



Exclusive: An Interview with “the Islamic Army in Iraq” (IAI) July 2008

NEFA Foundation Exclusive: An Interview with Dr. Ali al-Naimi, Spokesman for the “Islamic Army in Iraq” (IAI)



[In May 2008, the prominent Iraqi insurgent organization known as the “Islamic Army in Iraq” (IAI) agreed to an exclusive Arabic-language interview with NEFA Senior Investigator Evan Kohlmann. For more information on the IAI, the Reform and Jihad Front (RJF), and the troubled relationship between these groups and Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI), see “State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq: August 2007” (<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/iraqreport0807.pdf>).]

Q.) What is the Islamic Army? Is it a political movement, a military movement, or both? When was it founded and who was behind its founding?

A.) “I find it odd that after all these attacks and battles that we made, there comes someone who asks us about the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI), especially if he is a journalist. I believe that if you had asked the American soldiers, they would have given you a more satisfying answer. As for its founding, the concept was formed before the American occupation of Iraq, when all signs indicated that Bush was going to lead the Americans to slaughter the peaceful people of Iraq. Our goals are to drive the occupiers out and to put an end to the oppression of the Iraqi people, through establishing a state of justice and equality that will be based on the cornerstones of our nation.”

Q.) How big is the Islamic Army, approximately? What impact generally have fighters from the IAI had upon the insurgency? Why should those who are unfamiliar with the Islamic Army recognize its critical importance within the Iraqi insurgency?

A.) “The Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) is one of the largest Iraqi armed organizations confronting the American occupation and we have military and political knowledge, scientific capabilities and warfare skills, all while constrained within strict rules of morality. Furthermore, we follow a scientific method, which is respectful of the realities of Iraq—social, political, and economic. All this has established for us a wide base of support among the general public, which made it difficult for the biased American propaganda machine to distort the image of the resistance in Iraq.”



Q.) What are the most important political principles of the Islamic Army, and what will be the role of the Islamic Army in Iraq after the end of the occupation?

A.) “We have a complete political plan, with clear and realistic visions—and we have already taken into consideration everything relating to the status of Iraq following the departure of the occupying forces. The Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) is based upon a number of principles and moral values—such as fighting and sacrificing for the liberation of our homeland from the filth of the occupation, and making the effort to establish a state based on equal justice for all citizens and

ending the oppression of everyone—far from any bias, whatever its causes may be. You can turn to the website of the organization to learn more: <http://iaisite.org>.”

Q.) Some have referred to you as part of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, while others allege that you are followers of the Salafi-Jihad movement, what is your response?

A.) “These claims are not important. As the commander of the [Islamic] Army told the *Al-Hayat* newspaper: we belong to the School of the Book [i.e. the Quran] and the Sunnah [i.e. the traditions of the Prophet Mohammed], whose foundations were established by the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him salvation, and the Imams of religion and the clerics after him. The sources for our religious knowledge are the fixed sources—that is, the Book and the Sunnah, and anything else that Muslim religious scholars have agreed on unanimously. Nothing, save for these, shall be presented to be accepted or rejected. Whoever follows this course is a true believer and whoever follows another course is going astray.”

Q.) What religious leaders does the Islamic Army follow? What is your opinion on Dr. Yusef al-Caradawi, or the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq?

A.) “We have our own scholars of Islamic law, but we hold much esteem for other scholars and people of knowledge. We forgive their mistakes—if they have made any—we respect their opinions, and we value their efforts, for they are our concern, but we are affiliated with no one. Furthermore, we have addressed more than one call to all the Islamic scholars from our nation to take up their role in confronting the challenges [facing us] and to give what operative and moral support they can to the Iraqi insurgency, in the course of the duty that it is fulfilling on behalf of the Islamic nation.”

Q.) Were the fighters from the Islamic Army part of the Saddam Hussein regime or the Baath Party? According to Islamic law, was Saddam Hussein considered a criminal or a hero?

A.) “We have absolutely no relation to the former regime which was ruling in Iraq. We are Muslims, and Saddam is history now. The critical point here is that those who denounced Saddam for being a dictator are, in fact, much worse dictators and oppressors than he ever was—especially the American leadership and the bloody sectarian factions that the occupation has brought with it.”

Q.) Where were the mujahedeen of the Islamic Army during the U.S. invasion of Iraq? Were they a part of the insurgency at that time?

A.) “It was the pretext of Bush, and we were only preparing for our true battle then—which we did not commence until we were able to surprise those who took Iraq to be easy prey with the firepower of the resistance, which has become a legend of this era and has replaced the legacy of American Apaches and bombers. The American army has become mere numbers on paper, by the grace of Allah the Exalted, and His support.”

Q.) During the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the U.S. government claimed that Al-Qaida had worked in partnership with Saddam Hussein. What is your view of these allegations and do you have any evidence to prove them?

A.) “We cannot respond on behalf of anyone else, neither Saddam Hussein nor Al-Qaida.”

Q.) In your opinion, what are the most important events and battles in the history of the Iraqi insurgency? What was the importance of the battle for Fallujah in 2004? What were the major turning points for the Iraqi insurgency?

A.) “Our fighting doctrine is based upon guerilla warfare, and it is a successful method in the context of a conflict such as what is taking place presently in Iraq, since we try to avoid direct confrontations for many reasons. Fallujah was an important part of the conflict and it is a prominent symbol of Iraqi superiority over the tyranny of the American war machine—but it was only a stage along the way, and there may come something bigger and more violent, with the help of Allah the Exalted, if the opportunity will present itself. Fallujah may be born again in another place in the blazing land of Iraq. The truth is that the Americans always repeat the same mistakes at the expense of American blood, wealth, and reputation—and [at the expense of] Iraqi

human rights and civilians, which are the real victims of the mistakes and recklessness of American generals and leaders, the blood-dealers who are toying with the fate of both the Iraqi and American peoples.”

Q.) Everyone knows who [Al-Qaida in Iraq commanders] Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir are, but would you like to share with Americans the names of some mujahedeen leaders who are not from the Al-Qaida organization? Who were the most important martyred fighters from the Islamic Army (and its allies) over the history of the insurgency in Iraq?

A.) “We believe in action regardless of faces and names—the most important thing is that the goal is noble, and what gains great success upon the earth, shall win the contentment of Allah the Exalted, and then the happiness of the honorable free men who have not been deceived into submitting to the will of the oppressors. It is not important that the people know who we are—what is important is that we have written stories in history of dignity and honor among men, and that our God and our people are pleased with us and the reward is from Allah. It should be noted that we have documented some of our martyrs in the special video ‘Men Who Have Been True To Their Covenant.’”

Q.) Has the Islamic Army worked with other Iraqi insurgent groups besides the Reform and Jihad Front (RJF)? Have any other insurgent groups found particular inspiration in the operations or statements of the Islamic Army in Iraq?

A.) “We have joint operations and this is a successful method which the factions of the resistance have used. We may differ in everything, except for anger at, and fighting against these occupiers who have attacked us. We are cooperating in reverence, courage, and in chasing away our enemies, and the success is from Allah.”

Q.) What is the nature of your relationship with the ‘Movement of Reform and Change? Why did ‘the Al-Fatihin Army’ separate itself from the ‘Reform and Jihad Front’?

A.) “Perhaps you are referring to ‘the Reform and Jihad Front.’ We don’t force anyone to stay in any alliance that we have established. The important thing is that the work shall continue unblemished, and that the American forces and morale shall crumble under the blows of the various Iraqi resistance organizations.”

Q.) Many Americans do not wish to stay in Iraq, but at the same time, are worried about the consequences of an outbreak of civil war between Sunnis and Shiites, and the return of the influence of Al-Qaida if there were to be an abrupt withdrawal of our troops. What is your opinion on this, and on the future of the sectarian militias and Al-Qaida in Iraq? What would you say to those Americans?

A.) “The problem does not lie in the diversity of the population in Iraq, for the people here have lived together side-by-side for many centuries. The problem lies in the occupation and the fanatical [Shiite] religious parties that support it, which the occupiers have compensated with unprecedented and terrifying authority. They follow a corrupt, tyrannical mentality that has produced sectarian death squads in the territory of this dominion, which boasts many mottos of national unity. Meanwhile, their military forces—which were formed by the occupiers on a sectarian basis—are swarmed with thousands of murderers, who ignited the fire of the detested sectarian civil strife. It has burned thousands of our innocent peaceful people, who live together in harmony, and has forced them to abandon their homes. Thus, their wealth has been plundered and their honor has been ferociously savaged by those who hide behind the veil of religion and morals. We say to those Americans: surely, the American forces and the Iranian infiltration are the real cause of the sectarian problem in Iraq—and there is no doubt that the withdrawal of those forces and bringing an end to the Iranian infiltration are an essential part of the solution.”

Q.) Sources in the U.S. media have claimed that some commanders linked with the Islamic Army—such as “Abu Abed”—are working with the Awakening Councils and other groups allied with the U.S. Also, there are reports that Hamas a-Iraq is only fighting against Al-Qaida, rather than with the U.S. military. What is the truth of these claims?

A.) “Abu al-Abed is no longer a part of the Islamic Army, according to a statement he has published at the time. Moreover, he is not a leading figure as you have heard. Our position towards the Awakening Councils is well-known, and we separate them into different categories because they are not all one thing. Our fighting policy with Al-Qaida is based upon warding off their attacks and repelling their crimes and hostility against us and the innocent. In doing so, we depend upon our own capabilities and the assistance of the tribes of pure origins, without neglecting the fight against the American forces.”

Q.) When and why did the conflict begin between the insurgents and Al-Qaida?

A.) “The reason is the continuous mistakes which the Al-Qaida organization has perpetrated against the operations of the insurgency in Iraq—such as forcing others to swear allegiance to the so-called Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), and carrying out crimes targeting both our men and innocent people. We do not wish to continue discussing such a worn-out subject as this.”

Q.) During his most recent speech, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi introduced a truce agreement offered to other insurgent groups which were harmed by the Al-Qaida organization. What is the result of this offer?

A.) “We always expect from others to reconsider and correct their errors, as it is also our course of action to correct and reconsider in case we have made mistakes. We are certain that precaution is better than treatment and that true repentance is a superior humane concept, emphasized by our monotheistic Islamic faith.”

Q.) Also, recently, during a question and answer session, Al-Qaida’s Deputy Commander indicated that the establishment of Al-Qaida’s Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) was a step towards the re-establishment of a greater Islamic empire—and therefore—Al-Qaida superseded all other jihad movements in Iraq, and accordingly, it is the duty of other mujahedeen groups to acknowledge their superiority (and not the reverse). Regarding suicide bombing attacks on markets and mosques, Zawahiri said this was merely American and Saudi media propaganda. Was al-Zawahiri correct or incorrect?

A.) “Although the Islamic State is a great dream and a serious goal, we have objections to this statement, and we have our own evidence that has purposely not been published proving that the so-called Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) is not legitimate. The statements of al-Zawahiri do not obligate us whatsoever, and the errors of Al-Qaida in regards to spilling the blood of the innocent are more numerous than can possibly be covered in a single response, statement, or interview.”

Q.) Which voices from the Iraqi insurgency should Americans pay attention to?

A.) “Every resistance organization has its own representative, and if the Americans were really interested in negotiating, they would know how to reach the representatives of the resistance. As for us and the other factions that have joined the Political Council of the [Iraqi] Resistance, this was one of its purposes [i.e. representing the resistance]. If the Americans were to think it over, it would be better for the world to have peace—but I do not believe that the current American government wants this.”

Q.) Have you been paying attention to the U.S. elections? What do you think of them? Is there a candidate that you would want to win?

A.) “We believe that the Democrats are more aware of the severity of the American situation in Iraq and, therefore, they can give more attention to safeguarding American interests in this region—and yet, we know that the American presidential elections will not have any serious impact on U.S. foreign policy, and perhaps will only serve to renew the same tactics and strategies serving the president. As I have already told you: what is critical are the actions, not the names. We wish the American soldiers would leave us in peace, for we are not murderers and we do not experience joy in killing anyone. But if they insist on staying here in order to satisfy the whims of Bush, then American families should expect to receive many more bodies. We wish that if they were instead to come visit us as guests, they would discover the honor of Arabian hospitality, which is unequalled in the entire world—whereas, the American leaders have only made the

world bloodier. Send my blessings to the intelligent people of America and let them know of my point of view.”