

The Shariah Committee of Ansar al-Sunnah

AT A GLANCE

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Maps

Mapping Militants Project (MMP). “The Shariah Committee of Ansar al-Sunnah.” Last modified March 2019. <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/545>

SUMMARY

Formed: May 2007

Disbanded: Likely inactive.

First Attack: Unknown.

Last Attack: 2009: While there have been no verified attacks, AS Shariah has posted videos online that claim attacks against American military personnel. It appears the last instance of this was in 2009.

OVERVIEW

The Shariah Committee of Ansar al-Sunnah (AS Shariah) was an Iraqi nationalist organization that called upon all sectors of the Iraqi public to support the end of foreign occupation in Iraq and implement Sharia Law in the nation. The group was speculated to have split from Ansar al-Islam in 2007 over objections to Al Qaeda in Iraq's targeted killings of civilians. AS Shariah was a member of both the Jihad and Reform Front and the Political Council of Iraqi Resistance.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

In 2007, Ansar al-Sunnah (formerly known as Ansar-al Islam) — a militant organization founded right before 9/11 that carried out numerous attacks against US forces in northern Iraq — fractured between its largely Kurdish and Arab wings, apparently over the organization's stance toward al-Qaeda.¹ The US encouraged this division by releasing a primary leader of the Arab wing, Abu Wa'el. Abu Wa'el left Ansar al-Sunnah and formed the Sharia Committee of Ansar al-Sunnah Sharia, although some evidence suggests that AS Shariah did not completely break from Ansar al-Islam until July 2008.² AS Shariah aimed to purge Iraq of foreign influence and establish strict Shariah law within the nation. The group has appealed to numerous sectors within Iraq, such as other jihad groups, the media, Iraqi tribes, and Muslim scholars and imams.³

Since its inception, AS Shariah has operated under two umbrella organizations, the Jihad and Reform Front (RJF) and the Political Council of Iraqi Resistance (PCIR). Almost all of AS Shariah's announcements have come in the form of joint communiqués from one of the two fronts. Both of the front organizations were considered to be moderate relative to many of the other jihadi groups operating within Iraq. AS Shariah, as a part of Political Council of Iraqi Resistance, entered into talks with U.S. forces sometime in 2010, although they were unable to reach any meaningful results.⁴ Furthermore, they said that they would not attack polling places for elections, unlike Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and its affiliates. AS Shariah supported the killing of foreign forces in Iraq but did not appear to conduct any significant attacks.⁵

In 2014, there was a publication allegedly by Abu Wa'el asking for unity among the mujahideen.⁶ However, this is unconfirmed. There has been very little evidence of any activity, and it is unclear whether or not AS Shariah is still a relevant force.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

It is believed that AS Shariah was started by former leaders of AI.

Abu Wa'el (2007-Unkown): In 2007, Abu Wa'el was released from an American prison. He split apart from the main body of AI and established AS Shariah. AQI reportedly tried to kill him in 2010.⁷

Abu Sajjad (2007-Unknown): In 2007, Sajjad left AS Shariah and aligned with members of the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI) and the Mujahideen Army (MA) to form the Jihad and Reform Front (RJF).⁸

Shaykh Abu Hind (2007-Unknown): In 2007, Hind left AS Shariah and aligned with members of the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI) and the Mujahideen Army (MA) to form the Jihad and Reform Front (RJF).⁹

B. NAME CHANGES

There are no recorded name changes for this organization.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

The size of AS Shariah is unknown.

D. RESOURCES

The source of AS Shariah's material resources is unknown. Some researchers have suggested that RJF may have received assistance from Saudi donors, though they have not provided evidence to support their claims.¹⁰

E. GEOGRAPHICAL 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.

AS Shariah operates primarily in northern Iraq.¹¹

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY & GOALS

AS Shariah followed an extreme interpretation of Islam with a focus on Iraqi nationalism. AS Shariah advocated for fighting Shiite influence in Iraq, though not as vigorously as AQI. As part of RJF, one of AS Shariah's short-term goals was to unite all of the Iraqi militant factions together in a unified front.¹² In the header of the Reform and Jihad Front's official website there was a Qur'anic quote stating, "And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah (i.e. the Qur'an), and do not be divided amongst yourselves." In the long term, the group strived to liberate Iraq from foreign forces and establish a state ruled by Sharia Law.¹³

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

AS Shariah did not consider the 2008 Iraqi government to be legitimate, labeling it as a "traitor" government because of its close work with the U.S. military.¹⁴ However, they did not rule out the possibility of working within a political system based on elections and popular consensus as long as that system conformed to Islamic laws.¹⁵

AS Shariah was part of the political front organization, the Political Council of Iraqi Resistance (PCIR). This council showed greater political flexibility than other jihadist groups. It entered into talks with U.S. forces and in 2011 sources said they quietly backed candidates for the Iraqi Parliament.¹⁶

C. TARGETS & TACTICS

AS Shariah, as part of the Jihad and Reform Front, strictly targeted foreign forces within Iraq, especially U.S. military personnel.¹⁷

In 2009, AS Shariah's "Science and Technology Body" reportedly developed a missile named the Ansar Arrow. The missile had a range of 70 kilometers and was capable of carrying chemical, conventional, and nuclear payloads. Despite a 51-page manual and instructional video, it cannot be verified this missile was ever used or actually manufactured by the organization.¹⁸

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.

There is very little information on AS Shariah's attacks.

July 29, 2009: AS Shariah allegedly released a video showing a bombing of a US vehicle in Diyala Province.¹⁹

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

AS Shariah is not a designated terrorist organization, but its parent organization, Ansar al-Islam, was designated by the United States in Chapter Six of the 2011 Country Reports on Terrorism.²⁰

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

AS Shariah's relationship with the community was unknown, although it did not agree with AQI-style attacks on Iraqi civilians and joined the Jihad and Reform Front partly in response to the cruel practices of AQI.²¹

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

AS Shariah is part of two front organizations: Jihad and Reform Front (RJF) and the Political Council of Iraqi Resistance (PCIR).²² AS Shariah joined both of these groups in 2007. Because of this participation, AS Shariah likely had favorable relations with the groups in the RJF, including the Islamic Army in Iraq and the Mujahedeen Army, and groups in the PCIR, including Hamas Iraq.²³

AS Shariah and Ansar al-Islam (AI, formerly Ansar al-Sunnah) had a tenuous relationship. AQI's targeting of civilians appeared to be a precipitating factor for the split, with AS Shariah opposed to AQI's cruel tactics against civilians.²⁴ The RJF, of which AS Shariah was a founding member, also had a running feud with AQI over tactics. For their part, AQI sought to sabotage RJF activities, such as reconciliation talks with the Iraqi government.²⁵ The last known activity of the RJF was through the PCIR in 2010.²⁶ As of March 2019, no further information on the RJF's more recent activities, if any, was available.

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

There was little evidence of AS Shariah having any external influences; however, researchers suggested that RJF received assistance from Saudi donors.²⁷

MAPS

- Iraq

¹ Fishman, Brian H. *The Master Plan: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

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³ "Jihad Organizations in Iraq Establish New Front." MEMRI: Islamist Websites Monitor No. 95. Web. 24 July 2015. <https://www.memri.org/reports/islamist-websites-monitor-91-95>

⁴ Abu Rumman, Muhammad. "Sunnis in Iraq's Election: An Evolving Balance of Power." *Arab Reform Bulletin of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. February 24, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2010/02/24/sunnis-and-iraq-s-elections-evolving-balance-of-power/2fp>

⁵ Abu Rumman, Muhammad. "Sunnis in Iraq's Election: An Evolving Balance of Power." *Arab Reform Bulletin of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. February 24, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2010/02/24/sunnis-and-iraq-s-elections-evolving-balance-of-power/2fp>

⁶ Al-Tamimi, Aymen J. "Jamaat Ansar Al-Sunna." Aymen Jawad. October 22, 2014. Accessed July 5, 2018. <http://www.aymennjawad.org/15528/jamaat-ansar-al-sunna>.

⁷ Fishman, Brian H. *The Master Plan: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

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https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=pjis/six%20terrorist/report/appendix%20b.pdf
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- ¹⁰ Abu Rumman, Muhammad, "Politics of Sunni Armed Groups in Iraq." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Arab Reform Bulletin. Retrieved on July 24, 2011 from
<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2008/08/18/politics-of-sunni-armed-groups-in-iraq/cb6>
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- ¹² Gregory, Kathryn. "Ansar Al-Islam (Iraq, Islamists/Kurdish Separatists), Ansar Al-Sunnah." Council on Foreign Relations. November 5, 2008. Accessed March 10, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ansar-al-islam-iraq-islamistskurdish-separatists-ansar-al-sunnah>.
- ¹³ "Jihad Organizations in Iraq Establish New Front." MEMRI: Islamist Websites Monitor No. 95. Web. 24 July 2015. <https://www.memri.org/reports/islamist-websites-monitor-91-95>
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²⁶ Rumman, Muhammed Abu. "Sunnis and Iraq's Elections: An Evolving Balance of Power." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. February 24, 2010. Accessed March 14, 2019.
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²⁷ Abu Rumman, Muhammad, "Politics of Sunni Armed Groups in Iraq." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Arab Reform Bulletin. Retrieved on July 24, 2011 from
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