

## In the Depths of Jihadist Web Forums: Understanding a Key Component of the Propaganda of Jihad

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## Foreword

Jihadist Web forums are the main platform for understanding the workings of jihadist movements. They represent an authentic and important source of information for understanding the jihadist dialogue, jihadist propaganda efforts, religious-legal debate, dialogue about strategy, and the mood and feelings of Web surfers regarding the progress of Global Jihad. The following survey is based on source materials published on jihadist Web sites, including from prominent forums, some of which – like Al-Hesbah and Al-Falujjah – have closed or been taken down during the past three years, and some of which – like Hanein and Shumukh Al-Islam – continue to operate.

In part, this survey will review how these forums operate in the face of efforts to curtail their functioning. It will also review their efforts to become more sophisticated and to cope in ever more creative ways with their opponents – ways that are also increasingly challenging and dangerous for those opponents. In addition, this survey will attempt to distill the essence of jihadist Web forums – that is, whether they reflect one monolithic opinion, or rather are a platform for lively discussion, and whether they themselves can be considered an “arena of Jihad”.

**Throughout this survey we will use a number of concepts commonly occurring in the jihadist media: jihadist forum, jihadist media outlet, jihadist publications, forum personnel.**

**A jihadist forum is the platform for dialogue and discussion among supporters of a jihadist movement; through it, the various Global Jihad organizations maintain contact with their supporters.**

**A jihadist media outlet is a virtual institution, which functions under the aegis of a Global Jihad organization. It is responsible for publishing and disseminating materials to various Internet media channels, including file sharing sites.**

**Jihadist publications are text articles, video clips, and audio files, which are disseminated over the Internet by Global Jihad organizations through their jihadist media outlets.**

**The forum personnel who engage in, manage, and edit forum dialogue, include administrators; chat room supervisors; representatives (murasilun) of the media outlets responsible for disseminating materials; forum members; and Web surfers.**

# ICT's Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group Insights



Logos of some of the media outlets and Web forums of Global Jihad organizations

## Introduction

The media of jihadist organizations developed gradually, parallel with the technological developments in mass communications, and as a consequence of the global nature of jihadist organizations and their need to reach potential audiences worldwide. During the 1980s, recruitment publications were faxed to young people throughout the Muslim world. These faxes included the announcements of jihadist organizations and statements by their leaders. Later, the link between those initiating the jihadist discourse and those consuming it was maintained through audio files and video tapes, which told stories of jihad and related the heroism of Arab fighters against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and tales of the fighting in Chechnya and Bosnia. With the advent of the Internet, jihadist groups began using it to spread their message. Egyptian Jihad was the first to use this medium, establishing an Internet site of its own in 1996. However, the influence of the site was meager, as only a limited number of people then used the World Wide Web.

Al-Qaeda also made extensive use of the media and other channels of communication to reach its target audience. During the year following the attacks of September 11, 2001, Al-Qaeda made satellite television channels a central component of its media campaign, and used them to disseminate its publications and announcements, and to broadcast the statements of its senior leadership. Thus, for example, Al-Qaeda used Al-Jazeera to communicate its response to the US invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Subsequently, however, under the pressure of multiple countries, many satellite channels ceased airing Al-Qaeda's propaganda, causing the organization to lose an important platform, if not its main platform at the time.

Over time, the use of the Internet spread as a key, decentralized means of worldwide communication – a means of the utmost importance for Al-Qaeda and other organizations of Global Jihad. The Internet enables these organizations to maintain daily contact with their audience(s) and make their publications available; it is also a broad and influential springboard from which to recruit activists from its potential target audience. As Internet technology has developed, the channels of dialogue between jihadist organizations and their audiences have increased to

include Facebook, Twitter and other social networks, Web forums dedicated to serving the ideology of jihad, and file sharing sites, where these organizations can and do publicize their audio files and video clips, and upload these and other files that can later be downloaded by anyone interested in them. The plethora of jihadist sites that have been established on the Internet bears witness to this medium's status as a modern, facile means of communication, and an easy portal through which organizations can increase (and measure) their influence. Through the Internet, Al-Qaeda and its ilk transmit news, announcements, and ideology not only to the Muslim public but also, and perhaps primarily, to the Western public.

After the US occupied Iraq in 2003, a new era in communications dawned for Al-Qaeda. An arm of the organization in Iraq used the Internet to send visual messages, such as appallingly violent videos of the murder of hostages, which became the talk of the day worldwide, increasing Al-Qaeda's exposure immeasurably and having a broad deterrent effect internationally.

Electronic mail (hereafter, email) further eased direct, personal contact and, thanks to encoded programs, proved to be a relatively secure channel of communication between Al-Qaeda's leadership and its various activists. Mobile phones also began to be exploited for communication between Al-Qaeda and its activists and broader audience, via text messages, photographs, and video clips. The mobile phone also served the "handy" dual purpose of reinforcing support for the organization and its policy, and of promoting operations, for example as a remote control trigger for explosive devices used in terrorist attacks.

In effect, modern technology sparked a real revolution in Al-Qaeda's capabilities, enabling it to become a global organization, with all that that entails. Thanks to the Internet and modern communications technology, Al-Qaeda has succeeded in remaining active, despite having had to wage a war of survival since September 11, 2001. It has also succeeded in garnering support for its ideas and financial assistance for its activities from around the world and, even more importantly, in recruiting new activists worldwide, establishing new branches, and carrying out terrorist attacks in new locations.

Abd Al-Aziz Bin Saqr, head of the Center for Research in the Gulf, explains that Al-Qaeda invests large sums of money in obtaining state-of-the-art technological equipment, as well as in "recruit[ing] a new generation of young people with a natural aptitude for technology or academic technological capabilities...since they are



the key to the organization's survival, [and] to dissemination of its ideas and expansion of its ranks". He notes that the development of a professional media outlet such as As-Sahab<sup>1</sup> shows the extent to which Al-Qaeda has invested material and technological resources in strengthening this channel of communication, whose technical sophistication enables the organization to hone in on supervising its propaganda and media products. As-Sahab first appeared on October 30, 2000, when it posted a video clip of the bombing of the destroyer USS Cole in Yemen.

Those responsible for Al-Qaeda's media communications are constantly working to improve them. When they sense that the organization's influence is flagging, they dig through their archives and retrieve footage never before shown, posting it on significant dates such as the anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, or of the invasion of Afghanistan, or of the occupation of Iraq. Video clips posted years after the events they record are meant to breathe life back into Al-Qaeda's media communications and fire up its supporters, even as they exert a depressing influence on the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Qaeda has realized the unique importance of the media for spreading its message and publicizing its Salafi-jihadist ideology. The concept of "electronic jihad" has been inculcated into its propaganda. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, formerly the number two man in Al-Qaeda and currently its leader, stated in an interview with the media outlet As-Sahab in December 2007 that Al-Qaeda's propaganda activity is equivalent in value to [its] military activity: "I ask Allah to give those working in jihadist propaganda the greatest reward...I call on them for a greater effort and to give more. The enemies, who have incredible capabilities and immense media institutions will with Allah's help collapse before the meager resources of the mujahideen".<sup>3</sup>

For any jihadist organization, no less than for Al-Qaeda, Web forums, in particular, are a multifaceted, dynamic platform for spreading jihadist ideology, sending messages, and for recruiting, fundraising, camouflaging clandestine activities, and instructing in military tactics and even in how to make an explosive device. They provide all the information needed by the mujahideen – the soldiers of jihad – and by more passive sojourners on the jihadist path. Because it is so very easy to surf

<sup>1</sup> The name As-Sahab is taken from the expression *mujri as-sahab* (lit. "mover of the clouds"), one of the 99 names of Allah. See <http://www.jihadica.com/why-is-al-sahab-called-al-sahab/>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=37&issueno=11251&article=536290&feature=1> (Arabic).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.7anein.info/vbx/showthread.php?t=48166> (Arabic).

the Web, and so very difficult to supervise Web traffic, the Internet is the ultimate, most efficient tool for Global Jihad organizations, which can use it to engage in covert communication, reach an immense target audience, and freely disseminate information at relatively low cost. Web forums – with their chat rooms, administrators and supervisors, surfers and members, and the media outlet representatives (murasilun) who are responsible for disseminating news and publications – are thus undoubtedly one of today's most prevalent tools for jihadist dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, they are the focus of the extensive examination that follows.



**No matter how seemingly incongruous, anyone can use the technology of the Internet**

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<sup>4</sup> <http://aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/9008046A-4057-4BE5-A0F8-2194F01E5185.htm> (Arabic).

## Chapter I: A Closer Look at Jihadist Web Forums

Many studies have been published about jihadist Web forums, one of them in March 2009 by the journalist Al-Sayid Zayid of IslamOnline. According to him, the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the American war against terrorism symbolized a turning point in the history of jihadist media in general, and of jihadist Web forums, in particular. Prior to September 11, the term "jihadist Web forums" was not as familiar as it is today; back then, only a few attempts were made to assimilate into Web forums by individuals such as Sheikh Abdullah Azzam or the Saudi Arabian Yusuf Al-Uyeiri, leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) until his assassination in June 2003. With the expansion of the American war on terror, dedicated jihadist Web forums sprouted up as a means of communicating and disseminating the ideas of jihad "under the radar" of censorship and despite the limitations placed on discussion of jihad. These forums, which could cross borders and evade boundaries, became a locus of dialogue about the laws governing modern jihad, the legitimacy of jihad and suicide bombings, and other relevant matters.

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Arab Web forums began to crop up on the Internet at the end of the 1990s. The first of these was Ana Arabi, which later became Ana Al-Muslim; somewhat later, the forum Sahab appeared, and the forum Islam Way, which was established by an adherent of the Salafi school in Egypt in 2000. Also at that time, the first specifically jihadist Web forum was established, Al-Tawhid; apparently, the Palestinian Abu Qatada and the Egyptian Abu Hamza, who are currently incarcerated in England, contributed to this forum. Additional jihadist ideologues contributed to other forums, such as Al-Kalaan, Al-Tajdid and Al-Ikhlās.

The forum Al-Ansar appeared in 2003, and became more sophisticated with the rise of Al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004. Its posting of video clips of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi caused it to be taken down from time to time, until it was finally closed down completely. Its closure was followed by the appearance of the jihadist forum Al-Ikhlās, established by an individual who identified himself as Muhib Al-Sheikhayn the



Tunisian, with the assistance of several electronic jihadist activists.<sup>5</sup> In September 2008, that forum, too, was taken down, as part of an assault against jihadist Web sites. The forum Al-Hesbah, which was not affiliated with any specific jihadist organization, was also closed down after its administrators were arrested. Other jihadist Web forums worthy of note include Shumukh Al-Islam; Al-Boraq; Al-Firdaws (which has closed); Ma'arik Al-Salafiya; Al-Mujahirun; Al-Tajdid; Al-Luyuth Al-Islamiya; and Al-Falujjah, which posted publications of Al-Furqan, the media outlet of the Islamic State of Iraq.

During the first half of 2008, Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya appeared, a self-defined independent Islamic jihadist forum not affiliated with any organization, political party or institution; those who posted on it were not subjected to censorship, and their opinions did not reflect those of the forum administrators. All of Al-Qaeda's publications appear on this forum.

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In his 2009 study, journalist Al-Sayid Zayid distinguishes between two types of forum:

1. Forums that disseminate ideas, information, research, and media content, such as Al-Luyuth, Medad Al-Suyuf, and Ma'arik Al-Salafiya.
2. Forums that aim to generate dialogue and an exchange of opinions on complex issues such as migration, suicide missions, the use of Muslims as a human shield, whether it is permissible to kill foreigners or oppose a ruling regime, and matters of *al-wala' wal-bara*.<sup>6</sup> Such forums also recruit Web surfers to the cause of jihad.

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How does material actually arrive at jihadist Web forums? The example of As-Sahab, the media arm of Al-Qaeda's leadership, which has been active for more than a decade, illustrates. Although no reliable information is available on the nature of the relationship between As-Sahab and jihadist Web forums, As-Sahab's announcements and video clips are constantly being uploaded onto them (in the past, its materials were also sent to Al-Jazeera). Given the modus operandi of Global Jihad

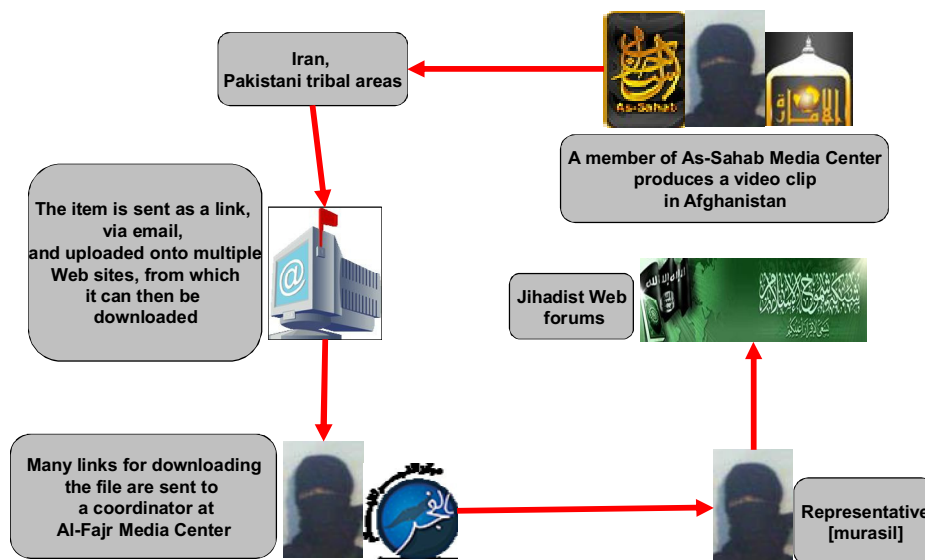
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<sup>5</sup> The reference is to a group of supporters of jihad, considered experts in Internet technology, who help establish and develop jihadist Web sites and also attack the Web sites of opponents (i.e. engage in cyber-terrorism).

<sup>6</sup> According to fundamentalist sources, the principle *al-wala' wal-bara* refers to universal fidelity among Muslims and absolute renunciation of any who are not Muslim, and of Muslims who have forsaken the tenets of Islam.

organizations, it is likely that these materials are produced in complete secrecy, in Afghanistan, by As-Sahab staff. Subsequently, they are moved to a county where the United States does not have a presence, such as Iran or the tribal areas of Pakistan. From there they are emailed to members of the Jihad Media Brigade, who upload them onto multiple Web sites. Concurrently, a file containing links to these materials are sent to an entity known as the Al-Fajr Media Center, which then disseminates them to jihadist Web forums; all materials produced by As-Sahab bear its logo. Following is a flow chart illustrating the path jihadist content takes to the relevant Web forums.

### How an Item Reaches a Jihadist Forum



Jihadist Web forums help to promulgate extremist ideas and recruit “soldiers” [mujahideen] and suicide bombers; to an extent, they even take the place of direct contact between faithful followers of jihad and its leaders. Web forums provide copious information about everything from how to create weapons and explosive devices to esoteric aspects of the concept of *jihad*. They carry debate and dialogue on the religious laws pertaining to jihad, to the use of Muslims as a human shield, and to the murder of civilians; on the issue of accusing someone of heresy; and on

the concepts *dar al-harb* and *dar al-Islam*;<sup>7</sup> they also simply serve as a platform for the announcements, articles, essays, and full text of speeches of the leaders of Global Jihad, as well as for illustrated military-jihadist encyclopedias. Jihadist Web forums are the repository for the ideas and longings of Web surfers sympathetic to the ideology of Al-Qaeda. Thus, overall, jihadist Web forums are actively responsible for filling the Internet with jihadist content.

Jihadist Web forums are monitored daily by foreign intelligence services; in fact, many forums are hacked into or closed down. Consequently, forum owners save a copy of the forum database every day, to prevent the loss of large quantities of material even if the forum crashes. Yet the activities of intelligence services do not harm the forums, which take advantage of all aspects of the Internet to develop jihadist media channels and find alternative routes of communication, such as email discussion groups and jihadist blogs.<sup>8</sup> For example, at present, Al-Qaeda uses discussion groups and blogs in addition to Web forums, as an additional means of communication.

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<sup>7</sup> A theological distinction between territories in which Islamic law is imposed [*dar al-Islam*] and those in which it is not [*dar al-harb*] - trans.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1236509006849&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1236509006849&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout) (Arabic).

## Chapter II: Jihadist Media as a Tool for Molding Consciousness and Expanding Support for Jihad

Jihadist media constitute the backbone of the war of the mujahideen – soldiers of jihad – against their enemies. Many members of jihadist Web forums are experts in Internet technology and computer programming, have command of foreign languages, and are familiar with aspects of network security – and freely share what they know. Many young people who cannot physically join jihad, contribute to it by participating in the war for consciousness, and by attempting to prevent the disgrace of the mujahideen in the international media.

One of the goals of the war for consciousness is to refute accusations that Al-Qaeda murders women and children from among the infidels – accusations that prevent people from following the path of the organization (that is, of jihad). For example, one suggested refutation is to cite a ruling of Sheikh Ibn Uthaimen, a popularly respected religious authority not associated with jihadist organizations, according to which it is permissible to murder infidel women and children if they have killed Muslim women and children.

Web surfers are asked to cooperate with each other in planning and implementing the jihadist propaganda campaign, by exchanging ideas and opinions. Constant dissemination of the publications of the mujahideen on every forum and Web site is also meant to fuel this campaign.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Web surfers often contribute to propaganda efforts by suggesting ways of making dissemination of the jihadist message more efficient, such as the following:<sup>10</sup>

1. Disseminate messages by geographic area, until all areas have been covered.
2. Prepare written responses grounded in Islamic religious law [shari'a].
3. Prepare an archive, arranged as follows:
  - a. Religious-legal texts supported by religious-legal literature [sunna].
  - b. Texts that support Al-Qaeda's path and disprove the counterclaims of opponents, including print and visual data on the murder and assassination of Muslims.

<sup>9</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=42283> (Arabic).

<sup>10</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=37835> (Arabic).

c. Propaganda video clips and jihadist songs.

From time to time, constructive criticism is voiced on the forums by contributors – some of them forum administrators and some courageous Web surfers – who express doubts as to the forums' quality and content. For example, a surfer calling himself Dir' Liman Wahada, a long-time contributor to Al-Falujja, wrote in February 2009 of the crisis affecting jihadist media outlets. In his analysis, it would be better for Muslims to learn on their own rather than for foreign research institutes to analyze [jihad]. He elucidated the indications of crisis and the reasons for it, and clarified that "jihadist forum" was a synonym for "jihadist propaganda". According to Dir' Liman Wahada, the forums had made important progress in recent years:<sup>11</sup>

1. Prominent and important Web surfers had enriched jihadist dialogue with their books, poems, and even graphic designs.
2. Reliable representatives of prominent international jihadist groups had begun to participate in the forums by posting news, which could be verified through audio clips and photographs.
3. Web surfers well-versed in Muslim religious law [shari'a] defended the mujahideen, offering proof that refuted doubts about the path.
4. Encyclopedic essays had been widely published, thereby spreading the idea of jihad and detailing how to wage it and how to prepare for it legally, materially, and militarily. In addition, explanations had been published of how to bear arms, create explosive devices, establish weapons factories, and obtain raw materials.
5. Jihadist forum administrators had steered Web surfers toward productive dialogue on practical and legal matters, at the same time reducing discussion of worthless matters. They had set limits on the number of site registrants and discussion participants, and prevented participants from raising redundant topics, or loaded topics (such as the defamation of certain jihadist organizations).

Nevertheless, Dir' Liman Wahada explained, war erupted against jihadist Web forums beginning in early 2008, during the term of then-US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who wished to respond to Al-Qaeda's increasing use of the media, especially since the onset of the Iraq war. Jihadist forums were blocked and closed down under pressure from host companies; jihadist materials were bumped from the Internet; and links to jihadist books and publications were severed. In addition,

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<sup>11</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=49526> (Arabic).



Islamic organizations were publicly denigrated, to discourage young Web surfers from participating in the forums. Arab governments recruited polemicists and students of religious studies willing to cast aspersions on Al-Qaeda's path of jihad. For example, the Al-Sakinah Campaign was launched in the Arabian Peninsula to establish online dialogue with jihadists and "reeducate" them, and a campaign was undertaken to "renew the religious message in the Maghreb [North Africa]".

These attacks forced jihadist forum administrators to upgrade their sites to keep them sustainable – a materially and psychologically exhausting endeavor. Preoccupied with defense and troubled by the need for constant vigilance, the forums slackened ideological development and sacrificed appropriate dialogue. At the same time, controversial topics were raised on the forums (possibly as provocation), and new forums began to appear, apparently sponsored by foreign intelligence services, which posed as jihadist forums but in essence aimed to impede jihadist dialogue and reduce its influence. According to Dir' Liman Wahada, the blocked sites, vanishing URLs, neglect of regular forum activity (such as registration of new members), and ensuing suspicion and distrust led to a decline in the number of Web surfers on "legitimate" jihadist forums.

Moreover, competition among the remaining jihadist forums and the desire to encourage people to return to them gave rise to the idea of "ranking"<sup>12</sup> writers, to reflect the extent of their participation in and contribution to a forum. The implementation of this idea indeed spurred participation, but also created problems:

1. Somewhat disrespectfully, some participants tried to receive a high rank by writing multiple but meaningless posts, or by quoting posters on other forums, rather than by genuinely enriching the jihadist dialogue.
2. Some Web surfers wrote on topics whose religious-legal underpinnings or implications they didn't understand; others wrote degraded moral content. Still others recycled threads initially posted on other forums, but claimed that they had initiated them.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, a forum member who excelled would be one who had posted 4,000 threads; the rank of "brilliant individual" was assigned to a forum member who had posted 10,000 threads.

50	عضو جديد
150	عضو
300	عضو مشارك
700	عضو مُنِيط
1200	عضو مجتهد
1800	عضو فعّال
2300	عضو متميز
3000	عضو متقدم
4000	عضو متفوق
5000	عضو متألّق
6000	عضو متألّق
7000	شخصية متميزة
8500	شخصية صاعدة
10000	شخصية لامعة
13000	شخصية بارزة
15000	من أبرز شخصيات التحدي
20000	اللقب حسب اختيار العضو بعد موافقة الإدارة عليه
30000	يدخل قائمة المرشحين لمهمة عريف قسم إذا كانت نوعية مشاركاته وسلوكياته تؤهله لذلك

**"Ranks" given to forum members, based on the number of threads they had posted**

Dir' Liman Wahada thoroughly explicated the crisis plaguing jihadist propaganda, listing its components thus:

1. Severe problems in publication and dissemination groups, many of whose members are more concerned with their personal prestige than with the goals of jihad or disseminating the publications of the mujahideen. Consequently, few publications are disseminated – a situation exacerbated by technical problems.
2. Similarly, only a few Web surfers bother to update links to publications of the mujahideen, and even fewer pay any attention to the responses and talkbacks to them.
3. Important topics are integrated with less important ones, rather than being given the special space (and attention) they warrant, and all too quickly are taken down.
4. More knowledgeable contributors lack commitment, and so do not attempt to educate forum visitors or offer helpful "courses".
5. Supporters of jihad are barely active outside jihadist forums; those who do enter other forums often do not participate.
6. Jihadist forums are not sufficiently advertised. Few if any links to them are posted on other forums.

7. Contributors are encouraged to write quantities of material at the expense of quality, on the assumption that a multitude of threads will stimulate the forums. However, in the medium term, this has a negative effect and weighs down the database.
8. There is no drive to remain current or maintain contact with Web surfers; forum chat rooms don't meet needs.
9. Few women contribute to jihadist propaganda.
10. Jihadist forums are disorganized, leading to problems with the "chain of command". When forum members, supervisors, or media outlet representatives are killed or arrested, no one replaces them.
11. To date, insufficient effort has been made to organize material in the forum data bases by and concerning the mujahideen, which would make it more accessible, easier to find, update, post and disseminate. Only computer experts are capable of doing this, and few of them contribute to jihadist media.

What, then, are the goals of jihadist propaganda? Dir' Liman Wahada asks, then answers:

1. To spread the message of jihad to Muslims directly and without distortion, because they do not know the truth.
2. To spread the message of jihad to infidels – and to indicate the progress of jihad, jihadist activities and victories, to as to frighten and intimidate the infidel.
3. To defend the mujahideen, and to deflect doubts and clarify facts for those who have been led astray by both foreign and Arab governments and media. To publish studies and articles that will raise the consciousness of supporters of jihad and other Muslims regarding the war against Islam.

How can these goals be reached? Here, too, Dir' Liman Wahada has solutions:

1. Publish the announcements and articles of the mujahideen on all Web forums and sites.
2. Download publications of the mujahideen and burn them onto CDs, to be disseminated among all Muslims in the markets and mosques.
3. Develop courses in religious law and military strategy to help the mujahideen.
4. Disseminate threads that defend the mujahideen to all forums.
5. Increase the number of Web surfers on jihadist forums.
6. Unify frameworks that have shared goals, for the benefit of jihadist communications.

7. Establish additional jihadist forums.

8. Jihadist forums should become a source for other forums, blogs, and YouTube.

For example, in an effort to expand the basis of support for jihadist forums, infuse them with new blood, and lend them a more dynamic, easy-to-navigate design, in August 2009 the general supervisor of Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya posted a "want ad" calling for the participation of graphic designers, computer programmers, translators, and others interested in monitoring forum content. One Web surfer responded by suggesting that the forum interview Muslim civilians about reports surrounding the mujahideen, and host media personalities, politicians and commentators.<sup>13</sup>

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On September 13, 2009, just a little over eight years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Al-Fajr Media Center published a special announcement detailing the achievements of jihadist propaganda since 2007, in its war against the "Crusader enemy". The announcement stated that the enemy had tried in vain to silence jihadist propaganda, despite having expended copious resources and much money, and despite having killed, taken hostage, persecuted and curtailed the movements of leading propagandists and the host companies of jihadist Web sites. Al-Fajr explained that the Crusader enemy had tried to divert attention from jihadist Web sites by doing the following:

1. It had pressured network supervisors to reveal details of the jihadist media campaign.
2. It had acted against religious authorities and legal scholars who opposed the Crusaders, and against others who guided forum members, in an attempt to distort the image of jihadist media, and portray the mujahideen as vainglorious and bloodthirsty.
3. It had worked to undo the work of technical specialists and other professionals, in an attempt to degrade the high level of jihadist publications.

Al-Fajr went on to detail attempts to challenge the reliability and validity of jihadist propaganda, such as spurious publications by Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), and other jihadist entities, and bogus announcements such as of the re-establishment of Al-Ikhlās. In conclusion, Al-Fajr emphasized that attempts to

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<sup>13</sup> <http://majahden.com/vb/showthread.php?t=28762> (Arabic).

impede jihadist Web forums would not succeed. It suggested that Web surfers take precautions, use encoded programs, and not contact anyone via the Internet.<sup>14</sup>

Almost concurrently, on September 15, 2009, an announcement was published by the administrators of Al-Ikhlās, in which they stated that it had been they who had brought down the forum in 2008, in order to prevent the Crusaders from hacking into and using it for nefarious ends. They stated that, in preparation for the eighth anniversary of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, they had intended to revive the forum, but poor cooperation with the GIMF and Al-Fajr which, according to them, had also slandered Al-Ikhlās, had prevented this from happening. The announcement clarified that until the reliability the GIMF and Al-Fajr had been proven, Al-Ikhlās would remain inactive.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, jihadist forums have carried reports that a forum called Al-Ikhlās is again up and running – except that it is not the original Al-Ikhlās, but rather a counterfeit forum operated by US intelligence. To prove this, they also post confidential information about the owners of the bogus forum's domain, and note that the forum's servers are located in the US.<sup>16</sup>

In March 2010, in light of reports of cooperation between the CIA and Jordan and the establishment of a center to coordinate their monitoring of jihadist forums and activists, Web surfers on Al-Falujja warned that Jordan was insinuating its agents into forums and using them to pit contributors against one another and lure them into the enemy's trap. One forum surfer recommended that forum administrators and supervisors remove any topic that cast doubt on the mujahideen, as such topics tended to arouse provocation from intelligence agents and "get out of hand". The same surfer mentioned that the US-Jordanian coordination center relied on "forums that are not jihadist", such as Al-Jazeera Talk, Hanein, and Ana Al-Muslim, whose administrators do not necessarily support the mujahideen or, even if they do, do not eliminate threads that are critical of Al-Qaeda – on the pretext of freedom of opinion. These forums thus become a platform for slandering the mujahideen. He called on other Web surfers not to cooperate with or respond to slanderers, except with photographs, or citations from the Qur'an or hadith, claiming any other response would unnecessarily inflame argument. The surfer concluded by saying that the

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.majahden.com/vb/showthread.php?p=144939> (Arabic).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-9745.html> (Arabic).

<sup>16</sup> <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=128108> (Arabic).



rehabilitation of the mujahideen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and the Maghreb was liable to lead to a fierce battle against the forums in 2010.<sup>17</sup>

As noted, Al-Qaeda uses modern technology, including mobile telephones, as part of its propaganda enterprise – to both recruit new activists and reach as broad an audience as possible worldwide. In September 2009, in response to attacks against jihadist forums and attempts to close them down, the Jawal Al-Ansar group was created as a subsidiary of the forum Al-Ansar. Its purpose was to use mobile telephones as a platform for disseminating theoretical, religious and ideological jihadist materials. Jawal Al-Ansar is composed of several technical teams, each of which is responsible for a different task. This move represented the involvement of new entities in jihadist propaganda, and the harnessing of an additional, sophisticated media technology to the cause.

Also in September 2009, an experimental version of the program Asrar Al-Jawal was uploaded onto Hanein. This program is able to encode text messages, files, and conversations conducted via cell phone, and supports three languages: Arabic, English and French.<sup>18</sup>



**Advertisements for mobile phone technologies used by jihadists: Jawal Al-Ansar (left) and Asrar Al-Jawal (right)**

It should be noted that, in the past, Saudi Arabian security forces succeeded in intercepting messages transmitted via cellular phone. Two of those "shot down" were sent by Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Said Al-Shihri, second in command of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), to authorize fundraising for the organization. In this

<sup>17</sup> <http://alfaloja.net/vb/showthread.php?t=106692> (Arabic).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=10851> (Arabic).

context, the Saudi Minister of the Interior has described the use of the cell phone to disseminate bank account numbers for fundraising purposes.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=10851> (Arabic).

### Chapter III: Advice for Secure Web Surfing

Given that Western intelligence services have jihadist Web forums under surveillance, which can lead to arrest, many jihadist forums post recommendations advising their visitors how to protect their identity while surfing the Web. Some of these recommendations are apparently based on personal experience – an indication that there is contact between Web surfers who have already been incriminated and those who still surf the Web freely.<sup>20</sup> The following recommendations were posted on Al-Falujja as early as October 2007:<sup>21</sup>

1. Do not register for multiple forums under the same username and password. Choose a different username and password for each forum. In this way, even if you are intercepted on one forum, you may escape being exposed on all of them.
2. Fill in all required fields when registering for a forum – but make sure the details you provide are not real. For example, you should list your country as being on a different continent from where it really is, and give your age as older or younger than you really are.
3. When you actively participate in a forum, write in a dialect different from your real dialect.
4. Do not give out any information, even if it seems to be insignificant. For example, don't write that you are "taking off on vacation tomorrow for X destination", or that you are "studying at the X institute or the Y university in country Z". Any such information can be cross-checked by intelligence services to compile a complete picture of your identity.
5. Do not contact many of the other forum surfers; even if most of them genuinely believe in jihad, you risk encountering an intelligence agent.
6. Refuse any invitation to meet with another Web surfer. If you nevertheless want to seriously consider such an offer, think carefully why he wants to meet you, and ask the advice of someone experienced before doing anything.
7. Do not volunteer any identifying information, such as your address or telephone number, as it could serve as a trap set by intelligence services.

<sup>20</sup> <http://alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=34448> (Arabic).

<sup>21</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=20118> (Arabic).

8. Create multiple email addresses. Only one of them should be used for correspondencing with other Web surfers on matters of importance.
9. Be circumspect about creating an email account through Yahoo, since intelligence services can intercept any correspondence sent or received via that carrier, and uncover information about the correspondents' identity.
10. Use a security system to guard against break-ins and hacking, one that changes your IP every minute or second.
11. If your email account has been hacked into by an unidentified entity that then tries to contact you, apologizes, and claims it is willing to give you back your email account, never use that address again, as the hacker may have implanted spyware in it, which will divulge its location.
12. Surf jihadist Web sites and forums from an Internet café. Never use your home telephone line to surf the Web, since some Internet providers monitor their subscribers' site visits and correspondence, and report that information to intelligence services whenever the conditions of the contract with them are breached – especially in regard to what they call harm to homeland security.
13. If you think you are being monitored, or that your identity has been discovered by intelligence services, use the most thorough programs to erase all files and information from your computer, so that they can't be reconstructed.

Another thread explained that since the international media derive information directly from the forums, surfers must exercise special caution. The establishment of jihadist forums has succeeded in ending the blackout of the Jihad Movement and breaking the media assault of Israel and the West against it. On the other hand, intelligence services have realized that jihadist Web forums provide an opportunity to monitor terrorists. They have therefore begun to use their agents to infiltrate the forums, and to pressure forum owners to cooperate with them.

Since the forums are full of Web surfers who are responsible for posting announcements, news, and publications concerning the mujahideen (i.e. chat room supervisors), and of Web surfers who wish to read these items, all Web surfers are called upon to take precautions and preventive steps. This warning is followed by a bevy of advice, some of it similar to that cited above and some new. This indicates

the significance ascribed to this topic, and a real awareness of the dangers inherent in using the Internet:<sup>22</sup>

1. When contributing to or corresponding via a forum, don't trust anyone: the person on the other side of the computer could be an intelligence agent trying to insinuate himself among the Web surfers and contributors; he may even ask them to join in preaching jihad, when in fact his aim is to trap the mujahideen.
2. When registering for a forum and, even more so, when surfing one, your IP and location, as well as any other identifying information you provide when registering, may become known to the forum owner. Therefore, if you post news items or announcements, or certainly if you are wanted by the intelligence services, it is best if you surf from an Internet café. Additional, more secure ways of surfing also exist – but they must not be revealed from this platform if we wish to prevent the enemy from knowing what they are. It should be added that many Internet cafes spy on their patrons, especially those who look Muslim. Therefore, even in an Internet café, caution must be exercised.
3. When registering for a forum, you must not provide any real data. Be wary of any forum administrators or personnel asking for your vital statistics, on the pretext that they want to verify your account, etc..
4. If you surf the Web from an Internet café, use a different café each time rather than frequenting one regularly, and choose one far from your place of residence. Do not linger in the café, but stay just long enough to post an item or announcement; intelligence services can identify a café's IP, and arrive at the café quickly. Before you leave, make sure to erase any temporary Internet files, history (even if you must do so manually), and cookies; exit and close the browser; then restart the computer.
5. Be wary of the files published on forums, as they may have spyware embedded in them, which will enable the person who posted them to spy on the computer you're using and see the entire contents of your hard disk.
6. Never agree when asked to install a program while surfing a forum, as some programs can enable someone "on other side" to spy on the computer and discover facts about you, especially if you have saved any real information or personal photographs on that computer.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=11119> (Arabic).



7. Do not give out your email address in order to receive personal or special materials. Correspond only via a private email chat room, if the forum has one; otherwise, relinquish corresponding.
8. If you wish to publish information on one forum that you have already uploaded to another forum, you must indicate that the material is "quoted from forum X" on the bottom of the screen; this will obviate the possibility of monitoring your whereabouts, or determining that both forums are frequented by the same surfer – all with the ultimate aim of preventing others from learning your surfing habits.
9. Remember that jihadist Web forums are not the appropriate place for meeting new people and making friends.

At the end of November 2008, a similar thread appeared, this time on Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya. A surfer identifying himself as Omar Abd Al-Hakim from Syria explained that the enemy was monitoring news of jihad and the mujahideen through the media of the Jihad Movement – that is, jihadist forums and Web sites. According to Al-Hakim, these media are a source of constant concern to the Americans and their allies, because they expose their defeat and their lies. [The enemy] therefore strives to shut down Web forums and sites, and in fact has succeeded in shutting down some successful forums. Al-Hakim posted the following advice for coping with the enemy's campaign, and reminded his readers that surfing the forums helps Islam and Muslims throughout the world:<sup>23</sup>

1. A census should be taken of the popular Islamic and general forums that have no connection to jihad and the mujahideen. New members who are committed to the idea of jihad should then join the general forums (such as paldf.net, muslim.net, Al-Jazeera Talk, m5m5) and, by posting announcements and publications from jihadist forums on the general forums and citing their provenance, use the general forums to spread the jihadist message and ideology. This will generate curiosity, "force" additional surfers to register for jihadist forums, and expose more surfers to the idea of jihad. Perhaps some of these surfers will later become senior contributors – as has already happened.
2. The material uploaded to jihadist Web forums should have direct, stable links, and be in small files of varying quality to facilitate downloading with technical ease. Materials should also be posted on file sharing sites. Programs for

<sup>23</sup> <http://majahden.com/vb/showthread.php?t=15168> (Arabic).

downloading and publishing materials should also be uploaded to the jihadist Web forums themselves, to facilitate dissemination of materials and generate dialogue and an exchange of ideas and information. Jihadist video clips should be uploaded to international Web sites such as Google video, Yahoo video and YouTube under Arabic or Islamic titles – although it is preferable to simply list the name and URL of the relevant jihadist Web site. Sites, forums, blogs, articles and items concerning jihad should be available via international search engines such as Yahoo and Google, so that Web surfers can find as much material as possible on the topic. In addition, sites and blogs should be established for free, or for a fee. Books, research studies, and articles dealing with religious-legal rulings on jihad and preparation for jihad should also be uploaded to both general and Islamic Web sites and forums, including those concerned with literature. All of these efforts are meant to spread the jihadist message as widely as possible.

Many newcomers to jihadist Web forums, and even some long-time surfers, are unaware of the rules of caution to be followed when surfing jihadist sites, and so make significant mistakes, which are liable to lead to their incarceration. In a thread posted on Al-Falujja at the end of August 2008, and which remained open through November of that year, detailed explanations were given for the necessity of security warnings and advice. Following is some more of this advice:<sup>24</sup>

1. Jihadist Web forums are not the appropriate place to plan or coordinate action in the field – that is, to plan an attack, to recruit participants in an attack, or to discuss implementing in attach, whether in a surfer's home country or abroad. The forums are not sufficiently secure for this purpose: as noted, intelligence services can hack into them and their databases.
2. Jihadist Web forums are not the place to make contact with other surfers or to divulge personal details – even if the other surfer asking for them has previously instructed you in the ways of jihad.
3. Do not discuss an action that a particular surfer plans to carry out – in fact, do not even hint at it – unless you have received instructions from someone in authority. You must conceal your identity and give false data about yourself, even post faked photographs and video clips of yourself, to deceive.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=27383> (Arabic).

4. Surfing Web forums is not the main goal: you should not waste time surfing for hours, responding to threads, vilifying the enemy. Although these forums are important, in that they expose surfers to the true path of jihad and foster identification with the mujahideen, the main goal that forum administrators strive toward, even risk their lives for, is dissemination of the message of jihad to all corners of the world, so that Muslims will follow the path of jihad. It is therefore recommended to obtain education in any field that might help the jihadists. Surfing jihadist forums is meant to provide the fuel that ignites the ambition to learn about the mujahideen, about their victories and defeats. Your obligation is to prepare [for jihad]; it is sufficient to spend one hour a day writing 10 comments on Web forums. The forums are not the center of the mujahid's life. In fact, most mujahideen are not registered with any forum, as they do not have time to surf the Internet.
5. If you have divulged even one detail of your real identity to a Web forum, you must immediately re-register for that forum under a different name. Never write personal correspondence. Never surf from home: even if you have been surfing jihadist web sites for years and have never been warned, and do not feel like you are under surveillance – you are under surveillance. Until you yourself take an interest in committing a terrorist attack, you may be a conduit for the arrest of others. Intelligence services use jihadist forums as an ongoing, open source of information that reveals hidden intentions. If you must [surf the Web], you should surf from an Internet café, and remain passive [i.e. not contribute]. If you feel you must respond [to a publication or thread], use general terms. Never return to the same café consecutively, but only after a hiatus of between one and three months. It is best to surf the Web where there is WiFi; you can sit in your car, write what you please, and then drive on as if nothing had happened. If there are no open areas covered by WiFi, go to a market (mall) or store, preferably a prestigious one, as these usually host tens of WiFi connections, and all you'll need is a laptop or a device for connecting to the Internet. If you can't do this, chose 10 Internet cafes and make the rounds, until you've visited each of them. As noted, it is also necessary to take precautions in an Internet café, because its computers may be programmed to remember your username threads, correspondence, and the sites you surfed. Therefore, never save files

concerning jihad on a computer at an Internet café; instead, purchase an external hard disk and save your files on it.

6. It is worthwhile to watch movies and television programs – like *The Unit*, *24*, *The Recruit*, *The Bourne Ultimatum*, *The Bourne Identity*, *The Bourne Supremacy*, and *S.W.A.T.* – that can help a mujahid develop his thinking.

One Web surfer responds with the warning that no [computer] program can mask data, because computers are wide open and any correspondence or thread can be monitored. Other surfers comment that the fear-mongering is also exaggerated, since one can't expect someone who has Internet access at home not to use it, or to expect that he'll wait a few months before reviewing the responses to what he's written. Another Web surfer suggests that the Internet is a good place to make initial contact, but that later, correspondents should transfer to another channel of communication.

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From time to time, various technology "experts" appear on jihadist Web forums. One such surfer, who called himself The Strategist, surfaced in February 2008. The Strategist listed a series of steps that should be taken to defend against "the enemies of the Muslim nation" who monitor jihadist Web forums. However, he gave a different justification for his recommendations than those usually given: despite precedents to the contrary, Web surfers feel increasingly assured that they are immune to surveillance, and that no one will have them arrested. The Strategist then described the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet, adding technical explanations of how easy it is to discover the identify of someone surfing the Web. The Strategist then offered a survey of jihadist activity on the Internet since September 11, 2001.<sup>25</sup>

According to The Strategist, the enemies of the Muslim nation took advantage of the events of September 11 to portray Islam as a frightening enemy [of the West], supportive of terrorism. Although many people believed this portrayal, others spoke out against this instilling of fear. Some of them began to choose military action, while others began to choose propaganda, in an effort to widely disseminate the theory of jihad and correct mistaken, negative perceptions and opinions about jihad and its followers. This effort bore fruit in Iraq, after the US occupation. International

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<sup>25</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=21213> (Arabic).



media registered with Web forums established by believers in jihad, out of a desire to receive information from a primary source, rather than from the US military, which distorted reality. For example, international press agencies began to write "a source close to Al-Qaeda reported..." or "an opposition force claimed...". As part of this propaganda struggle, the enemies of the Muslim nation declared war against these jihadist Web sites and forums, and again tried to distort the facts. The US tried to close down forums by exerting pressure on the owners of the servers that carried them; in many cases, they succeeded. Yet those who ran jihadist Web forums and sites have not succumbed; they have continued to open new forums and to change forum hosts as necessary. In this way, they have drawn closer to the public, and succeeded in promulgating their ideas and messages truly, and not in a warped fashion.

The Strategist recommends that forum operators be patient, and define their goals, plan their strategy, and decide where and how to be involved. He explains that jihadist Web forums are no place for adventure-seekers, since foreign intelligence services watch them like hawks. In fact, foreign intelligence services have encountered such an abundance of jihadist materials that they have had to recruit the assistance of private research institutes, and Arab and Muslim governments, to help them wade through them. The intelligence services of Arab and Muslim countries have thus also begun to monitor jihadist Web forums and arrest surfers who do not use secure means of communication. The Strategist therefore recommends, even to those who are appropriately cautious, not using a dialect or moniker identifiable with one's place of origin. This can make it too easy for the intelligence services' technical experts to find out where a Web surfer lives – and from there it's a short road to intercepting the surfer. Even surfers who use an Internet café are not immune, as the café owners are often threatened lest they fail to reveal the conversations conducted from them.

The Strategist then divides the users of jihadist Web forums into two groups:

1. Forum administrators, and prominent members and contributors to the forums and to media institutions such as Jihad Media Battalion, Al-Fajr Media Center, and the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). They should never surf the forums from their homes, but rather only from an Internet café.
2. Visitors to the forums, who wish to read and further disseminate news of the mujahideen. They can surf from home, if they follow rules of safety and security.



The Strategist next provides surfers with advice on how to protect their computer. He adds illustrated explanations of how to change the appearance of one's browser, so as to leave no traces that could be used to identify one's location (whether it be home or an Internet café). The Strategist also recommends changing the proxy, but warns that intelligence services – especially Saudi Arabian intelligence – create proxies to lure Web surfers; those who take the bait can then be monitored. The Strategist then lists the following advice:

1. To avoid being identified, do not write in your local dialect on any forum.
2. Erase any email you receive immediately after you've read it.
3. Do not divulge your vital statistics, even to people you consider friends, because they may be intelligence officers in disguise.
4. Do not use chats, messenger, Paltalk and the like, as they can be used to send spyware.
5. Do not exchange identifying information, addresses or telephone numbers with other Web surfers.
6. Do not upload material to the Internet from your home.

The bevy of recommendations continues to swell and develop; at times, improvements in them are visible. For example, if until this point surfers have recommended using an Internet café to surf jihadist Web sites, increasingly, reservations about them are voiced. Surfers on the forum Al-Boraq expressed concern about Internet cafes, because they do not know what sort of computer programs café owners install. Al-Boraq's administrator suggested that those surfing from an Internet café use an operating program burned onto a CD, rather than the operating program installed on the café's computer, to avoid being detected.<sup>26</sup> In response, some surfers recommended installing a program on the café's computer that would mask the surfer's identity. One contributor to Al-Boraq related that, during a visit to Syria, he noticed that every Internet café used spyware to monitor surfers, and then gave the information to Syrian intelligence, which maintains a database on all of Syria's citizens – especially those suspected of maintaining contact with religious elements.<sup>27</sup>

Around November 2008, reports surfaced that CNN was planning to establish its own Web forums in Arabic, as a means of "hunting down" mujahideen. A warning thus

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=49856> (Arabic).

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=49979> (Arabic).

went out to those in charge of posting jihad-related announcements, new items and publications, and to supporters and surfers of jihad, to take precautions when surfing jihadist Web forums.<sup>28</sup> Awareness of the dangers lurking on the Internet has led to some prudent advice for secure surfing, in light of the struggle between [Arab] regimes and [Arab and Western] intelligence services on one hand, and jihadist Web forums, on the other. To illustrate: when the Saudi Arabian authorities block access to jihadist forums, some, such as Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya, add new links, and attempt to hack into Saudi government sites and make them crash.<sup>29</sup>

An example of the devious methods used by the opponents of jihadist Web forums can be found in a December 2008 report that appeared on the forum Shumukh Al-Islam. It concerned a surfer who tried to contact many forum members, especially administrators and prominent members. After this surfer was allegedly killed, other surfers, [who posed as his] family members, appeared. To "fake them out" yet prevent them from realizing they had been found out, the forum assigned some of them some minor responsibilities on the forum. According to the forum, these surfers were in fact Saudi intelligence operatives, who were exposed by canny mujahideen. Another example of Arab intelligence services' spying on jihadist Web forums can be found in a warning written in April 2009 by a chat room supervisor on Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya. According to him, the forum was being monitored by foreign intelligence services, especially those of Arab nations such as Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Authority.<sup>30</sup>

Also in April 2009, awareness of the need to take security measures arose on jihadist Web sites in the Caucasus, which are under the surveillance of Russian intelligence. For example, the Web site of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus published recommendations by a mujahid [named] Ingush on how to be cautious; these recommendations were then re-posted on Al-Falujja by a frequenter of that forum. According to Ingush, jihadist Web forum surfers often encounter statements such as "I want to fight jihad - who can help me? - where can we meet?". Ingush claimed that such comments are bogus, and written intelligence and security agents. Ingush reviewed the history of jihad in the Caucasus, and explained that although jihad has been waged there for many years, only a few young people have joined its ranks;

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=76976> (Arabic).

<sup>29</sup> <http://majahden.com/vb/showthread.php?t=15474> (Arabic).

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.mojahden.net/vb/showthread.php?t=20858> (Arabic).

more seriously, jihadist fighters in the region are not sufficiently vigilant. He therefore offered his recommendations to those preparing to embark on jihad, based on the bitter experience of mujahideen in the northern Caucasus who did not heed these rules of caution:<sup>31</sup>

1. If you have decided to embark on jihad, you must keep your decision secret. Avoid visiting mosques, talking to people who can't be trusted, growing a beard (unless you usually wear a beard), or using items identified with the mujahideen, such as certain clothing, cologne, and Casio watches. The wives of mujahideen should avoid wearing the hijab, which is associated with the mujahideen and helps expose them.
2. Mujahideen must not be photographed in stills or video clips, which can be posted on the Internet, and which are an important source of information for the enemy.
3. Mujahideen must fight the infidel openly, and not remain underground, concerned only for their own welfare.
4. Information should be kept secure. Confidential information should not be discussed nor details mentioned (except via code words) on means of communication that can be bugged, such as the telephone, the Internet (email, chats, forums), and mobile phones. Mobile phones should be turned off at secret locations, and their battery and SIM card removed. Moreover, since mobile phones allow for voice identification, it is best to use text messages. Since a mujahid's voice messages can be saved using an electro-magnetic intelligence voice data base – and since the enemy automatically listens to all of the mujahid's conversations – the rules of caution must be carefully followed. A drop in the quality of a mobile phone line may indicate that it has been bugged.
5. Russian security services closely follow surfers on Islamic Web sites in the Caucasus. They also easily hack into the email of the mujahideen. To prevent being exposed, it is best to use servers and email services that are not in Russia; to change your password every two weeks; and to avoid using Russian or Islamic terms.
6. Be wary of information "leaking" through family or friends whom you trust. Russian security services do not hesitate to impose harsh measures against family, in order to expose the mujahideen.

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<sup>31</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=66126> (Arabic).

The general supervisor of Al-Falujja, who was not wont to write on the forum, nevertheless contributed a warning in April 2009 against a surfer who had posed as a senior contributor to the forum. (Apparently, he had posed as the general supervisor's deputy by adopting a deceptively similar name: he used a different vowel under one of its consonants.) The general supervisor announced that the poseur's membership had been canceled and blocked. In response, one surfer suggested that the forum's general supervisor and programmers prevent such occurrences *a priori*, by making it technically impossible to register names similar to those of existing forum members.<sup>32</sup>

April 2009 offers up yet another example of the role of the general supervisor in maintaining the security of visitors to a jihadist Web forum. The general supervisor of Al-Falujja again warned against cooperating with a poseur, who claimed he was an activist for Al-Qaeda in Yemen sought by the authorities. This poseur solicited money from the other surfers on various pretexts, and also asked them for information about secret programs used by the mujahideen. The general supervisor immediately announced that he, too, had been blocked from the forum.

On the thread that developed in the wake of this warning, denizens of Al-Falujja mentioned additional cases of surfers whose activity had been blocked, and discussed the above-noted poseur's appeals to them. One contributor challenged the general supervisor, claiming that the supposed poseur was in fact a legitimate surfer. The general supervisor thus again intervened, and scolded this surfer for his spurious comments; the supervisor noted that the challenger did not know what went on behind the scenes, and should trust that the forum's supervisors were concerned for the safety of thousands of surfers. The surfer-challenger responded that he had asked other supervisors on the forum about the case, but had not received a response (other surfers corroborated that forum supervisors did not respond to direct questions); he therefore had posted the surfer-poseur's request for a monetary donation. He added that he was insulted by the general supervisor's attitude and insinuations that he was "collaborating with the enemy", and explained that he was merely concerned for all Muslims and was faithful to the path of God. In an unprecedented move, the general supervisor again responded, this time with a warning to all surfers that it was impossible to trust any surfer at this time,

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<sup>32</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=56491> (Arabic).



especially given the phenomenon of multiple surfers using similar names. This quieted the belligerent surfer, who apologized for having argued with the general supervisor.<sup>33</sup>

The extent to which supervisors are involved in a forum's functioning, or try to maximize their dissemination, can be learned from an instance that took place in May 2009. At that time, the general supervisor of Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya asked Al-Qaeda's media outlets to publish their announcements and publications on the forum, so as to reach as broad an audience as possible. The supervisor attempted to preempt any concerns by declaring that the forum's server was secure – and was not American.<sup>34</sup>

Also in May 2009, an announcement was posted by the administrators of Al-Falujja, which contained the following:

1. A warning against forums that [speciously] identify as jihadist, and those who frequent them.
2. A call to Web surfers not to divulge the details of their location, name, age, email or occupation.
3. A request that surfers tell forum administrators about questionable members, so that the latter can be monitored.
4. A request that surfers use appropriate language, according to Islamic religious law, and report any deviation from this.

In response, some surfers noted that many people were quick to register with every new jihadist forum. One surfer challenged the administrators' announcement, claiming that there is no need to lay blame or label a particular forum as being bogus, until there is clear proof of the matter. Al-Falujja's general supervisor shot back the quick response that the challenger must be new to the forum, and unaware of what is happening around him. The supervisor revealed that Al-Falujja's administrators received many requests to examine the status of other forums, but added that since Al-Falujja is not in any way related to the owners of any other forum, its administrators could not determine which was, or wasn't a [legitimate] jihadist forum. Hence, they could only warn surfers to take precautions.

Another administrator reinforced the comments of the general supervisor, saying it was necessary to be wary of new forums, as "there are many who lie in wait for the

<sup>33</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=56927> (Arabic).

<sup>34</sup> <http://69.162.81.115/~majahden/vb/showthread.php?t=22490> (Arabic).



supporters of jihad...and it is not hard to try to earn the friendship of supporters of jihad – and trap them”. One surfer revealed that spies and poseurs had also been found on the forum Ana Al-Muslim.<sup>35</sup>

In June 2009, an administrator of Al-Falujja announced that, because of the administration’s concern for the forum’s members and visitors, an injunction was handed down against using one’s real name in those sections open to all surfers. He noted that surfers who had revealed the names of other surfers had been blocked from the forum.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, advice about security when surfing jihadist Web forums continued to become increasingly sophisticated. In September 2009, a contributor to Al-Falujja recommended additional rules for preventing opponents from spying on surfers:

1. Do not discuss religious matters, especially matters of jihad (or of organization), on the telephone. Many have been arrested because they were unaware of this proscription.
2. Do not use the Internet to make telephone contact (e.g., Skype).
3. When registering for a forum, do not use a first name that is similar to that of one of your relatives, and do not use your [real] family name.
4. Use computer programs that change proxy.
5. Do not leave jihadist video clips and movies on your personal computer. Rather, use an external hard disk, or burn films onto a DVD or CD.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> <http://faloja1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=64409> (Arabic).

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=77847> (Arabic).

<sup>37</sup> <http://al-faljaweb.com/vb/showthread.php?t=82203> (Arabic).

## Chapter IV: Attempts to Take Down the Forums, and Attempts to Fight Back

In recent years, and due to a growing awareness in the West of the importance and popularity of jihadist Web forums, attempts to close them down have become increasingly prevalent. Usually, around the anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, a veritable war is waged between intelligence services and jihadist Web forums. Often, the latter are taken down to prevent jihadist leaders from broadcasting their message of jihad to activists and supporters throughout the world. Some forums have vanished entirely, but others have known how to endure over time, surviving attempts to paralyze them and even take them down for brief periods. These forums have also known how to market themselves, and have flaunted their stamina.

The attack on jihadist Web forums has required forum administrators to take precautionary steps; consequently, more than once, a decision has been made to independently initiate the closure of a forum. For example, several days before September 11, 2009, Ansar Al-Mujahideen and Al-Falujja ceased their activity, to avoid being hacked into or infiltrated. Al-Falujja recruited its technical staff and senior agents to secure the forum as required, despite temporary blackouts.<sup>38</sup> Its administrators also posted an announcement describing the attempts to bring down jihadist Web forums, and claiming that, in the end, they had kept the upper hand.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://al-falojaweb.com/vb/showthread.php?p=562832> (Arabic).

بلغ ادارة شبكة أنصار المجاهدين من مصادر موثوقة و معتمدة أن "منتدى الغلوجة" لم يتعرض لأي اختراق، و إنما تم إغلاقه كإجراء احترازي و لترقية نظام الحماية لصد الهجمات.. و كذلك فإن "شبكة و منتديات أنصار المجاهدين" تقرر إغلاقها لذات الغرض و سوف تعود المنتديات بإذن الله تعالى سريعا فور الانتهاء من ترقية نظام الحماية، و عند ورود أية مستجدات بهذا الخصوص فسوف نوافيكم بها إن شاء الله تعالى. و الله ولي المؤمنين و هو ناصرهم و لا يفلح زبانية الطواغيت مهما حاولوا محاصرة كلمة الحق و عبثا يحاولون منعها من الوصول إلى الناس. قال تعالى: "يريدون أن يطفئوا نور الله بأفواههم ويأبى الله إلا أن يتم نوره ولو كره الكافرون

@sa



### An announcement of the deliberate take-down of Ansar Al-Mujahideen and Al-Falujja

The closing down of multiple jihadist Web forums proximate to the eighth anniversary of the attacks of September 11, 2001 aroused intense rage among their surfers. In their attempts to explain why this was happening, they concluded that the cause lay in loathing for the jihadist forums and their success in the electronic war being waged parallel to that on the battlefield. They claimed that jihadist propaganda retained the upper hand, and was emerging from each battle strengthened.<sup>39</sup>

Attempts to down the forums and the response to them also teach something about the phenomenon of cooperation among the forums. For example, in November 2008, after Al-Hesbah was taken down, its administrators posted an announcement on other jihadist Web forums warning surfers not to enter sites called "Al-Hesbah", or that were visually similar to the old forum, unless Al-Qaeda media outlets such as Al-Fajr and Al-Yaqin announced that the forum had been re-established.<sup>40</sup>

It is worth noting that the anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack against the World Trade Center is not the only time of year exploited in the war of attrition between intelligence services and jihadist Web forums. This war is waged throughout the year. For example, immediately prior to and during January 2010, surfers found that Al-Falujja and other jihadist forums had either ceased functioning, or else that surfing them was slower than usual. In an attempt to calm the waters, Al-Falujja's general administrator posted an announcement clarifying that "criminals and enemies" were constantly wielding their electronic intelligence capabilities to try and

<sup>39</sup> <http://majahden.com/vb/showthread.php?t=30394> (Arabic).

<sup>40</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=35685> (Arabic).

impede or close down jihadist Web forums; therefore, as a matter of policy and in the name of caution, the administrators of this and other forums were taking preventive, defensive steps.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in March 2010, a new link was opened to Al-Falujja, after all of the other links had crashed. Within the space of two weeks, Al-Falujja's general administrator was required again and again to clarify that the forum was indeed working more slowly, or was not working at all for a few hours or even days, because jihadist Web forums were being targeted by foreign intelligence services.

It appears that senior forum personnel maintain a network of contacts among themselves, and update one another. Thus, for example, in September 2009, the manager of Al-Shura Al-Islamiya informed Al-Falujja's general administrator that unidentified agents had taken over Al-Shura Al-Islamiya.<sup>42</sup>

Where do the members of jihadist forums go when a forum or forums they have surfed ceases to function – and why? These questions consume both Web surfers and forum administrators. In May 2009, surfers on one jihadist forum [Al-Falujja] discussed them, in an attempt to trace the footsteps of members of forums that had closed down. Some expressed the view that these surfers' disappearance was a sign of weakness; others claimed that, in recent years, the forums had only become stronger. During this discussion, several hypotheses were offered to explain the behavior and fate of the surfers in question:

1. Some of them have changed names.
2. Some of them have vanished for good.
3. Some of them are still active under the same names, but keep a "low profile" for a while, or participate passively – that is, they only read materials, and do not respond to them.
4. Some of them have gone to wage jihad, or have been taken prisoner; others are under security surveillance.
5. The security services' surveillance of the forums creates obstacles for the surfers.
6. Some of them, lacking expertise or finesse in media and communications, have despaired at their inability to make a real contribution to the forums, and so have abandoned them.

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<sup>41</sup> <http://alflojweb.com/vb/showthread.php?p=717302#post717302> (Arabic).

<sup>42</sup> <http://al-falojweb.com/vb/showthread.php?t=82228> (Arabic).

7. Some surfers cease trusting other forums, once the forum with which they were familiar has closed down; in other words, their forum's crashing has "taken the wind out of their sails".

One surfer offered a different explanation, one that placed blame on the surfers themselves: few responses to threads, some of them worthless; copious quoting from other forums; and a lack of creativity have all caused the discussion on some forums to slacken. Other surfers responded that this situation had existed since the forums were established, and called on the forums to train professionals [to engage in discussion]. Still other surfers excused "pointless" comments as a spur to others to contribute and increase the forums' dynamism.

Other surfers commented that, when Al-Ikhlās was active [during the initial period of the forums' popularity], surfers felt like one family in which everyone knew everyone else. Now, however, on Al-Falujja and other forums, "You feel alone, an orphan. No one knows you, and if he has 'met' you, he doesn't remember [you]. Back then, the forum administration was grateful to every member for his input," one surfer wrote, hinting that this is no longer the case.

Some of the participants in this discussion on Al-Falujja mentioned surfers who no longer identified themselves by the names they had once used, and expressed a hope to hear from them. Other surfers recommended that surfers on forums that had been closed down continue to participate in other forums, whether or not they agree with those forums' policy; they called on these "refugees" from forums that had closed down to adopt new names for security's sake.<sup>43</sup>

In May 2009, a surfer on Ansar Al-Mujahideen explained that, since US President Obama had taken office, increasing resources had been earmarked, and Arab agents employed, to confound the surfers on jihadist Web forums – the only platform from which the mujahideen can transmit messages, since they have been forbidden to establish a satellite station. According to him, CIA agents use psychological warfare, blaming the forums for colluding with intelligence services, to sow confusion and impede the forums' activity. He suggested removing any topic and canceling the membership of any surfer who accuses a forum of collaborating with the enemy. In the wake of this comment, forum administrators asked surfers not to make idle

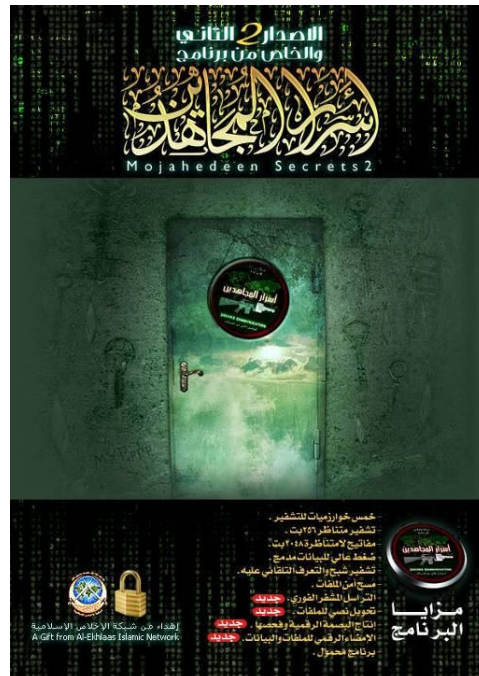
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<sup>43</sup><http://al-falujja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=65794> (Arabic).



accusations without clear proof, lest they deliberately or unwittingly serve the enemy and his goals.<sup>44</sup>

Jihadist Web forums also cope with attempts to hack into them with the help of a computer program called Asrar Al-Mujahideen, whose purpose is to ensure safe communication and correspondence over the Internet. The program is a product of the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), and was upgraded by Al-Ikhlās [when it was in operation]. Links to this program, and explanations of how to run it, are posted by the forums from time to time.<sup>45</sup>



Asrar Al-Mujahideen 2

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=4115> (Arabic).

<sup>45</sup> <http://66.96.232.222/~majahden/vb/showthread.php?p=12334> (Arabic).

## Chapter V: Are the Forums Themselves a Locus of Jihad?!

Jihadist Web forums were not intended solely to be the repository of published material, but also to send messages to, and field correspondence among, jihadist activists who have gone to war. In April 2009, the members of Al-Falujja were asked not to be too quick to post items on the arrest of forum members, including their nicknames, so as not to facilitate pursuit of them. They were also asked to write in Modern Standard Arabic, rather than in their colloquial dialect, even if they are not fluent in the former, to prevent identification of their location. (Surfers who had been "found" indeed favored the request to write in Modern Standard Arabic.) Also to protect their identities, surfers were asked to avoid contacting each other via messenger and email.<sup>46</sup> Following are several test cases, which illustrate the evolution of surfers from devotees of the media, as members of jihadist Web forums, to devotees of actual war, in the arena(s) of jihad.

### Test Case 1

In April 2009, a surfer reported that three members of Al-Falujja had been arrested within the space of a few weeks. He did not cite their names for fear that this would assist the intelligence services, but did note that he was posting the information as a warning to other surfers that intelligence agencies from around the world were pursuing those who frequented the forum. He called on forum members, especially those in the Arabian Peninsula, to take security measures, such as not leaving evidence in their homes that would indicate they were followers of Global Jihad. He also sent a message to the intelligence services: "We will not deviate from the principles of jihad". Lastly, he claimed the forum had 11,000 members, all of them [regular or reserve] "soldiers of Al-Qaeda".

In response to this post, some surfers called on their colleagues to take security precautions, while others expressed curiosity about the identity of the [arrested] members, their location, and how they had been caught. Some contributors urged the poster to write a secure, encoded message to the forum's general administrator listing the names of those arrested, so that their correspondence could be erased and their identification by unwanted entities prevented. The surfer posting the

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<sup>46</sup> <http://al-falouja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=55388> (Arabic).

original report responded that he had indeed done so; he further revealed that the three had been captured in their homes.

Other surfers recommended referring to the advice for secure Web surfing that many forums had published [see Chapter III], while others warned against recently-established, dubious forums – such as Al-Jazeera Talk and Medad Al-Suyuf – whose true aim was to trap supporters of jihad, and that were known to have inherent intelligence surveillance. Some of these forums had even closed down as soon as they had gotten what they wanted: the email addresses and IP of registered members.

One member tried incessantly to milk the others for details on the topic, until finally a forum supervisor was forced to intervene and block any further discussion of the topic, out of concern for the arrested members.<sup>47</sup>

#### Test Case 2

Another example of the arrest of Web surfers was provided in August 2009, against the background of the establishment of the Islamic Emirate in the Gaza Strip by Abd Al-Latif Musa, who was eliminated by Hamas on August 15, 2009. That same month, a report was issued of the arrest by Hamas of a member of Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya; however, Islamic Jihad intervened and brought about his release.<sup>48</sup>

Several months later, in November 2009, the general supervisor of Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya revealed with rare candor that all of the forum's administrators had been arrested or killed. He explained that, to date, nothing about this had been published for security reasons. However, things had now come to a head, and he wished to respond to the attack on the forum. Despite this [attack], he added, some surfers had "kept the fire burning", continuing to run the forum out a belief in jihad.

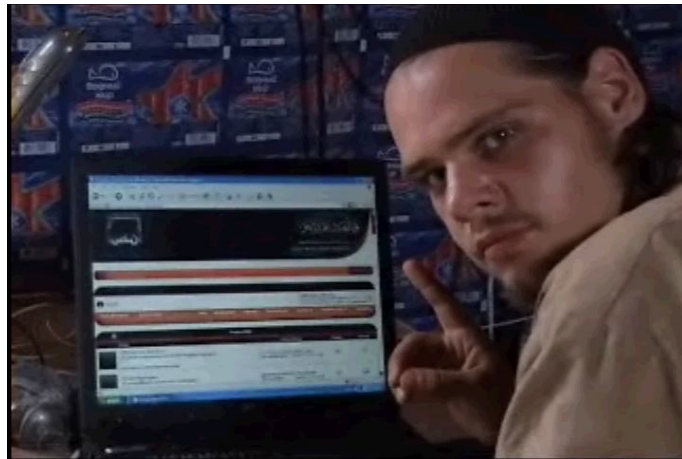
The general supervisor elaborated on the forum's Islamic identity and support for the ideology and leaders of Global Jihad. He reiterated that all of the forum administrators were mujahideen who had been imprisoned – in Hamas prisons, in Rumiya Prison in Lebanon, and in Iraq. After having been on a wanted list, the previous forum administrator was arrested in early November 2009; he had

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<sup>47</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=55015> (Arabic).

<sup>48</sup> <http://209.85.135.132/search?q=cache:z70LfstK8okJ:mojahden.net/vb/showthread.php%3Ft%3D27719+mojahden+27719&cd=2&hl=iw&ct=clnk&gl=il> (Arabic).

commanded a jihadist cell apparently affiliated with Fatah Al-Islam in Lebanon. Most of the members of that organization who were killed in battles with the Lebanese Army in the Naher Al-Bared Refugee Camp in 2007 had also been members of Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya, as was the former military "attaché", Abu Abd Al-Rahman Al-Maqdisi. The general supervisor reiterated that, at that time, the forum had had some 12,000 members, 15 of whom had been killed and five of whom had been arrested – all of them [chat room] monitors and members of the forum's "board of directors". He cited one board member, the late Abu Omar Al-Maqdisi, by name.<sup>49</sup>



**Abdul Ghaffar Al-Almani, a jihadist Web forum surfer whose real name was Eric Breininger. He was killed in Afghanistan in April 2010. Here he is shown surfing Ansar Al-Mujahideen**

### Test Case 3

In September 2009, Al-Falujja reported that a Jordanian Web surfer known as Abu Qandahar had left for jihad in Afghanistan. Abu Qandahar had formerly served as a monitor on Al-Ikhlās, and as a general administrator on Ansar Al-Mujahideen. The other surfers prayed for his safety.<sup>50</sup> However, within about three months, a thread posted on Ansar Al-Mujahideen by Al-Falujja's administrator made it apparent that their prayers had not been answered: after having spent time at the front, Abu Qandahar had been killed in an American bombing raid on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The eulogies of Abu Qandahar intimated that he had been in contact with

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.majahdenar.com/showthread.php?p=158492#post158492> (Arabic).

<sup>50</sup> <http://al-falujjaweb.com/vb/showthread.php?t=82332> (Arabic).



Abu Dujana Al-Khorasani, who had carried out the terrorist attack against a CIA base in Afghanistan at the end of December 2009.<sup>51</sup>



**A death announcement for Abu Qandahar**

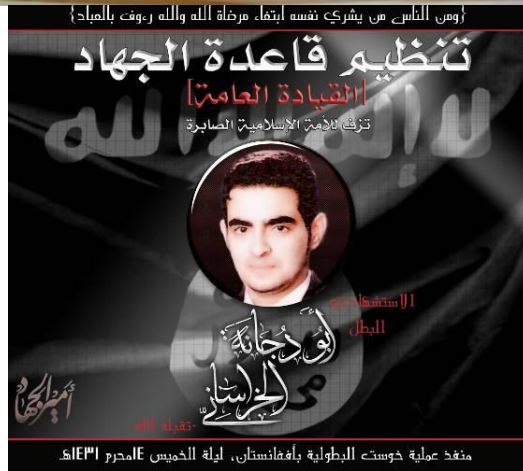
#### Test Case 4

One prominent example of surfers becoming fighters in the arenas of jihad is that of someone calling himself Abu Dujana Al-Khorasani, who was very active on Al-Falujja. Al-Khorasani, a Jordanian citizen, died on December 31, 2009 after carrying out a suicide terrorist attack against a CIA outpost in Afghanistan, in which seven US Army officers were killed. In January 2010, Al-Falujja announced with pride that forum participant Humam Khalil Muhammad Abu Mulal Al-Balawi – aka Abu Dujana Al-Khorasani – had “turned his words into deeds”. Al-Falujja reported that Abu Dujani had previously been an administrator of Al-Hesbah, and “had always expressed support for jihad and the mujahideen easily, pointedly, and creatively way”.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=31938> (Arabic).

<sup>52</sup> <http://alflojaweb.com/vb/showthread.php?t=98773> (Arabic).





**Abu Dujana Al-Khorasani: The Eulogy of the General Leadership of Al-Qaeda**

Test Case 5

In January 2010, an official announcement was posted on Al-Falujja concerning the deaths of two contributors in jihadist activities. One of them had been wanted by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of the Interior. The announcement did not state where they died or the circumstances of their deaths.<sup>53</sup>

	الاسم	محمد علي محمد المطلق
	الكنية	قاهر الصليب
	الجنسية	سعودي - رقم بطاقة الأحوال: (1036564621)
	مكان وتاريخ الميلاد	الرياض في (1/1/1406هـ) - (15/9/1985م)
	بيانات جواز السفر	تاريخ إصداره (G895600) تاريخ انتهائه (22/2/1428هـ) (22/2/1433هـ)
	الحالة	مطلوب

**The vital statistics and photograph of a Web surfer killed in jihad, as posted on the Web site of the Saudi Arabian Ministry of the Interior**

Test Case 6

<sup>53</sup> <http://alflojweb.com/vb/showthread.php?p=718676> (Arabic).

In March 2010, Al-Falujja announced the death of a surfer named Ghazwan Al-Yamani in an air strike along the Afghani border on March 9. Several of the surfer's colleagues were also killed in the strike.<sup>54</sup>

#### Test Case 7

The activities of jihadist Web forums and their members are also felt in North Africa. In May 2010, a court in Tunisia imposed a prison sentence on someone calling himself Abu Al-Wafa the Tunisian, who was a member of the forums Al-Falujja, Al-Shumukh, and Ansar Al-Mujahideen. He was accused of having written defamatory comments about the Tunisian regime.<sup>55</sup>

Many of the threads on jihadist Web forums bristle with the fear that surfers are being or will be monitored. In April 2009, surfers on Al-Falujja were asked how they had learned about the jihadist Web forums, and especially Al-Falujja – whether through Facebook, YouTube, other forums, other Web surfers, newspapers, or Web sites that follow jihadist forums. The surfers confirmed that they had learned about Al-Falujja through Google, YouTube, other forums, or from friends.

A number of the surfers wondered why this question had been asked; they expressed the fear that the thread might help intelligence forces monitoring Al-Falujja to better understand their actions and behavior. The surfer who had asked the question explained that his goal had been to reach as broad a segment of jihad supporters as possible, and learn from them how best to disseminate jihadist forums.<sup>56</sup>

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The forums are an important platform for recruiting jihadist activists and encouraging them to fight in the various arenas of battle. In this context, in January 2009 a document was uploaded onto Shumukh Al-Islam by the Al-Somood Media Center of the Islamic Emirate. Written by a Web surfer calling himself Al-Gharib Al-Muhajir, the document was titled, "Essential Security Advice and Instructions" and was aimed at Web surfers who had decided to embark on jihad. Al-Muhajir claimed

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<sup>54</sup> <http://alfaloja.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107824> (Arabic).

<sup>55</sup> <http://alfalojaweb.info/vb/showthread.php?t=114668> (Arabic).

<sup>56</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=56491> (Arabic).

that his advice was based on experience, and explained that many had been entrapped or had entrapped others through carelessness and irresponsibility.<sup>57</sup>



**Al-Somood's "Essential Security Advice and Instructions"**

The following are among Al-Muhajir's recommendations:

1. Tell your family that you are traveling for business or pleasure.
2. Leave no leave traces: no telephone numbers, names of email correspondents, or photographs of other mujahideen.
3. Leave books and DVDs on jihad-related topics only with people you trust. Some choose to burn them, [but] it is best to give them away, so that others can learn from them.
4. Do not use your real name to identify yourself to colleagues on the path of jihad; rather, use a pseudonym. Do not tell your family the real names of your friends or where they live. Do not meet [each other] at home, but rather in a neutral location far from where you live, such as a café or cemetery.
5. Always use the Internet to make contact, but be sure to take security precautions, such as encoding your correspondence.
6. Equip yourself with the clothing and paraphernalia of anyone going on a trip, so as not to arouse suspicion.
7. Save money for your trip, even though those in charge of your joining jihad are meant to provide you with money (sometimes there is not enough).
8. Prepare emotionally for jihad. Read jihadist books and view jihadist movies and video clips constantly, until the last minute. The goal: to avoid abandoning the idea of going to jihad, as has happened on more than one occasion – for

<sup>57</sup> <http://shamikh.net/vb/showthread.php?t=26702> (Arabic).

example, when someone has turned back from the airport at the last minute, or has even asked to go home after having reached the site of jihad.

9. Be happy and optimistic and act satisfied so as not to arouse suspicion among your relatives, who may think that depression and failure lead an individual to commit suicide [for jihad].
10. Use your passport to cross the border nearest where you are, because you may be under surveillance, or an exit order may have been issued against your leaving the country. If you are followed, at least do not reveal your (intended) destination.
11. On the day you depart for jihad, it is best that no one see you leave. Therefore, it is preferable that you shave, change your style of dress, and leave at night or in the early morning (before dawn). Do not use Islamic terminology that might arouse suspicion, and do not pray any longer than usual.

Al-Muhajir also offers advice on how to behave at the airport or a border crossing to avoid arrest. And indeed, from time to time, jihadist Web forums post advice on how to behave when arrested (usually copied from other sites). The following is an example of such advice, as it appeared on Ansar Al-Mujahideen:

"If a mujahid does not exercise caution when surfing the Internet, he should be aware of what happens during arrest, of methods of interrogation, and of practices that will help him keep silent and not confess [to anything]. The enemy will do everything [he can] to elicit information from the mujahid, including torturing him. [Our] advice includes detailed explanations of types of arrest and of interrogation, as well as of varied methods of eliciting any scrap of information. [We] recommend that the mujahid remains silent, or [at least] does not confess. [The mujahid] must try and convince his interrogators that the information they have is mistaken, and that [he] is not at all involved in terrorist activities. [He must] avoid divulging vital statistics and identifying details. [He] should take courage, solace and support from belief in God."<sup>58</sup>

Surfers on jihadist Web forums also reveal something of their attitudes toward and mood regarding involvement in actual jihad. Some surfers blame others for being

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<sup>58</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=8853> (Arabic).



cowards if they do not join the fight on the battlefield, but rather “make do” with inciting others to do so. Yet other surfers contradict them, and stress the obligation to help the mujahideen in any way possible. One such surfer offered proof of this from the earliest days of Islam, when poets assisted fighters by disproving the claims of the infidel. The same surfer wrote of surfers who had joined jihad and died for Allah in Iraq and Afghanistan, and of those who continued to write while fighting on the battlefield. A forum supervisor corroborated this phenomenon, stressing that “the enemies do not discern between the mujahid armed with a machine gun and the mujahid armed with a computer”. Both, he wrote, are sentenced to the same fate; both are persecuted.<sup>59</sup>



**The Shahid [martyr] Fahd Al-Anzi, monitor of the design chat room on Qassimy-net, who died in Iraq**

A surfer on Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya wrote in June 2009 about surfers who, conversely, had first contributed a great deal to then-nascent jihadist propaganda, transmitting their cumulative knowledge, but then had joined jihad, for example in Iraq, where the contacts they had formed through the Internet enabled them to connect with people in the field to carry out terrorist attacks (though some were also taken captive). He called on surfers not [only] to sit at home, but rather to properly prepare and then embark on jihad, or conduct terrorist attacks, in their own countries or against the US.<sup>60</sup>

In May 2010, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan reported that Abu Dujana Al-San'ani, an expert in explosive devices and belts, had been killed that month in a

<sup>59</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=56741> (Arabic).

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.mojahden.net/vb/showthread.php?t=24993> (Arabic).

"work accident", while preparing an explosive device for use in a suicide attack against foreign forces in Kabul. He had been involved in this field for three years, and had come to be seen as an authority by those around him. He invented devices that were very helpful to the mujahideen, taught the mujahideen, and left behind students who will continue his legacy. In an interview conducted prior to his death by the Al-Balagh media outlet, Al-San'ani had said that he was a Yemeni citizen; he listed the religious authorities who had influenced him, and related how he had come to jihad, including the influence of jihadist Web forums on him and on other mujahideen. He emphasized that Al-Falujja, in particular, had filled an important function for the mujahideen of Arab origin, who benefitted from its publications and news, especially regarding Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria.<sup>61</sup>

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سيقان الحي القيوم الذي لا يموت..  
اللهم نقله في الشهداء، وألحقنا اللهم بالشهداء.

ياسود الجهاد في يمن الإيمان والحكمة ان كان نجي الكلب البريطاني من سيوفكم فلا نتوانوا في المواصلة لغيره من الكفرة والمرتدين وليكون في سهامكم نصيب  
للاسود العنسي وغدا لناظره قريب  
ابودجاجة الصنعائي  
أفغانستان

رد مع اقتباس إقتباس متعدد لهذه المشاركة الرد السريع على هذه المشاركة

لسيقان الله القادر على كل شيء  
!هل تتعجبون مما أتعب؟  
سيقان الله

Al-San'ani writes on Al-Falujja



**Abu Dujana Al-San'ani**

Is it preferable, then, to embark on actual jihad, or to contribute to the ideology of jihad through jihadist media outlets [and forums]? In May 2010, discussion arose of this issue, which is apparently of some import to jihadist Web forum surfers. In one surfer's assessment, forums such as Al-Hesbah and Al-Ikhlās had been closed down because many surfers, among them the supervisors and administrators of blogs, Web sites, and media outlets, had left for jihad in Iraq and elsewhere. Other surfers disparaged this assessment.

One surfer suggested that the two were not mutually exclusive, and explained that jihad could be waged in three ways: sacrifice of the soul; jihad with financial resources; and jihad through propaganda. Most of Web surfers supported jihad "in the field", for various reasons, among them that those who fight jihad will be rewarded in the next life, and that jihad (and not jihadist propaganda, according to one surfer) is mentioned in the Qur'an and the sunna of the Prophet. One surfer cited the position of Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who obligates each and every individual to embark on jihad, but is lenient in ruling that if someone cannot or is not authorized by the mujahideen to perform certain tasks, he must promote Islam in any other way possible, such as through jihadist media institutions. Other reasons that surfers gave for actually fighting jihad included that replacements could be found for senior forum contributors who had been captured or killed while fighting jihad; someone who is capable of fighting jihad but who remains in a media institution is

contravening the path of God; not all those who write on forums may be considered fighters in electronic jihad.

Other surfers clarified that not everyone can embark on jihad, and that some do help the mujahideen through jihadist media, which are important to the war effort – in fact, no less important than it, such that skilled teams should be trained to work in the media. To illustrate their point, these surfers cited Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri themselves, who never actually fought jihad – with weapons, on the front – because it was in the interest of the Muslim nation that they stay alive. In effect, both of them did and would engage in propaganda jihad, until such time as God would ordain their death.<sup>62</sup>

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In May 2009, discussion arose on Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya of the importance of jihadist Web forums as a “locus of information, a platform for generating awareness, a source of instruction and training, and as a tool for recruiting, and as a channel of communication among mujahideen and their followers and supporters”. A contributor to Al-Mujahideen Al-Electroniya wrote that the forums constitute “an important weapon in the war between Islam and its enemies”. He claimed that [the forums] have accepted the role of electronic warfare, and indoctrinate [people] for jihad. They make the mujadeed knowledgeable, even if only theoretically, about the art of war. When an individual embarks on jihad, he is already mentally ready, and does not need a long time to prepare to implement what he has learned on the forums. Also, thanks to the forums, the mujahideen know that “a large nation is standing behind them...and keeping them up to date as to what is happening on other battlefields and in other arenas”. The forums are also a means of communication between commanders and their units, through encoded messages and with additional precautions. Lastly, he claimed, the forums play a role in fundraising campaigns, which help sustain transmission of the jihadist message.

It is therefore important that the forums remain active, and that there be as many of them as possible. In addition to helping spread the message of jihad broadly, a multiplicity of forums distracts and divides the efforts of the enemy, reducing his ability to harm them. When one forum is blocked, another takes its place. If some forums that are under the control of spy agencies, others should be used against

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<sup>62</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=66154> (Arabic).



them. The jihadist message should be spread to such forums, so as to cause the enemy to waste his resources maintaining and protecting them. People should be encouraged to participate in the forums, even if only passively, since exposure to the message of jihad may gradually increase the number of people who espouse jihad. At the same time, administrators must protect their forums and monitor their activity – since the more surfers enter them, the greater the risk of infiltration by hostile elements. Thus, a greater number of forum supervisors and administrators is needed, on condition that those recruited are proven to be trustworthy and reliable. Forums should exchange information among themselves about hacking methods, infiltration, and hostile surfers, as a means of self-protection. Forums should have an alternate, hidden server containing all of their files, updated and backed up from time to time, so that if their main server is attacked, their alternate server can be pressed into service.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=66154> (Arabic).

## Chapter VI: Internal Debate Within the Forums

The jihadist Web forums are not monolithic. No one opinion dictates the nature or form of internal discussion on them – which can be stormy, tense, and censorious. Official forum personnel, such as supervisors and administrators, are sometimes attacked for the way they manage the forums. Following are some examples of internal debate on jihadist Web forums, which illustrate the nature and the topics of discussion.

Criticism: In March 2009, a surfer on Al-Falujja suggested establishing email discussion groups as a part of the forum, so that surfers could receive news directly, quickly and securely. This suggestion was following the closing of the mujahideen's discussion group on the forum. The author of the suggestion wondered why surfers should be at the mercy of supervisors, who erase some comments, warn against or block their membership, and interfere with the spread of the jihadist message. To strengthen his claim, the surfer cited the Al-Ansar email discussion group, which had 50 members, and was accessed through the private "messenger" function. Group members received all of the forum's publications, announcements, magazines and news, and could pass them on. The surfer suggested that unique discussion groups be established for every media institution and forum (by Al-Qaeda's media outlets and forum supervisors), which surfers would join through their email accounts. This surfer also explained how to open a discussion group through Yahoo or Google.<sup>64</sup>

Competition among forums and factions: Also in May 2009, threads on Shumukh Al-Islam illustrated the competition among jihadist Web forums, and the "attrition" of prominent members from one forum to another. One surfer blamed this on the forum administrators, whom he claimed did not prevent the defamation of forum members, who are disappointed when the administrators do not encourage them or offer positive feedback. Divisiveness and factionalism are also evident on the forums – that is, topics raised by one particular "clique" may be favored at the expense of those raised by other members. Some members "migrate" from one forum to another, especially if a particular forum appears to be "stuck" – that is, if no new

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.al-falaja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=51880> (Arabic).

chat rooms open, or it sticks to an old-fashioned graphic display. Other members may move because a forum's management seems arbitrary to them, or if a forum administrator decides to erase a thread they posted for no [apparent] reason. In such cases, a forum administrator may apologize if he has unintentionally hurt a surfer's feelings. His fellow surfers may share his feelings, or they may advise him that despair is pointless, as "that's the way of the world", and one doesn't always receive feedback or encouragement.<sup>65</sup>

Lack of creativity: Some surfers complained that the forums persist in posting pointless or worthless comments on important issues – such as expression of hope or prayer – which they claimed do nothing to help develop meaningful discussion. Other surfers seethed at the posting of "recycled" topics, or topics quoted from other forums. Consequently, many surfers encouraged more lively participation, even at the expense of opening up [closed] forums to opposing and contradictory opinions, as is the case on Ana Al-Muslim and Hanein. For example, one surfer wrote that he preferred forums that fostered ideological debate to forums that touted consensus. Other surfers recommended that new topics be posted only if serious background materials, such as photographs, video clips, songs and amenable computer programs, accompany them.<sup>66</sup>

Complaints, and suggestions for improving efficiency: Many surfers on Al-Falujja recommended upgrading it by adding functions to facilitate easy, orderly surfing – such as enabling surfers to hear audio files without having to use a file sharing program, or improving the graphic layout of the site. Forum supervisors were quick to reassure that these ideas would be discussed among forum administrators, although many similar suggestions had been rejected because surfers with a slow connection to the Internet cannot benefit from them.<sup>67</sup>

An additional suggestion for improvement was made in May 2009: in light of the distortion of jihadist publications by the foreign media, one surfer suggested

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<sup>65</sup> <http://shmo5alislam.net/vb/showthread.php?t=36843> (Arabic).

<sup>66</sup> <http://shmo5alislam.net/vb/showthread.php?t=36909> (Arabic).

<sup>67</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=71610> (Arabic).

appending a small summary or abstract to each publication, in Arabic and English, that international media could rely on.<sup>68</sup>

Also in May 2009, a comment was posted on Shumukh Al-Islam to the effect that forum activity plummeted during exam time at universities and secondary schools. Surfers were asked to better plan their time.<sup>69</sup> In September 2009, a surfer on Medad Al-Suyuf complained that Al-Falujja was "boycotting" him and his posts.<sup>70</sup>

In March 2010, a surfer criticized his colleagues who complained about forum supervisors. He explained that not only do they receive no wages for their work, but they invest their own money to wave the banner of jihad, and their time, despite having families and other pursuits. Another surfer suggested lightening the burden of supervisors by involving forum members in developing and running the forum(s). He suggested a division of labor, with one group reporting to supervisors on repetitive or inappropriate topics, another group disseminating news, and a third group checking links that don't work or news items that have no source.

A supervisor on Al-Falujja responded that every announcement on the forum is read with care. He stated that the supervisors active on the forum at any given time constantly consult among themselves. Although they attend to every comment, they do not agree with a surfer who thinks that a particular thread is inappropriate. The supervisor then expressed the hope that, by revealing something about his work – which he is technically forbidden to do on the open forum – he had not exceeded his authority or the rules of supervision.<sup>71</sup> Another supervisor addressed the criticisms posted on Al-Falujja, from the standpoint of having previously been a supervisor on Al-Ikhlās, as well. He defended supervisors, explaining that they saw things that other surfers did not, and that did all they felt they should for the mujahideen. He added that they were sensitive to comments and suggestions, but responded to them when they felt it was appropriate.<sup>72</sup>

In this context, in April 2010, Hanein announced the establishment of a mediation council, comprising 13 forum members, which would address the threads of surfers

<sup>68</sup> <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=77413> (Arabic).

<sup>69</sup> <http://shmo5alislam.net/vb/showthread.php?t=38516> (Arabic).

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.almedad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=12960> (Arabic).

<sup>71</sup> <http://alfaloja.biz/vb/showthread.php?t=107748> (Arabic).

<sup>72</sup> <http://alfalojaweb.info/vb/showthread.php?t=113616> (Arabic).



opposed to the forum's regulations. The council would have the authority to suspend or block a surfer's membership.<sup>73</sup>

Asad Al-Jihad2, a prominent and important contributor to jihadist Web forums, surfaced in April 2010 after a protracted absence. As his venue he chose Al-Falujja, which was then the leading forum. Asad Al-Jihad2 criticized the administrators of jihadist Web forums, and suggested it was time to reassess jihadist propaganda. Because his comments were as detailed as they were copious, a summary of them is presented here.

According to Asad Al-Jihad2, the concept "jihadist propaganda" subsumes anything that contributes to jihad and the mujahideen, primarily via the Internet. He clarified that his comments were directed at those responsible for this aspect of jihad: although the enemy had yet to succeed in obstructing jihadist propaganda, several mistakes had nevertheless been made.



**The logo of Asad Al-Jihad [The Lion of Jihad] 2**

Asad Al-Jihad2 identified two main problems. First, supporters of jihad were relying on a small number of forums. [At the time of publication of his comments], Al-Falujja was the forum on which most supporters of jihad "congregated". He stated that those responsible for jihadist propaganda must "correct this error. Continuing to ignore this error, as is the case today, is bringing jihadist propaganda to the edge of an abyss". The presence of a representative [murasil] of the Al-Fajr Media Center on Shumukh Al-Islam did not resolve the problem, and a discrepancy remained between Al-Falujja and Shumukh Al-Islam. The solution, according to Asad Al-Jihad2: in cooperation with forum supervisors, the Al-Fajr Media Center should upload certain of its publications exclusively to jihadist Web forums *other than* Al-Falujja, even if only for one hour [before they are published on Al-Falujja]. This would establish an additional forum as a focus of attraction, and [a draw] for additional members,

<sup>73</sup> <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?165761> (Arabic).

without damaging Al-Falujja, which would still be very active. Asad Al-Jihad2 asked the supervisors of Al-Falujja to take responsibility and agree to this step, on behalf of the mujahideen.

Second, the forums authorized by the Al-Fajr Media Center were not the only ones helping the mujahideen. Personnel in charge of jihadist Web forums must take greater interest in forum members – for example, by interviewing commanders of the mujahideen in various arenas, and enabling forum members to direct questions to them.

Asad Al-Jihad2 raised yet another issue: the video clips of terrorist attacks committed in Iraq, for example, were getting lost because of the fierce fighting there. Since this could also happen in additional arenas of jihad, the raw material for the video clips should be backed up and saved and, preferably, transferred to a media center rather than to private individuals. Asad Al-Jihad2 also suggested using satellite [television] channels to broadcast the messages of leaders of jihad, although he acknowledged that doing so could encounter difficulties; to circumvent these, he suggested transmitting the messages through the leaders of the Taliban, whose messages were more likely to be broadcast by these channels. He added that sending the publications of the mujahideen to Al-Jazeera only left them all at that station's mercy; consequently, a greater variety of channels, including foreign ones, should be used.

Asad Al-Jihad2 called for the collection and dissemination of more photographs and recordings by religious authorities from every arena of jihad, so as to create an archive of influential jihadist materials. He suggested photographing as many of the mujahideen's operations as possible, since the lack of photographs limits the influence of the current war on public awareness. Since, he knew, the mujahideen were not keen to hold a camera, but rather were anxious to be on the battlefield, he urged commanders in various arenas of jihad to assign specific individuals to photograph or film the mujahideen's activities. He explained that the military leader and the person in charge of propaganda coordinate their efforts before every action, to ensure that skilled people film it.

In another vein, Asad Al-Jihad2 wrote that, to encourage people to embark on jihad, photographs of mujahideen and their jihadist activities should be disseminated, since most of their supporters know little about their way of life. He also suggested that more materials be published, even if some are of lesser quality, to prevent important

information from being lost. To this end, he suggested that new media institutions be established, to serve as a "rear guard" for the official media outlets.

Asad Al-Jihad2 added a message to foreign intelligence services: the forums are not the heart of jihadist propaganda, but do identify with and support jihad and the mujahideen. Jihadist propaganda has many options, as the forums compete among themselves over trumpeting the messages of jihad. If one forum is blocked or impeded, or if several forum members are captured – this means that jihadist propaganda is succeeding.

In this context, Asad Al-Jihad2 noted that important media outlets had folded after the disappearance of key jihadist Web forums such as Al-Hesbah and Al-Ikhlās; he castigated the administrators of these institutions for this. According to him, if the level of these institutions deteriorated in the wake of the arrest of some administrators, then there must be a leadership crisis, which must be redressed. In the field, in contrast, jihad did not stop just because some mujahideen or their leaders had been killed. Asad Al-Jihad2 stated his opinion that jihadist media institutions lacked professional staff, and blamed the managers of these institutions for difficulty recruiting professionals, when they could in fact use the members of jihadist Web forums, who often plead – in vain – to be allowed to serve jihadist discourse. The staffs of media institutions are constantly being winnowed, because these institutions rarely accept new members. If the media institutions improved their approach, their influence would grow, making them the pillar of jihadist propaganda.

Asad Al-Jihad2 then admonished the administrators of jihadist Web forums, as follows:

1. Establish a solid basis for the forums, on which it will be possible to formulate a means of administering them. In Asad Al-Jihad2's opinion, the basis itself must be founded on the underlying assumption that jihadist Web forums are unlike Western Web forums, which are a platform for discussion and exchange of ideas. The jihadist Web forums, in contrast, should not support the dissemination of messages that oppose the path of jihad.
2. The link between forum supervisors and members is too weak – when it exists at all. Supervisors rarely participate in, or encourage, discussion, as if the forums run on members alone. Consequently, forum activity is insubstantial. The situation in the field should serve as a lesson: the leaders of jihad give young

mujahideen individual attention; supervisors do not do this with their forum's surfers, and this has implications. For example, if supervisors had built a relationship with their forums' members, when a forum closed, its surfers would follow the supervisors to other forums in which they were active, or to new forums.

3. Forum administrators should choose supervisors with care, ensuring, for example, that they have good interpersonal relations and are not too harsh or suspicious. Supervisors should be decisive but not rude, pleasant but not lax.
4. Forum administrators needn't always be secretive. For example, when a forum closes, surfers should be told what has happened, and not be left to await [the forum's] return.
5. Supervisors must respond to surfers' suggestions and complaints [in the chat room designated for this purpose], and not ignore them. Forums should be upgraded, and additional chat rooms opened – for example, that are dedicated to comments by the leaders of jihad, which are often hard to come by; or that are available for those who wish to express, and receive a response to, their doubts. This latter type of chat room would prevent doubts from surfacing in other chat rooms – a favored tactic of “government agents”. The relationship between supervisors and surfers should be improved through dedicated email messages containing the contact information of supervisors, senior leaders, and even of other surfers, alongside recommended safety precautions.

Next, Asad Al-Jihad2 called on forum surfers to do the following:

1. Support all Muslims, without favoring one specific group or organization. In this context, the Somali who tried in January 2010 to murder Danish animator and caricaturist Kurt Westergaard is praised for acting on his own volition. Even though he was not affiliated with any group or organization, he nevertheless was a jihad fighter.
2. Be sensitive to the mujahideen. Do not give empty advice. Rail against the “infidels, tyrants and hypocrites”. Threads of praise, prayer, and requests for help from Allah are no less legitimate than threads analyzing current events. Not all surfers are equally well-versed in every topic; even those who are, and who post carefully reasoned threads, expect responses of the type that other surfers have called “pointless” [see above]. A variety of threads also sends a message to the



outside world: the agents who monitor the forums will realize that they are a "living, breathing" entity.

3. Do not collaborate with questionable forums that purport to be jihadist. Take security precautions to avoid being trapped and imprisoned.
4. Women should join jihadist forums. Women who currently hold key positions on the forums should encourage their sisters to join.

Lastly, and like others before him, Asad Al-Jihad2 warns that jihadist Web forums – indeed, the content and dialogue within jihadist propaganda – is constantly under surveillance.

What of the response to Asad Al-Jihad2? One supervisor on Al-Falujja, who claimed to also be an active member – perhaps to retain a semblance of objectivity – addressed Asad Al-Jihad2's comments on the apathy of forum supervisors, and their indifference to the cumulative capabilities and knowledge of forum members. This supervisor decried Asad Al-Jihad2's criticisms, and placed the lion's share of the blame on surfers who failed to cooperate with forum initiatives, or to be sufficiently active. Another supervisor corroborated his opinion, as did some surfers, who claimed supervisors should be strict with surfers who condemned or contradicted the forum's official stance. In contrast, other surfers praised the comments of Asad Al-Jihad2, and blamed forum administrators for being inattentive to the complaints and suggestions of surfers. For example, some cited the example of Al-Ikhlās, which once hosted tense debates, and never censured opposing opinions, even when the supervisor insisted on it. Now [at the time these surfers were writing], threads are erased, and supervisors refer disgruntled surfers to the complaint chat room – where their complaints are never addressed. As an example, they recalled a suggestion once made to appoint more experienced supervisors, which never received a response of any kind. They stressed that, since the forums were now under greater attack than ever before, the comments of surfers should not be ignored. They protested when one of the forum supervisors closed this discussion, too, because of its criticisms of the policy of forum administrators.<sup>74</sup>

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Strangely (or perhaps not so strangely), at the end of June 2010, about two months after Asad Al-Jihad2 had made his extensive comments, Al-Falujja exploded in an

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<sup>74</sup> <http://124.217.253.94/%7Efaall3s/vb/showthread.php?t=112294> (Arabic).

uproar, which eventually led to the final closure of what had once been the leading jihadist Web forum. In July 2010, an announcement was posted, in which Al-Falujja clarified that the "enemies of Allah" had overtaken the database of one of its supervisors, generating confusion meant to malign that supervisor's reliability in the eyes of the Al-Fajr Media Center. As a consequence, Al-Falujja had been "frozen" for several days at the end of June 2010; the forum's administrators claimed that it was they who had stopped its activity, in order to restore order.

أعضاء وزوار منتديات الفلوجة الإسلامية نعلمكم بأن أعداء الله قاموا بسرقة معلومات إحدى عضويات مشرفي منتديات الفلوجة الإسلامية ومن خلالها أثاروا بلبلة في المنتدى وكان هذا الأمر ظاهراً وكان المقصد منه ضرب مصداقية منتديات الفلوجة مع إخوانهم في مركز الفجر رأس حربة الإعلام الجهادي  
ولكن خابوا وخسروا والله

وكما قلنا سابقاً بأن هذه حرب يدار رحاها في الخفاء ولكن العاقبة للمتقين..

لذلك نعلمكم إخواننا بأن منتديات الفلوجة والله الحمد بخير وستعود في غضون أيام قليلة بإذن الله وستسير الأمور على ما كانت عليه سابقاً بحيث يتم إعادة نسخة المنتدى قبل الحادث الذي حصل.  
ولكن نطلب منكم إخواننا من باب الأفضلية ومن باب الحيطة والحذر تغيير كلمات السر الخاصة بكم مع أننا قمنا بتأمين المنتدى وخصوصاً النسخة التي تم إعادتها...  
ونحيطكم علماً بأن إخوانكم قاموا مباشرة بالسيطرة على المنتدى وإيقاف عمله حتى يصار إلى ترتيب الأمور

ونسأل الله أن يحفظ منتدياتنا الإسلامية من كل سوء.  
والله غالب على أمره ولكن أكثر الناس لا يعلمون

#### The clarification posted on Al-Falujja in July 2010

Subsequently, Al-Falujja's general supervisor explained that the forum had ceased its activity for a few days between late June and July 7, 2010, because "hostile elements" had stolen the username of one of the forum's supervisors, with the aim of shaking the foundations of jihadist propaganda and of Al-Falujja, and of fomenting strife among the supporters of jihad. He noted that the matter had been redressed within several days, and warned against surfing the Al-Tawhid Islamic Network or collaborating with its senior personnel.<sup>75</sup>

Most surprisingly, subsequent to the warning issued by Al-Falujja's general supervisor, the Al-Tawhid Islamic Network independently announced its closure. In

<sup>75</sup><http://alfaloja1.info/vb/showthread.php?p=906185#post906185> (Arabic).

this announcement, the supervisor of Al-Tawhid addressed the Al-Arabiya channel, which had aired a segment on the struggle among jihadist Web forums, attacking it for defamation. He also criticized the administrators of Al-Falujja for issuing a warning against Al-Tawhid Islamic Network, without contacting those in charge of Al-Tawhid to vet their suspicions. The supervisor of Al-Tawhid stressed that it was indeed a jihadist forum, and did not harbor collaborators with foreign elements.

6- أحد الأعضاء تكلم عنا بآية من كتاب الله (إن الذين كفروا يفتنون أموالهم ليصدوا عن سبيل الله فسيبغقونها ثم تكون عليهم حسرة ثم يغفلون والذين كفروا إلى جهنم يحشرون ) لا أدري ماذا أقول هل تم تكفيرنا في الأخير والله لقد دامت عيوننا ونحن نرى هجوم الأعضاء علينا بغير دليل ولكن حسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل.

7- بعض الأعضاء يقول هذا بيان الفلوجة يحذر منكم أقول لهم ليكنم فعلتم فعلهم وانكفبتهم أترهم وانكفبتهم بتحذيرهم وما أظننكم تنال من إخوانكم بغير حق.

8 - وأخيرا أسأل الله أن يرينا الحق حقا ويرزقنا اتباعه ويرينا الباطل باطلا ويرزقنا اجتنابه

وصلى اللهم وبارك على محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم

وكتبه أخوكم  
أبو مصعب الكنتاني  
مشرف شبكة التوحيد الإسلامية

الساعة الآن 10:11 AM

تعلن شبكة التوحيد الإسلامية أنها شبكة مستقلة لا تنتمي لأي حزب أو جماعة

#### The announcement posted by the Al-Tawhid Islamic Network

In an unprecedented step, the general supervisor of Al-Falujja announced on August 13, 2010, that it [too] was closing. Some surfers wondered whether this was a temporary move or a permanent one, hoped for the forum's return, and saw the move as a severe blow to jihadist propaganda. Conversely, some surfers stressed that other forums would [continue to] spread the messages of jihad. Still other surfers saw this as a tactical decision rather than a strategic one. Yet other surfers asked Al-Falujja's administrators to publish an official announcement recommending reliable forums to which they could transfer their allegiance. In light of this thread, Al-Falujja's general supervisor announced that the forum would remain active for one more week. Later, however, an announcement was made that the forum would close on August 14, 2010.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>76</sup> <http://alfalojaweb.info/vb/showthread.php?t=129941> (Arabic).

The supervisor of Al-Falujja explained that the closure of jihadist Web forums in recent years did not mean the end of jihadist propaganda. Quite the contrary: recent events only served as an impetus to increase the glory of jihadist propaganda. He called on surfers to show determination, to continue to assist jihad and the mujahideen, and even to join the battlefield. As expected, the [majority of] surfers applauded him. But one lone surfer dared to take a stand against the closing down of Al-Falujja. He claimed that the forum's supervisors had no right to close it, since it was not their property; if they could not fulfill their duty, that was their prerogative; but in that case, responsibility for the forum should be given to others. This surfer retorted: "Where is your perseverance? Where is your determination?..."<sup>77</sup> Another supervisor asked the members of Al-Falujja to become active members only of forums authorized by the Al-Fajr Media Center.<sup>78</sup>

The furor on Al-Falujja raged. Atypically, one forum supervisor (but not the general supervisor who had announced the forum's closing) announced on August 15, 2010, that the forum would continue operating as usual. He stated that, thanks to the immense effort and cooperation of "the honest people", and a shared desire to overcome difficulties, "we have decided to continue on...until we have achieved victory...your brothers at Al-Falujja Forum". Although surfers were relieved to read this announcement, some demanded an explanation as to what had happened; the contradictory announcements were, in their words "...not fitting for a jihadist propaganda organ such as Al-Falujja". Some surfers conjectured that there had been an "overthrow" of the forum's administration, and that the general supervisor had been fired. However, another supervisor reproached them: "You needn't know everything that happens in the forum administration...there are enough problems, enough things going on, without your admonishments and nonsense...Have you forgotten all we've done for you? How swift we've been to warn you of recent infiltration into the forum?! Have you forgotten – or has someone made you forget?!...Whoever has said such things, even if he is a registered member – the necessary steps will be taken against him."

Some surfers quoted Asad Al-Jihad2, who had attacked the forum's supervisors, asking, "Since when have the supervisors of Al-Falujja fulfilled their duty to warn [us] against what they knew well and the surfers would soon know?...You have

<sup>77</sup> <http://alfalojaweb.info/vb/showthread.php?t=129989> (Arabic).

<sup>78</sup> <http://alfalojaweb.info/vb/showthread.php?t=130046> (Arabic).



invented a huge, false plot". Asad Al-Jihad2 noted that the Al-Fajr Media Center had ceased publishing its materials on the forum. Some surfers attacked Asad Al-Jihad2, even daring to intimate that he was revealing his hatred for the forum and urging him to "Scram! Jihad at this stage has no need of people like you!". They cautioned him not to bear a grudge against the forum for removing his criticisms against its supervisors. The general supervisor himself joined the melee against Asad Al-Jihad2; he referred Asad Al-Jihad2 to Al-Shumukh, saying that the Al-Fajr Media Center did not publish its materials under its name on that forum, but that there was a representative [murasil] of Al-Shumukh who was responsible for disseminating materials on the forum. Deviating from his usual stance, the general supervisor rebuked Asad Al-Jihad2: "[You make] false statements...there are things you do not know...this proves you do not follow jihadist forums and are not well-versed in what goes on there". The discussion continued on, until at last the general supervisor decided that it had exceeded the limits of good taste and, on the night of August 15<sup>th</sup>, announced that it was closed for good. For offensive comments against Asad Al-Jihad2, he admitted that he, too, had been excessive in his criticism.<sup>79</sup>

In early September 2010, the administrators of Al-Falujja announced its final, ultimate closure on Al-Shumukh,<sup>80</sup> which has since taken its place. As of this writing [January 2012], Al-Shumukh Al-Islam is the leading Web forum in the arena of jihadist propaganda.

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It is worth backtracking a bit to cite an interesting discussion which appeared around the same time as Asad Al-Jihad2's initial comments, in April 2010, and which concerned the essence of the forums. The supervisor of Al-Falujja noted that he had been one of the first to join the jihadist Web forums, and "wondered aloud" whether they were a means to an end, or the end itself. This supervisor claimed that the forums were a gift from God, a means of helping the mujahideen, and a springboard to jihad through sacrifice – whether of one's savings or one's life. The forums inspired each and every individual who surfed them to watch video clips of the mujahideen, read threads urging participation in jihad, and love the sacrifice of one's life. In effect, the forums could help one realize the lofty goal of jihad for Allah.

<sup>79</sup> <http://alfalojaweb.info/vb/showthread.php?t=130106> (Arabic).

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=70526> (Arabic).

This supervisor recalled that many mujahideen had fought against the Russians in Chechnya and Bosnia-Herzegovina, without the aid of jihadist Web forums. Muhammad Atta, one of the senior terrorists who carried out the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, had not been a prominent contributor to the forums, but had decided to help Islam by sacrificing his blood. In sum, the supervisor opined, time spent on jihadist Web forums is an intermediate stage, in which one can overcome the difficulties and obstacles one can expect to encounter at the next, important stage of jihad on the battlefield. He added that the forums should be "productive" and not "wasteful"; that is, they should be a passageway to the outside world. While engaged with the forums, one should post and disseminate, participate in "workshops", design jihadist banners, participate in discussions about religious law, contribute, clarify the facts, even upload audio files and video clips.<sup>81</sup>

Even earlier, in January 2008, a surfer had raised the question of whether jihadist web forums were indeed "jihadist". Do forums that present themselves as a mouthpiece for the mujahideen, that publish their announcements and video clips, indeed represent them? One surfer succinctly summarized the matter thus: no forum speaks for the mujahideen. It is the media outlets, such as As-Sahab in Afghanistan and Al-Furqan in the Islamic State of Iraq, that speak for them. The forums are called "jihadist" because they constantly post news of the mujahideen. Those responsible for these forums walk the straight path, and devote their time to Islam and jihad, after having been abandoned by the satellite stations, which have joined the path of the West. But the threads that appear on jihadist Web forums do not reflect the opinions of forum administrators; moreover, they do not necessarily represent the ideas of the mujahideen. True, most forum contributors defend the mujahideen. Yet every forum is full of anonymous members, who hold a plurality of opinions and ideas. In sum, this surfer wrote, the forums give voice to the mujahideen. Yet if one were to search for the publications of the mujahideen on Google, he would find them on thousands of general sites and forums, which cannot be said to represent the mujahideen or speak in their name. Other surfers explained that some forums have "propaganda mujahideen". One such was a former supervisor

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<sup>81</sup> <http://alfalojaweb.info/vb/showthread.php?t=113616> (Arabic).

of Al-Ansar, known as Irhabi 007 [Terrorist 007], who was trapped in Britain and sentenced to ten years in prison.<sup>82</sup>



**Irhabi [Terrorist] 007**

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?t=275061> (Arabic).

## Summary

It may be concluded that jihadist Web forums are the leading propaganda mechanism of the jihadist organizations currently huddled under the umbrella of Al-Qaeda. These forums are a well-oiled means of sending jihadist messages that have widespread resonance, and of imparting the security and self-defense measures necessary to ensuring their dissemination.





The desire to continue to transmit the message of jihad has alerted the people behind these forums to the efforts of foreign intelligence services to infiltrate them, in an attempt to shoot down adherents to jihadist ideology and stop potential suicide attackers in their tracks. It is this that has led to the extensive dialogue on how to protect oneself and maintain security, technologically and through increased awareness, which in turn has kept jihadist Web forums alive, despite all obstacles.





**Appendix I: Leading Jihadist Forums in Arabic, as of November 2011**

Forum Name	Logo	Current Address (URL)	Explanation
Shumukh Al-Islam		<a href="http://shamikh.info/vb">http://shamikh.info/vb</a>	At present, Shumukh Al-Islam is the most prominent jihadist Web. With some 16,000 members, Al-Shumukh is considered a general jihadist forum, which covers all arenas of jihad. It is updated throughout the day.
Ansar Al-Mujahideen		<a href="http://www.ansar.com/vb/index.php">http://www.ansar.com/vb/index.php</a>	Ansar Al-Mujahideen is currently considered a key forum. In addition to an Arabic-language Web site, the forum runs an English-language site, available at <a href="http://www.ansar1.info">www.ansar1.info</a> . This general forum is updated daily.
Atahadi		<a href="http://www.atahadi.net/vb/index.php">http://www.atahadi.net/vb/index.php</a>	Al-Tahadi is a leading jihadist forum, with 9,500 members. Also considered a "generalist" forum, it covers all arenas of jihad. Apparently, it is operated out of Bulgaria.
Hanein		<a href="http://hanein.info/vb">http://hanein.info/vb</a>	Hanein covers all arenas of jihad, but stresses events in Iraq. Although it lists only 60 members, it is an extremely active site, and is updated constantly. Most of its items are informative. Apparently, it operates out of the US.

**Appendix I con't.**

Forum Name	Logo	Current Address (URL)	Explanation
Al-Jahafil		<a href="http://al-jahafal.com/vb/">http://al-jahafal.com/vb/</a>	Al-Jahafil is considered a generalist forum, which emphasizes events in North Africa, especially Algeria. Its reports are primarily informative. The forum appears to be operated out of Malaysia, and has 6,500 registered members.
Al-Jihad Al-'Alami		<a href="http://aljihad.com/vb/">http://aljihad.com/vb/</a>	A relatively new forum, Al-Jihad Al-'Alami was established in February 2011. It has 1,300 members, and covers all arenas of jihad.
Al-Qimmah		<a href="http://alqimmah.net/">http://alqimmah.net/</a>	Al-Qimmah has over 19,000 members; its primary language is Somali, with Arabic as a secondary language. The forum focuses on events in Somalia. Updated daily, the forum is apparently operated out of Denmark.
Sanam Al-Islam		<a href="http://www.snam-s.net/vb/">http://www.snam-s.net/vb/</a>	Sanam Al-Islam is a relatively new forum, with over 900 registered members. A generalist forum, it frequently posts informative news from all arenas of jihad.

Appendix II: Key Media Outlets of Global Jihad, as of November 2011


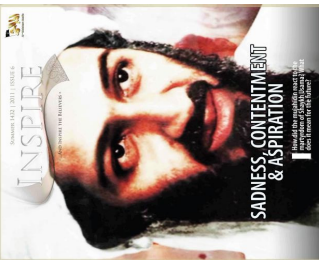
Name of Media Outlet	Logo	Organizational Affiliation	Details
Al-Fajr		The general leadership of Al-Qaeda	Al-Fajr is the official media outlet of Al-Qaeda's leadership, and is responsible for disseminating the official written documents of Al-Qaeda's branches worldwide.
As-Sahab		The general leadership of Al-Qaeda	As-Sahab is another official media outlet of Al-Qaeda, and is responsible for publishing its leadership's visual communications.
Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF)		The general leadership of Al-Qaeda	The GIMF is an official media outlet of Al-Qaeda's leadership, responsible for publishing its visual and written communications.
Islamic Emirate		Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan	This media outlet is responsible for the visual communications, announcements, and magazines of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan.
Al-Furqan		The Islamic State of Iraq	Al-Furqan is responsible for all communications issued by the Islamic State of Iraq.
Al-Malahem		Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	Al-Malahem is responsible for AQAP's visual communications and announcements, as well as for its magazine, <i>Sada Al-Malahem</i> .

## Appendix II con't.


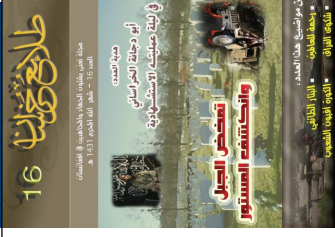
Name of Media Outlet	Logo	Organizational Affiliation	Details
Al-Andalus		Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)	Al-Andalus is responsible for all of AQIM's publications.
Sawt Al-Qoqaz		The Islamic Emirate in the Caucasus	This media outlet is responsible for all publications of the Islamic Emirate in the Caucasus.
Al-Kataib		Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen	This media outlet is responsible for the publications of Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen, which is active in Somalia.
Sawt Al-Islam		Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)	This media outlet is responsible for the publications of the TIP, including the Party's periodical, which has been published since 2008.



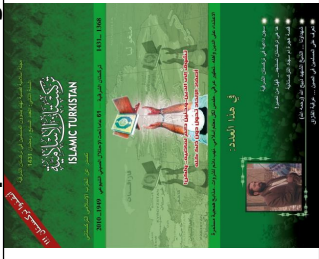

**Appendix III: Leading Jihadist Magazines, as of November 2011**

Name of Magazine	Sample Cover Page	Organizational Affiliation	Details
Sada Al-Malahem		Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	Published since January 2008
Inspire		Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	An English-language jihadist magazine, published since summer 2010.

**Appendix III con't.**

Name of Magazine	Sample Cover Page	Organizational Affiliation	Details
<p><i>Al-Somood</i></p>		<p>Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan</p>	<p>Published by the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan since July 2006.</p>
<p><i>Talaye Khorasan</i></p>		<p>Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan</p>	<p>Published by the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan since July 2005.</p>

**Appendix III con't.**

Name of Magazine	Sample Cover Page	Organizational Affiliation	Details
<p><i>Islamic Turkistan</i></p>		<p>Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)</p>	<p>Published since July 2008.</p>
<p><i>Al-Waqa</i></p>		<p>General, covering all arenas of jihad</p>	<p>Collates items from the international media on Global Jihad, in all its arenas.</p>