

**From 'Abū Reuter to 'Irhābī 007:
al-Qaeda's Online Media Strategies**



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Notes on Arabic Transliteration

| | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|---|------|
| ا | ā | ر | r | ف | f |
| ب | b | ز | z | ق | q |
| ت | t | س | s | ك | k |
| ث | th | ش | sh | ل | l |
| ج | j | ص | ṣ | م | m |
| ح | ḥ | ض | ḍ | ن | n |
| خ | kh | ط | ṭ | ه | h |
| د | d | ظ | ẓ | و | w, ū |
| ذ | dh | ع | ʿ | ي | y, ī |
| | | غ | gh | ء | ' |

Long vowels are rendered ā, ū, ī.

Diphthongs are rendered ay, aw.

Tā' marbūṭa is rendered -a in pausal forms, -at in iḍāfa.

Articles preceding “sun-letters” are not assimilated.¹

Hamzat al-qaṭʿ is marked.

Hamzat al-waṣl is not marked.

Arabic words and names that appear in the text will be given in italics and transliterated according to the above remarks. Certain Arabic names and words have become well-known to a non-Arabic audience, and seem to have obtained a standard form in the English language. Such names and words will be given in the English form throughout the text, and transliterated and given in italics in brackets only the first time they appear, for example: Osama bin Laden (*'Usāma bin Lādin*); jihad (*jihād*). Footnotes citing Arabic language sources will include the Arabic original and English translation in brackets.

¹ In cases where assimilation of article preceding a “sun-letter” has become a standard form of a name, the name will be given in this standard form, for example *As-Saḥāb*, *At-Tibyān*.

Abstract

This study examines the online media campaign of the global jihadist movement. It seeks to determine whether al-Qaeda has developed a strategy for its media operations, and to what extent the jihadist media operators adhere to such a strategy. Drawing on primary sources from jihadist websites, the study identifies a number of recommendations about the use of media offered by jihadist strategists. The study goes on to examine the jihadist media companies and the material they produce and distribute online.

Analyzing online jihadist media material – including text, audio and video – the study seeks to identify primarily the *modus operandi* of the media campaign, target audiences, and strategic goals of communication. The study finds that the Internet, which allows the jihadists to exercise ownership and control over mass media outlets, has a wider functionality than mainstream media. Allowing dispersed groups and individuals to participate in the media jihad, the Internet also provides for increased quantity, diversity and decentralization of the campaign. While the jihadist online media campaign so far seems to have targeted mostly supporters of the global jihadist movement, a current trend points to increasing efforts to reach new groups, and specifically the West.

This study offers a comparison between the jihadist strategic recommendations and the actual jihadist use of the Internet as a media channel, and finds a certain degree of coherence between the two. Yet, as both recommendations and media activity are multi-faceted, the study concludes that there in fact exists a number of strategies, leading to a host of jihadist online media campaigns cohabitating the web. Although the study shows that the jihadists use also other media channels than the Internet, the online jihadist media campaign is in fact growing and frequently opening new fronts, thus pointing to a jihadist perception of the Internet as a purposeful vehicle for strategic communication.

I. Introduction and Background

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature and extent of the jihadist media campaign, and particularly the use of the Internet as a media channel. It has been argued that a ‘war of ideas’, or a ‘struggle for hearts and minds’, is a significant part of the conflict between the West and the global jihadist movement in the 21st century, and that a large part of this war is being fought in the realm of the media. Such statements are put forth by participants from both sides in the conflict. For example, in July 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri (*ʿAymān al-Zawāhirī*), al-Qaeda’s (*al-Qāʿida*) second-in-command, declared that: “We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. We are in a media battle for the hearts and minds of our *ʿumma*”.² From the other side, the U.S. Defense Quadrennial Report 2006 states that “Victory in the long war [on terrorism] ultimately depends on strategic communication by the United States and its international partners”.³

Given what appears to be an increasing focus on media and communication in the conflict, questions arise about how the jihadists influence communication, using media outlets that allow ownership and control over information. According to a 2006 International Crisis Group report, “the role played by such forms of communication appears to have been systematically undervalued”.⁴ Nevertheless, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has expressed concerns about the allegedly successful manipulation of the media by terrorists, stating that: “Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today’s media age, but [...] our country has not”.⁵

² Untitled Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi, intercepted by American intelligence, July 2005, available in Arabic original and English translation, www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_arabic, (accessed 22 March, 2007).

³ United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, February 6, 2006, p. 92, www.defenselink.mil/qdr/ (accessed 10 March, 2007).

⁴ International Crisis Group, *In their own words: Reading the Iraqi insurgency*, Middle East Report No. 50, 15 February 2006, www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3953&l=1 (accessed 10 February 2007).

⁵ “US losing media war to al-Qaeda”, *BBC News*, 17 February 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4725992.stm> (accessed 12 June, 2006). Indeed, Rumsfeld’s comments may stem from the rather limited success of some of the public diplomacy initiatives instigated by the U.S. since 9/11 2001, including the establishment of media outlets in the Middle East, See Smith and von Hippel, “Ideology and the battle of ideas”, in Smith and Sanderson (ed.), *Five years after 9/11: An Assessment of America’s War on Terror*, Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2006.

The jihadists seem, in fact, to have undertaken a vast media campaign. The increasing number of jihadist-controlled media outlets that have been established over the last years is particularly noteworthy. Arguably, one of the main reasons for this phenomenon is the expanding access to new media, and especially the Internet, which offer new ways and effects of communication. It also may stem from an increased and widely promulgated awareness of the possible benefits of the use of the media and the Internet for terrorist activities.

A preliminary hypothesis for this study therefore suggests that the jihadist movement operates within a pronounced strategy concerning the use of the media, and that the Internet plays a crucial role in this strategy, facilitating the accomplishment of strategic goals for communication.

This hypothesis is supported by previous research in the field of ‘terrorism and the media’, and will be further developed after a review of the relevant literature. The study will subsequently examine the hypothesis by analyzing empirical data. First, strategic documents, speeches and letters of prominent jihadists will be studied in order to identify a possible declared media strategy. Second, the jihadists’ own online media outlets and the material they produce will be analyzed in order to determine the nature and extent of this phenomenon. Finally, the study will attempt to compare the declared goals of communication with the actual jihadist use of online media with a view to establishing whether there exists a comprehensive, applied media strategy on the part of al-Qaeda.

2. Methodology

As a basic interpretative qualitative examination, this study seeks to “discover and understand a phenomenon or a process, and the perspectives and worldviews of people involved”.⁶ Components of such qualitative studies include data reduction, data display,

⁶ Merriam, Sharan B. and Associates, *Qualitative Research in Practice, Examples for Discussion and Analysis*, California: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

and conclusion drawing.⁷ It is important to bear in mind that the researcher is the main instrument for data collection and analysis. Subsequently, the study has to a certain degree an inevitable subjective approach. It should, however, be inter-subjectively comprehensible, hence offering transparency of research procedures and being comparable to other studies in order to facilitate verifications of reliability and validity.⁸ Qualitative studies can be inductive or deductive, i.e. building or testing theories and hypotheses.⁹ This study will, deductively, test some existing theories about terrorism and the media, but as it strives to understand the specific and relatively new phenomenon of jihadism and the Internet, it will also inductively seek to reach new understandings.

As the focus is placed on the phenomenon of global jihadism, most of the data used in this study will be collected directly from jihadist sources. Many of these sources have previously been left out of similar examinations. One can argue that this is not necessarily a product of their relative insignificance, but rather because of their difficult accessibility: the sources are mostly in the Arabic language, and, probably due to the illegal nature of the jihadist movement, much of the material is guarded, for example, by password-protected websites. Tellingly, the most prominent jihadist websites have a password protection system. This does, however, not necessarily mean that these are the sole sources of authentic material, and much of the material on protected websites ultimately reaches other open sites, sometimes also in translation. The author has had access to some such restricted material, but has, when possible, used open and extensively distributed media in the research. Yet, one can argue that the use of, and reference to, the guarded sources partially obstructs the transparency of the research in this study.

Another aspect in this regard is the more general issue of using websites as primary sources. Consideration of authenticity, authority, purpose, accuracy and nature of sources - criteria for all research - are particularly important when dealing with the Internet, which potentially allows any individual to publish any type of content. Another

⁷ Miles, Matthew B. and A. Micheal Huberman, *An expanded Sourcebook, Qualitative Data Analysis*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Second edition 1994.

⁸ Mayring, Philipp, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research [On-line Journal], 1(2), June 2002, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-00/2-00mayring-e.htm>, (accessed 20. November, 2006).

⁹ Merriam, Sharan B. and Associates, *Qualitative Research in Practice, Examples for Discussion and Analysis*.

concern is the sometimes short validity of URLs, which, like password protection of sites, restricts re-examination of sources. Yet, the topic of this study – online media – requires the use of websites as primary sources. Therefore, all source material is filed in the author’s archive and can be accessed upon request.

The empirical jihadist media samples used in the analysis of this study date from a timeframe of four months, from September to December 2006. However, the author has studied the field since 2005, and some previously gathered media material will be incorporated in this study in order to present a more comprehensive picture of the jihadist media campaign: Empirical data concerning the media strategy will include older material, as a strategy denotes a long-term plan, and therefore should be proposed before the actual plan is put into action.¹⁰ Furthermore, since the jihadist online media campaign is ongoing, the author has chosen to mention some significant developments that have taken place after this period. These developments further illustrate the media jihad as it emerges from the period of research.

Empirical Data

The qualitative research methodology that will be employed in this study seeks to use as broad an empirical data base as possible. This data base can be separated into two main categories.

The first category consists of data that shed light on the jihadists’ own perspectives on the use of media. It includes texts of various natures, from written letters to audio-visual speeches, and covers ideological and strategic material. The material is all, however, produced by jihadists and includes comments on the use of the media. These texts will be examined in an attempt to determine whether there exists a pronounced media strategy. The second category of data comprises the jihadist media themselves. As mentioned above, the focus will be on online media channels or publications. These data are primary sources and *prima facie* evidence of the present state of the jihadist online media use. They will be subject to a qualitative content analysis, and tested against the research hypothesis.¹¹ By comparing the results of the analysis of data

¹⁰ See definition of ‘strategy’, Part I, Chapter 5, in this study.

¹¹ Since the 1980s, content analysis has become an increasingly important tool and the fastest growing technique in media analysis. See Neuendorf, K. A, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002.

from the two categories, the study hopes to indicate the level of coherence between the jihadists own ‘theory of communication’ and their ‘practice of communication’. This, again, is a potential sign of the existence or absence of a comprehensive, applied jihadist media strategy.

Because of the relatively large amount of information often available to a researcher, content analysis is generally based on a sample of text, sound, or picture. Unlike statistical sampling that seeks accurate representations of an informational entirety, content analysts seek information that is relevant to the research question: “Texts must be sampled in view of what they mean, the interpretations they enable, and the information they contain”.¹² A number of different techniques for sampling in content analysis exist, from *random* to *systematic* selection. This study employs three different techniques. Regarding the first category of empirical information – the jihadist ‘theory of communication’ – a technique called *relevance* or *purposive* sampling will be used. This practice implies the selection of all informational units relevant to the research question, and requires preliminary examination of the texts that will be analyzed. The analyst then systematically lowers the number of units that need to be considered for an analysis. The final sample is thus not meant to be “representative of a population of texts, but rather the population of relevant texts”.¹³ However, a problem associated with relevance sampling which may relate to this study pertains to the large amount of irrelevant information available on the Internet.¹⁴ This study seeks to circumvent the problem by using Internet sources only issued by specific sources, namely the jihadists themselves. The second category of empirical data – the media material issued by the jihadist media companies – is selected by a combination of *stratified* and *random* sampling. Stratified sampling recognizes distinct strata within a population of media material. In this study, the strata of jihadist media material include for example magazines, audio files, videos, and TV broadcast, and one example from each category available is selected. The final sample is selected randomly from these strata.¹⁵

¹² Krippendorff, Klaus, *Content Analysis, An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2004, p. 113.

¹³ Ibid, p. 119.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.120.

¹⁵ For a survey of different sampling techniques, see *ibid*, pp.111-124.

Operational Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis serves different purposes, such as describing characteristics of communication and making inferences about the antecedents and consequences of communication.¹⁶ This kind of analysis scrutinizes different elements of communication, namely the *source*, the *channel*, the *message* and the *recipient*. According to Ole R. Holsti, such an analysis may be operationalized by asking the questions *who*, *why*, *how*, *what*, *to whom*, and *with what effect*.¹⁷ While the answer to the last question regarding consequences of communication certainly could be interesting, it lies outside the scope of this study. The other elements will therefore form the basis of analysis for the data gathered in category one and two, e.g. the jihadist strategic texts and the media material.

In content analysis, the question ‘*who?*’ traditionally arises in order to determine the authorship of a text. In this study, most of the authors of texts or producers of multimedia are known - indeed, as a requirement of the study, all material examined come from members of the global jihadist movement and their media organizations. In stead of settling questions of disputed authorships, then, the study will simply provide information about the specific authors and analyze the (latent) meaning of the use of different actors in different material and for different purposes. The question ‘*what?*’ can be answered directly from a description of the attributes of content, thus largely circumventing potential problems of validity. Answers to the question ‘*how?*’ also follow from characteristics of content, but specifically from analyses of techniques of persuasion and style. Aspects of the analysis may include word count, presentational style, and the use of loaded terms and symbols. ‘*To whom?*’-inquiries relate known attributes of the audience to messages produced for them. The communicator is often said to form messages in the idiom of the intended audience, or to reflect values of the intended audience. The validity of such interpretations is to a large degree obtainable from attributes of the content. Regarding jihadist literature and media material, the message is often dedicated to a certain audience. While such a dedication, however, may be merely rhetorical, other attributes indicate target audience: For example, the use of Western languages may imply a Western public; religious references seem to indicate Muslim audiences; strong legitimization of activities may illustrate the targeting of potential

¹⁶ Holsti, Ole R., *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969.

¹⁷ Ibid. The following information about applied content analysis *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

supporters that need to be convinced of the cause and methods, whereas lack of legitimization seemingly indicates an already supportive audience. Other correlations between communicator and audience will be observed during the analysis. Finally, the question ‘*Why?*’ is posed in order to reveal a pragmatic dimension of the communication. Answers to this question treat motives, values, intentions and strategies of the producer of content. The validity of these inferences is difficult to test without further information from the communicators. Yet, it is possible to establish propaganda goals or strategies underlying the characteristics of content through an indirect method which “requires logic-of-the-situation reasoning and the use of generalizations other than the one-to-one type of correlation”.¹⁸ The ‘*why?*’ question tests part of the hypothesis of this study which concerns the jihadists’ strategic goals of communication.

Holsti’s method places itself within an analysis tradition that views content as a property of the source of a text.¹⁹ Critics of this method, like Krippendorff, argue that such an approach fails to acknowledge the analyst’s conceptual contributions to the reading of a text, and that it ignores the fact that the message or content may have multiple meanings.²⁰ He rather recommends a context-based analysis. Pertaining to this issue, Holsti treats the issue of manifest versus latent meaning, and states that “reading between the lines” is important in the interpretation stage in order to draw meaningful conclusions from the data.²¹ This study’s use of content analysis will include the perspective of contexts and latent meanings.

3. Previous Research

The following survey of previous research on terrorism and the media seeks to provide a basis for understanding the phenomenon of jihadism and online communication, and aims to facilitate the establishment of a research hypothesis for this study.

¹⁸ George, A. L., quoted in Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*, p. 70.

¹⁹ Krippendorff, *Content Analysis, An Introduction to Its Methodology*.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*, p. 12.

Media and Terrorism

Research in the field of terrorism and the media has, with little dissention, concluded that the two phenomena are closely linked.²² Many definitions of terrorism contain the aspect of communication, and even more specifically the media: “If terrorism is a strategy characterized by symbolic attacks on symbolic targets, it is also a strategy characterized by the intentional manipulation of the news media”.²³ This statement describes one side of the relationship, while the other side is illustrated by the claim that “dangerous media hype of terrorist ‘spectaculars’ [is the result of] fierce competition of an increased market share of the audience”.²⁴ This reveals a symbiotic relationship, in which terrorism is dependent on the media, in order to spread a message, and the media on terrorism, not only to sell their product, but also in order to satisfy an ever increasing news- and sensation-thirsty public.²⁵ Yet, despite a mutual need between the two, the relationship also involves mutual distrust.²⁶ While, on the one hand, terrorists often feel used by the media in sensational reporting that may fail to mention their grievances and goals, the media, on the other hand, may have reason to fear terrorists as journalists on several occasions have become the victims of terrorist acts. Furthermore, it is worth keeping in mind that terrorism is a phenomenon that long precedes modern mass media, and that the spread of terror historically has relied on oral communication: The violent wing of the Zealots, the Sicarii of the 1st century, as well as the Assassin sect of Shiite Islam operating in the Middle Ages, spread their terror by word of mouth in the mosques and marketplaces.²⁷ One may therefore argue that the development of the mass media is hardly the primary cause for the spread of terrorism and can certainly not be blamed for its existence. Yet, developments in media have been seen in relation to developments in terrorism, and researchers have argued that paradigmatic shifts in mass media have been

²² For a contrasting view, see Michel Wieviorka, who argues in favor of a less significant relationship between terrorism and media, and promotes four kinds of relationships: “pure indifference”, “relative indifference”, “media-oriented strategy”, and “total-break”, in Wieviorka, Michel, *The making of terrorism*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 43-44.

²³ Martin, Gus, *Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives and Issues*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003, p. 281.

²⁴ Wilkinson, Paul, “The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 1997, p. 55.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Wilkinson, Paul, “The Media and International Terrorism”, in Crenshaw, M. and J. Pimlott (ed.), *Encyclopedia of World Terrorism*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1997, p. 675.

²⁷ Ibid.

accompanied by new and more deadly forms of terrorism.²⁸ Technological innovations within the printing press during the 19th century were readily used for communication purposes by Russian and Balkan anarchists. Moreover, the year 1968 has been said to mark both the launch of the first television satellite and the birth of international terrorism. Live audio-visual broadcast to an international audience may have forwarded more spectacular forms of terrorism, exemplified by Palestinian terrorists' airliner hijacking operations in Europe in the 1970s.²⁹

With the development of mass media, modern terrorism has been portrayed as an act of communication,³⁰ and has specifically been named "mass-mediated terrorism", indicating an existential link between terrorism and publicity via the mass media.³¹ As terrorism is often politically motivated violence, it usually aims at conveying a specific message, often to governments and policymakers. The immediate victims of terrorism may be randomly or selectively chosen, yet they are often merely instrumental in the terrorists' calculus of obtaining both publicity and impact on the enemy target and a wider audience through the media.³² This description identifies some of the participants in what has been called "the informational battlefield"³³ - a battlefield in modern conventional conflicts, but particularly in asymmetrical conflicts in which terrorists are often involved. Thus, mass communication technologies appear to have become weapons of war, and the phrase 'information is power' has become something of a truism.³⁴ In order to obtain power (of information), terrorists, who feel they lack access to traditional mass media communication as they do not share the mainstream views of society, have come to understand that they can adapt their methods and styles of violence to attract the media.³⁵ These adaptations include the degree of violence applied, the attack on symbolic targets, and the performance of very spectacular deeds.³⁶

²⁸ Lia, Brynjar, *Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

²⁹ Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

³⁰ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, London: Sage Publications, 1982.

³¹ Nacos, Brigitte L., *Mass-Mediated Terrorism, The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Maryland, 2002.

³² Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*.

³³ Martin, *Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives and Issues*, p. 289.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Nacos, Brigitte L., *Mass-Mediated Terrorism, The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*.

³⁶ Martin, Gus, *Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives and Issues*.

The above discussion focuses on the relationship between terrorism and the international and national mass media. It is, however, important to bear in mind that, as Wilkinson pointed out in 1997, terrorists communicate on two different levels:

“The mass media provides a means to get the terrorist message to the population at large, but rarely replace the terrorists’ own press releases, communiqués, pamphlets and magazines, [however] the terrorists’ own methods of propaganda generally have very little circulation”.³⁷

This is an important point, and while the latter part of the statement may have been true almost a decade ago, it can be questioned in light of today’s expanded use of the Internet. However, also more recently, Brigitte L. Nacos touches upon this issue as she states that traditional media are more important in terrorists’ publicity calculus than the Internet. At the same time, though, she describes the Internet as a means of bypassing the gatekeepers of traditional media, thus offering terrorists nearly unlimited communication.³⁸ Another assessment which supports the idea that terrorists benefit from using their own media outlets, such as the Internet, rises from findings that traditional media coverage does not lead to public approval,³⁹ either of the terrorists or their causes.⁴⁰ The attention that so-called sensationalist media coverage lends to terrorism is rarely positive and often does not portray terrorists and their causes in the way that the terrorists perhaps would wish for. This indicates that news prepared and presented by the terrorists themselves potentially could be more advantageous to their cause.

The advent of the Internet constitutes one of the most recent paradigmatic shifts in mass media, and may therefore be expected to have profound impact on the nature of terrorism. Specific studies about the Internet and terrorist groups point to a number of aspects that have been influenced by this new technology, ranging from finance, training, data collection, and operational tactics, and the shaping of public opinion and communication.⁴¹ Gabriel Weimann usefully separates between the instrumental and the communicative use of the Internet by terrorists.⁴² He states that “at this point, terrorists

³⁷ Wilkinson, Paul, “The Media and International Terrorism”, p. 675.

³⁸ Nacos, Brigitte L., “Terrorism and Media in the Age of Global Communication”, in Hamilton, Daniel S. (ed.), *Terrorism and International Relations*, Washington DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2006.

³⁹ Downes-LeGuin, Theo and Bruce Hoffman, *The Impact of Terrorism on Public Opinion: 1988 to 1989*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-225-F.F/RC, 1993.

⁴⁰ Laquer, Walter, *The Age of Terrorism*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1987.

⁴¹ Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*.

⁴² Weimann, Gabriel, *Terror on the Internet*, Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006.

are using the Internet for propaganda and communication more than they are attacking it".⁴³ The communicative aspect includes using the Internet to advance an organization's political, religious and ideological agenda. It is also said to facilitate new relationships between an individual and a virtual community.⁴⁴ In the case of jihadism and the Internet, al-Qaeda is labeled "unique among all terrorist groups" in understanding the communicative potential of the Internet.⁴⁵ With a widespread network of websites⁴⁶, allowing flow of information from leaders to supporters, and among supporters, the "online propaganda strategy of al-Qaeda takes advantage of the anonymity and flexibility of the Internet".⁴⁷ The paradigmatic shift in terrorism caused by the Internet lies primarily in the possibility to "bypass censorship and communicate directly with external audiences", exemplified by the copious Internet-transmitted beheadings of hostages by salafi-jihadists in Iraq in 2004.⁴⁸

A growing body of scholarly studies treats jihadism and the use of the Internet as a media channel. Dr. Brynjar Lia argues that jihadist web media production differs from traditional media production in that it expands the quantity and quality of the material.⁴⁹ Furthermore, media producers sometimes seem to have a weak organizational affiliation to militant groups or to command structure, which allows them to speak with a relatively autonomous voice, and to operate along lines of network and not of hierarchical structures.⁵⁰ Another study on the online jihadist media campaign concludes that as technology permits widespread distribution of the global jihadist message, the opportunity arises for forging transnational alliances and interaction between dispersed

⁴³ Weimann, Gabriel, "Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges", Paper for the International Studies Association Convention 2004, p. 7. For a study on the instrumental uses of the Internet, see Denning, Dorothy E., "Activism, Hacktivism and Cyberterrorism: The Internet as a tool for influencing foreign policy", in Arquilla and Ronfeldt (eds.), *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy*, Rand Corporation, 2001, pp. 239-288.

⁴⁴ Sageman, Marc, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

⁴⁵ Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*.

⁴⁶ By Gabriel Weimann assessed to be more than 50 in 2006. See, Weimann, *Terror on the Internet*, p. 67.

⁴⁷ "Jihad Online, Islamic Terrorists and the Internet", *Anti-Defamation League*, 2002, www.adl.org/internet/jihad_online.pdf (accessed 10 September 2007).

⁴⁸ Lia, Brynjar, *Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism*, p.181.

⁴⁹ Lia, Brynjar, "Jihadi Web Media Production", Paper presented at the conference 'Monitoring, research and analysis of jihadist activities on the Internet – Ways to deal with the issue', Berlin, Germany, 26-27 February 2007, www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00092/Jihadi_Web_Media_Pro_92100a.pdf (accessed 1 October 2007).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

points.⁵¹ The jihadist online media campaign potentially maintains and increases the social base of support, promotes amateur terrorism, and preserves the narrative of modern jihadism.⁵² In addition to such academic studies, policy papers and magazine and newspaper articles provide frequent, if only partial, examinations of the jihadist media campaign and the media companies.⁵³ Furthermore, several individuals and private organizations monitor and analyze jihadist groups' daily activities, including media efforts, on the Internet, and present their findings on their websites.⁵⁴

Finally, when studying the media and terrorism, researchers have typically sought to decipher the various ways that terrorists use the media. A much-cited study by Schmid and de Graaf identifies as many as 30 different insurgent terrorist uses of the news media.⁵⁵ The list includes both active and passive uses, ranging from "communication of (fear-) messages to audience" to "obtaining information about public reaction to terroristic acts".⁵⁶ The list seems comprehensive, but, as the authors note, is primarily a survey of examples with overlapping elements. Furthermore, scholars within the field have pointed to incoherence in Schmid and de Graaf's list: it mixes strategic and tactical uses of the media.⁵⁷

While Schmid and de Graaf's study deals with terrorism as a phenomenon, other more recent studies specifically treat jihadism and its media strategies. A 2006 study by Corman and Schiefelbein, entitled "Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas", concludes that the most important jihadist strategic uses of the media are to

⁵¹ Jordan, Javier, Manuel R. Torres, and Nicola Harsburgh, "The Intelligence Services' Struggle Against Al-Qaeda Propaganda", *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence*, Volume 18, Issue 1, Spring 2005, pp. 31-49.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See for example, Yassin Musharbash, "Al-Qaida's German Blog", *Spiegel Online International*, 30 August, 2006, www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,434404,00.html (accessed 10 September 2007), or Trabelsi, Habib, "Al-Qaeda takes jihad to media four years after 9/11", *Middle East Online*, 9 September 2005 (via LexisNexis), or Kimmage, Daniel and Kathleen Ridolfo, "The Iraqi Insurgent Media, The War of Images and ideas", *RFE/RL Special Report*, Summer 2007, <http://realaudio.rferl.org/online/OLPDFfiles/insurgent.pdf> (accessed 10 September 2007).

⁵⁴ See for example, *Internet Haganah* (<http://haganah.us>), *SITE Institute* (www.siteinstitute.org), *MEMRI* (www.memri.org/jihad), *Counterterrorism Blog* (<http://counterterrorismblog.org/>). All accessed October 2007.

⁵⁵ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*.

⁵⁶ The full list of terrorist uses of the media is quoted in Appendix I.

⁵⁷ Gerrits, Robin P. J. M., "Terrorists' Perspectives: Memoirs", in Paletz and Schmid (ed.), *Terrorism and the Media*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1992.

legitimate and propagate the movement, and to intimidate opponents.⁵⁸ The study furthermore stresses the importance of “sophisticated, modern methods of communication and public relations” for the jihadist movement, and points to how jihadists use both traditional mass media and new media channels. Yet, the study relies primarily on older al-Qaeda documents, and the authors acknowledge the risk that it may be analyzing an organization of the past. Nevertheless, its assessments on the jihadist use of the media are functional, and will, along with supplementary theories, serve as framework for this study.

A Constructivist Approach: Framing Terrorism

According to the above assessments, terrorism itself can be viewed as political communication. Perhaps more than the deed, though, the actual terrorist message, presented in text, picture or audio-visual format, qualifies as such communication. Media communication in general, and political communication in particular, has long been subject to the theory of framing. The term framing refers to the selection of some aspects, and exclusion of others, of a perceived reality. By emphasizing certain aspects, making them more salient in a communicating text, a particular *problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation* and/or *treatment recommendation* is promoted.⁵⁹

The concept of news framing thus refers to how media channels present a topic within interpretative structures, thereby, consciously or unconsciously, promoting one particular interpretation of events.⁶⁰ News framing is related to the concept of agenda-setting, and has been explained as its second level. Agenda setting, at a first level, puts a particular issue, event or actor on the audience’s mind, and framing, at a second level, makes some aspects of the matter more salient than others.⁶¹ These two processes represent an important aspect of political communication, as it is expected that they influence the public opinion. Therefore, it is likely that governments and interest groups

⁵⁸ Corman, Steven R., and Jill S. Schiefelbein, “Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas”, *Consortium for Strategic Communication*, Arizona State University, April 20, 2006.

⁵⁹ Entman, Robert M., “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm”, *Journal of Communication*, Volume 43, Issue 4, 1993, pp. 51-58.

⁶⁰ Norris, Pippa, Montague Kern and Marion Just (ed.), *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

⁶¹ McCombs, Maxwell and Salma I. Ghanem, “The Convergence of Agenda setting and Framing”, in Reese et.al (ed.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, New Jersey and London: LEA Publishers, 2001.

alike will make an effort to make their frame the valid one, and hence used by the media channels.⁶²

Concerning terrorism, it is suggested that “terrorist events are commonly understood through news frames that simplify, prioritize, and structure the narrative flow of events”.⁶³ It appears that the U.S. government created a certain frame with its rhetoric after the 9/11 terrorist events, introducing the ‘war on terror’. The interpretation of the events included ‘an act of war’ on civilization (*problem definition*) by evil people (*moral evaluation*) motivated by hate of freedom (*causal interpretation*) against which the world should unite through a ‘war on terror’ (*treatment recommendation*).⁶⁴ It is important to bear in mind that the development of a frame suggests that the events could be interpreted in alternative ways. In the case of 9/11, many groups disagreed with the U.S. official frame, among them the jihadists, representing the other side in the conflict. It is likely, then, that they have developed their own frames and that they use alternatives to mainstream media to present the events from their point of view.

Theories of framing indicate that communication is not simply the transmission of data, but suggest that individuals play a vital role in constructing meaning.⁶⁵ This idea places itself within the broader theory of constructivism, also called social constructivism. Constructivism appeared primarily in the late 1960s, advanced by the seminal work “The Social Construction of Reality” by Berger and Luckman.⁶⁶ It became an increasingly important approach in the field of International Relations (IR) in the 1980s offering an alternative to the well established theories of realism and liberalism. However, constructivism places itself in the much earlier sociological tradition, with

⁶² Pan, Zhongdang and Gerald M. Kosicki, “Framing as a Strategic Action in Public Deliberation”, in Reese et.al (ed.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, New Jersey and London: LEA Publishers, 2001.

⁶³ Norris, Pippa, Montague Kern and Marion Just (ed.), *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public*, p.10.

⁶⁴ Archetti, Christina, “Understanding what shapes the news: The elite press and the framing of 9/11 in the US, France, Italy and Pakistan”, Paper presented at the Conference Media Change and Social Theory, Oxford, UK, 6-8 September 2006.

http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/staff/c.archetti/Understanding_What_Shapes_the_News.doc (accessed 2 June, 2007).

⁶⁵ Delwiche, Aaron, “Agenda setting, opinion leadership, and the world of Web logs”, First Monday Peer-reviewed journal on the Internet, www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_12/delwiche/index.html (accessed November 2006).

⁶⁶ Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York: Garden City, 1966.

strong roots in the works of Emil Durkheim and Max Weber.⁶⁷ Durkheim's theories on the role of ideational factors in social life and how ideas become socially constructive are of importance to constructivism. The same goes for Weber's approach to the normative, as well as instrumental, roles of meaning and significance: "We are cultural beings endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and lend it *significance*".⁶⁸ Constructivism, consequently, deals with human consciousness and its role in international society. It distinguishes between a material reality and a social reality, and claims that social reality is constructed and therefore always susceptible to change.⁶⁹ Rather than asking what social realities are, IR constructivists ask how social realities become what they are. Constructivists generally focus on the causal force of ideational, discursive, and linguistic factors in world politics, and argue in favor of a reconceptualization of power, with relevance for amongst others non-state actors. Furthermore they highlight the role of transnational movements and processes in international affairs.⁷⁰

Given this brief introduction to constructivism in international relations, the statement that "constructivism seemed to be the best placed [approach] to account for such a religious, transnational movement [like] al-Qaeda"⁷¹ appears reasonable. In a 2006 article, Marc Lynch claims that al-Qaeda, as part of the global jihadist movement, "has undergone a 'constructivist turn', employing not only violence but also a dizzying array of persuasive rhetoric and public spectacle toward the end of strategic social construction".⁷² According to Lynch, al-Qaeda, with its Islamist ideas, is inherently constructivist in its orientation.⁷³ But, allegedly, also structural factors have led to this turn. These structural factors include the absence of a territorial base, and a globalized

⁶⁷ Ruggie, John Gerard, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge", *International Organization*, 52, 4, Autumn 1998, pp. 855-885.

⁶⁸ Max Weber, quoted in Ruggie, John Gerard, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge", p. 856.

⁶⁹ Eriksson, Johan and Giampiero Giacomello, "The Information Revolution, Security and International Relations: (IR)relevant Theory?", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2006, pp. 221-244.

⁷⁰ Nexon, Daniel, "Realism and Constructivism", *the Duck of Minerva Weblog*, 26 September, 2005, <http://duckofminerva.blogspot.com/2005/09/realism-and-constructivism.html> (accessed 5 September, 2006).

⁷¹ Lynch, Marc, "Al-Qaeda's Constructivist Turn", *Praeger Security International*, 5 May, 2006, <http://psi.praeger.com/doc.aspx?d=/commentary/Lynch-20060505-Lynch-20060505.xml> (accessed 10 December, 2006).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Lynch, Marc, "Trans-National Dialogue in an Age of Terror", *Global Society* 19, 2005, pp. 5-9.

field of contention shaped by new media and information technologies. With these new media technologies, al-Qaeda frames the world politics as a clash of civilizations, focusing on the salience of religion, and places the power of radical Islamism on the same level as that of the state system.⁷⁴ This may point to a jihadist attempt to create a competing frame to the U.S. ‘war on terror’-frame mentioned above. For the purpose of this study, which focuses on the global jihadist movement and its use of new media technologies, a constructivist approach will be applied to help interpret the meaning and significance that the actors, the jihadists, ascribe to their collective situation. While the study does not aim to explore the jihadist message or ideology, it will take a constructivist approach in its attempts to decipher the frames used in jihadist media.

4. Formulation of Research Hypothesis

The theories and assessments mentioned above form a broad basis for approaching the jihadist media. The main purpose of this study is to define the nature and extent of the jihadist media campaign, and specifically the use of jihadist-controlled online media channels. Previous research suggests that the media play an essential role for terrorists, and specific research on jihadism today indicates a vital role for new media technologies, such as the Internet. These two observations constitute the starting point of this study.

From a constructivist point of view, the jihadist message, spread through online channels, can be seen as a socially constructed idea, framed by the specific jihadist worldview. Using precisely the Internet as a media channel, it seems that the jihadists are able to present news stories within a jihadist frame. This study therefore suggests that the possibilities for agenda-setting and framing may be among the main reasons for establishing and using these channels.

Moreover, the message may strategically aim at certain goals. This brings us back to the reasons for using media, or in this case using the Internet as a media channel. Corman and Schiefelbein’s study on jihadist media strategy proposed three main strategic goals of communication: legitimization, propagation and intimidation. It is furthermore useful to look to Schmid and de Graaf’s influential list of terrorist uses of the media.

⁷⁴ Lynch, Marc, “Al-Qaeda’s Constructivist Turn”.

Despite the fact that these uses are not specific to jihadism, and do not take into consideration the use of new media technologies, many seem to be valid for this study.⁷⁵ Interestingly, when re-categorizing the alleged overlapping, yet relevant, terrorist media uses in Schmid and de Graaf's list, the same three strategic goals as mentioned above - legitimization, propagation and intimidation - emerge.⁷⁶ One may therefore go on to assume that these three goals – purportedly the most important in media communication for terrorists, in general, and jihadists, in particular – also will be observed when examining the current media jihad. Consequently, one may suggest a hypothesis which states that the jihadists use the media in order to propagate the movement and the cause, legitimize the movement and its activities, and intimidate opponents.

An analysis of empirical data will determine if the goals of the media jihad, both from a strategic perspective designed by jihadist strategists, and in reality as seen through the media channels, correspond with these proposed uses. Furthermore, it seems interesting to assess whether a theoretical framework proposed mainly for traditional media also applies to the study of new media such as the Internet.

The research hypothesis could be summarized as follows: *The jihadists operate within a pronounced strategy concerning the use of the media. The Internet, playing a crucial role in this media strategy, allows the jihadists to directly frame their message, and is used in order to reach the following strategic goals of communication: propagation of movement and the cause, legitimization of movement and activities, and intimidation of opponents.*

⁷⁵ This study focuses on the jihadists' own media outlets and does therefore only consider Schmid and de Graaf's 22 active uses of media. Furthermore, some active uses clearly do not apply to terrorists' own media channels, and are therefore also disregarded – these are: 'demanding publication of manifesto under threat of harm to victim', 'occupation of broadcasting stations', 'using journalists as negotiators' and 'verifying demand compliance by the enemy'.

⁷⁶ This author has interpreted uses no. 2, 3, 7, 10, 12, 19, 21 from Schmid and de Graaf's 1982 list to correspond to "propagation of the movement"; uses no. 8, 13, 22 to correspond to "legitimization of activities"; and uses no. 1, 5, 9, 11, 14, 15, 17 to correspond to "intimidation of opponents". See Appendix I in this study for Schmid and de Graaf's list.

5. Definition of Terms

Before embarking on a further discussion and an analysis of the jihadist use of the media, a few terms central to the research hypothesis of this study need to be defined. The following definitions provide information about the background of certain terms, as well as their significance for the purpose of this specific study.

Terrorism

The saying ‘one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’ reflects the seemingly inherent difficulties in defining terrorism. On a global level, several attempts to reach a common definition have been unsuccessful, and governments, international organizations and private agencies thus operate with separate characterizations of the phenomenon. Scholars in IR and related fields often employ the UN Academic Consensus Definition:

"Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought" (Schmid, 1988).⁷⁷

However, modern terrorism allegedly differs in character from traditional terrorism, often lacking a discernible organizational structure or an identified central command, and operating with less easily defined aims or identified objectives, which potentially makes it more lethal.⁷⁸ Modern terrorism furthermore often incorporates an international or transnational aspect, adding the involvement of “citizens or the territory of more than one country”.⁷⁹

Global jihadism may be defined as modern terrorism, and will be further defined below. First, however, a closer look at how the jihadists themselves use the term terrorism seems warranted: Despite the fact that terrorism, in contemporary use, is commonly perceived as highly pejorative, denoting a lack of legitimacy and morality, and

⁷⁷ Definitions of Terrorism, UN Academic Consensus Definition, Alex Schmid, 1988, http://www.unodc.org/unodc/terrorism_definitions.html (accessed 15 May, 2007).

⁷⁸ Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside terrorism*.

⁷⁹ US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, quoted in Lia, Brynjar, *Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism*, p. 11.

that, consequently, very few groups have described themselves as terrorist, the jihadists regularly promote themselves as *'irhābiyyūn* (“terrorists”). One may, however, argue that the Arabic word, from the root *r-h-b*, carries different connotations than the English one. The jihadist ideologue *'Abū Muṣṣab al-Sūrī* claims that “‘terrorism’ is an abstract word [which] can carry a good or a bad meaning”, adding “we refuse to understand this term according to the American description”.⁸⁰ *Al-Sūrī* separates between “blameworthy terrorism” (*'irhāb madhmūm*) and praiseworthy terrorism (*'irhāb maḥmūd*), the latter indicating terrorism by the righteous that have been unjustly treated. A Quranic verse which is often used by today’s jihadists to legitimate terrorism in Islam is verse 60 of *Sūrat al-Anfāl*, which calls to “prepare to strike terror into the enemies of God” (Q 8:60). Subsequently, the deceased Saudi cleric Shaykh *Ḥamūd bin ‘Uqlā’ al-Shu‘aybī* stated that terrorism may be “legitimate, sanctioned and ordered by God, [and] is to prepare strength and be mobilized for resisting the enemies of God and his prophets.”⁸¹ Based on the same arguments, convicted Bali bomber *Mukhlāṣ* concluded in his writings: “This is why the word *irhabii* is popular with Arabs to refer to a terrorist”.⁸²

Global Jihadism

The concept of jihad (*jihād*) goes back to early Islamic jurisprudence, and is sometimes referred to as the sixth pillar of Islam, although it has no official status.⁸³ The basis of the jihad is generally found in the Quran (*al-Qur’ān*), the *sunna* and the *'aḥādīth* (plural of *ḥadīth*), denoting the transmissions of statements and actions of the Prophet Mohammad.

Jihad literally means “striving”, and denotes any activity, personal or communal, carried out by a Muslim in order to follow the path of God. Certain scholars, particularly Shiites, separate between the greater and the lesser jihad. The greater jihad is the personal, nonviolent struggle to lead a good Muslim life. The lesser jihad, however, is the

⁸⁰ 'Abū Muṣṣab al-Sūrī, “دعوة المقاومة الإسلامية العالمية” (“Call to Global Islamic Resistance”), Dec. 2004, available on <http://mobasher.110mb.com/AbuMusabSyrian.htm> (accessed 5 October 2006).

⁸¹ Shaykh Ḥamūd bin ‘Uqlā’ al-Shu‘aybī, “معنى الإرهاب وحقيقته” (“The Meaning and Truth of Terrorism”), *Minbar al-Tawḥīd wa l-Jihād* website, 20 November, 2001, www.tawhed.ws/r?i=676&PHPSESSID=6e7cd3991ebce2b89175bbbac81ca16 (accessed 10 October 2007).

⁸² Aly Ghufroon bin Nurhasyim (name as given in English), aka *Mukhlāṣ*, quoted in Fealy, Greg and Virginia Hooker (eds.), *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: SEAS Publications, 2006.

⁸³ Tyan, E., “Djihad”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2nd Edition, 1960-2005.

violent struggle for Islam. This latter striving is the usual meaning of jihad.⁸⁴ Stemming from a fundamental principle of the universality of Islam, jihad consists of military action with the objective of defending *Dār al-'Islām* (the Abode of Islam) against external aggression, and also of the expansion of Islam. As such, jihad has been presented as an obligation for Muslims. The individual obligation is called *farḍ ḥayn*, and denotes the duty of all Muslims to take part in jihad. It may include direct fighting, financial contribution, charity or prayers. The *farḍ kifāya* denotes the collective obligation to wage jihad.⁸⁵ The doctrine of jihad in modern Islam furthermore emphasizes *jihād al-daḥwa*, indicating the spread of Islam by peaceful means, also termed *jihād al-lisān* (“jihad of the tongue”) or *jihād al-qalam* (“jihad of the pen”).⁸⁶ Disregarding previous doctrine and historical traditions, some modern Islamic scholars have argued that this is the most important form of jihad nowadays, as intensive communication is possible without having to resort to military expeditions.⁸⁷ In fact, today’s global jihadist movement, as we will see, combines the violent jihad with the jihad of the tongue and the pen. Yet, the current jihadist media campaign is a supplement to violent activities, and would make little sense alone, as it to a large extent works to promote violence and to place the violence within a political and religious framework.

Within the history of modern militant Islamism, dating back to the 1930s, global jihadism is a relatively new phenomenon. It appeared in the mid-1990s when Osama bin Laden (*'Usāma bin Lādin*) declared the West to be the greatest enemies of the Muslim world, and urged his followers to fight this enemy, irrespective of natural and territorial boundaries.⁸⁸ The jihadist focus thus shifted from the near enemy to the far enemy, and supporters of the global jihad started carrying out attacks in the West as well as on foreign interests in the Muslim world.

Bin Laden specifically framed the image of the current enemy as “the Jews and the Crusaders” (*al-yahūd wa l-ṣalībiyyūn*), pointing to the Christian U.S., and to Israel.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Peters, Rudolph, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, Marcus Wiener Pub., expanded edition 2005.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Publicly manifested with the 1996 “Declaration of war against the American Occupier of the Land of the two Holy Places” (اعلان الجهاد على الامريكيين المحتلين لبلاد الحرمين), and the 1998 “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders” (بيان الجبهة الاسلامية العالمية لجهاد اليهود والصليبيين).

However, al-Qaeda's vision of the enemy is based on a wider and, notably, historic interpretation. The term "Crusaders" points to early invasions of Muslim land, and identifies any party that is perceived as invading *Dār al-'Islām*. For example, Bin Laden has made parallels between the American intervention in the Gulf War and the Mongol invasion of Iraq in the 13th century.⁸⁹ This historical interpretation of the term "Crusaders" suggests that the jihadists frame the image of their enemies independent of geography, values or religion: Other states, also non-Western, may qualify as enemies if they choose to invade *Dār al-'Islām*. In the current global jihad, however, the jihadists have specifically pointed out the West as their main enemy. Moreover, Israel ("the Jews") is not necessarily a direct target, as it is for instance for the Palestinian group *Ḥamās* (Hamas), but is rather seen as the United States of America's agent in the Middle East.

Global jihadism is often mentioned in connection with salafism – a revivalist movement aiming to restore the authentic Islam from the time of the Prophet and to reestablish an Islamic state.⁹⁰ While it in many cases is correct to label al-Qaeda elements as salafi-jihadists, one should be aware of the different components of salafism.⁹¹ Quintan Wiktorowicz argues that salafists share a common religious perspective, based primarily on the idea of *tawḥīd* ("monotheism"), but that disagreement over strategy has created three factions of salafists. These are the "purists", who focus on non-violent methods, the "politicos", who apply the salafi creed to the political arena, and finally, the "jihadis" who take a militant position and encourage for violence and revolution.⁹²

Al-Qaeda was the vanguard and base for global jihadism, and its training camps in Afghanistan provided the supporters with ideological information, paramilitary training and personal relations. With the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, this organization was dissolved, and its remnants reorganized itself into a decentralized movement, today often referred to as al-Qaeda-inspired Islamism (radical Islamism) or

⁸⁹ Osama bin Laden message, November 2002, transcript from *BBC Monitoring*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2455845.stm (accessed 20 September, 2007).

⁹⁰ *Salaf* means "ancestor" or the "ancient one", and refers in Islamic terminology to the companions of the prophet Moḥammad (*al-ṣaḥāba*), the generation following them (*al-tābi'ūn*), and the following generation (*tābi'ū al-tābi'īn*).

⁹¹ Wiktorowicz, Quintan, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29, 2006, pp. 207-239.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 208.

the global jihadist movement.⁹³ Despite the fact that al-Qaeda no longer seems to exist as a conventional organization, the term ‘al-Qaeda’ will be used interchangeably with ‘the global jihadist movement’ in this study.⁹⁴ The global jihadist movement will include the old cadres of al-Qaeda previously based in Afghanistan, also labeled ‘al-Qaeda Central’, regional al-Qaeda affiliated groups, and individuals adhering to the global jihadist ideology (called ‘jihadists’ or ‘mujahideen’).

The ‘Umma

The Arabic word *’umma* signifies people, community or nation. In modern times it is commonly used to mean the nation of Islamic states, or the community of believers, denoting the whole Muslim world. The Quran reveals a chronological development of the sense of the word, from a generic application, to religious communities, and, finally, to a more inclusive meaning of humanity in its potential toward becoming Muslim.⁹⁵ As a politico-social order, the *’umma* came into being in Medina after Prophet Mohammad’s *hijra* (“migration”) from Mecca in 622. Mohammad and his Meccan followers formed a political agreement and a formal group with the clans of Medina, which was called the *’umma*. This *’umma* resembled earlier Middle Eastern forms of society, but differed in one crucial respect: it merged political and religious communal organization.⁹⁶ This has characterized later Islamic states, based on sharia (*shari‘a*), the Islamic law. The jihadists frequently refer to the concept of the *’umma*, and use the term to denote the totality of Muslims, promoting a sort of pan-Islamic nationalism.⁹⁷

⁹³ Hegghammer, Thomas, ”Irak-konflikten i radikal islamistisk ideologi”, *Internasjonal politikk*, vol. 63, issue 4, 2005, pp. 351-370.

⁹⁴ It is worth noting that while al-Qaeda no longer has the same level of centralized organization as before, the group has reportedly recently been re-organized and has been able to establish new bases in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. See, “The Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland”, *National Intelligence Council*, July 2007, www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070717_release.pdf (accessed 20 September, 2007).

⁹⁵ Denny, F.M., “Umma”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2000.

⁹⁶ Lapidus, Ira M., *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 2002.

⁹⁷ For a description of ‘pan-Islamic nationalism’, see Hegghammer, Thomas, “Political Violence in Saudi Arabia: The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula”, Paper presented at Princeton University, 2 March 2007, http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00091/Political_Violence_i_91403a.pdf (accessed 1 October 2007).

Media, old vs. new

The word medium (pl. media), may be described as “an intervening substance through which something else is transmitted or carried on”,⁹⁸ or “a channel or means of communication”.⁹⁹ A medium is thus a carrier of information. It provides organized means of transmission or storage of information, such as fact, opinion, entertainment, *et cetera*.

In modern times, media is generally perceived as a truncation of the term media of communication. A medium of communication comes between the source and the intended audience, and communication can be a one-way process (broadcast), or a two-way process (interpersonal and interactive).¹⁰⁰ The term mass media is used to denote the section of the media specifically designed to reach a very large audience. It was coined in the 1920s, with the advent of nationwide radio networks, mass-circulation newspapers and magazines. During the 20th century, the growth of mass media was driven by new technology, and in the last part of the century, specifically by the Internet and the World Wide Web.¹⁰¹

The distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media is not always precise. The adjective ‘new’ carries many meanings, and may point to various aspects of communication based on modern technology, for instance its alleged democratic, or individual character, or its ability to transform social relationships.¹⁰² Some of these aspects may be observed in the online jihadist media campaign. However, the following definitions are rather based on a technological perspective: ‘new media’ will denote all forms of media enabled by digital technology, such as web sites, email, CD/DVD, and interactive television. ‘Old’ or ‘traditional’ media, on the other hand, are the traditional means of communication and expression that existed before the new media, specifically the printed press, radio and TV. ‘Mainstream media’ will be employed in the meaning of media sources other than ‘jihadist-controlled media’.

⁹⁸ Definition of “Medium”, *The Free Dictionary*, www.thefreedictionary.com/medium (accessed 5 October 2006).

⁹⁹ Allen, Robert (ed.), “Medium”, *The New Penguin English Dictionary*, Penguin Books Ltd., 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Noll, Micheal A., *The Evolution of Media*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007.

¹⁰¹ Chun, Wendy Hui Kkyong and Thomas W. Keenan (eds.), *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, London: Routledge, 2005.

¹⁰² Hassan, Robert, and Julian Thomas, *The New Media Theory Reader*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006.

Strategy

A strategy is a long term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal. Originally from the Greek *strategia*, meaning generalship, it was confined to military matters.¹⁰³ Today, however, the word is commonly used in many disparate fields. There still seems to be a common perception that strategy is an idea that creates a course of action, following a hypothesis implying that a certain future position offers an advantage for acquiring some designated gain. The description of the idea is generally prepared in prescriptive documentation. Borrowing from IR game theory, a strategy is furthermore a plan for dealing with every possible move from every player(s) in the game.¹⁰⁴

Accordingly, in this study, a jihadist online media strategy denotes a documented plan for the use of the Internet, aiming at an advantageous position in the future (for the jihadists), also taking into account methods for countering the enemy's (the West and local governments') media moves.

II. Jihadist Media Strategy in Theory

Frequent media appearances, both before and after 9/11, indicate that “the organization [al-Qaeda] has operated according to a deliberate and calculated media strategy”.¹⁰⁵ The existence of such a jihadist media strategy, including a strategy for the use of the Internet, is one of the main assumptions of this study. In order to reveal a possible strategy, the following chapter presents al-Qaeda's official statements, theoretical texts and correspondence that deal with the use of media.

The selection of texts is prepared according to the technique of relevance sampling. The author has searched through a large amount of mostly textual material thought to contain pertinent information, and presents the “population of relevant texts”. The texts are deemed relevant or important based on content, but also on the authors'

¹⁰³ Allen, Robert (ed.), “Strategy”, *The New Penguin English Dictionary*.

¹⁰⁴ McLean, Ian and Alistair McMillan, “Strategy”, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Hegghammer, “Dokumentasjon om al-Qa'ida – Intervjueer, kommunikéer og andre primærkilder, 1990-2002”, (“Documentation on al-Qa'ida – Interviews, Statements and Other Primary Sources, 1990-2002), *FFI/rapport-2002/01393*, 2002, <http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2002/01393.pdf> (accessed 1 June, 2007).

authority (the al-Qaeda leadership and prominent strategists) and on supporters' and analysts' interest in the text (as seen for example in online readers' assessments). Categories of strategic texts presented in this study include selections from the al-Qaeda leadership, from prominent jihadist strategists, and from the jihadist media establishments.

There is a risk that the sample has failed to incorporate important works about the use of media. However, it includes relevant texts that circulate on the jihadist web today, and seeks to include relevant articles from earlier jihadist publications. In fact, central jihadist documents are known to be repeatedly re-published on the web forums, and it seems that without such wide distribution they will only have limited impact on the movement. Therefore, as this study includes documents from the most active jihadist web forums, it arguably provides sufficient information in order to present main jihadist ideas about the use of media.

1. The al-Qaeda leadership

Previous studies have stressed that Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are “a leadership duo that is both media-savvy and productive”.¹⁰⁶ Even if their media appearances attract wide-spread attention, among their texts that are available to the public few focus on how they use the media. Taking into account that the West and the general public are the intended audience of many of their speeches, it is perhaps quite natural that they do not disclose their strategies there. Nevertheless, a close reading of their official statements and other publications reveals certain strategic thoughts about the use of the media on their behalf.¹⁰⁷

Osama bin Laden

A recurring topic in Osama bin Laden's speeches is the role of Western media, or more precisely how the Americans exploit their advantageous media position, rely on

¹⁰⁶ Hegghammer, Thomas, “Al-Qaida statements 2003-2004 – A compilation of translated texts by Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri”, *FFI/rapport-2005/01428*, 2005, <http://rapporteur.ffi.no/rapporteur/2005/01428.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2007). See also Riedel, Bruce, “Al-Qaeda strikes back”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007, www.foreignaffairs.org/20070501faessay86304/bruce-riedel/al-qaeda-strikes-back.html (accessed 10 September 2007).

¹⁰⁷ Several jihadist websites offer compilations of Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri audio and video files, see for example http://mobasher.110mb.com/Jihad_leaders.htm (accessed June 2007).

psychological warfare, produce deceptive lies about the mujahideen, and drowse the community by keeping people occupied with minor matters. On the other hand, bin Laden states that the Western media is not just harmful to the jihadists, it also terrorizes its own people by speculating and spreading propaganda about al-Qaeda, adding fear and helplessness to the psyche of the people of Europe and the United States: “What the enemies of the U.S. cannot do, its media is doing”.¹⁰⁸

Bin Laden has offered advice on how the jihadists themselves can use the media. In his “Offer of armistice with Europe” published April 14, 2004, he “ask[s] honest people, especially *‘ulamā*’ (“Islamic scholars”), preachers and merchants to form a permanent committee to enlighten the European peoples of the justice of our cause [...] they can make use of the huge potential of the media”.¹⁰⁹

Bin Laden sees the potential of the media in the fact that “it enters every home” and “touches the entire public” due to the communication revolution.¹¹⁰ This is something he was aware of long before 9/11. When asked by CNN journalist Peter Arnett in March 1997 about his future plans, bin Laden responded: “You’ll see them and hear about them in the media, God willing”.¹¹¹ However, renouncing from using the media for protracted periods of time also seems to be a bin Laden strategy: “our silence is our real propaganda”.¹¹² The latter appears to have been bin Laden’s main strategy over the last year.¹¹³

Ayman al-Zawahiri

Ayman al-Zawahiri generally conveys the same ideas about Western and “apostate” media as bin Laden. Furthermore, al-Zawahiri treats in particular the effects

¹⁰⁸ Bin Laden, interview in Pakistani newspaper *Ummat*, 28 September, 2001, via www.khilafah.com/1421/category.php?DocumentID=2392&TagID=2v (accessed June 2005).

¹⁰⁹ Bin Laden, “رسالة الهدنة مع الغرب” (“Offer of Armistice with the West”), April 14, 2004, see www.archive.org/download/hygNGF/454.mp3 (accessed 10 July 2007).

¹¹⁰ Bin Laden, Audio tape attacking Muslim scholars, July 2003, transcript reproduced in Thomas Hegghammer, “Al-Qaida statements 2003-2004 – A compilation of translated texts by Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri”.

¹¹¹ Peter Arnett’s interview with Osama bin Laden, *CNN*, 1997, reproduced in Thomas Hegghammer, “Dokumentasjon om al-Qa’ida – Intervjueer, kommunikéer og andre primærkilder, 1990-2002”.

¹¹² Bin Laden, interview in Pakistani newspaper *Ummat*, 28 September, 2001, see www.khilafah.com/1421/category.php?DocumentID=2392&TagID=2v (accessed June 2005).

¹¹³ During the editing of this study, in September 2007, Bin Laden appeared in three media releases in occasion of the 6 year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The propaganda effect of more than one year’s absence from the media was then seen in the widespread attention he received (as compared to the less attention generated by prolific media speaker al-Zawahiri).

that negative media campaigns have on the global jihadist movement. He draws his ideas from his experience with *Jamā'at al-jihād* (“Egyptian Islamic Jihad”, EIJ) during the 1980’s and 90’s. In his book “Knights under the Prophet’s Banner”, he illustrates his view on negative media influence with the story of the unintentional killing of the child *Shaymā’* during an unsuccessful attack on the Egyptian Prime Minister *Āḥīf Ṣiddīqī*.¹¹⁴ The Egyptian government subsequently launched a media campaign in which it claimed that *Shaymā’* was the target of the EIJ attack. According to al-Zawahiri, this led to a significant decline in public support for the group. Analysts have labeled this the “Shayma-effect”¹¹⁵, and for al-Zawahiri it seems to have been epoch-making evidence of the importance of public opinion.

The focus on public opinion appears again in al-Zawahiri’s letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (*‘Abū Muṣṣab al-Zarqāwī*), the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq.¹¹⁶ Reproaching al-Zarqawi’s brutal beheading scenes spread across the World Wide Web, al-Zawahiri states: “the general opinion of our supporters does not understand that [it is justified], and this general opinion falls under the malicious, perfidious, and fallacious campaign by the deceptive and fabricated media.”¹¹⁷

Returning to his book “Knights under the Prophet’s Banner”, al-Zawahiri suggests that “the jihad movement must dedicate one of its wings to work with the masses”.¹¹⁸ In concluding, al-Zawahiri offers advice to the future generation of the jihadist movement: “We must get our message across to the masses of the nation and break the media siege imposed on the jihad movement”.

None of the two leaders of al-Qaeda has to this author’s knowledge proposed any strategies about the use of online media in publicly available statements and texts. Their main focus remains on the harmful effect of the Western media on the jihadist movement

¹¹⁴ Ayman al-Zawahiri, “فرسان تحت راية النبي” (“Knights under the Prophet’s Banner”), via <http://alarabnews.com/alshaab/GIF/28-12-2001/Zawahri.htm> (accessed 10 July, 2007). The following quotes ibid, unless otherwise noted.

¹¹⁵ Brachman, Jarret and William McCants, “Stealing al-Qaeda’s Playbook”, *Combating Terrorism Center Report*, February 2006, www.ctc.usma.edu/Stealing%20Al-Qai%27da%27s%20Playbook%20--%20CTC.pdf (accessed 15 March 2007).

¹¹⁶ Untitled Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi, intercepted by American intelligence, July 2005, available in Arabic original and English translation, www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_arabic (accessed 22 March, 2007).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ayman al-Zawahiri, “فرسان تحت راية النبي” (“Knights under the Prophet’s Banner”).

– yet also its sometimes unintentional support to the movement through coverage that intimidates the Western public.

2. Jihadist strategists

“Jihadist strategic studies” is a relatively new phenomenon within the extensive textual universe of the global jihadist movement.¹¹⁹ This genre rose as a result of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was considered an attack on Islam by radical Islamists. Therefore, they may to a lesser degree have seen the need to present rationales for jihad, but rather directed their attention to developing a strategy for jihad. Marked by a secular tone and applying Western terminology and academic sources, jihadist strategic literature takes an analytical and empirical approach to how to wage jihad.

'Abū Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī

In his “Call to Global Islamic Resistance”, published online in January 2005, ideologue *Muṣṭafa bin 'Abd al-Qādir Sitt Maryam Nāṣir*, better known as *'Umar 'Abd al-Ḥakīm* or *'Abū Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī*, provided the global jihadist movement with what appears to be a unique and substantial strategic template.¹²⁰ The 1600 page-long treatise offers a detailed analysis of the movement’s past, present and future.¹²¹

One of the chapters is entitled “The Theory of Media and Incitement in the Call to Global Islamic Resistance”, or “Public Information and Advocacy for the Global Islamic Resistance Movement”.¹²² What *al-Sūrī* labels “the advocacy drive” is a four-level strategy including the following elements: Audience, Content of Message, Style of Message and Delivery System of Message. Based on these four components, *al-Sūrī* analyses the media campaign of the jihadist movement. He states that, in the past, the advocacy drive failed because of four deficiencies. One, the target audience was only the elite segment. Two, the content of message treated the question of governance. Three, the

¹¹⁹ The term “jihadist strategic studies” was coined by Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer in their article “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged al-Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings”, in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (5), September-October 2004, pp. 355-375.

¹²⁰ 'Abū Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī, “دعوة المقاومة الإسلامية العالمية” (“Call to Global Islamic Resistance”).

¹²¹ For a detailed description of 'Abū Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī and his work, see Lia, Brynjar, *Architect of Global Jihad. The life of al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri*, London: Hurst, forthcoming 2007.

¹²² 'Abū Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī, “نظرية الاعلام والتحرير في دعوة المقاومة الإسلامية العالمية” (“Theory of Media and Incitement in the Call to Global Islamic Resistance”), chapter 8, section 8 (pp. 1437-1500), in “دعوة المقاومة الإسلامية العالمية” (“Call to Global Islamic Resistance”). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

style of message was egoistical, uncompromising, threatening, impassionate and non-appealing to the masses. Finally, the delivery system of message was through clandestine written ways.

However, developments on the jihadist media front during the Bosnian and Chechen wars [1992-95, and 1994-96 and 1999-present], particularly with the use of Compact Discs, video tapes and the Internet, turned that campaign into a huge success, claims *al-Sūrī*. He furthermore cites four other reasons for this media success. One, it targeted the *'umma* at large. Two, the message focused on the obligation to join the jihad in order to prevent foreign aggression – an idea religiously deep seated within the public and comprehensible to them. Three, the style was passionate and inspiring, including promise of victory and rewards. Four, the delivery system included publications and magazines, and electronic media.

Based on these historical examples and the lessons learned from them, *al-Sūrī* presents a set of recommendations for today's jihadist advocacy drive. First, it must target the *'umma* in its entirety, also foreign language (non-Arabic) speakers. Additionally, opponents of the movement must be targeted with "threatening messages". Second, the content of message must focus on the injustice committed against the *'umma* through history, from the Prophet's life to "modern day conspiracies against the Islamic world". It should also emphasize achievements in preserving the Islamic faith, such as narratives of resistance and martyrdom. Furthermore, the message should be educational and disseminate information about military science and warfare through training manuals and personal battlefield experiences. The content in the message should also include Quranic textual material and fatwas for religious legitimacy. Third, the style of the message must be tailored to different audiences, and reflect the levels of awareness, culture and education of the public. Fourth, the delivery system of the message must combine modern and popular means of communication. The foremost of these are the Internet and satellite TV, and *al-Sūrī* stresses the utilization and manipulation of computer capabilities and mass transmission over the World Wide Web. However, he does not dismiss the role of printed material, the mosques and oral transmission, in order to reach the segment of the population that does not have access to, or are incapable of using, modern technology.

Another interesting component of the advocacy drive is the establishment of “Incitement and Media Brigades”. *Al-Sūrī* recommends that “those qualified [technically, linguistically and religiously] for such a mission undertake the formation of cells for advocating and disposing for jihad, and facilitate the enterprise of jihad by providing comprehensive information and guidance”. The Media Brigades are responsible for the achievement of the jihadist advocacy drive as outlined in the above.

It is important to bear in mind that the use of media is only one element of a comprehensive jihadist strategy discussed by *al-Sūrī*. Nevertheless, on several occasions in his treatise, *al-Sūrī* reveals a general perception that Western counterterrorism efforts include an aggressive media war aimed at slandering the image of the jihadists, and states that jihadist propagandists engaging in similar activities against the West will play the crucial role in breeding the Global Islamic Resistance.

To conclude, *al-Sūrī*'s media strategy seems to focus on influencing the public opinion, offering detailed advice on the four components audience, content, style, and means of delivery of message. It is conceivably the most comprehensive media strategy for the global jihadist movement available.

'Abū 'Ubayd al-Qurashī

Al-Sūrī's ideas have sometimes been interpreted as a development of al-Qaeda strategist *Abū 'Ubayd al-Qurashī*'s work.¹²³ In an article published in the jihadist magazine *al-'Ansār* in 2002, *al-Qurashī* positioned the global jihadist movement within the framework of 4th generation warfare (4GW).¹²⁴ The theory of 4GW was developed by American Colonel William S. Lind, and appeared in an article in the Marine Corps Gazette in 1989 entitled “The changing face of war: into the fourth generation”.¹²⁵ Lind defines 4GW as nonlinear, geographically dispersed warfare, involving non-national/transnational entities such as religion or ideology. Moreover, it rests upon new technology, and includes a sophisticated form of psychological warfare through

¹²³ Black, Andrew, “Al-Suri’s Adaptation of Fourth Generation Warfare Doctrine”, *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, volume 4, issue 18 (September 21, 2006), www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370137 (accessed 10 January, 2007)

¹²⁴ 'Abū 'Ubayd al-Qurashī, “حروب الجيل الرابع” (“Fourth Generation Warfare”), *al-'Ansār* no. 2, January 28, 2002. The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

¹²⁵ Lind, William S. (et al.), “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation”, *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1998, pp. 22-26, www.d-n-i.net/fcs/4th_gen_war_gazette.htm (accessed 10 January 2007).

manipulation of media.¹²⁶ *Al-Qurashī* claims that the 4GW is upon us, with al-Qaeda's demonstration of "superiority of the militarily weaker side" and "defeat of nations by stateless opponents".

Regarding the use of media, *al-Qurashī* cites Lind and other Western strategists: "Television news broadcasts may become more damaging weapons than armored brigades", "psychological influence [...] will seek to destroy support for the fighters among the enemy's own people", and "influence over the media and other information networks [...] manipulates public opinion". However, claims *al-Qurashī*, the media is the front where America holds an advantage in today's 4GW. Therefore, he calls upon the jihadist movement to give extra attention to the media and to produce serious and targeted communication in order to break the American media blockade and regain the positive effect of the movement's "heroic actions in creating sympathy and support in the Islamic world".

Al-Qurashī's media strategy emphasizes the influence on public opinion, hereunder both the enemy and the supporter public. He does not give specific details as to how to influence the public opinion, but his media strategy nevertheless seems to represent a noteworthy contribution in the category of jihadist strategic studies, as it exclusively employs Western theories and sources for supporting its arguments.

'*Abū Bakr Nājī*

'*Abū Bakr Nājī*'¹²⁷ is the pen name of the author of the online book "Management of barbarism", published on the web by the al-Qaeda affiliated "Center for Islamic Studies and Research".¹²⁸ *Nājī*, described as a so-called rising star in the jihadist movement, outlines the "grand strategy for defeating the U.S." based on Western studies on management and military and political theory as well as the history of the jihadist experience.¹²⁹ He states, much like *al-Sūrī*, that the jihadists have been unsuccessful in the past because of the role of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States of America, and particularly because of the latter's media campaign which has

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ A well-known pen-jihadist from his articles with the magazine "صوت الجهاد" ("The Voice of the Jihad").

¹²⁸ 'Abū Bakr Nājī, "إدارة التوحش" ("Management of barbarism"), *Center for Islamic Studies and Research*, via www.tawhed.ws/c/?i=62 (accessed 10 January 2007). Original version and English translation also available from the Combating Terrorism Center: www.ctc.usma.edu/Management_of_Savagery.pdf (accessed June 2007).

¹²⁹ Brachman, Jarret M., and William McCants, "Stealing al-Qaeda's Playbook".

convinced the masses of the U.S. invincibility. However, according to *Nājī*, with the one remaining superpower engaged in occupations in the Islamic world, the jihadists now face a great propaganda victory. He acknowledges the unlikeliness of defeating the U.S. militarily, but claims that a clash is important for communication victories in the short term (and for the political defeat of the U.S. in the long term).

“Management of barbarism” refers to the period of chaos after the collapse of a state, for instance as a result of jihadist operations, and *Nājī* offers advice on how to exploit and control such a situation. His “path of empowerment” guides the jihadists through the required steps. A first goal is to destroy the authority of America and spread confidence in the souls of the Muslims, by “revealing the deceptive media to be a power without force”.¹³⁰ According to *Nājī*, the enemy is weak with regard to battle and balances this with the use of gadgets, including a deceptive “media halo”. It is therefore, he claims, imperative to understand the media policies of the adversary in order to win the military and political battle.

Nājī's plan seems to include both a military and a media strategy, the latter targeting the masses with the goal that they join the jihad, offer positive support and negative attitude towards the enemy. The media strategy also targets enemy troops with lower salaries with the purpose of them leaving their service, and aims to recruit officers of Muslim armies to the ranks of the mujahideen. A media plan which seeks to justify jihadist operations must be established, *Nājī* argues, especially towards the masses. *Nājī* focus on the masses seems to dominate his media strategy, as “the masses will be our back and support in the future”. Another target audience for the media is the “evil sheikhs”, who question the jihadist cause and must therefore be refuted.

Nājī gives detailed examples of how a media plan should complement a militant operation: An announcement given in connection with a hostage-taking operation multiplies the attention it draws, and a statement prior to an attack on oil facilities will perhaps increase the oil price alone (supporting the income of the Muslim people).

These examples apply mostly to traditional media and are based on the idea that sensational operations draw attention of world media and opinion. *Nājī* does not specifically treat the use of new media in his communication strategy, but does refer to,

¹³⁰ 'Abū Bakr Nājī, “ادارة التوحش” (“Management of barbarism”). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

and encourages, the use of the Internet. For instance, he suggests reference sources for doctrinal and military tactics which are all available online.¹³¹

In conclusion, it seems that *Nājī*'s media strategy focuses on defeating government and Western control over information delivery. It acknowledges the important role of public opinion and stresses that the masses are the main target of the jihadist media campaign: the campaign must justify the jihad in order for the masses to support the global jihadist movement.

Sayf al-^cAdl

Sayf al-^cAdl is a former colonel in the Egyptian Special Forces who joined the jihad in Afghanistan in the late 1980s and became a military adviser to al-Qaeda there. He has published extensively in the jihadist magazines *Sawt al-Jihād* and *al-Battār*, particularly on security and communications. *Sayf al-^cAdl* is currently believed to be in house arrest in Iran.¹³²

One article that appeared in *al-Battār* issue no 7 was entitled “Information and Counter-activities”.¹³³ It is a text book-style article explaining the concept of public opinion and how to exploit it for the benefit of the jihadists. It informs the reader about the “character of public opinion” in different societies, how to measure public opinion, and, most importantly, it presents ways to influence public opinion. These include repetition of an issue in different media outlets; presentation of facts, as opposed to fake rumors in society; diverting the attention of the masses to a topic they not yet knew of; and arousing emotions in the audience in order to win sympathy – however only by sticking to the truth. The article is another illustration of the apparent importance the global jihadist strategists give to the opinion of the masses.

More recently, *Sayf al-^cAdl* has been in the limelight due to the text “al-Qaeda’s strategy till 2020”. In 2005, Jordanian journalist *Fu’ād Husayn* authored a book entitled *Al-Zarqāwī – al-jīl al-thānī lī l-Qā^cida* (“Al-Zarqawi: al-Qaeda’s second generation”), in

¹³¹ *Nājī* recommends the reading of “The encyclopedia of Jihad” (a collection of texts from Afghanistan, now available online), *al-Battār* online magazine, the writings of *al-Qurashī* in the online *al-’Ansār* magazines, and the works on the *al-’Uswa* website.

¹³² “Saif al-Adl”, *CTC Harmony Profiles*, Combating Terrorism Center, http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/profile_pdf/Saif.pdf (accessed 10 September 2007).

¹³³ Sayf al-^cAdl, “الإعلام والنشاط المضاد”, (“Information and Counter-activities”), *al-Battār Magazine*, no. 7, 2003. Reproduced by *al-Nūr* media organization in the e-book: *النظرية الإعلامية* (“Media theory”), via www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=23399 (accessed 10 January 2007).

which he synthesized the views of several al-Qaeda leaders and presented them in a seven phase strategy for the development of the global jihadist movement in the two first decades of 21st century.¹³⁴ On the jihadist web forums, where the strategy seems to be highly popular, the “2020 strategy” document has been attributed to *Sayf al-ʿAdl*. While it treats the media rather briefly, it is worth noting that its second phase, the “Eye-opener stage” (*marḥalat fath al-ʿuyūn*), aims at informing both supporters and adversaries. Here it is argued that, through the Internet, electronic jihad should be carried out to propagate al-Qaeda’s ideas, and open the eyes of the Islamic *ʿumma* for it to see the truth about the United States of America. Iraq is designated as the epicenter for the jihad in this second phase, running from 2003 till 2006. In retrospect, it appears that Iraq has been the main theater of the jihad in this period, and the source of an intensive jihadist online media campaign. However, *Sayf al-ʿAdl*’s second phase exceeds the timeframe of 2006. Comments have also been made to whether this “strategy” is really a strategy: published in 2005, the first phases are rather observations of the present. Nevertheless, one can argue that *Sayf al-ʿAdl*’s alleged signature on the text and the widespread attention it received on the jihadist web makes it an important and influential piece.

ʿAbū Ḥudhayfa*’s letter to *ʿAbū ʿAbd ʿAllāh

In June 2000, an unknown, presumably Saudi, jihadist under the name *ʿAbū Ḥudhayfa* sent a letter to his mentor bin Laden (also known as *ʿAbū ʿAbd ʿAllāh*) and presented his views on the leadership skills and tactics required for Al-Qaeda to achieve victory.¹³⁵ Emphasis was given to political and military methods as well as public relations strategies and information management techniques.

ʿAbū Ḥudhayfa begins the letter with a critique of previous media campaigns, or more specifically the lack of well-coordinated campaigns. He comments on jihadist operations in Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya and Afghanistan, which he claims generally lacked a PR aspect. “People resorted to Western foreign media to quench their thirst for the true news”. The author sees a potential for utilizing these past events for publicity

¹³⁴ Ḥusayn, Fuʿād, *الزرقاوي الجيل الثاني للقاعدة* (“Al-Zarqawi, al-Qaeda’s second generation”) Lebanon: Dar al-Khayal, 2005.

¹³⁵ *ʿAbū Ḥudhayfa*, “A memo to Sheikh Abu Abdullah”, 2000, available through *Combating Terrorism Center* website, Arabic version: <http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/AFGP-2002-003251-Orig.pdf>, English translation: <http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/AFGP-2002-003251-Trans.pdf> (accessed 2 July 2007). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

purposes, for example by publishing biographies of the martyrs. However, the media should be up-to-date and cover events as they occur. As soon as possible after an attack, he argues, the movement should also take responsibility in public, in order to “affirm the movement’s credibility to the people”.

'Abū Hudhayfa also focuses on psychological and emotional effects of jihadist media, suggesting that the informational apparatus should emphasize martyrdom operations. Published recordings of martyrdom wills and operations are thought to arouse the nation and rally mujahideen to join the movement. *'Abū Hudhayfa* explicitly links this practice to the Palestinian organization Hamas and encourages the jihadists to imitate it.¹³⁶

On an organizational level, *'Abū Hudhayfa* stresses that the information work must be carried out by individuals within the regular cadre of the movement, bound by commitment and a contract, and not only by volunteers. The information section, “the link between the movement and the Muslim masses”, must be separated organizationally from the political section. Yet, political and informational functions are combined, both linked to the military function, and “all acting together harmoniously to serve the ancestral jihad plan”.

'Abū Hudhayfa offers details with regard to means of communication, concentrating on new media. He suggests using e-mail and points to how large website locations can be used to store files on the Internet. He also highlights the importance of establishing a website for bin Laden that collects all his written and audio-visual communication, and adds: “I hope that anxiety over security does not hinder progress in this field.” While security often is a key component of texts dealing with the use of new communication technology, *'Abū Hudhayfa* rather focuses on the desire of the people to receive information: “People are thirsty for information and impatiently waiting for your [bin Laden’s] news”.

This letter was sent to Bin Laden in 2000, and it appears that it may have had great influence on the media practice of al-Qaeda Central, and later on regional branches: The recording of martyrs’ wills started with the operation on September 11, 2001, and the

¹³⁶ It is interesting to note that al-Qaeda began recording martyrdom wills and operations only after 2000, seemingly in line with the recommendations in *'Abū Hudhayfa*’s letter.

USS Cole attack in 2000 would have been taped had the jihadist cameraman not overslept.¹³⁷

'Ibn 'Aḥmad al-Salīm

In 2003, *At-Tibyān* Publications, a jihadist online publishing house specifically known to translate ideological texts, issued a document entitled “39 ways to serve and participate in jihad”.¹³⁸ Written in Riyadh by *Muḥammad bin 'Aḥmad al-Salīm*, it offers advice on various ways to carry out jihad. As the Saudi Arabian jihadist milieu showed pioneering efforts in the media jihad – despite, or perhaps because of *'Abū Hudhayfa's* critique above – it is perhaps not surprising that this text offers strategies for media campaigns, and incorporates the electronic jihad in particular.

Advice number 21 (of 39) highlights the importance of distributing news about the mujahideen among Muslims. Allegedly, the benefits of this activity include that the community recognizes the unity of the movement, which provides a base of support to mujahideen, and sows optimism among the community. It furthermore breaks the media blockade of the enemies, who, *al-Salīm* claims, have gained control of most media outlets. In his critique, *al-Salīm* singles out the London-based pan-Arab daily newspaper *al-Sharq al-'Awsaṭ*, which he urges his fellow brothers to boycott. As for the media work of the mujahideen, *al-Salīm* suggests the use of traditional media, but also other means including web forums and online chat, electronic mailing lists, and the printing and distribution of news from Internet sites.

Advice number 34 concerns “Electronic jihad”, thus treating the use of new communication technology more specifically. The Internet is described as a “blessed medium” to distribute and follow the news, defend the mujahideen by responding to false allegations, and publicize their ideas and goals. *Al-Salīm* adds that the Internet offers the advantage of instantly reaching millions of people in seconds. He suggests an “Internet project”, in which designated cells use web forums to discuss jihad and republish or prepare articles. Media content, or “subject threads in the forum”, should include incitement to jihad, defense of the mujahideen, ideological consciousness-raising for

¹³⁷ Wright, Lawrence, *The Looming Tower*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

¹³⁸ Muḥammad bin 'Aḥmad al-Salīm, “39 ways to serve and participate in jihad”, *at-Tibyān Publications*, 2003, www.tibyan.com/article.php?id=1170 (accessed June 2005). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted. The original Arabic version was published elsewhere and probably earlier. This author has only had access to the English version.

jihad, scholarly support and studies in Islamic law about jihad, and exposing of secular and heretic opponents of jihad. *Al-Salīm* reveals a system for continuous operations of the “Internet project”: One cell member should post news, articles or other information every day while the others should comment and stimulate general participation.

3. The media establishments

The establishment of a large number of jihadist media groups – seemingly in accordance with recommendations from the strategists – has been followed by the publication of templates and outlines for the work of these groups. Habitual strategic goals include “breaking the Crusader control over media” and “disseminate true information about the global jihadist movement”. Tactics for reaching these goals have also been presented. Below are two examples of such texts that combine strategic thought and tactical advice, published by some of the largest jihadist media groups. The texts are recent, and highlight what seem to be new trends in the jihadist media strategy.

Global Islamic Media Front and *Najd al-Rāwī*

In August 2006, the Global Islamic Media Front published a message entitled “A Working Paper for a Media Invasion of America” on jihadist websites.¹³⁹ The message was signed by *Najd al-Rāwī*, a till then unknown pen-jihadist, who nevertheless received great attention on the forums.

The document presented a plan to invade the U.S. media and offered examples of means and methods to be used to succeed in this plan. *Al-Rāwī* emphasized the importance of a media war accompanying the military war. This media war should target and seek to influence a Western public. *Al-Rāwī* therefore explained the need for English-proficient individuals to translate jihadist messages and to write articles and powerful messages. He also points to the need for people with experience from working with graphics, and finally for people to ensure quality control, both language- and religious-wise, of the English material. Suggested projects include “English translations of statements of the Shaykhs of Jihad [...] to throw fear into the American people’s hearts”,

¹³⁹ Najd al-Rāwī, “ورقة عمل- غزو أمريكا إعلاميا”, (“A working paper for a media invasion of America”), posted by Global Islamic Media Front, on *al-Firdaws* Forum, 11 August 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=15792 (accessed 2 September 2006). The following quotes ibid, unless otherwise noted.

and translations of subtitles in videos of jihadist military operations. Among the targets where these products are to be used, *al-Rāwī* lists American forums, American Pal Talk chat rooms, American newspapers and magazines, and TV stations which have websites. Finally, he argues that well-known American writers such as Thomas Friedman, Samuel P. Huntington, Francis Fukuyama and research groups such as the RAND Corporation should be addressed.

The document seems rather unique due to its detailed advices on how to reach the West and its naming of specific persons and institutions to target. It also represents a seemingly growing desire among media-jihadists to reach a wider public, and to focus specifically on the audience in the United States of America. It seeks both intimidation of a mass U.S. audience, and academic discussion with the U.S. elite in order to counter their ideas and theories.

Al-Fajr Media Center

An article that appeared in the October 2006 issue of *al-Fajr Media Center's* "Technical Mujahid" magazine is another recent contribution to the theoretical literature on media jihad.¹⁴⁰ Written by a member of the "Information Bureau of the Islamic Army of Iraq", under the pen-name *al-Burāq*, it echoes prevailing statements about the role of the media, such as: "The jihadist media in our present age has become a mainstay in the battle of Islam against the crusaders and the nations of unbelief".

The article also strengthens *al-Rāwī's* strategy of targeting the West. "Inflicting psychological damage on the enemy is the primary mission of the jihadist media", states *al-Burāq*. He supports his view by referring to the tradition of the Prophet, from the collections of *al-Tirmidhī* and *al-Nasā'ī*: "Abd 'Allāh bin Rawāha used to recite poetry satirizing enemies in the mosque, and was reproached by 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb. The Prophet intervened and said: His words will be more powerful against them [the enemies] than a rain of arrows."¹⁴¹

Apparently, *al-Burāq* envisions a jihadist media strategy based on the use of information technology, particularly the Internet, which includes words, sound and

¹⁴⁰ Al-Burāq, "نريد في عقر دارهم" ("We want it inside their country"), *مجلة المجاهد التقني* ("The Technical Mujahid Magazine"), no 1, October 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=39586 (accessed September 2006). The following quotes *ibid*, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴¹ *Al-Tirmidhī* and *al-Nasā'ī* are two of the six major Sunni *ḥadīth* collections.

image. He also highlights the importance of film production. In order to reach the enemy, and especially the family of the soldiers, he suggests to create sites operating in the major languages of the world, in particular in English.

Finally, *al-Burāq* warns that the jihadists are facing a strong enemy who “has in his hands the weapons of technology and tremendous scientific development” – however, the enemy lacks the faith that guides the jihadists on their way, thereby shortening the technological lead of the enemy.

4. Summary

Despite the different nature of the above texts (speeches, interviews, books, articles, and postings on web forums) and authors (leaders, recognized strategists, and newcomers) the ideas concerning the role of the media that are presented seem to be based on a relatively similar set of assumptions.

A common point of departure for the texts is the perception of media superiority of the enemy. All seem to agree that the enemy, both the West and local governments, effectively has used its advantageous media position against the jihadist movement. Nevertheless, the strategists disagree on how to deal with the media of the enemy, and recommendations range from boycotting local papers, to entering and using Western online media outlets, or to simply leaving it to terrorize its own people.

The jihadist strategists generally agree on the fact that they have failed in their attempts to communicate strategically in the past. One reason for the failure is that their communication has reached only the elite. The masses are therefore highlighted as the most important audience. However, the message should be tailored to different groups in society, an idea that illustrates the concept of audience segmentation. Jihadists separate clearly between friendly and adversary audience. Friendly include both current and potential supporters, and adversary include fallen Muslims/apostates (near enemy) and the West/unbelievers (far enemy). A separation between audiences with different level of education is also suggested.

Consideration of public opinion is another recurring issue in the jihadist media strategy. Balancing between “necessary” violent operations and negative reactions in the public opinion, strategists are painfully aware of the fatal consequences of having the

public opinion turned against the movement. They therefore recommend that the main concern should be given to public opinion - through mass distribution of justification of violent activities. Mass distribution is also expressed in more general terms: the idea that any issue should be advertised repeatedly in different outlets reflects the concept of media profusion.

Justification, as mentioned above, is thus a major objective of the media strategy. Justification, or legitimization, should be based on both religious and historic evidence. Other goals of communication that are mentioned in, or can be derived from, the strategic texts in the above include education of supporters, intimidation of enemies, and propagation of the movement (gaining support, motivate and encourage). Indeed, *al-Sūrī*'s entire theory about using the media is entitled the 'incitement theory', highlighting the role of propagation of the movement through media.

While the texts outline an organizational separation between for example political, military and informational work, they also call for coordination of militant operations and communication efforts. It seems to be argued that a successful information campaign adds to the value of violent activities.

Targeting the Western enemy through media is not a new idea among jihadists, yet more recent texts have a stronger focus on this aspect. One can argue that this is explained by the fact that while bin Laden and his allies a few years ago were able to reach the West through mainstream media, security measures now restrict such communication flows. Therefore, a desire to address the West has re-emerged. This is expressed in the suggestions to translate media material into foreign languages, and to influence and use Western media outlets.

Finally, in most of the selected texts one can observe an emphasis on new media. *Al-Sūrī*, for example, attributed much of the recent media success of the jihadist movement to the use of new communication technology. While they praise and advice the use of Internet channels such as chat forums, Pal talk and online newspapers, few substantial analyses of the benefits of new versus traditional media are offered. Yet, timeliness of delivery of message and the large number of recipients online are highlighted in this respect. It is also advised to exploit the multimedia options that online media offers. However, as focus also is placed on the use of print media, it seems that the simultaneous use of new and traditional media is a preferred jihadist media strategy.

It is worth keeping in mind that this summary synthesizes a number of independent texts, produced at different times with a different public in mind. Each text alone presents a strategy for the use of the media, and was most likely never intended to be seen in relation with other such strategies. Yet, the fact that these texts all are available and widely distributed online opens up for the possibility that practitioners of the media jihad have consulted one or more of the strategies, and operate accordingly.

The following chapters deal with the jihadist media practice. They offer an overview and analysis of jihadist media groups and the material they produce, which will possibly reveal connections between theory and practice of the jihadist media strategy.

III. Jihadist Media in Practice

1. Transitions in the Media Jihad

1.1. From Print...

Osama bin Laden reportedly displayed a “natural instinct for publicity”,¹⁴² and “even when he was a relatively young man, [he] was thinking about his media strategy”.¹⁴³ His early thoughts about media strategies predated the launch of new communication technologies, and therefore mainly included printed press, radio, and television.

Osama bin Laden started his militant jihadist career in Afghanistan, among the “Afghan Arabs” supporting the Afghan mujahideen in their struggle against the Soviet occupation. *‘Abd ‘Allāh ‘Azzām*, bin Laden’s mentor, had established the Services Office (*Maktab al-Khidamāt*) in 1984 in Peshawar, which administered the Arab mujahideen, and externally acted as a media office. *‘Azzām* also financed a number of the many Arabic language publications - in the 1990s more than 20 - that were published in the area.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Atwan, Abdel Bari, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda*, London: Saqi, 2006, p.159.

¹⁴³ Bergen, Peter, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, New York: Free Press, 2006, p. 425.

¹⁴⁴ Zaydān, Aḥmad Mu’affaq, *The “Afghan Arabs” Media at Jihad*, Islamabad: The Pakistan Futuristics Foundation & Institute, 1999.

Bin Laden supported these activities, and in 1984 started financing the magazine *al-Jihād*, a publication designed to attract money and recruits to the Afghan cause. In order to spread the cause further, he also invited mainstream journalists to Afghanistan to document his battles against the Soviets. During the end of the 1980s, Egyptian filmmaker 'Issām Dirāz started shooting a documentary about bin Laden and his movement, which resulted in three released films. A biographer, Ḥāmid Mīr, also followed bin Laden during the 80's, but has yet to publish his biography.

Bin Laden also assisted in establishing a media office in London in 1994, called the Advice and Reform Committee (ARC). The office was led by *Khālīd al-Fawwāz*, and published and distributed bin Laden's statements and letters between 1994 and 1998. It allegedly also served as a vehicle for messages between various al-Qaeda cells, and facilitated interviews with bin Laden for a number of international media outlets.¹⁴⁵

Bin Laden gave his first interview to a representative of the Western press, Robert Fisk from the British newspaper the Independent, in 1993. His first interview to a global TV network was given to CNN in March 1997. At the time, bin Laden allegedly chose CNN over BBC and CBS's 60 minutes show, because of the larger audience CNN would reach.¹⁴⁶ In 1999, bin Laden gave his first television interview in Arabic to the satellite channel al-Jazeera (*al-Jazīra*).

By the end of 1999, bin Laden stopped giving interviews and his communications were instead recorded by the media committee of al-Qaeda, incidentally headed by a jihadist with the catchy nom-de-guerre 'Abū Reuter. Tapes were then given to Arab media for further distribution.¹⁴⁷ The main reason for bin Laden's halt in media appearances was allegedly due to Taliban's, bin Laden's host in Afghanistan, concern with his careless handling of the media. Reportedly, Bin Laden gave press conferences from camps in Afghanistan that the Taliban had had denied existed.¹⁴⁸ This resulted in great embarrassment for the Taliban, who subsequently confiscated all bin Laden's means of communication, including his satellite phones.¹⁴⁹ However, bin Laden seems to have been reluctant to give up the media limelight, and 'Abū Muṣṣab al-Sūrī, strategist

¹⁴⁵ Indictment, US vs. bin Laden, <http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/reports/pdfs/binladen/indict.pdf> (accessed 10 March 2007).

¹⁴⁶ Bergen, Peter, *Holy War, Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, London: Phoenix, 2002.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Lia, Brynjar, *Architect of Global Jihad. The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri*, pp. 286-87.

¹⁴⁹ Bergen, Peter, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*.

and former media adviser to Bin Laden, reproached him for jeopardizing their safe haven by disobeying the Taliban: “I think our brother [bin Laden] has caught the disease of [television] screens, flashes, fans and applause”.¹⁵⁰

Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda movement were also very well aware of the effects of ‘events as communication’, and planned operations with the objective of receiving maximum mainstream media attention. Allegedly, one of the reasons that the U.S. embassy in Kenya was targeted in 1998, for example, was the idea that taking the life of the female American ambassador would generate more publicity than that of a male.¹⁵¹

As for the 9/11 events, bin Laden reportedly described them as a set of communications:

“These young men... said in deeds, in New York and Washington, speeches that overshadowed all other speeches made everywhere in the world. The speeches are understood by both Arabs and non-Arabs - even by the Chinese. It is above all what the media said”.¹⁵²

However, the jihadists have expressed skepticism and mistrust towards the mainstream media, accusing them of manipulating the jihadist message.¹⁵³

1.2. ...to Online

Already while the jihadists relied mainly on mainstream media, new technologies had entered the communication sphere. Despite initial debate during the 1980s about whether it was consistent with Islamism to use any kind of technology of Western origin or not, the movement soon came to embrace the Internet and the World Wide Web. ‘Abd ‘Allāh ‘Azzām was reportedly a fierce advocate of the use of new electronic technology, and encouraged his followers, among them bin Laden, to exploit the potential of this evolving medium.¹⁵⁴

By 1995, radical Islamist groups had started using email lists to disseminate information. Simultaneously, designated jihadist media groups started to operate on the

¹⁵⁰ Cullison, Alan, “Inside al-Qaeda’s Hard Drive”, *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004, www.theatlantic.com/doc/200409/cullison (accessed 10 May 2007).

¹⁵¹ Wright, Lawrence, *The Looming Tower*.

¹⁵² Osama bin Laden, in unauthenticated videotape, November 2001, reproduced in Hegghammer, Thomas, “Dokumentasjon om al-Qa’ida – Intervjueer, kommunikéer og andre primærkilder, 1990-2002”.

¹⁵³ For a recent example, see a note from *as-Sahāb* about the “[...] counterfeiting of the facts and altering the purposes and objectives of the [bin Laden] speech by al-Jazeera”. Posted on *al-Hisba*, “بلا تلبس السحاب” للإنتاج تقد إلى أهلنا بالعراق - رسالة من الشيخ أسامة (‘‘No deception, *as-Sahāb* Production presents, To our People in Iraq – letter from Shaykh Osama’’), 23 October 2007, www.alhesbahonline.net/v/showthread.php?t=150312, (accessed 23 October, 2007).

¹⁵⁴ Atwan, Abdel Bari, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda*.

web. The term ‘media group’ describes entities that present themselves as producers, reproducers and distributors of jihadist material. These groups can be affiliated with a specific group or with groups in a specific country, or only loosely associated with the global jihadist movement in general. Many stand out as highly productive, spreading news and other communications to and from geographically scattered cells of the movement and, just as importantly, to the grand public.

The oldest online jihadist media group is probably the Islamic Media Center (IMC). Allegedly founded already in 1991, it produced online material “in a time when the Internet was a new thing”.¹⁵⁵ The IMC was known to distribute training manuals, and it also produced films. Since 2005, however, the IMC has been inactive. The websites ‘alned.com’ and ‘maalemajihad.com’ are other vanguards of the online media jihad.¹⁵⁶

Another example of an early online media group includes *‘Azzām Publications*. *‘Azzām Publications*, named after the Palestinian *‘Abd ‘Allāh ‘Azzām*, operated since late 1996 through a website (www.azzam.com) and a post office box in London. It described itself as “an independent media organization providing authentic news and information about Jihad and the Foreign Mujahideen everywhere [...] based entirely on the Internet”.¹⁵⁷ *‘Azzām Publications* offered news, articles, videos and photos on its website, and financed the business through the sales of books and cassettes. Much of the material focused on Bosnia, Chechnya and Afghanistan, the most important jihadi fronts at the time. Indeed, the Chechen jihadi site ‘www.qoqaz.net’ was allegedly linked to *‘Azzām Publications*.¹⁵⁸ While the latter site still exists (although under a new URL), the *‘Azzām* website was shut down shortly after 9/11 2001, and only old *‘Azzām* publications now circulate on the web.

At-Tibyān Publications has existed at least since 2001, and has operated on a number of websites.¹⁵⁹ The publishing house is specialized in translation and subtitling of ideological works of al-Qaeda, and presents figures such as *‘Abd ‘Allāh ‘Azzām*, *Ḥamūd*

¹⁵⁵ Lia, Brynjar, “Jihadi Web Media Production”.

¹⁵⁶ For details on ‘maalemajihad.com’, see Atwan, Bari Abdel, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda*, p.127. For information about ‘alned.com’, see Di Justo, Patrick, “How Al-Qaeda Site Was Hijacked”, *Wired*, 8 October 2002, www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2002/08/54455 (accessed 10 September, 2007).

¹⁵⁷ “FAQs about Azzam Publications”, *‘Azzām Publications*, via www.confuddled.com/board/messages/7/8.html?1054157383 (accessed 10 June, 2007).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ For example: <http://tibyaan.atspace.com/>, <http://www.tibyan.tk/>, <http://www.tibyan.com>, <http://www.tibyanpubs.com>.

bin ‘Uqlā’ al-Shu‘aybī, ‘Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, and Nāṣir al-Faḥd. Currently, at-Tibyān seems to be inactive as the at-Tibyān publications circulating on the web observed by this author are dated no later than early 2006. There exists, however, a web forum called at-Tibyān and a blog called at-Tibyān Publications.¹⁶⁰ It is not known whether these sites are official at-Tibyān Publications sites: the blog has been inactive since February 2006 and the discussion forum is closed for registration.¹⁶¹ One should, however, be aware of the important role that at-Tibyān has played in the jihadist media campaign in the past, and continue to play through its previous publications which are still available online.¹⁶²

A more recent and perhaps better known representative of the jihadist online media campaign is the late al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. With his video-taped and Internet-distributed scenes of hostage beheadings, he made the media jihad notorious across the world. Such brutal, yet relatively sophisticated, jihadist online media campaigns did not end with al-Zarqawi. On the contrary, the media jihad seems to be a business on the rise – a fact illustrated by the establishment of a large number of new online media groups during the last few years. Some of these currently active groups will be dealt with in depth in case studies presented in the below.

It is worth noting that the emergence of such Internet-based media groups marked not only a shift from print to online, but also to a large extent appears to have facilitated the move from the use of mainstream (Western and local) media to media outlets operating in the name of al-Qaeda and the global jihadist movement. While al-Qaeda also in the past exercised ownership and control over information through publication of printed magazines and newspapers, they did not to the same extent control information about the movement that was spread to a wider audience. The Internet seems to have opened for media groups to operate more independently, and to cover broader and reach wider. Online jihadist-controlled media channels have thus emerged as a crucial supplement to mainstream mass media.

¹⁶⁰ *At-Tibyān* Publications blog: <http://tibyan.blogspot.com/>. The blog links to the *at-Tibyān* forum: www.at-tawheed.com, (both accessed 15 May, 2007).

¹⁶¹ The forum is closed for registration as of May 2007. When registration was open, two Muslims needed to vouch for new member applicants.

¹⁶² See for example posting on Islamic Networking Forum, “All Tibyan Publications on Permanent Links Insha Allah”, 20 December 2006, <http://talk.islamicnetwork.com/showthread.php?t=12294> (accessed July 2007).

1.3. ... and Beyond

While the online scene currently seems to be the main theatre for the jihadist media campaign, and new jihadist media companies continue to emerge on the Internet, other developments in the media jihad have become visible with time. They point to a slightly different use of the Internet, as well as to a use of other channels of communication.

The use of non-jihadist controlled media outlets

First of all, the use of other than jihadist-controlled online media outlets is increasingly common. In what is perhaps an attempt to reach a wider audience, jihadists have started to employ Western online outlets that exercise little control over content. User-generated blogs and video sharing sites, such as YouTube (www.youtube.com) and LiveLeak (www.liveleak.com), now contain a large collection of jihadist videos. These videos are mainly from Iraq, but numerous recordings from other al-Qaeda fronts are also available. Moreover, one can observe productions from the main jihadist media companies, such as *as-Sahāb* and Global Islamic Media Front, though the companies appear to not distribute the films themselves. Instead, individuals who support the movement seemingly post the videos, which are often followed by hostile discussions between users online.¹⁶³ Jihadists in discussion forums have also discussed the possibility of entering pro-jihadist information on American chat rooms or on Wikipedia, yet it is unknown whether this has actually taken place.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, there seems to emerge signs of a jihadist trend of seeking to use and influence media outlets other than those under their control, and in particular Western media outlets.

Satellite TV and Cell phone

Early 2007, jihadists started streaming TV broadcast online.¹⁶⁵ While this service lasted only for a few months, a satellite TV station, established by jihadists in 2005, is still available. A TV channel, called *al-Zawrā'*, appears as a Sunni insurgent satellite television station that broadcasts footage of attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. It

¹⁶³ See for example: www.youtube.com/user/KhateebJihad (accessed 2 July 2003).

¹⁶⁴ Posting on *al-Firdaws* English Forum, "Psychological Warfare", 22 March 2007, <http://alfirdaws.org/vbss/showthread.php?t=7835> (accessed 6 June 2007).

¹⁶⁵ The jihadist media group the Global Islamic Media Front established a TV service called the "Caliphate Voice Channel" that in January 2007 launched online streaming broadcast.

began broadcasting from Iraq, but was eventually closed down by U.S. forces. It then moved its broadcast to the Egyptian government-controlled satellite network NileSat, where it remained until technical problems forced it to move again in February 2007. Subsequently, French Eutelsat Communications hosted *al-Zawrā'*, before Western pressure forced it to move to the Dubai-based network Arabsat. Arabsat is owned by 22 countries of the Arab League, with Saudi Arabia as the principal shareholder. *al-Zawrā'* is owned and run by *Mishān al-Jabūrī*, an exiled member of Iraq's Parliament currently based in Syria. The videos aired on *al-Zawrā'*, also known as Muj-TV, are allegedly taken from insurgent websites. *Al-Jabūrī* himself has reportedly also gone on air to spread his personal views of the conflict in Iraq. Lately, *Al-Jabūrī* and his *al-Zawrā'* have taken side with the anti al-Qaeda elements of the Iraqi insurgency, but continue to air statements, music and graphic videos of attacks on Western forces.¹⁶⁶

The distribution of media material through cell phone has also become increasingly common. Videos in the 3GP format, designed for easy use on mobile devices, are made available online, and some jihadist forums operate sub-forums entitled "mobile forum". In addition to videos in cell phone friendly format, these contain jihadist cell phone wallpapers and images formatted for cell phones.¹⁶⁷

One can argue that the use of satellite-based TV and cell phones aims to further expand the audience of the jihadist media. While the satellite station is certainly accessible only to people with access to Arabsat, it may still reach a number of those without Internet access.

Passive use of mainstream media

Furthermore, the jihadists still continue to use mainstream media. They seem to use it not primarily to spread their ideas, for example through interviews, as before. Rather, it appears to serve as a source of information: News stories in Western and local media about jihadism, the conflict in Iraq or in Afghanistan, offer the jihadists information about their opponents, such as developments in counterterrorism issues,

¹⁶⁶ "As-Sahab: The rise of new media through al-Qaeda's eyes", *The Layalina Review on Public Diplomacy and Arab Media*, vol III, no. 12, May 25- June 27, 2007, www.layalina.tv/press/PR_III.12.asp#article2 (accessed 10 June, 2007).

¹⁶⁷ "Internet Intelligence Report", *Terrorism Research Center*, August 2, 2007, Ed. 3, Vol. 31, www.terrorism.com (accessed 5 August 2007).

Western military progress or retreat, and Western public opinion of the conflict.¹⁶⁸ They may also take advantage of mainstream media and general public information, such as timetables, information about electricity grids, *et cetera*, in order to identify future targets.¹⁶⁹ Mainstream press sources, in addition to assessments from Western academic and official institutions, are observed circulating on the jihadist web.¹⁷⁰ Private counterterrorism enterprises, which for example provide English translations of jihadist material, are also referenced in jihadist forums in the English language.¹⁷¹

These are passive uses of the media, and may as such be labeled a second dimension of the media jihad.

A physically violent media jihad

What may be considered a third dimension, then, is the practice of physically targeting journalists and media workers. This aspect of the media jihad lies outside the main focus of this study, but merits to be mentioned as it appears to be increasing in scale. Attack on media personnel is a phenomenon heavily observed in Iraq, where as of July 2007 as many as 194 journalists and media assistants have been killed since March 2003.¹⁷² One may argue that this is a perhaps predictable result of a violent conflict, however, evidence suggests that such attacks are also part of a strategy by the global jihadist movement. Texts issued in the name of al-Qaeda in Iraq, as well as individuals on the discussion forums and in jihadist strategic literature, deal with al-Qaeda's apparent problem with the coverage of 'terrorism' in mainstream media.¹⁷³ What the jihadists perceive as misinformation, or lack of support to their cause, is criticized, and they call for revenge on journalists who "publish materials injurious to the cause of the

¹⁶⁸ See for instance, "How Jihadist Internet Forums are Used to Inform Mujahideen of News from Western Media", *MEMRI*, Special Dispatch Series - No. 1615, 8 June 2007, www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=subjects&Area=jihad&ID=SP161507 (accessed 15 June 2007).

¹⁶⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report cites specific cases in which the future hijackers used the Internet for such purposes, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, Authorized Edition, pp. 157, 164.

¹⁷⁰ See for example posting on *al-Firdaws* English Forum of an article from the Jamestown Foundation, www.alfirdaws.org/vbe/showthread.php?t=11942 (accessed August 2007).

¹⁷¹ See for example posting on *al-Firdaws* English Forum of a SITE commentary on an al-Zawahiri speech, www.alfirdaws.org/vbe/showthread.php?t=10950/ (accessed 6 July 2007).

¹⁷² This number according to "Reporters Sans Frontières", www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=43. "Committee to Protect Journalists" reports 110 killed journalists, www.cpj.org/index.html (both accessed 10 July 2007).

¹⁷³ Ulph, Stephen, "Al-Qaeda extends threats to journalists and intellectuals outside Iraq", *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 2, Issue 14 (July 22, 2005), <http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369748> (accessed 10 July, 2007).

mujahideen”.¹⁷⁴ From being mostly focused on Iraqi media workers, this violent strategy seems to have expanded to at least rhetorically target also Arabic satellite channels such as *al-^cArabiyya*, *al-^cIrāqiyya* and al-Jazeera, “mouthpieces of the Crusader and Jewish occupation”.¹⁷⁵ In recent developments, this practice has spread to other groups, as also female journalists in Palestine and Afghanistan have been particular targets of respectively Hamas and the Taliban.¹⁷⁶

2. Restrictions with Internet-based media

The Internet has emerged as the main vehicle for the dissemination of jihadist information and propaganda, and appears to have contributed significantly to an increasing number of jihadist media groups gaining foothold in the informational world. Yet, based on the above information, one can conclude that the Internet and the jihadist online media channels are not the only means of communication used by the jihadists. While one can argue over the reasons for this diversity, one candidate may be the limitations of the Internet as a media channel. The main restrictions with the use of the Internet as a media outlet seem to lie in the following three aspects: difficult Internet access for supporters, and jihadist and counterterrorism security measures.

2.1. Difficult Internet access

As will be observed in the below analysis of jihadist media material, supporters and potential supporters, and more specifically Arabic-speaking Muslims, appear as a main target audience for the jihadist media campaign. The majority of individuals belonging to this group are allegedly located in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). As a matter of fact, Internet access in this region is highly irregular, and the percentage of Internet users within the total population of a country varies from 15.2 in Morocco, to 6.6 in Saudi Arabia, and 0.1 in Iraq.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ See for example “Threats undermine media freedom in Afghanistan”, *The Hindu*, June 12 2007, www.hindu.com/2007/06/12/stories/2007061208231200.htm, or “Gaza TV women protest at threats”, *BBC news*, 4 June 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6720445.stm (both accessed 15 June 2007).

¹⁷⁷ Numbers according to *OpenNet Initiative*, <http://opennet.net/research/profiles> (accessed 10 July 2007).

The case of Iraq stands out as particularly interesting. This study will argue that Iraq is the source and catalyst of a significant part of the jihadist online media campaign. Yet, this is also the country in the MENA region with the lowest number of Internet users.¹⁷⁸ It appears that the use of the Internet is not restricted by the Iraqi government, but rather by the state of war in the country.¹⁷⁹ For instance, the power supply sometimes only covers a few hours of electricity per day in Baghdad.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, the low number of Internet users in Iraq may be misleading, as cyber cafés are now becoming more common.¹⁸¹

In other MENA countries, freedom of expression is often restricted, both by technology and legal and physical means. The region as a whole has been labeled “one of the most repressive Web environments in the world”.¹⁸² This, in addition to a high number of illiterates, seemingly undermines the role of online jihadist media. However, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of jihadists are recruited from educated strata of the society¹⁸³ and therefore may have the means to circumvent such restrictions.¹⁸⁴

2.2. Jihadist security measures

Due to the illegal nature of the global jihadist movement, the jihadists themselves have also taken measures to restrict the access to their media material. Despite an articulated goal for the jihadist media to reach a widest possible audience, parts of their production remain accessible only to individuals actively seeking it.

¹⁷⁸ Internet users in Afghanistan also number 0.1 % of the population. Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ “Iraq”, *OpenNet Initiative*, <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/iraq> (accessed 10 July 2007).

¹⁸⁰ Zavis, Alexandra, “In Iraq, another summer of power shortages”, *LA Times Online*, 14 August 2007, www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-heat14aug14.0.2993091.story?coll=la-home-world (accessed 15 August 2007).

¹⁸¹ The U.S. Department of Defense has spent more than USD 165 millions on establishing Internet cafés, and the blogging community in Iraq is known to be very active. Source: “Iraq”, *OpenNet Initiative*, <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/iraq> (accessed 10 July 2007).

¹⁸² “Middle East and North Africa”, *OpenNet Initiative*, <http://opennet.net/research/regions/mena> (accessed 10 July 2007).

¹⁸³ Marc Sageman, in his *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, 2004, claims that “most mujahideen have a higher technical education”, pp. 162-3.

¹⁸⁴ Research on Internet filtering in the Middle East and North Africa reports that “some technologically sophisticated user groups went as far as developing their own circumvention tools [...] that enabled users to access blocked Jihadist-oriented Web sites. Source: “MENA”, *OpenNet Initiative*, <http://opennet.net/research/regions/mena> (accessed 10 July 2007).

Most of the media material is distributed on jihadist discussion forums, and new releases are often published on the most prominent forums before reaching other sites. Such prominent jihadist forums are generally password protected, and while many of them are open for registration, others appear to require personal connections or screening through communication with the moderator before new members are accepted. The use of forums, as opposed to official websites for groups, may in itself be interpreted as a security measure, as forums are open to member participation and forum owners may disclaim responsibility for (illegal) content posted by visitors.¹⁸⁵

While production of jihadist media material is probably quite ‘safely’ carried out, distribution to the Internet remains a critical point, as it may be traced back to individuals. Sometimes a video production is released online weeks or months after the production date indicated in the opening scene. The time gap between production and release probably reflects the period it has taken the material to move from one place to another, and may indicate a certain level of cautiousness or tribulations on the way.

Technologically sophisticated solutions for protecting material, such as steganography and encryption - knowledge thought to be in the possession of online jihadists¹⁸⁶ - are likely not used for media material. Again, one can assume that the lack of such measures reflects the goal of wide distribution of the jihadist media campaign.

2.3. Counterterrorism measures

Counterterrorism officials, both in the West and the Middle East, closely monitor the jihadists’ steps on the Internet. This has sparked a debate about whether one should seek to close down jihadist websites, or rather allow them to stay online in order to gain insights about the movement through surveillance. This debate also pertains to the issue of balancing security and civil liberties.¹⁸⁷ The body of laws, on national and international levels, regulates the measures that may be taken against jihadist websites,

¹⁸⁵ *Al-'Ikhlaṣ* Forum, for example, presents the following notification: “المشاركات في هذا المنتدى لا تخضع للرقابة” (“Postings on this forum don’t undergo censoring, and don’t necessarily represent the views of *al-'Ikhlaṣ*”), www.ekhlaas.ws/forum/ (accessed July 2007).

¹⁸⁶ The jihadist magazine “المجاهد التقني” (“The technical mujahid”), no. 2, March 2007, offered detailed instructions on the use of steganography tools, and presented encryption software developed by jihadists.

¹⁸⁷ See Weimann, Gabriel, *Terror on the Internet*, pp. 173-242, or Pillar, Paul R., “Counterterrorism after al-Qaeda”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2004, pp. 101-113. For a pre-9/11 2001 assessment on the topic, see Pedahzur, Ami, and Magnus Ranstorp, “A Tertiary Model for Countering Terrorism in Liberal Democracies: The Case of Israel”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2001, pp. 1-26.

and while a legal framework controls certain criminal activities on the Internet (such as child pornography, identity theft, credit card fraud etc.), online communicative activities seem to have been partially protected by the concept of ‘freedom of speech’.

Yet, over the last years the increased awareness about terrorists’ online propaganda activities has led to the establishment of resolutions and statements by various authorities. For example, the UN Security Council resolution 1624 (2005) calls to “prohibit by law incitement to commit a terrorist act or acts”¹⁸⁸; and the Plan of Action of the UN global counter terrorism strategy (A/RES/60/288), 2006, calls upon member states to “a- coordinate efforts at the international and regional level to counter terrorism in all its forms and manifestations on the Internet, [and] b- use the Internet as a tool for countering the spread of terrorism [...]”.¹⁸⁹

Despite these efforts, it has been noted that “the small number of suspects arrested for dissemination of propaganda may indicate the lack of legal basis and difficulty in investigating these types of crimes”.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, recent cases in Europe indicate that increased action is being taken: On July 5, 2007, Younis Tsouli, also known as the online jihadist ‘*Irhābī 007*’ (“Terrorist 007”), was convicted for inciting to commit acts of terrorism,¹⁹¹ and on July 26, 2007, five British Muslim men were sentenced for downloading and sharing extremist terrorism-related material.¹⁹²

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that most jihadist websites are hosted by Western, and especially U.S., Internet Service Providers (ISPs), that often are unaware of the identity of their clients and the content on their sites.¹⁹³ ISPs have a legal authority to remove sites that violate the law or that abuse regulations stated by the ISP itself.

¹⁸⁸ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1624 (2005), 14 September 2005, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/510/52/PDF/N0551052.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 30 July 2007).

¹⁸⁹ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution: The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, A/RES/60/288, 8 September 2006, <http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/361eea1cc08301c485256cf600606959/1ef6e139f9f1786f852571fe0069ff46!OpenDocument> (accessed 30 July 2007).

¹⁹⁰ “EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report” (TE-SAT), *Europol*, March 2007, www.europol.europa.eu/publications/TE-SAT/TE-SAT2007.pdf (accessed 30 July 2007).

¹⁹¹ “Three jailed for inciting terror”, *BBC News*, 5 July 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6273732.stm (accessed 30 July 2007).

¹⁹² Casciani, Dominique, “Students who descended into extremism”, *BBC News*, 26 July 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6916654.stm> (accessed 30 July, 2007).

¹⁹³ Carmon, Y., (et al.), “The Enemy Within: Where are the Islamist/Jihadist Websites Hosted, and What Can Be Done about It?”, *MEMRI Inquire and Analysis Series*, no 374, 19 July, 2007, <http://memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=IA37407> (accessed 30 July, 2007).

Therefore, a preferred counterterrorist security measure is arguably to notify ISPs that host jihadist websites, which should have “both the ability and the obligation to remove such sites from their servers”.¹⁹⁴ During the summer of 2007, private counterterrorism initiatives carried out a ‘notification campaign’ which resulted in the disruption of a handful of jihadist websites.¹⁹⁵

Finally, one should be careful when crediting either counterterrorism efforts or jihadist security measures with the disappearance from the web of jihadist sites, which may perhaps not be more than “the result of a series of unrelated events like unpaid Internet Service Provider bills, incompetent [jihadist web-] administration, and technical failures.”¹⁹⁶

IV. Case Studies

A jihadist online media group has in the above been described as an entity that presents itself as a media establishment and acts as a producer and/or distributor of written and audio-visual material on the Internet, supporting al-Qaeda’s salafi-jihadi ideology. The large number of such media groups can be classified according to different criteria: On a functional level, the distinction between producers and distributors is conspicuous, yet many groups belong to both categories. Another useful and less overlapping categorization is the separation between local and global jihadist media groups. The term *local* may sound somewhat unfit as ‘al-Qaeda’ in this study is used interchangeably with ‘the *global* jihadist movement’. Yet, there is a clear distinction between media groups that serve al-Qaeda Central and the whole movement, and groups that are affiliated with local branches of al-Qaeda. A local media group is not necessarily physically based in the region it serves, but its media material is focused on issues relevant to the local node, while at the same time supporting the al-Qaeda cause. Local jihadist media groups exist in the spheres of al-Qaeda’s main fronts, including

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ “When freepers “attack””, *Internet Haganah* blog, 22 July, 2007, <http://internet-haganah.co.il/harchives/006152.html> (accessed 30 July, 2007).

¹⁹⁶ “Internet Intelligence Report”, *Terrorism Research Center*, July 26, 2007, ed. 3, vol. 30.

Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and North and East Africa. Their online presence is often a development of their traditional media activities, yet for some more recent groups it is solely Internet-based. As for global jihadist media groups, they seem mostly to have been conceived with and on the Internet.

In the following, this study will present case studies from each category, beginning with global jihadist media companies before moving on to one of the current major local fronts of the media jihad, namely Iraq.

1. Global Media Groups

1.1. Media Producer: *As-Saḥāb*

a. Background

Among the global media groups, *As-Saḥāb Media Production Establishment* thrives as a popular, highly productive and authoritative institution.¹⁹⁷ An obvious reason for its prominent position is that it is as the al-Qaeda leadership's exclusive media outlet: It has produced the entire collection of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri audio and video tapes since late 2001. *As-Saḥāb* ("the Clouds") also promotes other high-level jihadists to the public, and produces jihadist documentaries and media material on military operations from Afghanistan.

As-Saḥāb presented its first major project on the Internet in the summer of 2001. It was a nearly two hour long video called "The destruction of the American Destroyer [USS] Cole".¹⁹⁸ While the video did not contain actual footage of the attack, it presented previously unseen recordings of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and clips from al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. The video was translated into English. This was the first al-Qaeda propaganda piece that showed signs of the relatively high technical sophistication, cinematic effects, unique footage, and foreign language capabilities that would later be the characteristics of *as-Saḥāb* productions.

There are few known facts about the operational system of *as-Saḥāb*. *As-Saḥāb* most likely operates out of Pakistan or Afghanistan, in the vicinity of the possible hide-out of the al-Qaeda leadership. Indeed, top al-Qaeda figures seem, at least in the past, to

¹⁹⁷ Name in Arabic: مؤسسة السحاب للإنتاج الإعلامي

¹⁹⁸ "تدمير المدمرة الأمريكية كول" ("Destruction of the American Destroyer Cole"), *As-Saḥāb Production*, 2001.

have been linked to *as-Sahāb: Khālid Shaykh Muḥammad*, the alleged mastermind behind the 9/11 and other al-Qaeda attacks, revealed in a court hearing that “I was the Media Operations Director of as-Sahab [...] under Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri”.¹⁹⁹ On another operational level, it is said to have several cameramen and couriers at its disposition, and one *as-Sahāb* tape allegedly goes through a large number of links, of persons unknown to each other, before it reaches its final form and destination. One assumed cameraman of *as-Sahāb*, interviewed by ABC News in June 2003, claimed that *as-Sahāb* uses minivans as mobile studios for the editing of its videos.²⁰⁰ Another kind of a covert studio was discovered by Pakistani police in a secret basement in Waziristan in 2004, containing equipment used for editing audio-visual material.²⁰¹ It is important to bear in mind that the seemingly high quality of the *as-Sahāb* productions can be relatively easily obtained with handheld battery cameras, low-cost, commercial digital editing equipment and only a minimum of technical knowledge.

Many of the tapes of the al-Qaeda leaders have been aired at least partially on the Qatar-based satellite TV station al-Jazeera before finding their way to the jihadist Internet sites. Others are released directly on the web. *As-Sahāb* currently does not operate a website, but relies on distribution on the jihadist web forums. Al-Jazeera has denied any link to *as-Sahāb* and al-Qaeda, and claims that the tapes are anonymously delivered to them, often at the Pakistani al-Jazeera office in Islamabad.²⁰² The al-Jazeera bureau chief in Pakistan has also on a few occasions met with emissaries of al-Qaeda in order to receive their tapes.²⁰³ The distribution on the Internet seems to be facilitated by the *al-Fajr* Media Center, which is mentioned as ‘source’ for the *as-Sahāb* material.²⁰⁴ Additionally, an “army of volunteers” are responsible for the widest possible circulation

¹⁹⁹ Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024, March 10, 2007, www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10024.pdf (accessed 16 July 2007).

²⁰⁰ Gannon, Kathy, “Al-Qaeda’s Media Machine”, *ABC News*, 23 June 2003, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=2111045&page=3> (accessed 2 February, 2007).

²⁰¹ Authors conversation with Alexis Debat, *The Nixon Center*, Washington D.C., March, 2007.

²⁰² “Al-Jazeera: Bin Laden tape obtained in Pakistan”, *MSNBC News*, 30 October, 2004, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6363306/ (accessed 10 October 2006).

²⁰³ “Al-Jazeera bureu chief confirms receiving ‘bin Laden’ tape”, *Asian political News*, 18 November 2002, via www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0WDQ/is_2002_Nov_18/ai_94330882 (accessed 10 October 2006).

²⁰⁴ See further elaboration on this point in the section below on *al-Fajr*.

of the tapes.²⁰⁵ More specifically, it has been suggested that the relatively well-known and now arrested online jihadist Younis Tsouli, also known as 'Irhābī 007, has been involved in *as-Saḥāb*'s media campaign. A short-lived website, www.as-sahab.com, launched in November 2005 was according to fellow jihadists the creation of 'Irhābī 007'.²⁰⁶

A statistical analysis of *as-Saḥāb* issuances from 2002 till 2007, offered by the IntelCenter²⁰⁷, illustrates a steady growth of publications until 2005, with respectively 6, 11, 12 and 16 issuances a year, then a sharp increase in 2006, which saw a total of 58 distributed tapes.²⁰⁸ As of March 11, 2007, *as-Saḥāb* had released 13 tapes, indicating a continuing prolific production.²⁰⁹ The IntelCenter categorizes the tapes into three groups: "bin Laden-tapes", "al-Zawahiri tapes", and "Other *as-Saḥāb*" (including other prominent jihadists and operational videos). Throughout the period, "bin Laden" represented 16% of the total issuances, "al-Zawahiri" 31%, and "Other *as-Saḥāb*" 53%. During the year of 2006, their numbers are respectively 10%, 26% and 64 %.

These observations essentially seem to be in accordance with the results from the period of research in this study: From September throughout December 2006, *as-Saḥāb* produced 4 Ayman al-Zawahiri tapes, and 24 other *as-Saḥāb*. However, no Osama bin Laden tapes were issued during this period, which was a trend for the first half of 2007 as well.²¹⁰ The above numbers give al-Zawahiri 16 % and other *as-Saḥāb* 84 % of the media share. Another, and more operational, way of categorizing the *as-Saḥāb* productions for the period September – December 2006 is separating between the video/audio messages

²⁰⁵ Hassan M. Fattah, "Al-Qaeda increasingly reliant on Media", New York Times, September 30, 2006, www.nytimes.com/2006/09/30/world/30jordan.html?ex=1317268800&en=fb3722198f902aae&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss (accessed 10 October 2006).

²⁰⁶ Kohlman, Evan F., "The Real Online Terrorist Threat", *Foreign Affairs*, Sep/Oct 2006, Vol. 85 Issue 5, pp. 115-124.

²⁰⁷ The IntelCenter is a private company providing "the intelligence, counterterrorism and first responder communities with information about terrorist groups and other threat actors", *IntelCenter*, www.intelcenter.com/aboutus.html (accessed 10 September 2007).

²⁰⁸ "Al-Qaeda Messaging Statistics", *IntelCenter*, www.intelcenter.com/QMS-PUB-v2-9.pdf (accessed 20 March, 2007).

²⁰⁹ This number is according to the IntelCenter statistics. The author's own research suggests an even higher number; seven al-Zawahiri tapes, 14 videos in the series "Hellfire for Americans in *Khurāsān*", and one 'Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī tape.

²¹⁰ There were no bin-Laden tapes issued during the first half of 2007. However, during the editing period of this study, in September 2007, Osama bin Laden featured in three *as-Saḥāb* productions: one video- and two audiotapes were issued on the occasion of the 6th commemoration of the 9/11 2001 attacks.

from prominent jihadist, and the operational videos. These two categories represent respectively 40% and 60% of the total *as-Saḥāb* media issuances.

b. Content Analysis

In the following, a sample of *as-Saḥāb* productions will be analyzed. The selection of tapes includes material of different character: one video speech by the American Adam Gadahn, one 9/11 commemoration tape, one video speech by Ayman al-Zawahiri, and one operational video.

i. A video tape entitled “An Invitation to Islam” was published on jihadist websites on September 2, 2006.²¹¹ It is a 48 minute-long tape, including a short introduction by al-Zawahiri, and a lecture delivered by Adam Gadahn, also known as *‘Azzām al-’Amrīkī*.²¹² Al-Zawahiri’s introduction, in which he presents Gadahn as a brother who has “responded to this noble, divine call”, is given in Arabic, with English subtitles. Gadahn’s message is in English, with Arabic subtitles. The lecture opens up with an invitation to all Americans and other unbelievers - specifically U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan - to join Islam. Gadahn goes on to discuss the benefits of Islam over Judaism, Christianity and other religions, and treats extensively the ignorance of the unbelievers, which he argues is both willful and the result of an effort made by Western political and religious authorities. Gadahn also addresses the moderate Muslims, attacking “interfaith dialogue” as a misinterpretation of the Quran. He furthermore preaches unification of state and religion, and the rejection of “false Gods” like governments and the UN – creators of tyranny and oppression. Gadahn’s performance generally appears as a diatribe against the West, juxtaposed with an invitation combining enticement and fright.

“An Invitation to Islam” addresses “all Americans in particular and all Western people in general”. The message is presented in the English language by an American, possibly strengthening its appeal to Westerners. However, the speech is subtitled in

²¹¹ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “دعوة للإسلام” (“An Invitation to Islam”), 2 September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=16291 (accessed 10 October 2006).

²¹² Gadahn is an American convert to Islam who appears as an al-Qaeda spokesman toward the West. He was charged with treason in the United States in October 2006 for his propaganda activities with al-Qaeda.

Arabic, making it accessible also to Arabic speakers. It specifically addresses non-Muslims, urging them to embrace Islam, but also calls for Muslims to join the Jihad.

The message of Adam Gadahn is different in style than his previous messages, something he himself comments on in his speech: “it will be alleged by others that this message represents an unusual and suspect change in tone. It will be said they used to say they want to slit the throats of the infidels, now they say they want to invite them to Islam”. Compared to Gadahn’s previous threats of attacks (on Los Angeles and Melbourne in 2005²¹³), this message does seem to mark a shift towards a slightly different rhetoric. In effect, one can argue that it resembles the truce offered by bin Laden²¹⁴: Gadahn offers forgiveness to all unbelievers who repent. Also, Gadahn appears concerned about the fate that awaits the West, and with his “heartfelt invitation”, Gadahn seems to add a personal approach to the video. He mentions his own experiences with Christianity and Islam, but does not embark on a sophisticated religious rhetoric. In a simple language, and with only a few references to and quotes from the Bible and the Quran, he seeks to compare the two religions. His alleged intimate knowledge of Western societies appears in anecdotes from his life in the United States, and in references to Western personalities. He also treats Western ideas, such as the “American dream”, which he denounces, and the concept of “clash of civilizations”, in which he depicts the Western culture as barbaric. He appears intent on shortening the gap between himself and his audience, while elevating himself as someone with knowledge about “the right religion”, who has “chosen the right path”. In the video, Gadahn is shown sitting in front of a computer and a row of Arabic books, both symbols of knowledge. His appearance in a white Pakistani dress, turban and long beard stands in contrast to his American accent, another example of Gadahn trying to combine Western characteristics with what he deems “the right path” - jihadism.

The main strategic goal of the “Invitation to Islam”-video seems to appear in the title: propagation of the movement. Thus, the video represents an approach of recruitment of those who are normally considered to be the enemies of the movement.

²¹³ “رسالة الى شعوب الغرب” (Letter to the People of the West’), video message, *As-Sahāb* Production, September 2005.

²¹⁴ Osama bin Laden offered a truce with Europe in the spring of 2004, following the Madrid train bombings. Bin Laden’s message is reproduced in Hegghammer, Thomas, “Al-Qaida Statements 2003-2004 – A compilation of translated texts by Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri”.

ii. The video entitled “Manhattan raids: Knowledge is for acting upon” was published on occasion of the fifth anniversary of 9/11.²¹⁵ The 91 minute long production does not have one single protagonist, but presents a number of prominent al-Qaeda figures, and appears as an educational documentary film reviewing the grievances of the al-Qaeda movement. The narrator is an unnamed individual. The video begins with a review of the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the consequent “expulsion of Palestinians from the Holy Land”, accompanied by historic footage from the 1948 war. It further condemns the previous presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia, and the West’s exploitation of the oil in the Middle East. The American invasion of “the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” is heavily criticized, as well as the UN-embargo of Iraq in the 1990s and the U.S.-led invasion and subsequent occupation in 2003. The documentary claims that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were planned long before the 9/11 attacks, as part of a Zionist-Crusader plot to take over Muslim lands. These views are presented through old recordings of statements by Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Adam Gadahn, and ‘Abd ‘Allāh ‘Azzām and Shaykh *Ḥamūd bin ‘Uqlā’ al-Shu‘aybī*, the latter offering theological justifications for al-Qaeda’s jihad. Clips of the 9/11 hijackers’ recitations of wills are also featured, some of which are previously unseen, such as *Wā’il al-Shihri* and *Hamza al-Ghamdī*. They point to their wrongly imprisoned brothers, in particular the blind Shaykh ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, and invoke previous successes of al-Qaeda, such as the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the attack on USS Cole in the Gulf of Aden. Extensive footage from Manhattan at 9/11 2001 is aired at the end of the video, perhaps underlining the extent of success *as-Saḥāb* attaches to the 9/11 attacks. The general message of the film is that injustices are being perpetrated against the ‘*umma*, and the duty upon Muslims is to wage jihad in response.

The documentary film “Manhattan Raids” has multiple potential audiences. It targets potential supporters with education about the movement, and justification for its existence. It also incites existing supporters, pointing to the success of al-Qaeda. Moreover, by showing footage of the 9/11 attacks and suffering Americans and using Arabic narration and English subtitles, intimidation of the enemy appears as an underlying goal of communication of the documentary.

²¹⁵ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, ” غزوة منهناتن: العلم للعمل ” (“The Manhattan raids: Knowledge is for acting upon”), 9 September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb (accessed 10 October 2006).

In essence, the film appears as an educational piece. One of its assets lies in the professionalism and technological sophistication of the film: A narrator guides the viewers through history, accompanied by old and new footage carefully put together. It teaches its viewers about the history of the Arab people, linking the suffering of Muslims in general, and Palestinians in particular, to the jihadist cause. Personalities with high symbolic value feature in the video, offering authority (bin Laden and al-Zawahiri), religious significance (*'Ibn 'Uqlā' al-Shu'aybī*), and recruitment drive (the so-called martyrs from 9/11). The fact that some of the footage has not been shown prior to the release of this video, adds to its authoritative and exclusive character. The different personalities mentioned in the above all emphasize different aspects of jihad: the video include legitimization of the movement's violent activities, outlining the historic rationale for al-Qaeda's fight and its religious justification, as well as a call for participation in jihad as a personal duty. Moreover, the eulogy of the 9/11 martyrs, in effect branding them as role models, and the presentation of the attacks as successes worthy of imitation, point to propagation as a goal of communication.

iii. On December 20, 2006, *as-Sahāb* released a video with a speech by al-Zawahiri, entitled "Realities of the Conflict between Islam and Unbelief".²¹⁶ Seemingly, the speech aims to educate the *'umma*: it presents legal and factual points of view concerning critical events in the Islamic world. Al-Zawahiri begins by reminding his public of the Balfour Declaration, which he points out as a historic starting point and example of the Crusader animosity to Islam. He then claims that the main goals of the jihad are the implementation of sharia and recovery of land which was once a land of Islam. Al-Zawahiri launches several messages: To the *'umma*, claiming that Palestine is the cause of every Muslim; To the mujahideen in Afghanistan, praising their strong resistance; To the Democrats in the U.S., reminding them that they are considered the same as Republicans, and that the Mujahideen, not the Democrats were the winners of the midterm elections [in November 2006]; And to the American people, whom al-Zawahiri calls a people who has neglected the voice of morality, justice, principles and intellect. Subsequently, al-Zawahiri begins a discussion of the role and duties of the Muslim

²¹⁶ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, "حقائق الصراع بين الإسلام والكفر" ("Realities of the Conflict between Islam and Unbelief"), 22 December 2006, <http://alfirdaws.org/vbss/showthread.php?t=5438> (accessed 2 January 2007).

'umma towards the Western aggression, criticizing support of the moderate Muslim clerics to the Crusaders, and calling upon Muslims to use all methods of popular protest, like demonstrations, strikes, boycott of products against the enemies. Finally, al-Zawahiri sends his greetings to all fronts of the global jihad, from Chechnya and Turkey, via Iraq, to Algeria and Somalia.

Al-Zawahiri's message is explicitly addressed to Muslims in Palestine, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, Chechnya, Somalia and Algeria in particular, and to the Muslim *'umma* in general. He also addresses the American people. The message is spoken in Arabic, and has English subtitles. A part of the video was shown on al-Jazeera.

“Realities of the Conflict between Islam and Unbelief” appears more aggressive than Gadhafi's “invitation”. Al-Zawahiri conveys his message through a structured speech, in which he presents enumerated points and messages to named groups. As promised in the introduction, Al-Zawahiri provides factual and religiously legal arguments in his discussion, yet his rhetoric is rather religious. Comparing the sharia, or “divine law”, to international law, he quotes the Quran thirteen times, referring only six times to International or Western law or agreements.²¹⁷ He also refers to recent events, such as the U.S. midterm election and the Bush-*Malikī* meeting in Amman, both in November 2006, thus proving his knowledge about current affairs as well as underlining the recent date of recording of the video. However, al-Zawahiri also refers to historic events, drawing parallels between the Soviet defeat by the mujahideen in Afghanistan and the current situation of the Americans there. This rhetoric represents a reminder to the *'umma* of the ‘invincibility’ of the mujahideen: Seen in a near historic context of Arab military defeats, it may seek to undermine a (military) inferiority complex of Muslims. To both the West and the Muslim *'umma*, al-Zawahiri presents ultimatums— to the West: To stop attacking Islam or to come under attack; To the Muslims— to live on “the margins of the new world order” and receive due punishment on the day of judgement, or to join the jihadists. He reinforces his words by repeating well-known phrases, such as Bin Laden's: “as you bomb, you will be bombed, and as you kill, you will be killed”. However, he praises the faithful mujahideen, and seems intent on creating

²¹⁷ These are: the Balfour Declaration, UN Resolution 1701, the UN charter, the Oslo Accords, Sykes-Picot agreement, the French law against the wearing of the *hijāb*.

unity in the *'umma* – a word he repeats as many as 42 times – by addressing “brothers” across the globe.

Intimidation of the enemy stands out an apparent strategic goal of communication in al-Zawahiri’s piece. Moreover, it seeks propagation by inciting supporters, and possibly recruiting Muslims who are not yet supporters by offering facts that arguably legitimize the jihadist cause.

iv. The series of videos under the name “Hellfire for Americans in *Khurāsān* [Afghanistan]”²¹⁸ are generally short recordings of attacks. Titles read, for example, “Attack on military vehicle in Helmand”, and “Attack on American camp”. A typical video is the “Rocket attack on American base in *Khūst*”, issued on jihadist websites in October 2006.²¹⁹ The 3:34 minute long video is introduced with computer-generated graphics of rockets firing at a map-shaped and flag-colored North American continent. The entire video is accompanied by *nashīd*²²⁰, and only a few exulting exclamations in Arabic are heard. The video has captions explaining the events on the screen. It shows soldiers arriving on the battlefield at night. They prepare the weapons, and finally fire rockets into the dark. Then the mujahideen, rejoicing, are informed through Intercom that the attack was successful. However, the video does not show the actual damage inflicted by the attack.

The operational video consists of short clips, recorded during night, and is therefore of low visual quality. The value of the video, and its appeal to the public, seems to lie in the direct view of mujahideen activities that it offers. Showing an allegedly successful attack, one can argue that it presents the movement as a strong, talented and victorious force. Moreover, the operational video is presented with religious chanting and only Arabic caption, indicating a probable target group of mainly supporters of the movement. Its most likely goal seems to be propagation by incitement among supporters, and more specifically direct recruitment of new fighters. It is furthermore known that jihadist groups, at least in the past, have used recordings of successful attacks to prove

²¹⁸The original Arabic title is “محرقة الامريكان في بلاد خراسان”.

²¹⁹ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “رماية الصواريخ على قاعدة امريكية بمنطقة خوست” (“Rocket attack on American base in *Khūst*”), 26 October 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb (accessed 30 October 2006).

²²⁰ *Nashīd* is an Islamic song, traditionally performed *a capella*, with the aim to educate about the Islamic religion.

their credentials to sponsors.²²¹ This may be another goal of the films in the series “Hellfire for Americans in *Khurāsān*”.

c. Summary – *as-Saḥāb*

As the above analysis indicates, *as-Saḥāb*'s observed strategic goals of communication include propagation, intimidation, legitimization and education. *As-Saḥāb* distinguishes itself on the global jihadist media scene particularly by two characteristics: it is the exclusive producer of bin Laden and al-Zawahri tapes, and it has a strong focus on audiovisual productions.

First, *as-Saḥāb* has become known as the official al-Qaeda media bureau, and seems to be the only jihadist media company with direct links to bin Laden and al-Zawahri. It also seems to have exclusive access to recordings of other prominent individuals, such as the 9/11 “martyrs”. It is also worth noting that while some jihadist media establishments remain focused on a local audience, *as-Saḥāb* targets a wide public. This is evident in its meticulous work of subtitling (to English and Arabic) and in the global issues it often addresses. One can argue that one of the reasons for this outward-oriented media strategy is the fact that *as-Saḥāb* productions feature figures that are prone to receive attention outside their immediate sphere, such as the leadership of al-Qaeda and Adam Gadahn. It is worth noting, however, that while statements by the al-Qaeda leadership previously drew vast media attention, mainstream Western and Arab audiences seem increasingly inured to the numerous al-Zawahiri speeches: During winter 2007, few of his released speeches seem to have received noteworthy attention in mainstream media. Yet, *as-Saḥāb* remains a particularly popular media outlet among supporters: New productions are advertised in advance, and generate widespread praise from web forum members.²²²

Second, *as-Saḥāb* has chosen to focus on audio-visual productions, unlike most other jihadist media outlets that include - or even solely employ - written texts.²²³

²²¹ For a short description of how jihadist groups use the media and specifically the Internet as a fundraising tool, see Rogan, Hanna, “Jihadism Online – A study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes”.

²²² For example, an *as-Saḥāb* video released August 2007 on the jihadi forum *al-'Ikhlaṣ* received 12 pages of comments during three weeks, see <http://www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=73309> (accessed 30 August 2007).

²²³ A few books have also been published by *as-Saḥāb*, these are old publications re-published on the Internet, such as Ayman al-Zawahiri's “إعزاز راية الإسلام” (“Cherish the banner of Islam”).

Compared to other types of media, sustaining audio and video productions require relatively significant economic and human resources. For *as-Saḥāb*, these resources seem to be in place, allowing the group to produce multimedia productions that employ a wide range of means in order to influence its audience. It remains an open question whether audio-visual means are more efficient than other methods, but *as-Saḥāb*'s prominent position on the global jihadist media scene and its remarkable continuous increase in activity is at least noteworthy.

It is also worth noting that the increased productions from the *as-Saḥāb* media campaign accompany a decline in al-Qaeda operations. According to an IntelCenter study, the period from 2006 to March 2007 saw the lowest number of attacks allegedly directed by 'al-Qaeda Central' since 2002.²²⁴ Speculations over whether media efforts are linked to operational planning, consequently making media activity an indication of pending violent activities, are therefore uncertain. What seems perhaps more likely, is that as long as no new 'al-Qaeda Central' attacks are carried out, the leadership relies on an intensified *as-Saḥāb* media campaign in order to remain the center of attention of both supporters and opponents.

Regarding social construction, *as-Saḥāb* productions place the jihadist movement and its fight within the frame of 'clash of civilization'. The Western civilization is depicted as the evil force opposing the Muslim people and the *'umma*, whom *as-Saḥāb* (or its protagonists) pretends to represent. Violent activities are therefore carried out in defense of the allegedly long-time suffering *'umma*, in a struggle where the mujahideen are presented as an invincible military force. The al-Qaeda leaders, promoted through *as-Saḥāb*, speak to U.S. and European state leaders, in effect placing themselves on the same level.

Finally, the prominence of *as-Saḥāb* seems to lie essentially in the characters it features, and its access to unique video footage, both old and new. Early on, *as-Saḥāb* set the standard for technological sophistication of jihadist media productions, and was for a while one of few quality-producers. However, it has recently been followed by a number of other jihadist media companies.

²²⁴ "Jihadi Ops Tempo Statistics v. 1.5", Intel Center, 16 March 2007, <http://www.intelcenter.com/JOTS-PUB-v1-5.pdf> (accessed 10 April 2007). The IntelCenter study excludes attacks carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan and other insurgency arenas.

1.2. Media distributors: Al-Fajr Media Center, et. al.

a. Background

Al-Fajr Media Center, much like *as-Saḥāb*, seems to be attributed high internal prestige in the jihadist milieu. It distinguishes itself from *as-Saḥāb* in the sense that it is almost solely dedicated to distribution - and not production - of media material. In the following, *al-Fajr* and similar jihadist media distributor networks will be presented. Since these groups do not produce their own media material, no sample of media productions will be analyzed in this section.

Al-Fajr Media Center began its campaign on the jihadist web early 2006 as a distributor of jihadist news. During its time of operation, it has expanded its scope, representing an increasing number of jihadist groups and distributing to an increasing number of websites. Operating a seemingly highly effective distribution system, it is still unclear exactly how *al-Fajr* works. Experts have suggested that “*al-Fajr* is a small number of individuals who have organized themselves into a tight network, they trust each other, and they’ve developed a really good distribution system”.²²⁵ A similar interpretation assesses that *al-Fajr* is a “group of individuals on the Internet who have taken upon themselves to be responsible for distributing authentic terrorist propaganda”.²²⁶ The timelines and accuracy of the *al-Fajr* news releases indicate that these individuals are well-coordinated internally as well as externally with their “clients”. *Al-Fajr* does not operate a website, but distributes news to the jihadist forums.

Al-Fajr has nonetheless a reputation of distributing authentic material. Jihadist groups, such as those included in the “Islamic State of Iraq”, rely solely on *al-Fajr* for distribution of their material, and disclaim all other sources.²²⁷ Nevertheless, *al-Fajr* is aware of the possibility of copycats, and in June 2006 it issued a statement about “the

²²⁵ Aaron Weisburd, quoted in Pelley, Scott, “Terrorists take recruitment efforts online”, CBS News, 4 March 2007, www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/03/02/60minutes/main2531546_page3.shtml (accessed 10 May 2007).

²²⁶ Evan Kholman in NPR interview, “Tracking al-Qaida’s Media Production Team”, July 11, 2006, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5548044 (accessed 10 July 2007).

²²⁷ Posted on *al-Ikhlāṣ* Forum, “تنويه من وزارة الاعلام” (Notification from the Ministry of Information”), 6 November 2006, www.ekhlaas.info/forum/showthread.php?t=37851 (accessed 10 November 2006).

fabrications of statements in the name of *al-Fajr*”.²²⁸ In this statement, it listed a number of forums and sites designated to post authentic *al-Fajr* newswires. These were *al-Hisba*, *al-'Ikhlaṣ*, *al-Burāq*, *al-Firdaws* forums, and the World News Network, and The 'Ansār Mailing List. Since that time, the number of partners has increased.

The jihadist groups that are represented by *al-Fajr* include, most notably, the Islamic State of Iraq (formerly the “Mujahideen Shura Council”), 'Ansār al-Sunna, *Qā'idat al-Jihād* in Afghanistan, *al-Qā'ida fī 'Arḍ al-Ribāt* (Palestine), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (formerly the Salafist Group for Call and Combat), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, *Fath al-'Islām* in Lebanon, and some Somali jihadist groups. All these militant groups have media wings that produce media material, but apparently have outsourced the distribution job to *al-Fajr*. Multi-media companies also rely on *al-Fajr*'s distribution network; These are *as-Saḥāb*, *Labbayk* of the Taliban, and *al-Furqān* in Iraq. Furthermore, texts by prominent individuals within the movement, such as Shaykh 'Aḥyāt 'Allāh and 'Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī, are published directly by *al-Fajr*.

The above list illustrates an international coverage, and includes both newcomers and well-established jihadists. *Al-Fajr*'s efforts to incorporate new groups in the global jihadist media network are worth mentioning. By lending its name to new groups or individuals that publish on the Internet, *al-Fajr* also seems to increase these groups' prestige and proves the authenticity of their material. Somalia is an example of how *al-Fajr* boosted a relatively inexperienced online media operation. One of the first online multimedia propaganda pieces that emerged from the jihadists in the Horn of Africa during the escalation of the conflict in 2006 was distributed by *al-Fajr*.²²⁹ The production appeared to be local, and was a Somali language version. What may have been added by *al-Fajr* was the Arabic title, “*Jaḥīm al-Murtaddīn fī l-Ṣomāl*” (“Hell for Apostates in Somalia”), a well-known label for al-Qaeda videos.²³⁰ Due to *al-Fajr*'s wide distribution network, the Somali film was made accessible to a much larger audience than it seemingly was intended for: *Al-Fajr* assisted in lifting the jihad in Somalia to a global

²²⁸ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “بيان من مركز الفجر للإعلام بخصوص البيانات الملققة” (“Statement from al-Fajr Media Center about fabricated statements”), 22 June, 2006, <http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=13640> (accessed 2 February 2007).

²²⁹ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “مركز الفجر للإعلام : يقدم : جحيم المرتدين في الصومال” (al-Fajr Media Center presents: Hell for apostates in Somalia”), 30 November, 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?p=86612 (accessed 10 January 2007).

²³⁰ “Russian Hell”, “Hell for Romans and Apostates in Iraq”, “Hellfire for Americans in Afghanistan” are similar video titles used by al-Qaeda affiliated groups.

level. Moreover, this jihadist video of unknown producers got its ‘stamp of authenticity’ by *al-Fajr*.

Al-Fajr has also released a small number of its own productions. These include most notably a publication series entitled the “Technical Mujahid”, which is dedicated to information technology issues and focuses in particular on the secure use of computers and the Internet.²³¹

Another distributor of jihadists media is the “World News Network” (WNN, www.w-n-n.com). Unlike most other jihadist media companies, it operates a website that contains what is perhaps the most comprehensive database of statements and news reports from global jihadist groups. The WNN started its activity during the summer of 2005, and ran its service for a year. After a break of six months, it has now been active since December 2006. The website has sections for “Latest news worldwide”, “[Jihadist] statements, reports and issuances”, “Editorials and opinions”, and an “English section”. The “Latests news” section contains news pieces taken from online Arab and Western mainstream newspapers, as well as from online Islamic news sites. The sources include, but are not limited to, Qatar-based *al-Jazeera*, Lebanese *an-Nahār*, Jordanian *al-Ra’y*, U.S.-based *CNN Arabic*, UK-based *al-Quds al-‘Arabī*, as well as Italian and Dutch news sources, and finally websites like islamicnews.net and islamtoday.net. “Statements, reports and issuances” include information about the jihadist groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Algeria, Somalia, Saudi Arabia *et cetera*, as well as publications from the media groups. The material includes official statements, films, and magazines. “Editorials and opinions” are mainly longer postings collected from the jihadist discussion forums, often written by senior members on the forums. Also, editorials from mainstream media are included. Finally, the “English section” presents some of the jihadist news releases in English, but the WNN does not provide translations beyond what is already translated by other media establishments or the jihadist groups themselves. It is worth noting that the WNN is slightly slower than other sites in presenting new releases. On the other hand, it is known to offer a comprehensive collection and to be a trustworthy source partly

²³¹ Posted for example on *al-‘Ikhlaṣ* Forum, “مركز الفجر للإعلام يقدم: العدد الأول من مجلة المجاهد التقني” (al-Fajr Media Center presents: First issue of the magazine the Technical Mujahid”), 28 November 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=39586 (accessed 10 January 2007).

because it presents official statements and commentaries from password-protected jihadist web forums.

Another means for distributing news is mailing lists. The *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* (“The Supporters Mailing List”) announces on its registration site (www.ansar-jihad.net): “Don’t be the last to know. Hurry up and join us. Receive the latest news of the jihad... and everything the mujahideen release”. By signing up on their mailing list, members receive *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya*’s selected news picks. A majority of the news distributed by the group concerns the jihad in Iraq. Some of their messages are also distributed on the jihadist web forums.²³² In fact, *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* encourages its members to forward the news to the forums to help spread the jihadist message. *'Ansār al-Barīdiyya* is also known to translate jihadist media material from Arabic to Western languages, such as English and French.

b. Summary – distributor groups

The jihadist media distributor groups work with the objective of conveying the message of groups or individuals to the largest possible audience. Through various online means, such as websites, mailing lists or forums, they spread the jihadist news on a global scale.

Al-Fajr Media Center appears as the most important distributor node. As a representative of some of the largest jihadist media establishments, and a mouthpiece for jihadist ideologues and militant groups, it seems to manage much of the global jihadist media campaign and acts as a support network for the global jihadist movement in media affairs. *Al-Fajr* has not added much to the campaign with regard to content – however, the “Technical Mujahid” magazine is significant, representing a new genre and seemingly fulfilling a perceived need among the jihadists.²³³ Rather than adding content, *al-Fajr* has come to hold an important role in expanding and coordinating the jihadist online media

²³² For example on *al-Burāq* Forum, “قوافل الشهداء - في بلاد الرافدين” (“Caravan of martyrs in Mesopotamia”), 22 February 2007, www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=33034 (accessed 10 March 2007).

²³³ The editors of the jihadi magazine “The Technical Mujahid” stated that the magazine was founded as a response to the call for technical information made by the *'Amīr* of the Islamic State of Iraq. See for example *al-'Ikhhlāṣ* Forum, “مركز الفجر للإعلام يقدم: العدد الأول من مجلة المجاهد التقني” (al-Fajr Media Center presents: First issue of the magazine the Technical Mujahid”), 28 November 2006, www.al-ekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=39586 (accessed 10 January 2007).

campaign. Regardless of the question of *al-Fajr* holding direct links to ‘al-Qaeda Central’, it seems to be understood as a reliable agent of the global jihadist movement. This is apparent in the trust that militant groups, such as the “Islamic State of Iraq”, seems to place in it. Its authority seems also to lay in the fact that *Al-Fajr*, and other distributor groups, have gained access to the most important jihadi web forums on an administrative level, acting as “correspondents” (*murāsilūn*) that are approved by the forum administrators.

In addition to carrying out a ‘screening and authentication process’ when selecting groups and news for publication, the distributors WNN and ‘*Ansār al-Barīdiyya*’ also facilitate access to the messages: WNN’s website acts as a relatively stable node for visitors, while ‘*Ansār al-Barīdiyya*’ provides a constant flow of jihadist news delivered directly to the subscriber of their service. The translation service offered by ‘*Ansār al-Barīdiyya*’ furthermore expands the target audience.

With regards to strategic goals of communication of these media distributor groups, one may argue that the goal of the client group, which produces the material, is also the goal of the distributor. In general, however, the goal of expanding and coordinating the global jihadist media campaign seems to stand out, an activity that may translate into propagation of the movement and community building.

2. Local Media Front: Iraq

Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq has arguably become the most important battlefield of the global jihad. Insurgency groups in Iraq affiliated with al-Qaeda have been active on the ground, and their media wings have been equally active distributing information on the Internet. This period has also seen the establishment of new Iraqi-centered media organizations operating on the web. In order to understand the current jihadist online media situation in Iraq, it is helpful to review events that have taken place since 2003 and in particular during the last year (2006). The following analysis of the Iraqi jihadist media scene comprises the elements linked to “al-Qaeda in the Land of the two Rivers [Iraq]”, including; First a background narrative of al-Zarqawi’s group, arguably the starting point of the jihadist online media campaign; And second, background and analysis of its successors, the “Mujahideen Shura Council” and

the “Islamic State of Iraq”. Furthermore, background and analysis of other jihadist Iraqi-focused media establishments without group affiliation are included. Finally, a brief overview of the media wings of the Sunni insurgency groups in Iraq is provided. It can be argued that some of these groups may not necessarily form part of the global jihadist movement, but they are nevertheless included in the study in order to give a comprehensive understanding of the media jihad in Iraq.

2.1. “Al-Qaeda in the Land of the two Rivers [Iraq]”

a. Background

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of “Group for Monotheism and Jihad” (*Jamā‘at al-Tawḥīd wa l-Jihād*), later “al-Qaeda in the Land of the two Rivers [Iraq]” (*Qā‘idat al-Jihād fī Bilād al-Rāfidayn*), took the crucial step of mobilizing computer-savvy allies to fight against the U.S. occupation. His use of media benefited the propagation of the jihadist movement globally and also promoted the recruitment of foreign fighters to his ranks. Al-Zarqawi’s first communiqué appeared on a jihadist web forum in April 2004, amidst a flurry of other audio-visual propaganda, including video clips of military operations and photographs of suicide attacks. In particular, al-Zarqawi gained notoriety for videotaping beheadings of foreign and Iraqi hostages. While this practice spread to other groups in Iraq, Ayman al-Zawahiri, ‘*Abū Muḥammad al-Maḥdisī* and other leading figures in the global jihadist current, reprimanded al-Zarqawi for these gruesome practices.²³⁴ Despite this controversy, al-Zarqawi’s media campaign was generally perceived as a success within the global jihadist movement. One particular reason for this was the attention it received in the West.

Al-Zarqawi himself appeared openly only in one video in April 2006, less than two months before he was killed by U.S. forces in Iraq.²³⁵ By that time, he had already transferred authority - and management of media - to the “Mujahideen Shura Council”.

The “Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq” (*Majlis Shūrā al-Mujāhidīn fī l-‘Irāq*) was formed in January 2006 and announced on the jihadist forums by the official

²³⁴ See untitled letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi, intercepted by American intelligence, July 2005, available in Arabic original and English translations, http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_arabic (accessed 15 March 2007).

²³⁵ Al-Zarqawi possibly also appeared in the Nick Berg execution video, May 2004.

spokesman of “al-Qaeda in Iraq”, ‘*Abū Maysara al-‘Irāqī*. The “Mujahideen Shura Council” (MSC) was allegedly a coalition of six insurgent organizations, the most well-known of them “al-Qaeda in the Iraq” led by al-Zarqawi until his death in June 2006, upon which ‘*Abū Hamza al-Muhājir* took over the leadership. The other groups of the MSC were not well-known at the time and most likely included rather small organizations or armed factions.²³⁶ In its first statement the MSC declared its intention “to liberate Iraq from occupation, to unite and direct all mujahideen efforts and to raise the flag of Islam and Sunna”.²³⁷ The MSC has since its formation run a website, originally only in Arabic, but since March 2006 also in English.²³⁸ The sites are hosted by Blogspot, a free automated weblog publishing tool. This MSC blog is administered by the “MSC Media Company”, which on a daily basis posts statements about military operations carried out by its partner groups. The site also links to newly released jihadist videos, ranging from amateur recordings of ambushes to technologically sophisticated audio-visual material. These productions are signed by both the “MSC Media Company” and other media establishments. Unlike most blogs, this one is not open for comments by its readers; it is purely a source of jihadist information. Until mid-October 2006, the MSC was an important component of the Iraqi insurgency and the material from its media company a widely distributed jihadist source. At that point, the “Islamic State of Iraq” was established and the MSC became part of an even broader coalition.

On October 15, 2006, the establishment of the “Islamic State of Iraq” (*Dawlat al-‘Irāq al-‘Islāmiyya*) was announced on jihadist forums. The announcement was published by the “MSC Media Company” and distributed on several jihadist websites and also accompanied by a video explaining the details of the new state. The MSC announcement brought:

²³⁶ The coalition partners in MSC were *al-Qā‘ida fī Bilād al-Rā‘fidayn* (“al-Qaeda in Iraq”), *Jaysh al-Ṭā‘ifa al-Manṣūra* (“Victorious Sect Army”), *Sarīyat ‘Ansār al-Tawhīd* (“Supporters of Tawhīd Platoons”), *Sarīyat al-Jihād al-‘Islāmī* (“Islamic Jihad Platoons”), *Sarīyat al-Ghurabā* (the Strangers Platoons), and *Katā‘ib al-‘Ahwāl* (the Calamities Brigades). Source: MSC, “البيان رقم 1 - بيان عن إعلان تشكيل مجلس شوري المجاهدين في العراق” (“Statement no.1 – Statement about the establishment of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq”), 15 January 2006.

²³⁷ MSC, “البيان رقم 1 - بيان عن إعلان تشكيل مجلس شوري المجاهدين في العراق” (“Statement no.1 – Statement about the establishment of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq”), 15 January 2006, in “الأرشيف الجامع لبيانات مجلس شورى المجاهدين” (“Comprehensive Archive of MSC Statements”), www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=33100 (accessed 6 March 2007).

²³⁸ Arabic: www.albayanat.blogspot.com. English: <http://press-release.blogspot.com> (both accessed February 2007).

“good news from the land of the two rivers, from the land of the Caliphs, from Baghdad, home to the Caliphate, may God release it from the hands of the Crusaders and the Shiites. And this is the fruit of the tree of monotheism - watered by the blood of the martyrs – and the fruit has ripened and the time of harvest is approaching [...] The faithful mujahideen in the land of the two rivers present to the people of Islam in every place, and to the people of the Sunna in Iraq in particular, the announcement of the establishment of the state of truth, the state of Islam, that will rule by the law of Allah over humanity and over the land. [...] And we ask every Muslim in the world to support this state with money, men and prayer”.²³⁹

The announcement of the establishment of the “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISoI) caused much discussion, and a good portion of skepticism, on jihadist discussion forums and in particular in the Arab press.²⁴⁰ Part of the announcement video was aired on al-Jazeera, whereas Western media initially paid seemingly little attention to the whole incident.²⁴¹ However, despite initial doubt, the ISoI has proven to be a lasting concept at least in the virtual world. Its impact on the ground in Iraq has yet to be analyzed, but it is noteworthy that the period following the announcement has been very violent.

The Islamic State of Iraq is now dominant on the weblog site that the MSC operated. The design of the site is identical and the content is also of the same character, but whereas the statements used to be signed by the “MSC Media Company”, they are now signed by the “Ministry of Information/ the official spokesman of the Islamic State of Iraq”.²⁴² Moreover, a new website, Islamic Iraq (<http://islamiciraq.modawanati.com>), also in blog format and exclusively dedicated to information from the “Ministry of Information of the Islamic State of Iraq”, has been established. The contributions on this site are posted by a certain 'Abū Qā'qā' al-Tamīmī, but a disclaimer states that “this site is a personal effort, and not an official site of the Islamic State of Iraq”. Both this blog and the former MSC blog publish “news reports” from the different provinces of the new

²³⁹ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “مجلس شوري المجاهدين يبشر الأمة بالإعلان عن قيام دولة العراق الإسلامية”, (“MSC brings the good news to the 'umma about the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq”), 15 October 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=18147 (accessed 15 November 2006).

²⁴⁰ For example “بين الدولة الإسلامية ودولة المنطقة الخضراء”, (*Al-Ghad*, 19 October 2006, <http://alghad.jo/?article=4902> (accessed 15 November 2006); or “مجلس شوري المجاهدين يعلن تأسيس إمارة إسلامية في العراق”, (*al-Arabiyya*, 15 October, 2006, www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2006/10/15/28296.htm (accessed 15 November 2006).

²⁴¹ But see: Poole, Oliver, “Sunni Insurgents declare own state, as Bush calls to reassure Maliki”, *The New York Sun*, 17 October 2006, www.nysun.com/pf.php?id=41640 (accessed 30 November, 2006).

²⁴² The Islamic State of Iraq quickly established a Ministry of Information. Other ministries, such as Oil, War, Health, Security, Martyrs and Prisoners, etc., were announced in a video on 19 April 2007, “إعلان التشكيلة الوزارية لدولة العراق الإسلامية”, (“Announcement of the Creation of the Cabinet of the Islamic State of Iraq”), *Islamic Iraq*, <http://islamiciraq.modawanati.com/26740/html> (accessed 26 April, 2007).

State, including information about military operations, and official statements from the State on political, religious and military matters. The news reports give detailed accounts of the operations of the different partner groups in the “Islamic State of Iraq”, and mention means, goals and results of attacks. “Blessed martyrdom operations” carried out by their members and ‘spectacular attacks’ are usually presented in separate postings. Religious comments are provided by the State’s “Sharia Court” whose rulings have been published on a few occasions. It is, however, worth noting that despite having a “Sharia Court”, the “Islamic State of Iraq” relies on religious legal opinions and fatwas from outside scholars. On December 18, 2006, the “Ministry of Information” officially blessed such an opinion regarding “Jihad against the enemies”.²⁴³ Furthermore, political comments include focus on events in the United States, such as President Bush’s speech before the mid-term elections in November 2006.²⁴⁴ They also keep a focus on Iraqi internal affairs, like the escalation of Shiite-Sunni violence.²⁴⁵ One can observe a military and organizational focus: For example, a statement threatened with revenge for “crusader” operations,²⁴⁶ and another announced that two paramilitary groups had sworn loyalty to the leader of the ISoI, ‘Abū ‘Umar al-Baghdādī.²⁴⁷

On October 31, 2006, the formation of the “*al-Furqān* Establishment for Media Production” (*Mu’assasat al-Furqān lī l-’Intāj al-’I‘lāmī*) was announced on the ISoI website and other jihadist websites.²⁴⁸ Parts of the statement read:

²⁴³ “The Islamic State of Iraq / blesses the statement "Call for the Sunnites in Iraq and the necessity of supporting them by the nation"”, *Press Release*, 18 December 2006, http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/12/islamic-iraq-state-news-re_116647020053881538.html (accessed 22 December 2006).

²⁴⁴ “The Islamic Iraq State / about the speech of the Roman's dog " Bush"”, *Press Release*, 28 October 2006, <http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/10/islamic-iraq-state-about-speech-of.html> (accessed 3 December 2006).

²⁴⁵ “The Islamic State of Iraq: About the recent Safawi (Shi’ah) escalation against Sunnits in Baghdad”, *Press Release*, 29 November 2006, <http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/11/islamic-state-of-iraq-about-recent.html> (accessed 3 December, 2006).

²⁴⁶ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “دولة العراق الإسلامية / تدين جريمة العدو الصليبي في الإسحاقي وتتوعد بالثأر”, “The Islamic State of Iraq/ condemns crusader enemy crime in *al-’Ishāqī* and threatens revenge”, 10 December 2006, <http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=21919> (accessed 20 December 2006).

²⁴⁷ Posted on *al-Burāq* Forum, “بيعة سرايا فرسان التوحيد وسرايا ملة إبراهيم لأمير المؤمنين”, “(Oath of loyalty by the Knights of Tawhid Squadron and the Millat Ibrahim Squadron to Emir of the Believers)”, 29 November 2006, <http://al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=24834> (accessed 5 December 2006).

²⁴⁸ “إعلان عن قيام مؤسسة الفرقان للإنتاج الإعلامي”, “Announcement of the creation of al-Furqan Media Production Establishment”, *Islamic Iraq*, 31 October 2006, <http://islamiciraq.modawanati.com/> (accessed 10 November 2006).

“The Ministry of Information in the Islamic State of Iraq is pleased to announce the formation of a media establishment that will handle audio and video dispatches, and all media issuances from the Ministry of Information in the Islamic State of Iraq, may Allah glorify and facilitate it. This establishment, with the Grace of Allah, shall be a distinct milestone on the distinguished course of the jihadi media, which occupies great prestige and conducts the struggle with the Crusaders and their followers to reveal the shame and falsity of the Crusader media. So await that which will please the faithful and frustrate the infidels and hypocrites. In the upcoming days, await our issuances in their new technical and informational format. We ask Allah for guidance and success and for that work to be for him”.²⁴⁹

Al-Furqān is the name of the 25th *sūra* of the Quran and means “the Criterion”. The Criterion also refers to the Quran itself, as the decisive factor between good and evil. The announcement of *al-Furqān* Media Establishment points to this connotation: “*al-Furqān* distinguishes between right and wrong [...] and *al-Furqān* separates between the one who fights in the name of Allah and the one who fights in the name of Despotism”. Interestingly, in a statement from the “Ministry of Information” published a week later, on November 6, it reminds the public that all its media issuances published on the Internet, both written and audio-visual, and including the issuances from *al-Furqān*, are collected from “*al-Fajr* Media Center” and the “Ministry of Information” disclaims all media material referring to the ISoI from other sources.²⁵⁰

Since the announcement of the formation of *al-Furqān* Media Establishment, it has, as declared, been in charge of the audio-visual material issued by the ISoI. In December 2006, *al-Furqān* announced the start of a new series of media publications. The new films were to include the “Knights of Martyrdom” e.g. documentation of suicide operations, and “The hell of Romans and Apostates in the Land of the two Rivers”, consisting of clips of military operations of short and medium length.²⁵¹ No videos in these series were published in 2006, however, *al-Furqān*’s productivity has risen noticeably in 2007.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Posted on *al-Ikhlāṣ* Forum, “تنويه من وزارة الاعلام” (Notification from the Ministry of Information”), 6 November 2006, www.ekhlaas.info/forum/showthread.php?t=37851 (accessed 10 November 2006).

²⁵¹ Posted on *al-Burāq* Forum, “مؤسسة الفرقان للإنتاج الإعلامي تعلن عن سلسلة إصداراتها الجديدة” (“*al-Furqān* Media Establishment announces its new series of releases”), 6 December 2006, www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=25498 (accessed 10 April 2007).

²⁵² During the four first months of 2007, one “Knights of Martyrdom”-video and 22 “Hell for Romans and Apostates in the Land of the two rivers”-videos have been issued on the jihadist web. Furthermore, in January 2007, *al-Furqān* revived the former MSC publication “Announcement of the Martyrs”, publishing issue no. 27.

b. Content Analysis

The above discussion of MSC, ISoI and *al-Furqān* gives a general picture of the kinds of media issuances published from the global jihadist movement in Iraq. In the following, a sample of selected pieces will be presented. The pieces represent a sample from “al-Qaeda in Iraq’s” three successive media entities, and include productions of different character: video productions, audio speech, written news report, and political and military commentaries.

i. MSC operational videos are generally short clips of attacks. One example is the film posted October 13, 2006, entitled “Killing of an Iraqi soldier by the Mujahideen”.²⁵³ The film, which is 1:30 minutes long, includes two clips. The first is the “confession” of a captured Iraqi man who in front of the camera confirms that he is a soldier affiliated with the Ministry of Interior and that he has participated in rape of Sunni women. The second clip contains the “implementation of God’s judgment”, and shows the execution of the man. The last scene is accompanied by *nashīd*.

The “Killing of a crusader spy” is an example of visual manipulation, showing the fear and suffering, and finally the brutal execution of a captured enemy. Presented only in the Arabic language, its main target appears to be Arabs, in particular the Iraqi population or other Arabs who cooperate with the Crusaders or the Iraqi government. Intimidation of the enemy appears as its strategic goal of communication.

ii. News reports from the “Ministry of Information of the Islamic State of Iraq” are issued on an almost daily basis, and cover all the provinces of the State, as well as all the member groups. Some serve to sum up a month’s operations, others describe only one attack. A typical example is the news report dated November 28, 2006.²⁵⁴ It contains two announcements. One regards the “Downing of six crusader planes north west of Baghdad”. It states that the Mujahideen of the ISoI in cooperation with the “Army of the Mujahideen” have responded to the recent directives from the leader of the ISoI calling for increased attacks against the “Crusader” forces and especially against their planes and

²⁵³ Posted on *al-Ikhlāṣ* Forum, “فلم لقتل جندي عراقي بيد المجاهدين” (“Film of the killing of an Iraqi soldier by the Mujahideen”), 13 October 2006, www.al-ekhlas.net/forum (accessed 1 November 2006).

²⁵⁴ “The news report of the State 28-11-2006”, *Press Release*, November 29, 2006, http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/11/islamic-iraq-state-news-report-of_29.html (accessed 10 January 2007).

helicopters. The second announcement is a news report for the period October 20 – November 16 from the Iraqi province of *Dayyāla*, which depicts 51 incidents of military operations, including among other things assassinations, IED attacks, launching of missiles, and sniper attacks.²⁵⁵

Despite the fact that most messages from the “Ministry of Information” are translated and published on separate Arabic and English language blogs, the target audience seems mostly to be supporters of the Islamic State. The news reports carry informational and emotional value for the fighters, and represent a form of dialogue between various parties of the State, such as the report confirming that the mujahideen have responded to operational requests by the leader of the State. A linguistic propaganda technique employed by the “Ministry of Information” is the near-consequent naming of the USA as the “USL (Ex-America)”. The USL stands for “United States of Losers”, and is a simple, yet popularly resonated and comprehensible, attack on the enemy.

iii. On December 9, 2006, the ISoI responded to the “Iraq Study Group Report”²⁵⁶ in a written commentary entitled “The Baker-Hamilton Report and the American Failure”.²⁵⁷ It states that the U.S. discourse is no longer about victory or defeat in the war in Iraq, but rather that the only goal is to stop the Jihad in Iraq and restrict its expansion to other areas. It compares the “Baker-Hamilton” with the “Sykes-Picot agreement”, claiming it is just another attempt to impede the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.²⁵⁸ The commentary also condemns other Muslims, even other jihadist groups, for not supporting the Caliphate project, and for keeping a nationalistic profile. The commentary points to the history of the *'umma*, where nationalism and pan-Arabism have “reaped the rewards of the Islamic Jihadist revolutions”. It concludes with a call to the jihadist brothers, urging them to be aware of the tricks of the American policy of establishing a secular Iraq, finally followed by Quranic quotes.

²⁵⁵ It has not been possible for this author to verify the information in the statements, for instance by comparing these statements with other sources on insurgents’ attacks on allied forces in Iraq at the given dates.

²⁵⁶ The Iraq Study Group Report was the product of a U.S. Congress-mandated Commission, headed by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, published in December 2006.

²⁵⁷ “The news report of the State 09-12-06”, *Press Release*, 10 December, 2006, http://press-release.blogspot.com/2006/12/islamic-iraq-state-news-report-of_10.html (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁵⁸ The Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 was a secret agreement between the colonial powers France and United Kingdom, and with Russia’s assent, aiming to divide the Middle East between them after the First World War.

This commentary stands out as a short political-strategic document, based on historical examples of the failure of the *'umma* to create an Islamic Caliphate, urging Muslims to learn from these lessons and be aware of the “political gimmick” of the U.S. government. The commentary does not, however, go into great details, and is more religiously anchored than other jihadist strategic documents.²⁵⁹ The drawing of historical parallels is a favored rhetoric style among the jihadists, as in the comparison between the 2006 Baker-Hamilton report and the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement. The commentary targets both supporters and adversaries of the movement, and seeks to educate them on a political level.

iv. Another short commentary, signed by the “Ministry of Information” and issued on December 13, 2006, praises the “Salafist Group for Call and Combat’s” (GSPC) raids on western workers in Algeria.²⁶⁰ It mentions facts about the raid, and blesses the mujahideen in Algeria, “the grandsons of the hero of Islam *Ṭāriq bin Ziyād*”. It calls for the establishment of an Islamic State in Algeria, and more generally urges all Muslims to revenge the harm done to Afghani and Iraqi Muslims, specifically denouncing the Shiites and the Crusaders.

It is essentially a message which targets supporters, seeking to incite members by showing a successful attack. Again, historical references are made, as the message rhetorically links GSPC’s fight to the early days of Islam, evoking the 8th century victorious Muslim commander *Ṭāriq bin Ziyād* who conquered the Iberian Peninsula. It also links the Algerian cause to the wider jihadist cause (Iraq and Afghanistan), and names the overall enemies to be Israel, the West and the Shiites. In effect, attacks on Shiites have become an increasingly important issue in the jihadist rhetoric, paralleling the escalation of Sunni and Shiite fighting in Iraq. It is furthermore worth noting that the numbers of killed and injured in the GSPC raid reported by ISoI may be inflated. The above commentary states that “no less than twenty crusaders were killed” in the GSPC attack. Official Algerian and Western sources reported that one Algerian driver was killed and 9 Western workers injured. The original GSPC statement claiming

²⁵⁹ See description of the phenomenon of ‘jihadist strategic literature’, part II, chapter 2, in this study.

²⁶⁰ Posted on *al-'Umm* Forum, “دولة العراق الاسلامية / تبارك غزوة "بوشاوي" في الجزائر”, “The Islamic State of Iraq blesses the “Bouchawi” raid in Algeria”, 14 December 2006, www.al-omh.net/vb/showthread.php?t=9967 (accessed 10 January 2007).

responsibility for the attack did not mention specific numbers. Exaggeration of own capabilities may serve to increase self-confidence among fighters, and could also be part of a psychological warfare against the enemy.

v. *Al-Furqān* released its first audio-visual production, a 58 minute-long film called “Release the one who suffers”, on November 18, 2006.²⁶¹ The video depicts a raid on a police station in *al-Maqdadiyya* in Iraq, with the objective of releasing mujahideen prisoners.²⁶² Old video clips of jihadist leading figures, such as Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and *ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Muqrin* (the former leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia) speak to the duty of every Muslim to wage jihad and to free their imprisoned brothers. Pictures and footage with evidence of torture in “apostate” prisons are also shown as admonition.²⁶³ The film depicts preparation for the attack, including planning, prayer, weapon collection, and shows clips from the attack and the liberation of the prisoners. This is followed by a description of the raid by *ʿAbū Farūq al-ʿAnsārī*, a field commander of the MSC. He claims that the attack took place in March 2006 and that it resulted in the death of 25 “apostate” policemen and the destruction of 42 vehicles, including two American airplanes. The commander furthermore warns the Crusaders of more attacks. Three mujahideen who were killed during the operation receive praise as martyrs in the film.

The video “Release the one who suffers” is an audio-visual piece seemingly set on propagating and legitimizing the movement. First, it shows a successful jihadist operation, most likely to boost the fighters’ morale. Second, it uses emotional techniques by showing mistreatment of Muslims, probably to demonize the enemy and legitimize violence against it. The clips of speeches by jihadist leaders offer authority to the message, and seem to target the consciousness of Muslims concerning their duty to support suffering brothers. Third, the video contains a religious style, blatant especially in the last part of the film which praises the martyrs and offers Quranic recital and *nashīd*.

²⁶¹ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “مؤسسة الفرقان للإنتاج الإعلامي تقدم إصدارها المرئي "فكروا العاني"” (*al-Furqān* Establishment for Media Production presents a video ‘Release the one who suffers’), 18 November 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=20556 (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁶² The film includes previously released clips by the MSC from the *al-Maqdadiyya* operation.

²⁶³ Pictures represent American soldiers’ alleged harsh treatment of civilians in Iraq, and the clips are taken from al-Jazeera TV, voicing former prisoners of Iraqi prisons.

The video has only Arabic audio and Arabic language captions, indication of an Arabic speaking target audience.

vi. On December 22, 2006, *al-Furqān* released an audio tape of a speech by 'Amīr al-Mu'minīn ("Emir of the Believers") 'Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī, the leader of the "Islamic State of Iraq".²⁶⁴ The 18:22 minute long speech was entitled "Say, Truth has appeared and Falseness has vanished". It reviews the birth of the "Islamic State of Iraq", naming groups and tribal leaders that have sworn alliance to the State. *Al-Baghdādī* praises the State's Sharia Court, which is established to "mediate conflicts and quarrels" and gives examples of its work. He also describes the composition of the Shura Council, which consist of representatives of all member groups in the State. *Al-Baghdādī* laments the threat of nationalism, patriotism and paganism that Iraq faces, and states that the Islamic State refuses to negotiate with its enemies. Instead it offers a truce to U.S. President Bush, offering secure withdrawal within a month, on condition that all equipment and military bases are ceded to the Islamic State. The truce expires in two weeks from the announcement, and *al-Baghdādī* urges President Bush not to "miss this historical opportunity [...] as you missed the opportunity of truce that was presented before you by Shaykh Osama bin Laden". Finally, despite his offer of armistice, *al-Baghdādī* calls on the mujahideen to prepare for battle. *Al-Baghdādī* concludes with recitation of "slogans" for the mujahideen, quoting from the Quran.

The ISoI leader's audio speech targets both followers and enemies of the movement. To the enemies, it simultaneously offers a truce and threatens with more attacks. The speech is, however, given in the Arabic language and only distributed on jihadist websites, and therefore one cannot necessarily assume that it reached the intended U.S. audience. The producers also most likely realize the limited reach of such a speech, and it is therefore expected that the general message was as much intended for followers as opponents. To followers, then, and the Muslim *'umma* in general, this audio speech offers basic information about the organization of the "Islamic State of Iraq". It points to the success of the state, and specifically the Sharia Court, hereby seeking to increase the followers' motivation. At the same time, it indicates the difficult situation of

²⁶⁴ Posted on World News Network, "وقل جاء الحق وزهق الباطل" (And say: Truth has appeared and Falseness has vanished"), 22 December 2006, www.w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=16792 (accessed 10 January 2007).

the State, as it urges for increased military efforts and support. The speech seems to aim at propagating the movement, in addition to perhaps intimidating enemies.

c. Summary

Drawing from the above information about the media material from the “Islamic State of Iraq”, one can conclude that the primary strategic goal of communication seems to be propagation of the movement by incitement of supporters in particular and of Muslims in general. The messages also seek to intimidate the enemy, and target the Muslim enemy (“collaborators”) more than the West. Addressing its Muslim audience, the Islamic State also seeks to inform about its activities as well as educate its audience on other events in the world – both in Western and Muslim spheres. Linking other areas to the Iraqi cause, it arguably seeks to build a global community for the movement. Furthermore, legitimization of the existence of the State and the activities of the global jihadist movement is generally seen in a historic view, admixed with religious and emotional arguments. Legitimization is, however, less salient here than in other jihadist propaganda, perhaps because the target audience is assumed to be already supportive of the movement. To a certain degree, the media pieces also function as channels for specific messages intended for specific persons, thereby fulfilling a strategic goal of direct dialogue.

2.2. Media jihad; Iraqi focus without group affiliation

In addition to the “Ministry of Information” and *al-Furqān*, which represent a number of the Iraqi global jihadist-insurgency groups, several media establishments without group affiliation have contributed to the Iraqi-focused jihadist media campaign. Some of these establishments are prolific producers of news and propaganda material, whereas others have only produced a few media issuances. Some operate their own websites, but most distribute their material on the jihadist forums.

a. Background “The Media Jihad Brigade”

“The Media Jihad Brigade” (*Katibat al-Jihād al-ʿIslāmī*) is one the most active of these establishments. After the launch of its campaign in March 2005, it became particularly well-known for its monthly “Harvest Reports” from Iraq. The aim of the Brigade is, according to their opening statement: “a full-scale propaganda war as the newest arm of the jihad [...] to influence the morale of our enemies ... and expose the reality of what is happening to them in Iraq, so that the soldiers lose their faith in themselves and their commanders.”²⁶⁵ Allegedly, the Brigade targets particularly the U.S. and has “sent to the soldiers, their dependents and families frightening, terrifying letters to shake them to the core”.²⁶⁶

The Harvest Reports have been published on a monthly basis since April 2005. They contain information about the losses that the Mujahideen in Iraq have inflicted on their enemies, including human losses, vehicle losses, aircraft losses, and war booty taken from the enemy. The Brigades claims that “the losses for the Crusaders are far more than what is mentioned in this report, due to inability to get accurate figures when using missiles and mortar bombs against the HQ of the Crusaders, due to concealing of many operations for security reasons, and due to difficulties of receiving press releases from all mujahideen groups on the ground”.²⁶⁷

The format of the Harvest Reports has changed significantly since it first was produced. A summary of reports from April 2005 till April 2006 comes in the format of a Power Point presentation. The reports published during the fall of 2006, however, are presented as high quality videos, bearing resemblance to Western or Arab satellite TV productions. The October 2006 report, for example, shows clips of attacks, while scrolling text informs about the month’s “harvest”. A news feed runs on the bottom of the

²⁶⁵ Cited in Ulph, Stephen, “Iraqi Propaganda War Begins in Earnest”, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 2, Issue 6, 17 March 2005, www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369437 (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁶⁶ Cited in *ibid.*

²⁶⁷ The jihadist groups included in the Harvest reports are: *Dawlat al-ʿIrāq al-ʿIslāmiyya* (“Islamic State of Iraq”), *Jaysh ʿAnsār al-Sunna* (“Supporters of the Sunna Army”), *Jaysh al-ʿIslāmī al-ʿIrāqī* (“Islamic Army of Iraq”), *Jaysh al-Fātiḥīn* (“Army of the Conquerors”), *Jaysh al-Rāshidīn* (“Army of the Rightly Guided”), *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn* (“Army of the Mujahideen”), *al-Jabha al-ʿIslāmiyya li l-Muqāwama al-ʿIrāqiyya* (Iraqi Islamic Resistance Front, JAMI), *ʿAṣāʾib al-ʿIrāq al-Jihādiyya* (“Iraqi Jihadi Troops”), *Katāʾib Thawrat al-ʿAshrīn* (“1920 Revolution Brigades”).

screen, presenting the most important attacks or other significant events of the month. The Harvest Reports are available both in Arabic and English.

In addition to the focus on the jihad in Iraq, the Media Jihad Brigade has looked briefly to another geographical area. In December 2006, as the conflict in Somalia escalated and forum chatter about the issue flourished, the Brigade published a “Comprehensive file on Somalia”. However, this is the exception of an otherwise Iraqi-focused media campaign.

Iraqi Islamic Media Center

The Iraqi Islamic Media Center (*al-Markaz al-ʿIrāqī al-ʿIslāmī lī l-ʿIʿlām*) has been less active during the time of research. While it has published one news report about clashes between Sunni mujahideen and Shiites in Iraq²⁶⁸, it has distinguished itself from other media groups by focusing on activities of the enemy. This has manifested itself in two publication series, one entitled “Know your enemy”, and the other “the Foreign Pen”.

Two issues of the “The Foreign Pen” series have been issued. They include Arabic translations of American policy papers concerning Iraq. One is a summary of a study published by the United States Institute for Peace entitled “Scenarios of the Insurgency in Iraq“, by Alan Schwartz.²⁶⁹ The study was published in the United States in October 2006, and distributed online by the Iraqi Islamic Media Center two months later.

So far, one “Know your enemy” document has been published. It treated the “Freemasonry and terrorist organizations in Europe”, focusing in particular on the Italian Masonic Lodge and Gladio (the Nato clandestine stay-behind operation after WWII).²⁷⁰ The author moves on to the Turkish branch “Kontrgerilla”, and finally concludes in more familiar jihadist rhetoric, claiming that the Zionist forces maintain control over the entire “Western terrorist project”, including Gladio, Mossad, and the CIA. The document is

²⁶⁸ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “هل قرا احدكم هذا الخبر العاجل والهام جدا”, 23 November, 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=20725 (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁶⁹ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “مستقبل العراق.. سيناريوهات حافة الخط”, 2 December 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=21357 (accessed 10 January 2007). Original English title “Scenarios for the Insurgency in Iraq”, see <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr174.pdf> (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁷⁰ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “الماسونية والمنظمات الارهابية في اوروبا”, 29 November, 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=21189 (accessed 10 January 2007).

written by a certain 'Ūrkhān Muḥammad ʿAlī, and footnotes cite sources in English and Dutch language.

The *Ḥaqq* Agency

The *Ḥaqq* (“Truth”) Agency appears as a traditional news agency, reporting from Iraq. It distributes news on its own website, which has both Arabic and English versions.²⁷¹ While *Ḥaqq* covers events in which jihadists in Iraq are involved, its news have a particular focus on crimes committed against the Sunni population in Iraq. It also runs a section with weekly “Human Rights” reports, which describes Shiite atrocities against Sunnis. The multimedia section also contains several films showing suffering Sunnis, such as “Sunni in *Sawāfi* jail” and “Ugly crime: killing three Sunnis in Iraq”.

The *Ḥaqq* agency has furthermore produced a few documentary films. One is a lengthy description of the clash between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq entitled “*al-Shīʿa al-Rawāfiḍ* – War on Islam”.²⁷² Another documentary pays tribute to the jihadist media, and states that: “The media war has no less importance than the war of tanks, rockets and explosive devices”.²⁷³ The narrator claims that the jihadist media in Iraq operate on two levels. The first level concerns the jihadists, and aims at spreading news about their operations and the state of their soldiers. The second level aims at influencing the general view of the Americans. An example of such an operation is the so-called “media bomb” that was detonated by the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI) for the celebration of the *ʿīd*.²⁷⁴ It was a video issued on the Internet October 22, 2006, entitled the “Baghdad Sniper”. It showed how the Iraqi sniper “Juba” – a nickname allegedly given to him by American soldiers – assassinated coalition soldiers in Iraq. The video was spread on jihadist websites, but also received vast attention in Arab and Western mainstream news outlets. The narrator comments on the success of the video in influencing the general public, while clips from news channels reporting on the case, such as CNN, Reuters, and al-Jazeera, are shown as evidence of its distribution world wide. The film was apparently

²⁷¹ Arabic: <http://www.76news.net/>, English: <http://76news.net/eng/index.php> (both accessed March 2007).

²⁷² Posted on *al-Tajdīd* Forum, “الشبيعة الروافض... حرب على الإسلام” (“*Shia Rawafid* [Dissenter].. War on Islam”), 29 December 2006, www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=f88765c0f166a58a98ed1489e1a22e7d&threadid=47854 (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁷³ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “الحرب الإعلامية وقناص بغداد” (“The Media War and the Baghdad Sniper”), 6 November 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=19828 (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁷⁴ The *ʿīd al-fiṭr* is a Muslim holiday that marks the end of the holy month Ramadan.

distributed over only three days, a fact that the narrator claims “demonstrates the technological abilities of the Media Resistance”. *Haqq* Agency’s two documentary films were originally distributed only in Arabic, but the Sniper-film was re-released with English subtitles in March 2007.

***Qāʿidat al-Jihād* Media Brigade**

Late in December 2006, the *Qāʿidat al-Jihād* Media Brigade distributed a video production, entitled “Yes to the State of the Islamic Caliphate [Iraq]”.²⁷⁵ It was an almost 5 minute long slide show montage with pictures presenting the conflict in Iraq from a jihadist point of view: images of suffering Muslims in Iraq combined with pictures of American soldiers, Western, Israeli and “apostate” Arab state leaders framed in burning flames, and crested with image of jihadist leaders such as bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and al-Zarqawi. Accompanied with *nashīd* and Quranic citations, it represents a standard jihadist propaganda piece. This was the only *Qāʿidat al-Jihād* Media Brigade production observed on the web during the time of research.

***Al-Burāq* Media Establishment**

Al-Burāq Media Establishment joined the online media jihad in September 2006.²⁷⁶ Its opening statement, published September 5, announces that:

“The role of the media in decision making is well known, the media is a decisive factor, like money and military power. The media is part of the war that the Crusaders wage on Islamic Iraq. An army of masters of the media have fought the *ʿumma* to brainwash and intimidate the people. Part of the media war effort tended to justify the invasion, another to intimidate the Muslim Iraqi population. Now we are starting a new phase in our media war and we establish *al-Burāq* media establishment, a media enclave that will take care of the jihadi media inheritance which was formed by the orchestrators of Iraq, and will make it, if God wills, a flare that lights the way for those after us, to Jerusalem, and supports the sons of the *ʿumma* when they are confronted by suspicions and lies from the unbelievers. [...] *Al-Burāq* takes interest in digital and traditional media, its goal is to cover, follow, and analyze jihadist news from the Land of the two Rivers [Iraq], and put the news in a context that forms a true picture of what takes place in the country. There are tens of media organization and centers in the media field, and *al-Burāq* does not aim at rivalry with these organizations, but rather at complementing them. Certainly, the

²⁷⁵ Posted on *al-Tajdīd* Forum, “نعم لدولة الخلافة الإسلامية” (“Yes to the State of the Islamic Caliphate”), 29 December 2006, www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=809492f164e8ab25ce0a1aa3d5808f40&threadid=47980 (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁷⁶ Website *al-Burāq* Media: www.boraqmedia.org. The website was registered July 28, 2006, but not launched until September 5, 2006.

media production in Iraq is huge. But it remains in the category of “news”. Therefore we need a group that works with analysis of the news and extraction of lessons learned, of the reasons and results of this period of the jihad that is going on in Iraq now. [...] *Al-Burāq* Media Establishment will be the body that includes the previously known *al-Burāq* Islamic Network, and *al-Burāq* workshop.”²⁷⁷

The *al-Burāq* Islamic Network is a jihadist web forum.²⁷⁸ The *al-Burāq* workshop is a feature of the web forum, proposing projects for volunteers to assist in the media jihad.

Al-Burāq Media clearly has a focus on Iraq, and questions have been raised as to whether it is the media wing of the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI).²⁷⁹ While *al-Burāq* Media has participated in several media projects of the IAI, it also promotes other Iraqi jihadist groups. These groups are the MSC, *'Ansār al-Sunna*, *Jaysh al-Rāshidīn*, *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn*, *Katā'ib Thawrat al-^ḥAshrīn*, *al-Jabha al-'Islāmiyya lī l-Muqāwama al-'Irāqiyya*, *Jaysh al-Fātiḥīn*, *Ḥashā'ib al-'Irāq al-Jihādiyya*, *Katā'ib Qassās al-^ḥĀdil*.²⁸⁰ The *al-Burāq* Media website furthermore issues news about Iraq from various sources, including their own news, analysis, and reports, and news from international agencies such as AFP, al-Jazeera, and CNN. *Al-Burāq* Media thus distinguishes itself to a certain degree from other similar news outlets by including sources other than jihadist ones. Also, a unique feature of *al-Burāq* Media is its workshop project. Self-declared goals of the workshop are to guide viewers to jihadist websites as alternative sources to the Western media, to move visitors on the jihadist web forums out of a passive state of receiving information and into an active state of participation and production, and to carry out large-scale media operations.²⁸¹ *Al-Burāq* promises to oversee this work by providing suitable venues for meeting of brothers, and provide required material, designs and links. It suggests that workshop projects should include the release of speeches, improvement and re-distribution of important publications, design of banners, slide shows and animation presentation. Finally, it notes that “this project will not apply and succeed without the participation of the brothers”. Examples of workshop projects that were carried out during the fall of 2006 were workshop no. 18: Translation of *al-*

²⁷⁷ Posted on *al-Burāq* Media, “انطلاق مؤسسة البراق الإعلامية” (“Launch of *al-Burāq* Media Establishment”), 5 September 2006, <http://al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=18635> (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁷⁸ *Al-Burāq* Forum: www.al-boraq.com (accessed January 2007).

²⁷⁹ Posted on Infovlad website, “Al-Boraq Media”, 6 September 2006, ww.infovlad.net/?cat=1 (accessed 10 July, 2007).

²⁸⁰ *Katā'ib Qassās al-^ḥĀdil* translates to “Brigades of the Just Slanderer”. For translation of the other names of the groups, see footnote 267, in this study.

²⁸¹ Posted on *al-Burāq* Forum, “ما هي ورشة عمل البراق” (“What is the *al-Burāq* Workshop”), 12 May 2006, www.al-boraq.com/index (accessed 10 January 2006).

Muhājir's speech to English and French, and workshop no. 19: An archive compilation of all statements issued by the MSC.²⁸² Earlier projects include, among others, the collection and translation of speeches by Ayman al-Zarqawi, an anthology of Osama bin Laden speeches, and the release of names of officers in the Shiite *Badr* Corps in Iraq.

b. Content Analysis and Summary of Jihadist Media with Iraqi focus

The above describes the attributes of media issuances produced by media establishments in Iraq without a group affiliation. They seem to focus on the same cause, but vary slightly in choice of topics, target audience and strategies for conveying their message.

First of all, there is little information available about who run these establishments, other than supporters of the jihadist cause in Iraq. The fact that they have access to material, such as news and video clips, from the Iraqi battlefield suggests that they are based in the area, but other geographical locations are also possible. It seems that several of the establishments use volunteers in their work, such as *al-Burāq* Workshop and the “Media Jihad Brigade”, both of which openly call for contributors and manpower to their new enterprise.

Both supporters and enemies seem to be their targeted audience, at least according to their self-declared goals. The “Media Jihad Brigade”, for example, stated that it targets U.S. soldiers and their families. This is, however, not observed directly in their issuances. Still, their monthly Harvest Report comes in both Arabic and English versions, indicating a desire for a wider readership. Also, the *Haqq* Agency targets speakers of these two language groups with their separate English and Arabic websites. *Al-Burāq* Media seems to take the translation a step further, offering also French material through their Workshop project. Finally, the “Iraqi Islamic Media Center” targets solely Arabic speakers, with translations of English language documents and news into Arabic. One can argue that the academic style suggests that the target audience belongs to an elite group.

²⁸² Workshop 18, posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “خطاب (إن الحكم إلا لله) مكتوباً و مترجماً للإنجليزية و الفرنسية” (“Speech ‘The rule is only for God’ written and translated to English and French”), 16 November 2006, <http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=20447> (accessed 10 January 2007). Workshop 19, posted on *al-Burāq* Forum, “الأرشيف الجامع لبيانات مجلس شورى المجاهدين” (“Archive of all statements from the MSC”), December 2006, <http://www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=33100> (accessed 10 January 2007).

On the other side, the “al-Qaeda Media Jihad Brigade”, which also offers productions in Arabic only, relies mostly on pictures and *nashīd*, and is therefore perhaps suitable also for the many illiterates in the Arab world.

There appears to be diverse strategic goals of communication, obtained by different techniques. A self-stated goal of the “Media Jihad Brigade” is to lower the morale of the enemy, something their Harvest Report might theoretically succeed in doing if it actually reaches the enemy. Moreover, the Harvest Report informs the mujahideen of their successes, with a possible desired effect of boosting the morale of fighters and supporters. The high technical sophistication of the Harvest Report videos arguably adds to the feeling of success. A different approach is taken in the *Haqq* Agency’s media productions, which focus on the defeats of and crimes against the Iraqi Sunni mujahideen. While the *Haqq*’s strategic goal of communication also seems to be propagation of the movement, it describes the movement as harmed and unjustly treated, and therefore in need of support. Graphic and emotional techniques, such as when showing tortured Sunnis, indicate this approach. Furthermore, the approach represents a means of legitimizing ‘revenge’ activities of the mujahideen, although *Haqq* does not seem to focus on such operations.

Haqq also seeks to educate supporters of the movement with its documentaries. A perhaps even stronger example of education is the publications in the series “Know your enemy” and “Foreign Pen”. The series offer material that arguably would remain out of reach for many Iraqis.

Al-Burāq Media’s many activities seem to seek the strategic goals of communication observed with the other groups, i.e. propagation, legitimization and education. However, one additional goal can be seen in their workshop project: The effort to activate supporters and dynamically incorporate volunteers in the media jihad points to an objective of creating a strong feeling of belonging and a sense of community among supporters.

One can thus conclude that the main strategic goals of communication among these media establishments are propagation, legitimization, education, and the creation of a sense of community.

2.3. Other Iraqi insurgency groups' media wings

Finally, a number of other Iraqi militant groups, which did not swear loyalty to the “Islamic State of Iraq” in October 2006, also participate in the jihadist media campaign. During the fall of 2006, postings on jihadist forums and statements from these groups spoke to the relationship of the Iraqi Sunni insurgency to al-Qaeda and the “Islamic State of Iraq”. What appeared as hardliner global jihadists requested unity of the Iraqi jihad under the al-Qaeda banner, whereas nationalist, specifically Baathist and Kurdish, forces argued in favor of a separation between the Iraqi and the global jihadist cause. This debate culminated in March-April 2007, when 'Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī, the ISoI leader, accused the insurgency groups of cooperating with the US-backed Iraqi government. At the same time, mujahideen of the ISoI launched a series of attacks on Sunni Muslims, and killed the leader of 1920 Revolution Brigades, *Ḥārith Zāhir al-Dārī*, who had refused to join the ISoI. In response, several of the Iraqi insurgency groups split over the issue of support to the “Islamic State of Iraq”. A breakaway faction of the 1920 Revolution Brigades, for example, established the anti-ISoI “*Hamas-Iraq*” group, and the “Islamic Army of Iraq” denounced the “Islamic State of Iraq” in an Internet issued letter, although the letter was later removed from the IAI website following reactions on jihadist forums. This ‘Iraqi nationalist insurgency versus global jihad’- debate received attention in the Arab and Western press, and the spokesman of the IAI appeared in an al-Jazeera interview where he explained his group’s views.²⁸³

The internal debate among Sunni insurgency groups in Iraq about support to al-Qaeda and the ISoI indicates that the groups balance between nationalism and global jihadism. At this point, it is difficult to predict what the outcome of the dispute will be; Political analysts have suggested advantages for both the global al-Qaeda movement and for the Iraqi national unity government.

Iraq holds a special place in the global jihad, and news of and by the Iraqi mujahideen constitutes an important part of the general global jihadist media campaign, as observed in the use of news reports and battlefield videos from various Iraqi groups in productions. Therefore, without categorically placing the Iraqi Sunni insurgency groups

²⁸³ “الشمري: الجيش الأميركي وإيران وراء أكثر المفخخات بالعراق” (“al-Shammarī: The American Army and Iran is behind most of the booby traps in Iraq”), *al-Jazeera*, 11 April 2007, www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/7616C26C-87E1-4BC3-849D-EA549863CC86.htm?wbc_purpose=Ba (accessed 10 May 2007).

under the header of the global jihadist movement, a brief description of their media jihad will be included in this study.

The Islamic Army in Iraq

Al-Jaysh al-'Islāmī fī l-'Irāq (“The Islamic Army of Iraq”, IAI) is one of the largest insurgency groups in Iraq, and one that expressed anger with al-Qaeda in April 2007 – although previous information indicates a closer relationship.²⁸⁴ On the media scene, the IAI spreads its material through various channels. Its “Military leadership” issues newsletters of operational character, often several per day. Its “Central Media Organization” is responsible for the audio-visual material. It has most notably produced the infamous “Juba Sniper” videos, a joint venture with *al-Burāq* Media. The “Juba Sniper” was released in November 2005, followed by a sequel in October 2006. With the second video, a website (<http://www.jubaonline.org>) and a blog (<http://juba-online.blogspot.com>) were also set up in the name of Juba. The website links to the films, and offers additional information in Arabic, English, and French. As the *Haqq* Agency reported in its documentary about the “Juba Sniper” film, it received attention in mainstream press, and also found its way to YouTube.

The IAI operates an Arabic language website (<http://www.iaisite.info>) where media issuances are published, but these are also distributed on various jihadist forums. IAI furthermore distributes a periodic electronic magazine, *al-Fursān*. In October 2006, issue no. 10 was published online. The 67 pages long magazine contained articles about jihad in Iraq in particular, but also included more general topics. The 10 first pages were dedicated to “Harvest”, showing statistics on IAI’s attacks for the first six months of the year. This was followed by sections for political, strategic, and military affairs, as well as religious topics, rounded off with jihadist poetry. It is worth noting that the IAI offers extensive coverage of American military affairs, such as American losses in Iraq and stories about American soldiers fleeing to Canada. The rest mixes conspiracy theories, such as “The Jewish-Kurdish relationship”, boasting, such as “The jihad in Afghanistan, its tactics inspired by the Iraq method”, and the customary Islamist ideology, here in the pen of *'Ibn Taymiyya*.

²⁸⁴ In an interview with *al-Fursān*, the spokesman of the Islamic Army of Iraq stated that IAI and the MSC [later part of ISoI] are unified in their religion and belief, but not yet militarily. Interview in the IAI periodic magazine, *al-Fursān*, 10th issue, Oct 17, 2006.

'Ansār al-Sunna

The *'Ansār al-Sunna* (“Supporters of the *Sunna*) Group is another major insurgency group in Iraq – and also a prolific contributor to the media campaign there. *'Ansār al-Sunna* was one of the groups that early copied al-Zarqawi’s media strategy, distributing video recordings of decapitation of enemy hostages. While these are less frequently observed now, *'Ansār al-Sunna*’s Media Department issues recordings of military operations on a regular basis. These are generally short, relatively professionally produced video clips, depicting attacks with IED, mortars, etc. The Media Department issues daily written news reports about operations, and also official statements from the leadership of the group. Such statements have been issued, for instance, as an assessment on the closing of Baghdad University.²⁸⁵ *'Ansār al-Sunna* furthermore publishes an online periodical, “Harvest of the Mujahideen”, of which issue no. 34 was released in October 2006.²⁸⁶ It contained information about the group’s activities, comments on the Pope’s remark on Islam, blessings from the Department of Law and Justice for Ramadan, and advice on security measures for the mujahideen “guerilla fighters”.

The *'Ansār al-Sunna* does no longer operate a website. Until at least early 2005, it maintained a site, although it was constantly moving from one URL to another. Their media material is now distributed on the jihadist web forums.

Other groups

Other insurgent groups in Iraq handle their media campaign much in the same way as *'Ansār al-Sunna*. Groups with media wings that are active on the Internet include, most notably, *al-Jabha al-Islāmiyya lī l-Muqāwama al-ʿIrāqiyya* and its Military wing the *Katāʿib Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-ʿAyūbī*, *Katāʿib Thawrat al-ʿAshrīn*, *Jaysh al-Rāshidīn*, *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn*, *Jaysh al-Fātiḥīn*, *Katāʿib Qassās al-ʿĀdil* and *ʿAṣāʾib al-ʿIrāq al-Jihādiyya*. The latter operates its own website in both Arabic and English²⁸⁷, whereas the

²⁸⁵ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “حملة النصر لإسائنتنا وطلبتنا في جامعات بغداد” (Campaign for the victory of our professors and students at Baghdad University”), 5 December 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?p=88225 (accessed 10 January 2007).

²⁸⁶ Posted on *al-Firdaws* Forum, “لأن جماعة أنصار السنة تقدم مجلة حصاد المجاهدين” (“*'Ansār al-Sunna* Group presents Harvest of the Mujahideen Magazine”), 18 October 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb (accessed 20 October 2006).

²⁸⁷ www.iraqiasaeb.org/asaeb2007/index.htm (accessed January 2007).

others rely on jihadist web forums for distribution of their news. Like *'Ansār al-Sunna* their main production and distribution include daily reports about military operations, often accompanied with video recordings.²⁸⁸

2.4. Summary Jihadist Media in Iraq

The Iraqi jihadist media scene is diversified in the sense that it is comprised of a large number of different media establishments, using a wide range of methods in order to reach a number of strategic goals of communication. Yet, their media jihad has certain common features, and, moreover, features that are characteristic to Iraqi-focused jihadist media outlets.

First, a distinctive but perhaps less surprising characteristic is that the sender and receiver of the media material seem to belong to a rather limited group, consisting generally of Iraqis. Due to their extensive access to source material, senders seem to be located in, or at least have direct links with, Iraq, and while some material targets a Western public, a large majority of media issuances clearly address an Iraqi audience. As a result, media topics may cover events in the entire world, but the news are seen from an Iraqi jihadist perspective, and framed likewise. It is worth noting, however, that the group of Iraqi media receivers also includes opponents – such as Shiites and Kurds. So, while serious attempts of intimidation of Western enemy are scarce, intimidation of non-jihadists Iraqis seem to flourish.

Their strategic goals of communication generally correspond with those of other jihadist media, including propagation, education, and intimidation. Legitimization is also present, but seems to be less obvious as in other non-Iraqi media outlets. This may be explained by the fact that Iraqi media address primarily supporters who already adhere to the jihadist cause. Furthermore, one can observe direct communication (dialogue) between different Iraqi groups in their media issuances. Despite their close geographical location, war-torn Iraq may well prevent physical contact between the group members, leaving dialogue through media as the preferred option. On the other hand, it is worth

²⁸⁸ For an assessment of the Iraqi insurgency groups' discourse and communication strategies, see, "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency", *International Crisis Group*, Middle East Report no. 50 – 15 February 2006, www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/iraq_iran_gulf/50_in_their_own_words_reading_the_iraqi_insurgency.pdf (accessed 15 September 2007).

keeping in mind the current low level of Internet access in Iraq.²⁸⁹ Finally, the creation of a sense of community among Iraqi jihadists also stands out as a strategic goal of communication. One may argue that this is a goal inherent in most acts of communication – with the exception of intimidating communicative exchanges – but the incorporation of individuals in the media work and the interactive media features nonetheless emphasize the specific community building efforts of communication in Iraq.

The framework of the jihadist media of Iraq is to a large extent shaped by the ongoing war with U.S. and allied troops, and most issues that are treated in their media concern this conflict. The conflict is presented as an extension of the Crusader war, and a defensive struggle for freedom and human rights against the unjust invasion of Muslim land. As sectarian violence has increased in Iraq over the last years, the divergence between Sunnis and Shiites saturates the rhetoric. This dichotomy is even employed when referring to other geographical regions where the Sunni-Shiite relationship is not an issue, such as in Algeria. News furthermore focus on defeats of the enemies, and the jihadists' own losses are framed as heroic martyrdom deaths. The portrayal of Iraqi jihadist institutions as equal to state institutions is also noteworthy: The Iraqi jihadist media presents the "Islamic State of Iraq" with ministries, a court, and a leader who himself addresses U.S. President George W. Bush.

Finally, some of the media material coming out of Iraq appears more violent than other jihadist media. Examples are execution, in particular beheading, videos. While this has been characteristic of al-Qaeda branches in several places, the particularly aggressive theatre of war that Iraq has become seems to be reflected in the jihadist media issuances.

V. Analysis of the online media jihad

The introduction of this study presented general studies on terrorism and media, and some rather specific examinations of jihadism and the Internet. Based on the previous theories about the terrorist use of media, a hypothesis for this study was outlined:

The jihadists operate within a pronounced strategy concerning the use of the media. The Internet, playing a crucial role in this media strategy, allows the

²⁸⁹ See part III, chapter 2, in this study: "Restrictions with Internet-based media".

jihadists to directly frame their message, and is used in order to reach the following strategic goals of communication: propagation of movement and the cause, legitimization of movement and activities, and intimidation of opponents.

These assumptions have served as guidelines for this study on the jihadist online media campaign. The study has thus far presented empirical evidence about the current state of jihadist media, and has by doing so only implicitly addressed the assumptions in the hypothesis. In the following, a more explicit examination of the different aspects of the hypothesis compared to the findings in the study will be presented.

1. Words vs. Deeds: Media strategy in theory and practice

An issue pertinent to the aspect of consistency between jihadist media strategy and practice is the question of whether there in fact exists a strategy. This study has collected numerous texts by leaders and strategists of the jihadist movement, and has sought to identify theories about the use of media. As previously mentioned, it is important to keep in mind that neither of these theories presents a comprehensive media strategy. Rather, each theory seems to treat different elements. In a holistic perspective, one can therefore argue that the theories together represent a strategy for the use of media. Accordingly, this study argues that, in theory, there indeed seems to exist a basis for a jihadist media strategy. It is worth noting that the form and content of this media strategy are prone to evolve over time: the jihadi media campaign appears as a constantly evolving phenomenon which to a large extent is shaped by the jihadist media companies. As new companies emerge with new templates for their work, they arguably form part of the jihadist media strategy.²⁹⁰

Having determined that there exists a potential strategy for the jihadist media campaign, the following discussion deals with the consistency between this strategy, as deducted from jihadist strategic literature, and the current jihadist online media practice.

²⁹⁰ Such templates or strategic texts by the jihadist media companies are briefly treated in the previous chapter on media theory.

Old versus new media

First, it is worth clarifying the relationship between new and traditional media in the jihadist media strategy. The ‘media strategy in theory’, as outlined in the above, indicates that the preferred method of distribution of jihadist media material includes a combination of new and traditional media. This study has focused solely on new media, mainly because the large amount of Internet-based media indicates that it is an increasingly important means of communication for jihadists today. The strategic advice from jihadist strategists, such as *al-Sūrī*, to combine new and old media appears to be carried out in practice by continuing local distribution of old media, such as printed publications, while waging a global media jihad with new means online. Some of the online publications also seem intended for local print and distribution in the mosques and marketplaces, or at least the media companies encourage such distribution. While this author possesses limited knowledge about the actual local distribution of traditional jihadist media – although it is well-known that CDs of speeches and violent operations along with print magazines are sold in marketplaces in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan – it seems apparent that traditional media, both Arabic and Western, no longer are the main vehicles for or sources of information about the jihadist movement.

Mainstream versus jihadist media

On another note, one can argue that the jihadists have over the last few years placed less emphasis on mainstream media, both new and traditional: The global jihadist movement seems lately unable to receive continuous and extensive coverage in mainstream media. In fact, since late 2001, due to the illegal nature of the al-Qaeda movement, no interviews or other publications from the jihadists have been first released in its entirety in traditional mainstream Western or Arabic media. Al-Qaeda remains a hot topic both in the West and the Middle East, but news about the movement in mainstream media is allegedly presented consistently from a non-jihadist perspective. In parallel, one can observe the sharp increase in online publications with jihadist ownership and control.

One can also assume that the exclusion of the global jihadist movement from active participation in Western mainstream media stands in the way of the explicit goal of reaching the Western public. Several of the strategic texts suggested a more active approach towards the Western public, focusing on the importance of targeting the West,

and encouraged the use of Western, in particular online, media. In fact, we have witnessed increasing efforts to translate media material into foreign languages. English is the main language after Arabic, but also German, French and Spanish are used. The jihadists have also made use of Westerners, such as the American convert Adam Gadahn, also known as *ʿAzzām al-ʿAmrīkī*, who seemingly target a U.S. public in English. Focus on issues of alleged importance to the Western society, such as U.S. foreign and domestic politics, may also be a way of targeting the West. Yet, thus far, the global jihadist movement seems mainly to have relied on media outlets with jihadist ownership and control in its efforts to reach Western societies. Consequently, one can ask to what extent the message actually reaches the Western public, as the jihadist sites remain difficult to access for outsiders due to password protection and frequent change of URLs. One should, however, not ignore the role of mainstream journalists: jihadist media material is often picked up by mainstream, Western journalists and presented in mainstream media outlets. This has been labeled a “two-step flow of information: terrorist to journalists via the Internet to the public”.²⁹¹

Audience segmentation

Targeting the West seems to be part of a larger strategy of audience segmentation. Jihadist media strategists recommend the distribution of audience-tailored messages, and operate with a general separation between friendly and adversary audiences. It is also suggested that the audience’s level of education is taken into consideration when producing media material. In practice, it is interesting to note that a large number of jihadist media explicitly state the target audience: “To the West” or “To the Brothers in Iraq” are typical titles of messages. Yet, messages with such titles may also contain material intended for other audience segments, and in many cases the target audience consequently appears different than communicated in the title. Thus, message titles may have more of a rhetoric value than truly revealing the final target audience.

Furthermore, certain characteristics of a text, audio or video production indicate a certain target audience, as shown in the content analysis of media material. Language is

²⁹¹ Gabriel Weimann, quoted in Aft, Aaron, “Terror groups exploit Internet for Communications, Recruitment, Training”, *JINSA Online*, 4 August, 2004, www.jinsa.org/articles/articles.html/function/view/categoryid/1930/documentid/2621/ (accessed 10 September 2007).

one such easily detectable factor, and Western languages, as mentioned above, are increasingly used. One can also observe the use of other languages, such as Pashto, Urdu, Somali, Albanian, indicating that the jihadists target a potentially Muslim, non-Arabic speaking public. Productions also seem to vary with regard to cultural and educational levels, as recommended in jihadist media strategy. Text and oral messages seem to target highly educated individuals with eloquence and argumentation on a sophisticated level. But they also include simple and straightforward messages that require little intellectual effort. Picture and sound are allegedly easily accessible to illiterates, and generally have great emotional resonance at all levels. Furthermore, we observe what seems to be audience segmentation along gender lines: Women seem to be targeted with topics which allegedly are particularly pertinent to them, such as family life.

These efforts seem to follow the specific recommendation and the great concern of the global jihadist movement in general, of reaching a wide as possible audience. Jihadist strategists, such as *al-Sūrī* and al-Zawahiri, deplored the failure of previous jihadist media campaigns to reach the masses. While the elite segment of the jihadist movement is still identified as a target for certain productions, to date one cannot exclude the possibility that the large and varied jihadist media productions have been more successful than in the past in reaching out to the masses. However, the problem with difficult Internet access for a large number of potential supporters remains an obvious obstacle to their success in this regard.

Public opinion

A recurring topic among jihadist strategists, largely related to the issue of audience, is the question of public opinion. As previously stated, this study does not attempt to measure neither the jihadist media campaign's influence on the public, nor the public reactions to jihadist media. Nonetheless, it aims to treat the question of how the jihadist media strategy is aware of public opinion.

Opinion polls offer certain indications about the public opinion on the global jihadist movement, and show that only a minority both in the West and the Middle East support al-Qaeda and its activities – although a notable number appear to support some of

its ideas.²⁹² Accordingly, one may jump to the conclusion that the jihadist media campaign has failed to consider the public opinion. However, certain characteristics of the media jihad suggest that some efforts may have been made in order not to repulse the general public. First, we have observed a decreasing number of videos showing decapitation of enemies. This decline seems to have followed al-Zawahiri's letter to al-Zarqawi in Iraq, in which he stated that even though decapitation may be a legitimate practice, the public opinion may not approve of it. Second, while jihadist media material still contain graphic, violent accounts and representations, they also seem to follow the book of jihadist media strategy as such acts are often accompanied by elaborate religious, historical and/or political legitimization. Legitimization, particularly if based on Islamic and salafist-jihadist terms, supposedly resonates specifically well with Muslims. When, in addition, it is based on historic arguments, it may also target a wider public of potential supporters. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that media material from Iraq that contains some of the most violent and possibly repulsive material also seems to be the most void of direct legitimization.

Organization of media groups

Jihadist strategists treat the organization of the media groups in their works. Due to the illegal nature of the global jihadist movement, it is difficult to gain access to information about how the theories are implemented in practice, and it has therefore not been examined in detail in this study. Yet, the recommendation by strategists to create media groups and information brigades as separate organizational entities certainly seems to be carried out. It is also evident that the media groups work closely with other organizational entities, as recommended by jihadist strategists. The work of the media groups seems to pick up on events carried out by political and military wings of the movement, and strives to maximize the effect of these events. For example, videos of hostage situations, and translations of political or ideological speeches, add a media dimension to these events, making them more accessible and comprehensible to the public.

²⁹² See, for example, "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians, and al-Qaeda", *The Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland*, 24 April 2007, www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf (accessed 1 August 2007).

Furthermore, a picture of how different jihadist media groups organize - or fail to do so - has to a certain degree emerged during the research. Here, this study will mention only one dimension of this, which has to do with profusion – an issue treated by jihadist media strategists. The jihadist media groups are aware of each other, and even state that they are not competitors, but rather form supplements to each other. Yet, they cover the same topics in a somewhat overlapping way, often leading to an abundance of reports about the same topic. This seemingly chaotic state of the jihadist media may have strategic value, as explained by the theorists: The repetition of a topic in different outlets and in different forms sets the agenda, states salience, and contributes to making the cause look more important and the group more powerful than what is perhaps the case. This is something the jihadist media groups appear to have succeeded with over the last years, as they have used the Internet as a media outlet and sought to lavishly spread their message across the world. It is also worth noting that the main channels for online diffusion are the web forums, and not static home pages of the media groups. This coincides with the suggestion of one strategist who encouraged the use of precisely discussion forums in order to generate active participation in the media jihad.

Refuting mainstream media

The basis for most jihadist comments and strategies about the media is the perception of control of media by ‘the West’ and local governments and their consequent abuse of the media dominance to distort, silence or discredit the jihadists. Returning to the introduction to this study, former U.S. Minister of Defense Donald Rumsfeld expressed his concern about the pre-eminence of media manipulation by terrorists. In fact, Rumsfeld’s comment was perceived as a victory by some of the jihadist media groups and as evidence of their success.²⁹³ The fact that the perception of a jihadist media triumph for a moment reigned on both sides of the current battle front may perhaps indicate that the jihadist media campaign has been more successful than in the past. However, this alleged success reveals nothing about the actual role of the jihadist media strategy in this effort, making it subject to speculation. What seems clear, however, is that

²⁹³ Posted on *al-Umm* Forum, “بخصوص تصريحات رامسفيلد الأخيرة” (“About Rumsfeld’s latest comments”), February 2006, www.al-omh.net/vb/ (accessed September 2006).

the jihadist media groups make continuous efforts to refute media reports from mainstream local and Western press and generally improve the jihadist media campaigns.

Summary – words versus deeds

One may conclude that the majority of the theories put forth by jihadist strategists concerning the use of the media appear to have been incorporated in the actual jihadist media campaign. This does not necessarily mean that the campaign follows one jihadist media strategy: Rather, it seems that they have adopted a number of the suggested theories for the use of the media on a tactical level. In this study, it has been impossible to measure exactly the extent to which some of the recommendations presented in these theories, such as targeting the masses and considering public opinion, have been implemented. The other theories seem to be followed in the jihadist media campaign on the whole. Yet, one should remember that the media jihad campaign as presented in this study consists of a number of interlinked campaigns, driven by different local al-Qaeda branches and larger media companies. Thus, not all strategic recommendations are observed in all of the campaigns. Nevertheless, as all the campaigns are carried out on the Internet, they tend to, intentionally or not, form a virtual whole, potentially perceived as one media jihad campaign.

2. Strategic goals of communication

The hypothesis of this study assumes that the jihadists seek to achieve a set of strategic goals of communication through their media campaign: *propagation* of the movement, *legitimization* of activities, and *intimidation* of enemies. The assumption is based on conclusions from Corman and Schiefelbein's study about jihadist media and Schmid and de Graaf's theories about terrorism and media. This study's survey of jihadist strategic thought about the use of media has identified four explicitly articulated goals of communication, in fact adding the goal of *education* of supporters to the three goals mentioned in the above. In practice, this study has observed six different strategic goals of communication in the media jihad, including two additional goals: *dialogue* between members of the movement, and *community-building*.

These goals merit to be elaborated on in further detail. First, it is worth noting that these goals could be seen as overlapping, and are in any case prone to be interpreted as broad conceptual categories. For example, propagation of the movement may include a number of aspects, but is here intended to mean the spreading of the ideas of jihadism, and recruitment of new supporters or strengthening of faith among existing supporters. Also legitimization of existence and activities of the movement has proven to include both Quranic, historical and political arguments, and can be presented by clerics and laymen. With regards to intimidation of enemies, one can argue that the mere existence of a jihadist media campaign may be perceived as intimidating. However, this study has considered only media material that specifically addresses the enemy in menacing terms as attempts of intimidation of the enemy. Furthermore, education as a strategic goal of communication has in this study been interpreted as referring to material of purely informational character. While the media companies no longer usually are in charge of the distribution of traditional training manuals,²⁹⁴ education is indeed observed on religious, political, and military levels. One could argue that education consequently can be interpreted as a means to propagate the movement, in effect overlapping with that strategic goal of communication. What is more, the concept of dialogue has only been considered as a strategic goal when two or more parties are involved and explicitly communicate through media issuances. Finally, the study has registered community-building as a strategic goal of communication when, for example, new or distant branches of al-Qaeda are promoted online, or when Muslim suffering in far-away places is cited - seemingly with the goal of creating a transnational conscience and virtual solidarity. One can argue that this interpretation of community-building in fact may overlap with the goal of propagation of the movement. More specifically, then, community-building denotes the encouragement to active participation of supporters in the online media jihad.

Returning to the hypothesis, the three main strategic goals of communication for terrorists seem indeed to be present in the jihadist media campaign. These goals were mainly indicative of how terrorists use traditional media, such as mainstream press and television. It is therefore interesting, but perhaps somewhat less surprising, to note that the jihadists have used the Internet as a similar basis for communication. What is more,

²⁹⁴ The Islamic Media Center that operated until 2005 was known to distribute training manuals. While training manuals circulate on jihadist discussion forums and other sites, the jihadist online media companies generally do not participate in this business.

the Internet offers additional options for strategic communication. The Internet, acting as a channel for jihadist-based media, thus seems to facilitate the expansion of the media jihad outside the boundaries imposed by the role of traditional, mainstream media. For example, traditional mainstream media could allegedly not lend itself as well as the Internet to act as a platform for education of supporters, nor would it perhaps represent a means for community-building to the same degree. As for dialogue between groups or individuals within a terrorist movement, it could arguably take place indirectly in traditional mainstream media through for example coded messages, but it is more easily carried out through online media. The Internet, and the opportunity it offers for creation of own media outlets, consequently appears as a more suitable channel for terrorist communications than traditional media, as it expands the functionalities of the jihadi online media campaign.

On the other hand, traditional mainstream media, as described by Schmidt and de Graaf, also offer passive uses.²⁹⁵ As this study set out to examine jihadists' active uses of their own media outlets, these passive uses fall outside its scope. Yet, some of the passive uses, potentially representing powerful means for terrorists, are indeed also employed through the Internet, and therefore merit to be mentioned. As noted above, mainstream media channels offer information that easily is spread to jihadist sites, and we have observed the jihadists using these channels to access information such as the enemies' troops, public reactions to terror activities, and counterterrorism measures.²⁹⁶ This passive use of the media is a secondary, yet non-negligible, strategic goal of the media jihad.

Having established that the jihadists use the Internet for different strategic goals of communication, it could be useful to try to assess the hierarchy of jihadist use of these goals. A preliminary statistical summary of the empiric material used in this study reveals 14 cases of propagation of the movement, 4 cases of education of supporters, 4 cases of intimidation, 3 cases of legitimization, 2 cases of community-building, and 1 case of dialogue. Propagation of the movement thus seems to emerge as the considerably largest goal. This should perhaps not come as a surprise, as the goal of propagation also is the

²⁹⁵ See appendix I in this study.

²⁹⁶ See part III, chapter 1.3. "...And Beyond", in this study.

broadest conceptual category. It is maybe more surprising to observe the relatively high score of education, a use which was not included in Schmidt and de Graf's list. The other goals score rather evenly, with dialogue appearing the less significant part of the media jihad according to this short survey.

It is worth keeping in mind that one media production may, and typically does, contain several strategic goals of communication. All goals are observed relatively evenly with the different – local and global, producer and distributor – jihadist media companies.

3. Framing jihadism

The hypothesis assumes that jihadist-controlled media outlets on the Internet facilitate the framing and constructing of a jihadist worldview. Without going into details about the jihadist message or ideology, which is undeniably spread through the jihadist media, this study has nevertheless observed aspects of what seems to be a preferred jihadist framework for their self-narrative. A theoretical model for framing the 'war on terror' proposed four levels of perception: *problem definition*, *causal interpretation*, *moral evaluation*, and *treatment recommendation*. In addition to other observations, these four levels of perception will in the following be used to explain the jihadist framing of the conflict.

In fact, the jihadist problem definition seems to resemble ideas that have emerged from a Western sphere. The concept of a 'clash of civilizations' is repeatedly put forth in jihadist media, as a basic explanation for their conflict with the West. In the jihadist frame, the Western civilization is the aggressive part that has provoked the conflict, and the U.S. current "imperialism" is seen as the latest manifestation of the Crusades. In fact, the behavior of the West and local regimes are allegedly manifestations of an historical enmity toward Islam, presented as the reason for the jihadists' so-called current defensive war. The jihadist causal interpretation therefore seems to include the perception of self-defense of Muslims against evil forces. The moral evaluation appears to lie in the religious aspect, which highlights Islam as the one true religion, and reminds the Muslims about their personal duty (*farḍ ʿayn*) to protect and spread their religion. A jihadist treatment recommendation disseminated through the media is seen in the call to unite the *'umma*, and continue to fight evil and defend Islam. A "middle way" is rejected as

unacceptable, as moderate Muslim scholars and Muslims cooperating with allied troops (in Iraq, for instance) are considered apostates and traitors.

The killing of apostates and other forms of violence is moreover often presented within terms of “moral disengagement”.²⁹⁷ Jihadists present violent actions as an inevitable result of compelling circumstances (the U.S. invasion of Iraq, for example) forced upon the weak, thereby “displacing the responsibility” to the enemy. Enemy targets are also “demonized” as oppressors and tyrants, and American soldiers in Iraq “de-humanized” as mere symbols of the Crusader state. Another rhetoric aspect is the “making of advantageous comparisons”, in which the jihadist violence is compared to supposedly far more violent behavior of the enemy (for instance torture in Iraqi prisons).

Furthermore, the jihadists frame their message as if they represent the whole *’umma*, e.g. all Muslims, pretending to defend Islam and Muslim rights. Moreover, messages are framed on a ‘state-level’ in Iraq, where the global jihadists have announced the establishment of a caliphate: the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq addresses Western state leaders, for example offering them ultimatums. Jihadist military power is also presented as being on the same, and sometimes even on a superior, level as that of enemy states. For example, the defeat of the Russians in Afghanistan in 1989 is frequently mentioned; it seems to represent the ultimate jihadist victory, and is by jihadists presented as the reason for the fall of the Soviet Union two years later. One could argue that Iraq now is emerging as an heir to Afghanistan in the jihadist social construction: The foreign occupation forces in Iraq are already determined to lose the war, as the Russians lost the war in Afghanistan, and the U.S. would subsequently be on the verge of losing its world hegemony, according to the jihadist cause-effect logic. On the jihadist side of the battlefield, human losses are framed in positivist terms as martyrdoms.

Norris’ theory about terrorism and framing suggests that news frames of terrorism “simplify, prioritize and structure the narration”. It is intuitively evident that jihadist media would structure the account according to their priorities, thereby setting a certain agenda and giving salience to certain issues. Mainstream news coverage of terrorism may well lend itself to simplification of the narration in order to reach its public. Jihadist-based media, on the other hand, seem to attempt to present a more detailed and

²⁹⁷ Albert Bandura’s theory of “Moral Disengagement” is referenced in Weimann, Gabriel, *Terror on the Internet*, pp. 54-61.

comprehensive world view with its extensive coverage. Nevertheless, a rather analogous rhetoric is observed in various al-Qaeda online fronts. This rhetoric preaches an Islamic state based on sharia, refutes the Western, secular and democratic model, and is hateful towards the United States. By employing a radicalized interpretation of the Quran and reducing individuals and social and political mechanisms to stereotypes, the jihadists strive to present a simple, yet attractive edict to their followers.

4. General Observations

In an attempt to gather characteristics and particularities of the online media jihad that exceed the specific research questions of the hypothesis, this chapter seeks to sum up different qualities of the jihadist media campaign that have been observed during the analysis of empirical material.

Characteristics of jihadist media groups

In addition to efforts to achieve strategic goals of communication and frame a jihadist worldview, the media groups also fill more tactical roles. A number of the largest and most well-known media companies, such as *as-Sahāb* and *al-Fajr* may be labeled ‘authenticators’: Because of their long existence, and the persistence and alleged quality of their media campaign, such companies are seemingly acknowledged by online supporters as authorities – and the media material they produce as authentic. It is interesting to note that also when such companies act as distributors of media material produced by sometimes unknown militant groups, the material appears to be just about automatically accepted by an otherwise relatively skeptical community of online jihadists. The logo of a senior media distributor company on a media issuance published by an official ‘correspondent’ thus seems to work as a stamp of authenticity of the material.

Furthermore, it seems that the media companies, both senior and junior, play a role as ‘agenda setters’ within the global jihadist community. First, the media companies apparently influence each other: a story published by one media company will often be picked up by the others, and make the ‘tour of the web’. Second, the media companies seem to shape interests within the online community: it is common to find discussions on the jihadist web forums about topics that have been promoted through media issuances.

The variety of the jihadist media appears to have something to offer to almost all supporters, and possibly influences or sets the agenda within the different strata of adherents to the jihadist media.

The abundance of jihadist media material that one can observe, and the overlapping coverage of issues, arguably turns the media companies into ‘force multipliers’. This notion indicates that the media companies reinforce the importance of a certain issue by ‘bombarding’ the websites with it. Videos and messages are then reposted to other sites, often by individuals. Moreover, this ‘force multiplier’ role of the jihadist media companies can be found in the efforts to increase the value of a terrorist incident. One can argue that attacks, suicide operations, and hostage situations would perhaps not have been as ‘profitable’ for the jihadists without the attention that their media attracts to them.

Hierarchy and organization of the media jihad

It seems fair to conclude that the Internet has facilitated the maintenance of a decentralized global jihadist movement. Indeed, this structure was probably vital for an organization that was deprived of its geographical base and scattered across the globe. Yet, there seems to be a certain hierarchy among the jihadist media groups, and just as there reportedly still exists a leadership of al-Qaeda, a few media organizations have seemingly emerged as ‘leaders of the media jihad’. These are primarily the groups that have been presented as global media companies in this study, and that act as the main ‘authenticators’ and ‘agenda setters’. It is, after all, these groups that often promote the numerous new jihadist online media groups.

When considering the jihadist web as a whole, the jihadist discussion forums emerge as the most important nodes. This is the space where media material is made available to supporters, and where seemingly important communicative exchanges take place. A trend seen over the last years indicates a shift away from the use of official, non-interactive jihadist websites for propagation of the media material. As previously mentioned, the local media groups seem to have outsourced this distribution work to ‘professional media entities’. The distribution of media material to web forums appears to follow a rather sophisticated system, consisting of in-advance advertisement, responsible correspondents, and simultaneous releases on the most prominent forums. Consequently,

the web forums seem to have materialized as the most important venue for jihadist media campaigns. One could argue that one of the reasons for this development is security measures taken by the jihadists: permanent official sites are easier to track to individuals and to shut down, whereas owners or moderators of web forums may disclaim the responsibility for content on sites.

On another note, the use of discussion forums as main vehicles for jihadist media material stands out as highly useful for observers of the media jihad. Monitoring these interactive sites gives an insight into the mind of ordinary jihadists, as well as the strategies, tactics and ideologies they follow. It also reflects the status of jihadist media material: the commentaries that members of the forums express at the release of a new video or statement, as well as the number of downloads, may help interpret the importance and popularity – or lack thereof – of specific media companies and issuances. It should be noted that these main nodes of the jihadist media campaign are mostly in the Arabic language. The exceptions are a few prominent English, French and German-language discussion forums, accompanied by an increasing effort by the media companies to translate material into foreign languages. All media companies examined in this study are originally Arabic-language initiatives.²⁹⁸

Arguably, the use of forums with active participation of members also makes the media jihad ‘self-sustainable’. Forum members themselves provide for the re-distribution of material, and also for information about new URLs to often unstable sites. This assures continuity not only of the media campaign, but also of the organizational architecture of a decentralized movement.

Prominence of media jihad

When observing the jihadist web, it appears that the campaign carried out by the media groups fills a major role in this virtual world. Since the jihadist online media not only covers the traditional issues of the mainstream mass-media, but also facilitates, among other things, communicative exchanges on religious, military, ideological and strategic levels, it is perhaps not surprising that it attracts substantial attention. Yet, it is

²⁹⁸ Akil N. Awan claims that “[jihadist] websites catering to an English-language audience constitute a very small percentage of this body of media [...] and thus it is not easy to find high-quality English-language jihadist sites”, in “Radicalization on the Internet? The Virtual Propagation of Jihadist Media and its Effects”, *RUSI*, Vol.152, No. 3, June 2007, pp. 76-81.

well-known amongst observers of ‘jihadism online’ that the phenomenon also consists of other factors, such as financing, reconnaissance, or hacking, and promotes other voices than those spread by the media groups.²⁹⁹ A pertinent question therefore remains: How important is in fact the jihadist online media campaign?

We know that in the past, high ranking jihadists have held important roles in the media jihad. Now imprisoned al-Qaeda strategist ‘Abū Muṣṣab al-Sūrī is revealed to have served as a media advisor to Osama bin Laden. Moreover, *Khālid Shaykh Muḥammad*, the alleged 9/11-mastermind, reportedly led *as-Saḥāb* Media Production Company in its early days, along with al-Qaeda’s second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri, and assisted by online jihadist ‘*Irhābī 007*. Such familiar names offer authority to the media jihad. Today’s leaders of the media groups seem to be less well-known, although it is difficult to assess their identity as the Internet offers relative anonymity to users.

Another possible means to determine the actual status of jihadist online media is the reference to such material as sources of inspiration in court testimonies of captured jihadists. Here, the Internet is frequently mentioned as a ‘radicalizing factor’, and jihadist video material is reportedly often seized in their property. The investigations following the Madrid train bombings, for instance, revealed the use of jihadist discussion forums and jihadist proselytizing websites, as well as specific jihadist online media material from the Global Islamic Media, ‘*Azzām* Publications, ‘*Ansār al-Sunna* Media, and “al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula”’s media wing.³⁰⁰

Nevertheless, it may be difficult to assess the influence of the jihadist media campaign on supporters of the movement and on the general public opinion, a topic outside the scope of this study. Yet, compared to other functions of ‘jihadism online’, the media campaign seems from these preliminary findings to hold a prominent position, based on, if nothing else, its sheer quantity, increasing quality, and the praise it receives

²⁹⁹ See Lia, Brynjar, “Al-Qaeda online, Understanding jihadist internet infrastructure”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, Dec, 02, 2005, or; Rogan, Hanna, “Jihadism Online”, *FFI-Rapport- 2006/00915*, 2006.

³⁰⁰ Sumario 20/2004, auto de procesamiento del diez de abril 2006, Juzgado Central de Instrucción N° 6 de la Audiencia Nacional (“Proceedings 20/2004, Indictment of April 10 2006, Court of First Instance Number 6 of the *Audiencia Nacional* [Spanish National Court]), Madrid, 10 April, 2006, pp. 457, 489, 509-510.

by online supporters, as well as the growing attention and concern by counter-terrorism agencies.³⁰¹

VI. Conclusion

A Comprehensive, Applied, Jihadist Media Strategy?

This study's hypothesis suggested that the current jihadist online media campaign originates from a defined strategy for using the media for terrorist purposes. Findings from the analysis of primary sources have led this author to argue that there exist jihadist strategic thoughts about this issue, and that jihadist media campaigns in most cases adhere to these. It seems important to stress the plurality of this phenomenon. There appears to be not one jihadist media strategy and one media campaign, but rather a number of strategies, leading to a number of campaigns that cohabit the jihadist web. Indeed, the phenomenon of jihadist online media is still developing, and it is difficult to determine its exact shape. Looking at the 'broader jihadist picture', the jihadist online media campaign, while facilitating the achievement of certain premeditated goals, seems also to play a role on a tactical level. In fact, the media jihad appears to serve an overall jihadist strategy rather than being an end in itself – just like the entire doctrine of jihad is commonly viewed not as an end but as “a means to rid the world of a greater evil”.³⁰² Even so, the fact that the jihadist online media campaign is growing, frequently opening new virtual fronts, certainly seems to be a sign of a jihadist perception of the Internet as a purposeful vehicle for strategic communication.

Findings from this study further support this assumption: Jihadist online media is used for framing and agenda setting, and facilitates the accomplishment of a number of strategic goals of communication. Indeed, the fact that the jihadists exercise ownership

³⁰¹ The prominence of the media jihad, based on quantity and popularity, is seen on for instance *al-'Ikhlaṣ* Forum: Out of a total of 75.657 threads and 502.333 replies, divided on 12 subforums, two subforums dedicated to media issuances received 21.631 threads and 194.603 replies. Media related threads constitute just under a third of all threads, and receive just over a third of all replies. Source www.al-ekhlas.net/forum/ (accessed July 2007).

³⁰² Tyan, E., “Djihad”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2nd Edition, 1960-2005.

and control over mass-media outlets on the Internet makes the jihadist media campaign more functional, i.e. facilitating the achievement of additional strategic goals of communication, than when relying on mainstream media channels. The Internet also allows for dispersed groups and individuals to participate in the media jihad, leading to increased quantity, and diversity and decentralization of the campaign. On the one hand, this situation may promote a sense of community among geographically scattered jihadist supporters. Recent developments also indicate that the media jihadists make serious efforts to incorporate new target groups, with multi-language and -culture productions. On the other hand, a diversified and decentralized media campaign allows for internal debates and disputes to emerge in the open. It also may allow for critical voices to mix with the official jihadist message, potentially distorting the prevailing global jihadist narrative. Nevertheless, the jihadist online media campaign appears so far to be a driving force for the maintenance and development of the movement, as it spreads the messages of global jihadism, invites individuals to participate, educates, and creates and preserves bonds between various factions of the movement. Although we have in recent times witnessed jihadist use of other channels of communication, the Internet and the jihadist online media groups will most likely remain essential vehicles and drivers of the jihadist media campaign.

APPENDIX I

Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, Sage Publications, London, 1982

List of insurgent terrorist uses of the news media (pp.53-54):

| |
|----------------|
| A. Active Uses |
|----------------|

1. Communication of (fear-) messages to mass audience
2. Polarizing public opinion
3. Making converts, attracting new members to terrorist movement
4. Demanding publication of manifesto under threat of harm to victim
5. Using media as conduits for threats, demands and bargaining messages
6. Verifying demand compliance by the enemy
7. Winning favourable publicity via released hostages
8. Linking message to victim
9. Misleading enemy by spreading false information
10. Winning publicity by granting interviews in the underground
11. Intimidating media by killing or wounding journalists
12. Advertising terrorist movement and cause presented
13. Arousing public concern for victim to pressure government to concessions
14. Discrediting victim by making his 'confessions' public
15. Discrediting enemy by making victim's 'confessions' public
16. Deflecting public attention from disliked issue by bombing it from front pages
17. Announcing further actions
18. Using journalists as negotiators in bargaining situation
19. Inciting public against government
20. Occupation of broadcasting stations to issue message
21. Boosting one's own morale; Herostratism
22. Gaining Robin Hood image

| |
|-----------------|
| B. Passive Uses |
|-----------------|

23. External communication
24. Learning new coercive techniques from media reports on terrorism
25. Obtaining information about identity and status of hostages
26. Obtaining information on countermeasures by security forces
27. Using media presence at site of siege as insurance against 'dirty tricks' by security forces
28. Creating fear with the enemy by media's exaggeration of own strength, thereby reducing likelihood that individual policemen dare to apprehend terrorist
29. Identifying future targets for terroristic violence
30. Obtaining information about public reaction to terroristic act

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