Ansar al-Islam

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: December 2001

Disbanded: August 29, 2014

First Attack: 2002: In the spring of 2002, AI sent several gunmen to assassinate PUK leader, Barham Salih. Salih survived the attack, but five of his bodyguards were killed along with two of the AI assailants. (7 killed, unknown wounded)[1]

Last Attack: April 21, 2014: Assailants attacked a polling station in Tawuq village, Kirkuk, Iraq. No group claimed responsibility, but AI is suspected to be behind the attack. (10 killed, 6+ wounded)[2]

OVERVIEW
Ansar al-Islam (AI) is a predominantly Kurdish Salafist militant organization based in Iraqi Kurdistan. The group was formed in December 2001 by a merger of several other Kurdish Islamist groups. AI had ties with Al Qaeda and fought against secular Kurdish groups as well as the U.S.-led coalition and the Iraqi government. Since 2011, the group has also fought alongside Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front in Syria. Although it previously opposed the Islamic State (IS), AI's leadership announced that the group was disbanding and merging with IS in August 2014. However, the Syrian branch of AI rejected the merger and as of October 2018, continues to operate in Syria as Ansar al-Islam, occasionally clashing with IS, the Assad government, and other insurgent groups.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY
Ansar al-Islam (AI), also known as Ansar al-Sunna or Jamaat Ansar al-Islam (JAI), was a predominantly Kurdish, Salafist militant organization based in Iraqi Kurdistan.[3] Although the group's initial membership was primarily Kurdish, it grew to comprise a large number of Sunni Arabs, including Iraqis, Saudis, and Yeminis.[4] AI was formed in December 2001 by a series of mergers of Kurdish Islamist groups, including Kurdish Hamas, Tawhid, the Al-Tawhid Islamic

Front, the Second Soran Unit, the Reformist group, and Jund al-Islam, many of which had previously broken away from the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK). The leader of one of these groups, Mullah Krekar of the Reformist Group, became the head of Ansar al-Islam upon its formation in 2001.[5]

From its inception, AI had close ties with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda (AQ). AQ was purportedly responsible for training one of AI's predecessor organizations, Jund al-Islam, when it formed earlier in 2001. Additionally, many of the initial AI members were veterans of the Soviet-Afghanistan War during which they fought alongside bin Laden and the Mujahedeen.[6] Some sources even allege that over a hundred of Ansar al-Islam's original members were Al Qaeda fighters.[7] Although it has never been confirmed, it is believed that AI also received funds, training, and weapons from Al Qaeda.

AI's ties to AQ came under international scrutiny in 2003 when the Bush Administration alleged that AI was the link between the Hussein regime and bin Laden. In his February 2003 address to the UN Security Council on the proposed invasion of Iraq, U.S. Secretary of Defense Colin Powell asserted that "Baghdad [had] an agent in the most senior levels of the radical organization, Ansar al-Islam, that controls [the northern region] of Iraq. In 2000 this agent offered Al Qaida safe haven in the region. After [the U.S.] swept Al Qaida from Afghanistan, some of its members accepted this safe haven. They remain there today."[8] Although the link between the Hussein government and AI was never proven, the Bush administration often referred back to it as a justification of the U.S. 2003 invasion of Iraq. Ansar al-Islam did, however, undoubtedly offer AQ operatives safe haven after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001.[9]

Prior to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2003, AI predominantly targeted the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which together with the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) controlled the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). AI was founded and based within the PUK controlled region of Iraqi Kurdistan and the two group's differing ideologies quickly brought them to blows in early 2002. While the PUK was vehemently secular and nationalist, AI sought the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in the Kurdistan and enforced strict Shariah Law on all towns under its control.[10] In addition to Shariah law, it instituted laws that required men to grow beards, segregated the sexes, banned women from attaining education or seeking employment, and outlawed the playing of music and television. The group also proscribed harsh punishments, including amputation, flogging, and stoning, for crimes such as theft, consumption of alcohol, and adultery.[11]

Shortly after the U.S-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, KRG and Coalition troops launched an offensive against Ansar al-Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan. The majority of AI members were captured, killed, or fled to neighboring Iran. Mullah Krekar fled to Norway where he has remained ever since. In his place, Abu Abdullah al-Shafi, also known as Warba Holiri al-Kurdi, assumed command of the remnants of the organization.[12] From Iran, the group continued to operate under Shafi's leadership and was temporarily renamed Ansar al-Sunna (it officially re-adopted the name Ansar al-Islam in 2007).[13]

From 2003-2007, AI continued to target Iraqi government forces and stepped up its attacks on coalition forces. Its deadliest attack during this period occurred on February 1, 2004, when it launched multiple simultaneous suicide car bombings at PUK offices in Erbil, killing over 100 civilians and injuring over 130 more. By February 2007, AI had claimed responsibility for over 1,600 attacks in Iraq.[14] Also during this period, the group openly cooperated with Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI); however, it adamantly refused to formally join the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an umbrella organization established by AQI. Instead, in May 2007, AI joined with the Mujahideen

Army, the Islamic Army in Iraq, and Ansar al-Sunna Shariah (a splinter group that separated from AI in early 2007). Its members wished to take a harder line against AQI to form an anti-Coalition umbrella organization called the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF). The RJF was a pan-Islamist organization that challenged AQI for leadership of the Iraqi Sunni Islamist movement.[15]

Over the course of 2007-2008, AI moved increasingly away from the RJF and strengthened its ties to AQI. Not only did it coordinate with AQI on several attacks against U.S. and PUK troops, but AI also began to adopt AQI's hardline attitude against Sunni Iraqis who worked for the U.S. or Iraqi governments.[16] Prior to this AI had been somewhat more moderate than AQI in this regard, and it generally did not promote the anti-Shiite policies espoused by AQI.[17]

AI remained active after the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, primarily targeting the Iraqi government and Iraqi security forces. The majority of its attacks occurred in and around Mosul and Kirkukm, although starting around 2006-2007 the group was known to also have a small presence in the Anbar province.[18] With the advent of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the group expanded its operations into Syria. AI's Syrian branch was initially called Ansar al-Sham, but by 2014 the organization dropped this pretext and instead began to refer to its troops fighting in Syria as an official part of AI. Within Syria, AI predominantly fought alongside Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front against Assad government forces, Kurdish government troops (the Peoples Protection Units or the YPG), and occasionally the Islamic State (IS), the successor organization of AQI.[19] After the start of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq in late 2011, AI stepped up its attacks against the Iraqi government, targeting police and weapons depots and even claiming to have captured an oil field from the Iraqi government.[20]

With the rise of the IS in 2013-2014, AI and IS's relationship vacillated between one of close cooperation and one of armed hostility. While AI supported the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East, it regarded IS's declaration of itself as a state and as the leader of the Islamic caliphate premature and inappropriate. AI often spoke out against IS attempts to subjugate AI under IS leadership and insisted on calling IS "Jamaat al-Dawla", or "the group of the State," which is the name used for IS by Al Qaeda and its affiliates.[21] As a result of these differences, the two groups clashed in both Iraq and Syria in late 2013 and early 2014, including when IS claimed responsibility for assassinating a top leader of AI's Iraq branch, Abu Ahmad, in early 2014.[22] Subsequently, in April 2014, reports surfaced of attempts by AI and IS to reach a ceasefire. No lasting agreement was reached, and AI officially declared war on IS in May 2014.[23] Then on August 29, 2014, in a statement that shocked observers and participants of the Iraqi insurgency alike, 50 of AI's top leaders declared the group's allegiance to IS and officially merged AI into IS. Allegedly, about 90% of AI's Iraq branch joined IS at this time, although the AI's Syrian branch rejected the merger and continues to oppose IS. Though the group lost its original Iraqi leadership cohort, AI's Syria branch, hereafter AI Syria, continues to identify itself as Ansar al-Islam.[24] In July of 2018, AI Syria launched an attack in Latakia province against loyalists to Bashar al-Assad's regime, killing more than two dozen soldiers.[25] It still remains unclear what precipitated the leadership of AI's sudden decision to switch from actively opposing IS to joining its ranks.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
A. LEADERSHIP
Mullah Krekar (Najmuddin Faraj Ahmad) (December 2001- 2003): Mullah Krekar was a member of the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) and subsequently the leader of the Reformist Group, a splinter of the IMK, before becoming the first Emir of AI in December

2001. After the U.S. invasion and offensive against AI in 2003, Krekar fled to Norway where he remains in exile. He is not believed to still be active in AI.[26]

Abdullah al-Shafii (2003-May 3, 2010): Shafii replaced Krekar as the Emir of AI upon Krekar's exile to Norway in 2003. Shafii was arrested by Iraqi security forces on May 3, 2010 and remains in custody.[27]

Sheikh Abu Hashim Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman al Ibrahim (December 15, 2011-Present): Ibrahim was announced as new Emir of Ansar al-Islam on December 5, 2011.[28]

Abu Ahmad (unknown-2014): Ahmad was a senior leader in AI's Iraqi branch. He was killed by Islamic State (IS) forces in 2014.[29]

B. NAME CHANGES
- Ansar al-Islam (December 2001): Ansar al-Islam is the original name of the group. The group formally adopted this name in December 2001 after the merger of Jund al-Islam, the Reformist Group, and other Kurdish Islamist groups.[30]
- Ansar al-Sunna (September 2003): Members of AI who were exiled to Iran following the U.S. invasion of Iraq and offensive against Ansar al-Islam in 2003 renamed the organization Ansar al-Sunna in September 2003.[31]
- Ansar al-Islam (November 28, 2007): In 2007, AI's Shariah Council split from the larger organization and founded Ansar al-Sunna Shariah. In order to distance itself from Ansar al-Sunna Shariah, which was adamantly opposed to AQI, AI officially changed its name back to Ansar al-Islam.[32]

C. SIZE ESTIMATES
- December 2001: 350 (Christian Science Monitor)[33]
- March 2002: 700 (Christian Science Monitor)[34]
- March 2009: 500-1000 (Australian National Security)[35]
- 2014: Although its precise size was unknown, AI was considered one of the largest terrorist organizations in Iraq by the U.S. government. (U.S. Department of State)[36]

D. RESOURCES
AI receives a large portion of its funding from donations by local Sunni sheikhs, diaspora communities in Jordan, Turkey, and Europe, former Ba'athist officials, and its local criminal activities.[37] In the past, the group has also received training, munitions, and funding from Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network. There were also reports that the Iranian government, or at least factions within Iran, has provided funding to AI.[38]

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS
Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

Ansar al-Islam originated in the PUK-controlled region of Iraqi Kurdistan (northeastern Iraq). Prior to 2003, it controlled the towns of Biyara and Tawela, which lie just to the northeast of Halabjah in the Hawraman region of the Sulaimaniya governorate.[39] After the U.S. invasion and its campaign against AI in 2003, the group was largely expelled from this area and many of its members fled to Iran where they regrouped. As the group slowly returned to Iraq between 2003-

2007, it re-established a foothold in Iraqi Kurdistan around Kirkuk and Mosul.[40] However, beginning with the Sunni insurgency and the Syrian civil war in 2011, AI expanded its operations into Syria, particularly around Aleppo, and into the Anbar province in western Iraq.[41] When the Iraqi branch of AI merged into IS on August 29, 2014, the Syrian branch of AI refused to acknowledge the merger. As of October 2018, AI Syria continues to fight the Islamic State, Kurds, and the Assad regime in Syria under the name of Ansar al-Islam.[42]

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

Ansar al-Islam is a Kurdish-Arab Salafi militant organization that seeks to overthrow the Iraqi government and expel all foreign troops from Iraq. In the short term, it seeks to impose strict Shariah Law on those territories under its control and eventually establish a Sunni Islamist state in Iraq.[43] In the longer term, AI supports AQ's global militant Sunni jihadist ideology, namely the re-establishment of a Muslim caliphate in the Middle East.[44] The group was not, however, generally supportive of IS's proclamation of a caliphate prior to merging with IS in August 2014 because AI felt IS was attempting to subjugate AI under its leadership.[45]

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITES

AI does not have any known political activities.

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

AI targeted a range of different ethnic, political, and religious groups after its inception in 2001. Initially the majority of its attacks were directed against the PUK, which controlled the area of Iraqi Kurdistan where AI was based.[46] Within its sphere of control in the Hawraman region of Iraqi Kurdistan, AI targeted PUK supporters as well as Naqshbandi Sufis and any Sunnis who did not subscribe to AI's vision of Islam. AI instituted measures such as requiring women to wear veils, segregating the sexes, banning all education and employment of women, confiscating all musical instruments and televisions, and mandating attendance at Mosques. Those who failed to comply with these laws were subject to the historical practices of amputation, flogging, decapitation, and stoning.[47] Additionally reports surfaced of other forms of torture employed by AI in the areas under its control, including pouring acid on the skin of political prisoners and women who dressed in a manner considered immodest. The group also purportedly experimented with larger scale chemical attacks, particularly with ricin and cyanide gas.[48]

Following the U.S. invasion in 2003 and the joint PUK-U.S. offensive against AI that temporarily expelled the group from Iraq, AI's main targets became U.S. troops, Iraqi government forces, and any private citizens or businesses reported to be cooperating with the government or the U.S. AI also used methods such as suicide and car bombs to target Shiite mosques, Christian churches, and Kurdish political parties.[49]

After the advent of the Sunni insurgency in 2011, AI continued to target Iraqi government forces and Kurdish government troops, as well as the Assad government in Syria. AI also occasionally clashed with IS militants prior to merging with IS in August 2014.[50]

AI has used a range of weapons and tactics over the course of its history. Small arms and IED attacks were the group's most commonly employed munitions, although the group also frequently used suicide bombers and car bombs. AI has also, on occasion, used rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and anti-Aircraft weapons, including man portable air defense systems (MANPADS).[51]

In 2014, the Syrian branch of AI rejected the merger with IS and as of October 2018 continues to fight the Islamic State and Assad government in Syria under the name Ansar al-Islam.[52]

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

After Al Qaeda in Iraq, Ansar al-Islam has carried out the most attacks of any Sunni militant organization in Iraq.

2002: In the spring of 2002, AI sent several gunmen to assassinate PUK leader, Barha, Salih. Salih survived the attack but five of his bodyguards were killed along with two of the AI assailants. (7 killed, unknown wounded)[53]

October 14, 2003: AI claimed responsibility for bombing the Turkish Embassy in Baghdad. (1 killed, 24 wounded)[54]

February 1, 2004: The group carried out simultaneous suicide attacks at the headquarters of the KDP and the PUK in Erbil.   (100+ killed, 130 wounded)[55]

December 2004: AI used a suicide bomber to attack a U.S. military dining facility at Marez in Mosul. (22 killed, 60 wounded)[56]

January 2005: AI claimed credit for the assassination of Sheikh Mahmoud Finjan, who was a senior assistant to the prominent Iraqi Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. (1 killed, unknown wounded)[57]

April 22, 2007: In Ninawa, AI stopped a bus and took all the Yazidi passengers aboard prisoner. Though the other passengers were allowed to continue on their journey, AI took the Yazidi passengers to Mosul, where they were systematically executed. (23 killed, 7 wounded)[58]

May 8, 2007: AI claimed credit for a suicide attack in Erbil outside the Kurdish Interior Ministry. (15 killed, 65 wounded)[59]

April 2008: AI perpetrated a series of attacks in the Diyala province including the assassination of an Iraqi policeman, a bombing which killed two Christian soldiers, and an attack on a Mahdi Army checkpoint that resulted in 6 deaths. (9 dead, unknown wounded)[60]

November 25, 2012: AI claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing of a Shiite militia camp in the town of Rabia, Iraq. In a statement released shortly after the attack, AI not only claimed that the Shiite militants had been about to deploy to Syria to assist the Assad regime, but that the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) – the successor of AQI and predecessor to IS – had participated in the operation. (casualties unknown)[61]

March 2014: Ansar al Islam, Jabhat al-Nusra, and the Islamic Front fought together near Aleppo to capture Jabal Shwayhana and Kafr Hamra from the Assad Regime. (casualties unknown)[62]

April 21, 2014: Assailants attacked a polling station in Tawuq village, Kirkuk, Iraq. No group claimed responsibility, but AI is suspected to be behind the attack. (10 killed, 6+ wounded).[63]

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED
- AI has been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States Department of State since March 22, 2004.[64] It is currently still under this designation.
- AI was added to the United Nations Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List on February 24, 2003 and remains on the list as of October 2018 under UNSC Resolution 1390.[65] This action was taken by The Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) And 2253 (2015) Concerning Isil (Da'esh) Al-Qaida And Associated Individuals Groups Undertakings and Entities.
- AI is also designated as a terrorist organization by Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the EU.[66]
- Mullah Krekar was designated by U.S. Treasury Department as an individual providing assistance to terrorism and thus subject to having all international assets frozen in December 2006.[67]

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS
AI's strict implementation of Shariah Law and harsh punishments aroused resentment from the communities under its control. Not only did it deny religious rights to minorities such as the Naqshbandi Sufis, but AI also banned women from receiving education or seeking employment. Several reports from Kurdish civilians suggest that AI was responsible for the arbitrary arrests of numerous Kurdish civilians and the execution and torture of surrendered combatants. Additionally, in the areas under AI control, the organization required men to wear beards, banned all music and television, and made attending mosque daily a mandatory practice. The group also enforced punishments such as amputation, flogging, and stoning to death for crimes like the consumption of alcohol and theft. Such measures ultimately rendered AI unpopular among all but the most radical Kurdish civilians.[68]

Before its merger with IS, AI produced a monthly publication, *Hasad al-Mujahidin* (Mujahidin Roundup), which compiled summaries of its recent operational press releases, and maintained a twitter account that provided updates on the group's military activities.[69] Following the AI merge with IS in August 2014, AI Syria created its own Twitter account that made clear its continued opposition to IS (though it is no longer active).[70]

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS
From its inception, AI had close ties with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda (AQ). AQ had purportedly been responsible for training one of AI's predecessor organizations, Jund al-Islam, when it formed earlier in 2001. Additionally, many of the initial AI members were veterans of the Soviet-Afghanistan War during which they fought alongside bin Laden in the Mujahedeen.[71] Some sources even allege that over a hundred of Ansar al-Islam's original members were Al Qaeda fighters.[72] Following the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, AI provided many AQ members fleeing Afghanistan safe haven in its bases in Eastern Iraqi Kurdistan.[73] During this time, the U.S. also believed AI to be in contact with the Hussein regime. The Bush administration thus believed the Hussein regime to be connected to Al Qaeda through Ansar al-

Islam—one of the justifications it gave for the U.S. invasion of Iraq.[74] Throughout the mid to late 2000s, AI is believed to have worked closely with AQ and coordinated with its affiliate, Al Qaeda in Iraq, on several occasions. However, after 2011 differences began to arise between AI and AQI's successor, the Islamic State. When fighting IS in 2012, AI attempted to use its ties to AQ to end the violence, sending a letter to AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to ask him to mediate a ceasefire. Zawahiri does not appear to have ever replied.[75] In Syria, Ansar al-Islam has worked alongside Jabhat al-Nusra, an AQ affiliate, since beginning operations in the country in 2011. Although in August 2014, AI's leadership announced that the group would merge into IS, which is a rival of Jabhat al-Nusra's. A small fraction of AI's Syrian branch rejected the merger and as of October 2018, continues to cooperate with AQ and Jabhat al-Nusra.[76]

Although AI has been allied with Al Qaeda since its formation in 2001, its relationship with Al Qaeda in Iraq and its successor, the Islamic State, has vacillated between one of close cooperation and one of armed hostility. Initially AQI and AI were close allies to the point that an AI spokesman listed Zarqawi, the founder of AQI, as one of AI's earliest allies. However, the two groups' relationship began to deteriorate after the U.S. withdrawal in 2011 and on October 16, 2012, AI released a statement claiming it could no longer support the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), the successor organization to AQI and predecessor of IS, because of the group's repeated attacks on AI members.[77] It is unknown when these attacks started. Over the course of 2012 and 2013, AI repeatedly tried to negotiate with IS, even pleading with AQ central leadership to mediate, to no avail. Although AI refused to officially declare war on IS, it did release several statements denouncing IS's declaration of a caliphate in 2014.[78] While AI supported the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East, it regarded IS's declaration of itself as a state and as the leader of the Islamic community as premature and inappropriate. Thus, AI called IS "Jamaat al-Dawla," or "the group of the State," which is the standard name used for IS by Al Qaeda and its affiliates.[79] As a result of these ideological differences, the two groups clashed in both Iraq and Syria between 2012-2014, prompting IS to assassinate a top leader of AI's Iraq branch, Abu Ahmad, in early 2014.[80] However in the same time period, sporadic reports of cooperation between the two groups arose, including in November 2012 when they jointly attacked a Shiite militia near the Syria-Iraq border.[81] Then in April 2014, AI and IS purportedly opened negotiations to reach a ceasefire; the negotiations were not successful as AI publicly declared war on IS in May 2014. Throughout May the two groups purportedly clashed around the city of Baquba just north of Baghdad.[82] Then on August 29, 2014, in a statement that shocked observers and participants of the Iraqi insurgency alike, 50 of AI's top leaders declared their allegiance to IS and officially merged AI into IS. It appears that about 90% of AI's Iraq branch joined IS at this point as well as a large portion of the group's Iraqi membership. AI's Syrian branch, however, rejected the merger and continued to oppose IS.[83] It still remains unclear what precipitated AI's sudden decision to switch from actively opposing IS to joining its ranks.

AI has also had variable relations with other Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq. In early 2007, AI's Shariah Council (religious judicial council) split from AI because it wished to take a harder line against AQI and founded its own group, which it called Ansar al-Sunna Shariah (AS Shariah).[84] Later in 2007 both AI and AS Shariah joined with the Mujahideen Army and the Islamic Army in Iraq to form the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF). The RJF was anti-AQI and coordinated the attacks of its member groups on Iraqi government and U.S. troop installations.[85] The extent of AI's participation in the RJF is somewhat unclear, as it continued to support AQI and its successor organizations up through roughly 2012.[86]

AI also targeted Shiite militias in Iraq as well as those fighting in Syria. For instance, in April 2008, AI bombed a Mahdi Army checkpoint in the Diyala province, killing six Mahdi Army

members.[87] AI also clashed with Shiite groups fighting alongside the Assad regime in Syria, most notably in the areas surrounding Aleppo in March 2014.[88]

In October 2017, a group in Egypt calling themselves Ansar al-Islam launched an assault in the Western Desert of Egypt, attacking a security convoy and "killing at least 16 soldiers and police."[89] Though this organization is also an Al Qaeda affiliate, it appears to have no allegiance to the original Ansar al-Islam in Iraq.

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

There have been reports over the years that the Hussein regime provided support to AI or at least was in communications with its leadership.[90] The Bush administration asserted that the Hussein regime had a representative in the highest echelons of the AI leadership and that AI was thus the connection between the Hussein regime and AQ.[91] No corroborated evidence of this connection has been found nor were more specifics about the nature of AI's relationship to the Hussein regime ever given.[92]

Although the Iranian government has denied having any ties to AI, many sources believe that Iran has provided AI with logistical and financial support. At the very least it has harbored AI militants within its borders and provided a safe route by which foreign fighters can enter Iraq to join AI.[93] Additionally, civilians in towns under AI control reported witnessing Iranian agents meeting with AI leaders.[94]

MAPS
- Global Al Qaeda
- Global Islamic State
- Iraq

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