

Chinese living and working in Algeria, days after the riots in Urumqi.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, in a videotaped statement that featured senior al-Qa`ida leader Abu Yahya al-Libi that appeared online on October 7, 2009, Abu Yahya called on Muslims to direct their attention to the plight of the Uighurs. Regarding the violence in Xinjiang, Abu Yahya declared:

This massacre is not being carried out by criminal Crusaders or evil Jews who have committed crimes against our nation...Today, a new massacre is being carried out by Buddhist nationalists and communists against the Muslim population in eastern Turkestan... It is a duty for Muslims today to stand by their wounded and oppressed brothers in East Turkestan...and support them with all they can.<sup>43</sup>

Al-Qa`ida's decision to single out China is noteworthy on a number of levels. Given al-Qa`ida's unshaken focus on targeting the United States and U.S. interests abroad, it is unclear if the group is capable of or interested in expending resources to target China. In this regard, al-Qa`ida may not be interested in opening up another front in its campaign that would entail taking on China directly; this would likely encourage the United States and China to cooperate more closely in destroying the organization. Rather, al-Qa`ida may be content with providing moral support to others who may choose to strike China and Chinese interests in other countries independently.

AQIM, for instance, claimed responsibility for an attack on June 17, 2009 against an Algerian paramilitary police convoy escorting Chinese construction workers; 19 paramilitary police and one Chinese worker were reportedly killed in the incident.<sup>44</sup> AQIM has a history of targeting foreigners in Algeria, including foreign workers, and the group's apparent intent to target

Chinese in particular following the July 2009 riots may lead to further attacks against Chinese interests in the region. It is also unclear if al-Qa`ida has the resources required, namely capable networks operating on Chinese soil, to strike inside China. At the same time, al-Qa`ida's decision to exploit the July 2009 riots demonstrates its ability to harness current events dominating the news cycle to further validate its narrative as a vanguard of Islamic resistance. In this case, al-Qa`ida saw an opportunity to speak in defense of what it sees as a besieged Muslim minority suffering under an oppressive regime as most of the world—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—stand by in silence.

### Conclusion

The nature and scope of the violence in Urumqi in July 2009 and the increasing international interest among Muslims and non-Muslims alike in the Uighur question will impact the future of the region. By all accounts, China will continue to treat the Uighur question as a vital security matter. In doing so, it will go to great lengths to root out all forms of dissent, peaceful or violent, under the guise of counterterrorism. Meanwhile, al-Qa`ida's foray into the politics of Xinjiang should remain cause for further observation. Yet it is unlikely that the group will set their sights on China in the near future when there are far more pressing issues at hand, such as striking their primary targets: the U.S. homeland and U.S. interests abroad.

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## Ninawa Province: Al-Qa`ida's Remaining Stronghold

By Andrea Plebani

SINCE THE DEATH of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in June 2006, al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) has been seriously weakened as a terrorist and insurgent organization. The group was unable to achieve its main objective of creating a "genuine" Islamic state in the heart of the Muslim world. Nevertheless, AQI continues to retain sufficient support and capabilities to prevent the complete normalization of the Iraqi system, to wage a prolonged low-intensity conflict (focused on several strategic provinces<sup>1</sup>), and to implement high-profile coordinated attacks such as the operations targeting Baghdad on August 19, October 25 and December 8, 2009.<sup>2</sup> While Baghdad continues to remain AQI's major operational center of gravity, its presence in the capital is limited due to the strong pressure exerted by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and U.S. forces. In this framework, several elements indicate that Ninawa Province is the movement's main stronghold and financial hub.<sup>3</sup>

This article will show how the death of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in June 2006 marked the gradual weakening of AQI, identify the factors that have made Ninawa Province the group's main remaining stronghold, and assess whether AQI has moved toward a more traditional terrorism campaign and away from the "mini-state" model.

1 Some 79% of the attacks waged from July to September 2009 took place in four provinces: Baghdad, Ninawa, Diyala and Salah al-Din. See "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," U.S. Department of Defense, report to the U.S. Congress, September 2009.

2 The August 19 bombings hit the Foreign and Finance ministries and killed at least 100 people. On October 25, attacks targeted the Justice Ministry and the Baghdad governorate headquarters, killing at least 150 people. The December 8 attacks targeted a courthouse, two colleges, a mosque and a bank, killing at least 120 people. For details, see Steven Lee Myers and Marc Santora, "Election Date Set in Iraq as Bombs Kill Scores," *New York Times*, December 8, 2009.

3 Eric Hamilton, "The Fight for Mosul," Institute for the Study of War, April 2008.

42 Liam Stack, "China Warns Citizens in Algeria of Al Qaeda Threat," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 15, 2009.

43 "China: Al-Qaeda Urges Holy War to Defend Muslims," Adnkronos International, October 7, 2009.

44 Christian Lowe and Lamine Chikhi, "Insurgents Ambush Algerian Police Convoy, Kill 19," Reuters, June 18, 2009.

### The Post-Zarqawi Phase

Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's death in June 2006 dealt a serious blow to AQI. Since its birth, AQI was organized around al-Zarqawi, who offered charismatic, albeit controversial,<sup>4</sup> leadership. The group was primarily guided by foreign fighters, with Iraqi militants substantially underrepresented in the upper echelons of the organization.<sup>5</sup> After his assassination, the movement had to reorganize and overcome a crisis of legitimacy as it was increasingly marginalized from its Sunni Arab supporters in Iraq.

To stem losses of local support, the new AQI leadership<sup>6</sup> tried to strengthen its links to Iraqi society. In October 2006, AQI was involved in the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an umbrella organization of Iraqi insurgent groups led by Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi. AQI's interest in creating the ISI can be seen as an attempt to limit the deepening divisions that were weakening the movement. Yet it did not move fast enough to prevent its near complete marginalization from Iraqi society. A growing number of Sunni Arab tribal elders—whose economic interests as well as authority had become seriously compromised by AQI<sup>7</sup>—began to view the group as a more dangerous enemy than U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi government forces. As a result, a growing number of Sunni Arab tribal leaders began to cooperate with the new Iraqi regime and U.S.-led forces.<sup>8</sup>

In a few months, and in large part due to the strengthening of the Awakening movements<sup>9</sup> and the new strategic posture adopted by U.S. troops and ISF units in the wake of the "surge," the ISI's power waned and the movement lost much of its ground. Caught between two fires that threatened to put an end to its battle in the "land of the two rivers," AQI gradually abandoned several of its traditional strongholds in central-western Iraq and sought shelter in areas that remained supportive of its cause. It also restructured its logistic and financial networks, strengthened cooperation with the remnants of the insurgency and crafted a new strategy favoring the continuation of its struggle.

### Ninawa Province: AQI's Main Stronghold

Ninawa Province is characterized by a series of intertwined elements that have made it the perfect base for AQI's revival. It is situated in an ideal geographic position, it suffers from a strong insurgency not courted by Iraqi government reconciliation initiatives, and has a sociopolitical fabric fragmented along ethno-sectarian lines that is deeply affected by mistrust toward the central government. Select local communities are ready to consider insurgent groups as the only actors capable of restoring the old social order to the area.

### The Geopolitical Factor

Ninawa's geographic position has made it the perfect nexus between AQI's needs and the traditional smuggling routes controlled by tribes and communities living on either side of the Iraq-Syria border. The relations between these tribes and AQI were built on solid and shared interests; these interests make it less likely that the relationship will backfire as it did with the Sunni Arab tribes in Anbar Province. As a result, AQI has been able to rely on safe channels, allowing it to take advantage of the supply lines offered by the "facilitation networks" based in Syria,<sup>10</sup>

and to count on a flow of fighters, funds and materials that the local security forces have proved unable to halt. Moreover, the population involved in the smuggling activities can benefit from the increased traffic and related money flow. As stated by Matthew Levitt, smuggling is "a lucrative business, and the foreign fighters pipeline in Syria is believed to have benefitted the local populations on both sides of the Syrian-Iraqi border in

**"Ninawa's geographic position has made it the perfect nexus between AQI's needs and the traditional smuggling routes controlled by tribes and communities living on either side of the Iraq-Syria border."**

the form of jobs, increased cash flow into the local economy, purchase of supplies, staples, and rents."<sup>11</sup> Smuggling routes are extremely significant for local communities since they represent one of the main sources of income in areas which—due to the instability of the recent years and the existing Arab-Kurdish standoff—have been neglected by the central government and are traditionally devoid of suitable and attractive economic alternatives.

Smuggling routes are not the only element that has made Ninawa relevant for AQI. The economic importance of Ninawa's capital Mosul, for example, is a major factor helping to transform the province into AQI's main logistical and support center.<sup>12</sup> Beginning with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the area in 2004, the city became the most important financial hub for AQI, capable of providing up to 80% of its

4 For an in-depth analysis of AQI's status after al-Zarqawi's death, see Brian Fishman, "After Zarqawi: The Dilemmas and Future of Al Qaeda in Iraq," *Washington Quarterly* 29:4 (2006): pp. 19-32.

5 Personal interview, Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, secretary-general of the al-Wasat Front and the former Iraqi national security adviser, Como, Italy, December 6, 2009.

6 AQI is now under the command of "Abu Hamza al-Muhajir," who is presumably the Egyptian militant Abu Ayyub al-Masri.

7 Another important source of hatred against AQI was the movement's disregard of traditions, as described in David Kilcullen, "Field Notes on Iraq's Tribal Revolt Against Al-Qa'ida," *CTC Sentinel* 1:11 (2008).

8 For an in-depth analysis of the causes of AQI's decline, see Brian Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside al-Qa'ida in Iraq* (New York: Combatting Terrorism Center, 2009).

9 On this issue, see John McCarty, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *Washington Quarterly* 32:1 (2009): pp. 43-59; Michael Eisenstadt, "Tribal Engagement: Lessons Learned," *Military Review*, September-October 2007; Kimberly Kagan, "Anbar Awakening: Displacing Al-Qaeda From Its Stronghold in Western Iraq," Institute for the Study of War, April 5, 2007.

10 For more information about these networks, see Mat-

thew Levitt, "Foreign Fighters and Their Economic Impact: A Case Study of Syria and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3:3 (2009); Ryan Mauro, "Has Damascus Stopped Supporting Terrorists?" *Middle East Quarterly* 16:3 (2009); Safa A. Hussain, "Enough is Enough," [www.bitterlemons.org](http://www.bitterlemons.org), September 10, 2009.

11 Levitt, p. 18.

12 "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq."

internal funds<sup>13</sup> at its height as a result of a mafia-style network entrenched in the city.<sup>14</sup> Despite several ISF military operations to destroy this network, it continues to provide the movement with a significant financial stream.

#### *Tactical Cooperation with Local Insurgent Movements*

Insurgent groups, especially former members of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party, are abundant in Ninawa Province. Their presence has helped AQI regroup in the region. Learning from its losses in Anbar Province, AQI did not try to impose its will on the other insurgent groups active in the area, but instead forged strong tactical linkages to keep the region under the grips of the insurgency.<sup>15</sup> In this framework, particularly relevant is the cooperation between AQI and Ba'athist groups. Several high-level Iraqi officials,<sup>16</sup> as well as U.S. General Ray Odierno, deem this relationship as responsible for the high-profile attacks targeting the country in the last year. According to General Odierno,

the size of al-Qaida has been reduced significantly, they can no longer conduct the attacks independently, they can only do it with the help of others. Baathist elements are no longer capable of operating independently as well, so the successes we've had have forced them to work together.<sup>17</sup>

This tactical cooperation shows that the dividing line between AQI and former Ba'athists is thin and at times overlaps. Moreover, a growing ideological rapprochement between the two movements appears underway, as demonstrated by the statement released on December 2, 2009 by Ba'athist leader Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri,<sup>18</sup> who invited the Iraqi resistance and the mujahidin to lay down the basis for the creation of a new Iraqi state founded on a legislative system that considers the Qur'an as its first and main legal source.<sup>19</sup>

#### *A Fragmented Sociopolitical Fabric*

Ninawa Province's ethno-religious mosaic represents another valuable asset for AQI's revival. While historically dominated by a strong Sunni Arab majority, which traditionally held the levers of power, Ninawa is the seat of important Kurdish, Christian, Shabak and Yazidi communities that claim ancient and strong linkages to the territory. Under Saddam's regime, the region witnessed the effects of a prolonged Arabization campaign—aimed at limiting the relevance of the Kurdish community and strengthening Sunni Arab identity in the area—that altered the original ethno-religious map, fueling the resentment of hundreds of families obliged to abandon their ancestral homes.

The fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 and the transfer of control from U.S. to Kurdish security forces in 2004 in Ninawa pushed many of the Sunni Arab families, which settled in the area in the wake of the government-led Arabization process, to flee their homes. This added hatred to hatred toward the new Iraqi government, which was perceived hostile to the Sunni Arabs and allied with its worst enemies: the United States, Iran and the Kurdish leadership.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the growing Kurdish military, economic and

political influence in Ninawa, cemented by the victory of its list in the 2005 elections, created resentment among Sunni Arabs.<sup>21</sup> This resentment has not been extinguished by the pro-Sunni al-Hadbaa coalition's victory in the 2009 provincial elections.<sup>22</sup> This has fueled a strong insurgency in Ninawa that the Iraqi government has been unable to tackle.

In this context, AQI has been able to exploit the anger of the Sunni Arab community and the existing local divisions. AQI has adopted a strategy that targets Ninawa's minorities to prevent the stabilization of the area, to display the Iraqi government's inability to provide security, and to perpetuate

**“This tactical cooperation shows that the dividing line between AQI and former Ba'athists is thin and at times overlaps.”**

a climate of fear that sustains the movement directly (through its mafia-style network) and indirectly (by strengthening the perception that it still retains powerful military capabilities).

This strategy also underlines a deep understanding of the local ethno-sectarian balance: by attacking these communities, AQI can continue its struggle without waging a bloody campaign against local institutions and security forces (which maintain strong linkages with the local Sunni community and have been accused of collaborating with insurgents) and *peshmerga* (or Kurdish militias whose presence in the area AQI recognizes as instrumental in fomenting Sunni Arab anger and distrust).

13 Personal interview, Safa A. Hussain, former brigadier general in the Iraqi Air Force and Iraqi national security adviser, December 2009.

14 AQI fundraising activities in Ninawa (mainly kidnapping, racketeering, extortion as well as oil theft and smuggling) rely on a network of agents located on the territory and are based on an alliance of interests with local criminal gangs. For more details, see Michael Knights, “Al-Qa`ida in Iraq: Lessons from the Mosul Security Operation,” *CTC Sentinel* 1:7 (2008); Lennox Samuels, “Al Qaeda Nostra,” *Newsweek*, May 21, 2008; Phil Williams, “Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq,” Strategic Studies Institute, June 2009.

15 Knights.

16 Sammy Ketzi, “Iraq Security Adviser Warns of Qaeda Threat Ahead of Poll,” Agence France-Presse, December 29, 2009; Khalid al-Ansary, “Iraq's Maliki Blasts Foreign Support for Bombings,” Reuters, December 9, 2009.

17 Jim Garamone, “Commanders: Iraq Progress Will Continue in U.S. Drawdown Year,” U.S. Department of Defense, January 1, 2010.

18 Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri was Saddam Hussein's former deputy chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council and is the leader of one of the two wings of the “new” Iraqi Ba'ath Party.

19 “A statement from the leader believer Mujahid Izzat Ibrahim Al Duri on the occasion of the formation of the Jihad, Liberation and National Salvation Front,” posted on al-Basrah.net, November 2, 2009.

20 “On Vulnerable Ground: Violence Against Minority Communities in Nineveh Province's Disputed Territories,” Human Rights Watch, November 10, 2009.

21 The 2005 elections were boycotted by the Sunni Arab community.

22 The provincial elections held on January 31, 2009 marked the victory of the al-Hadbaa National List which, appealing to Arab identity in the province, received 48.4% of the votes, defeating the Kurdish coalition that has headed the region since 2005. For a deeper analysis of the political situation in the province, see “Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle over Ninawa,” International Crisis Group, September 28, 2009.



### Toward A Major Strategic Shift?

AQI has exploited local conditions to transform Ninawa into one of its main strongholds. Yet this achievement could represent just one element of a broader strategic shift by AQI aimed at reversing the debacle it suffered during the last three years. In this regard, the creation of a solid base in the province and the completion of the Iraqification process of the group that started after al-Zarqawi's death has been coupled with a series of initiatives aimed at adapting the movement's strategy to local conditions and to exploit its traditional strengths.

The recent terrorist attacks that hit Baghdad indicate that AQI is increasing high-profile coordinated attacks against Iraqi political targets and institutions, in addition to continuing its campaign aimed at fostering sectarian divisions. The decision to focus on these types of attacks—widely recognized as an AQI trademark—could indicate a shift from the “ISI paradigm” of transforming areas under jihadist control into states or mini-states administrated according to Shari`a.<sup>23</sup> By concentrating on high-profile attacks, AQI could be moving toward a more traditional terrorism campaign, aimed at reasserting AQI's role in the country and limiting the huge losses experienced by the movement since 2006.

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## The French Approach to Counterterrorism

By Charles Rault

IN THE LAST five years, a number of terrorist attacks have occurred in Western Europe. In March 2004, Islamist terrorists attacked Madrid's commuter train system, killing 191 people. On July 7, 2005, Islamist terrorists struck London's public transportation system, killing more than 50 people. A number of other plots in Western Europe have been disrupted. Since the 9/11 attacks on the United States, France has managed to escape a terrorist attack. Nevertheless, the threat to France remains high, and French authorities believe that it is only a matter of time before their country is targeted successfully, likely by militants associated with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of reasons why France has not suffered a terrorist attack in more than a decade. One reason is due to the successes of the country's experienced and well-established counterterrorism apparatus. France's security apparatus was strengthened in the last two decades in response to multiple terrorist attacks that struck the country in the 1990s—effectively foreshadowing today's threat of Islamist terrorism. It is useful to review France's domestic counterterrorism efforts to better understand how other governments have met this growing challenge. This article will provide background on previous terrorist attacks targeting France, the government's overall view toward counterterrorism, and finally the tactics it uses to combat the ongoing terrorism threat.

1 According to French former counterterrorism judge Jean-Louis Bruguière, the current threat level is four, with five the highest. See “L'ancien juge Jean-Louis Bruguière évalue trente ans de terrorisme,” *La Voix du Nord*, November 7, 2009. As for the claim that the greatest terrorist threat to France is likely from AQIM militants, see personal interview, former DGSE intelligence officer, Paris, November 6, 2009. AQIM was formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). French sources argue that the GSPC's connection to al-Qa`ida is nominal, not operational.

### History of Terrorist Violence in France

From the mid-1970s, France and other European countries faced threats from separatist or left-wing terrorists. In 1985, for example, General René Audran, the chief of arms sales for the French Ministry of Defense, was assassinated by the urban guerrilla group Action Directe.<sup>2</sup> In 1986, the same group was blamed for the murder of Georges Besse, the director of the French automotive company Renault.<sup>3</sup>

From 1982 to 1987, terrorist violence in France peaked after state-sponsored terrorist groups from the Middle East targeted French interests in the context of East-West tensions generated by the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> Groups such as the Palestinian Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) and Lebanese Hizb Allah, in addition to Carlos “The Jackal,” were the most active. In 1988, the ANO executed four French citizens on a Greek tourist boat, the *City of Poros*. Hizb Allah conducted a campaign of 13 terrorist attacks beginning in 1985 that culminated with an attack against the store “Tati” at Rue de Rennes in Paris in 1986, killing seven people and wounding 66.<sup>5</sup> Known for having planned the attack on the headquarters of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Vienna in 1975, Venezuelan terrorist Carlos “The Jackal” first joined the Palestinian cause as a member of the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) before operating undercover for East Germany's Stasi and Romania's Securitate.<sup>6</sup> In 1982, Carlos was

2 Frederick Pajnton, William Dowell and William McWhirter, “Terrorism New Generation of Violence,” *Time Magazine*, February 11, 1985.

3 Action Directe denied any responsibility. In Dominique Lorentz's and David Carr-Brown's *La République atomique: France-Iran le pacte nucléaire* film documentary, the authors suggest that Besse might have been killed by Iranian operatives due to his previous involvement in the nuclear-related disagreements between France and Iran.

4 In this context, terrorist groups also targeted U.S. and Jewish interests.

5 There were a number of motives behind Hizb Allah's targeting of French interests. The group demanded the release of Lebanese militant Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, which France refused to do. Moreover, France was targeted due to its alleged support for the Christian Maronites. Iran was also not pleased with French support to Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

6 John Follain, *Jackal: The Complete Story of the Legendary Terrorist, Carlos the Jackal* (New York: Arcade Publish-

23 This strategy seems to be based on Abu Bakr Naji, an important jihadist ideologue who wrote *Idarat al-Tawabbush* (Management of Savagery). In his book, Naji indicates a plan to re-establish the caliphate and, according to his program, under the “management of savagery” stage, the mujahidin should transform the areas under their control into states or semi-states which they should administrate according to Shari`a law.