



Islamic Army in Iraq



The Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) is one of a number of underground Islamist militant (or mujahideen) organizations formed in Iraq following the 2003 invasion of Iraq by United States and coalition military forces, and the subsequent collapse of the Baathist government headed by Saddam Hussein.

Although it carries an Islamic title, the group combines Islamism with Iraqi nationalism, and has been labelled as "resistance" by Iraq's Sunni Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi despite Tariq al-Hashemi's close relations with the US government.

Following the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq in late 2011, the IAI demobilized and turned towards political activism, setting up the Sunni Popular Movement. The groups turn away from armed opposition towards activism was criticised by other militant groups, including groups that the IAI had previously allied with such as Jaysh al-Mujihadeen.

Since the beginning of 2014, however, the group has been active in the ongoing anti-government violence in Anbar and Northern Iraq. The group is primarily active in the Diyala and Saladin Provinces. Most of its fighters have renounced fighting against the Iraqi state although some have joined ISIS.

Ideology:

The precise details about the emergence of the IAI are unclear, although it is generally assumed that the group was established in the summer of 2003 to fight coalition forces.

When the IAI first formed, it used kidnapping as a means of pursuing its goals. The group also threatened to target the January 2005 elections, although it didn't carry out any such attack. Unlike most resistance movement organizations today, the IAI does not have Salafist tendencies, its primary focus and goal being the expulsion of foreign troops from Iraq.

A November 2004 Washington Post interview with the group's leader, Ishmael Jubouri, stated that the IAI was predominantly composed of Iraqis (Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, and Arabs) trying to force foreign troops out of Iraq.

The Terrorism Monitor put out by The Jamestown Foundation confirms some of what Jubouri was claiming. In a March 2005 article, the monitor stated the group was composed primarily of Sunnis with a small Shiite congregation and, in general, was "[an] inclusive Islamic organization with Iraqi nationalist tendencies."

In a November 2006 Al Jazeera interview, spokesman Ibrahim al-Shamary expanded on who the IAI considers foreign troops, "There are two occupations in Iraq. Iran on one side through the militias which they control and through direct involvement with the national guard and the intelligence services, that causes the killing and destruction of the Sunnis... And then there is the American occupation which destroys the Iraqi people."

The group has released several joint statements with other groups such as Islamic Resistance Movement and the Islamic Front for the Iraqi Resistance, which are known to be of an ikhwan background.

In one of these joint statements, six groups (including the IAI) called for Iraqis to participate in the referendum on the October 2005 constitution by voting against it. (This was in conspicuous contrast to al-Qaeda in Iraq, which said that simply participating in voting is a compromise of the fundamentals of Islam, even if one were to vote against it.)

When rumours spread in Iraq of the alleged demolition of the al-Aqsa Mosque, in April 2005, the IAI announced the formation of the "al-Aqsa Support Division." This group was to support Palestine in the armed struggle against Israel. The current status of the al-Aqsa Support Division is unknown, leading people to believe that the statement was merely rhetoric.

Hostages:

The group was responsible for the abduction of the following persons who were released unharmed:

- ❖ Fereidoun Jahani, Iranian Consul.
- ❖ Georges Malbrunot (41) and Christian Chesnot (37), French journalists.
- ❖ Marwan Ibrahim al-Kassar and Mohammed Jawdat Hussein, Lebanese electrical workers.
- ❖ Angelo dela Cruz, Filipino truck driver.
- ❖ Rosidah Anom and Rafikan Binti Amin, female Indonesian nationals.

The IAI is believed responsible for the execution of the following foreigners:

- ❖ Enzo Baldoni, Italian journalist killed on or about August 26, 2004.
- ❖ Raja Azad (49), engineer, and Sajad Naeem (29), his driver, Pakistani nationals working in Iraq for a Kuwaiti-based firm killed on or about July 28, 2004.

- ❖ Dalibor Lazarevski, Dragan Marković, and Zoran Naskovski, nationals of Republic of Macedonia, working for United Arab Emirates-based Soufan Engineering on contracts and subcontracts for the U.S. military and its private contractors. The three were seized in August 2004 and the Macedonian government confirmed their execution by October 21, 2004; receipt of videos depicting two beheadings were announced, but not broadcast, on al-Jazeera TV on October 17, 2004.
- ❖ Ronald Schulz, American contract electrician, killed around December 8, 2005.

Campaign of Violence:

The Islamic Army in Iraq claimed responsibility for the 1 September 2004, assassination attempt against Iraqi politician Ahmed Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National Congress, in which two of his bodyguards were killed, two were wounded and two went missing (the IAI admitted capturing one of Chalabi's bodyguards and executing the other), and Chalabi escaped unharmed.

On 22 April 2005, the IAI released a video of their members killing a Bulgarian civilian contractor, who survived after the downing of his helicopter. He was helped to his feet and then shot with 27 rounds of ammunition. The group also claims to have shot down a commercial airliner in Iraq, although officials maintain the accident was caused by fog. The crash killed 34 people.

In 2006, videos were released of their snipers killing coalition forces. The nom de guerre of the IAI sniper(s) is "Juba". These sniper videos were distributed for free to Iraqi citizens on CDs as part of a propaganda, recruiting campaign and as a means of waging psychological warfare on coalition forces. Islamic Army videos of attacks on US-led coalition forces are aired on the al-Zawraa TV channel, which is banned in Iraq.

War with al-Qaeda in Iraq

In early 2007, the Islamic Army engaged in an armed conflict against Al-Qaeda in Iraq. In June, this ended in a ceasefire between the two rival groups. The IAI was quoted saying "The most important thing is that it's our common duty to fight the Americans;" nevertheless, the groups never adopted al-Qaeda's philosophy and refused to sign on to the al-Qaeda-led Islamic State of Iraq.

According to Iraqi sources, fighters from the Islamic Army battled Al-Qaeda gunmen around Samarra at least twice in October and November 2007, a possible indication that the cease-fire brokered earlier this year had collapsed (however, coalition officials later issued a statement claiming that Iraqi policemen and coalition troops, not Islamic Army fighters, had carried out the latter operation).

Furthermore, although the Islamic Army denied that it had joined forces with the U.S. military, several news outlets reported that many Islamic Army commanders in and around Baghdad were now working together with the U.S.-led coalition to counter Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

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