

BEHIND THE SCENES OF VIRTUAL JIHAD IV

JIHADI MEDIA: A GLOBAL PRODUCTION OF LOCAL NEWS



By Eli Alshech * & Jacob Apelbaum * | Inquiry & Analysis # 592 | March 03, 2010

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Published in 2010 in the United States of America by
The Middle East Media Research Institute,
P.O. Box 27837,
Washington, D.C., 20038-7837

www.memri.org

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Introduction

In the past two years there has been a surge in the quality and quantity of jihadi media, as is evident from the numerous texts, films, and images distributed by Islamist websites on a daily basis. What started as a small group of jihadi media organizations has, within several years, mushroomed into a vast network of regional jihadi media branches throughout the Islamic world, Asia, and Europe. Surprisingly, these secondary jihad news outlets, which claim to operate independently from each other and autonomously from the global major jihad news outlets, have exhibited no learning curve. On the contrary; the professional quality of their news productions is

indistinguishable from that of most Middle Eastern mainstream broadcast media right from the outset. Moreover, the films that they purportedly created on their own are uniform in both style and content and conform to existing commercial media standards.

The purpose of this article is to show that despite their implicit or explicit claims of independence, the jihad media outlets, whether global or local, are operating under an umbrella organization and coordinated media network which resembles a large news cooperation, rather than local grassroots jihadi cells.

The Jihadi Media Network

Currently, four primary media organizations generate the majority of the original and high-end jihadist materials: Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), Al-Furqan, Al-Fajr, and Al-Sahab. In terms of scope and

outreach, these organizations emulate the operational models of large news networks such as the BBC, France 2, and Al-Jazeera.

#	Logo	Organization Name
1		Global Islamic Media Front
2		Al-Furqan
3		Al-Fajr
4		Al-Sahab

Figure 1: The four main jihadi media producers

Aside from these four media organizations, which monopolize the mainstream jihadi media landscape (**Figure 1**), there is a multitude of smaller media organizations that ostensibly act as independent producers of jihadi material (**Figure 2**). Over the past few years, many of these previously unknown entities have begun producing regional content, specializing

mainly in low visibility conflict areas. The content generated by these secondary media organizations encompasses multiple subjects, such as field operations, news releases, etc. The content is carefully scripted and edited to reasonable broadcast standards, and is almost always intended for multilingual audiences.

#	Logo	Organization Name	#	Logo	Organization Name
1		Al-Andalus	10		Shield of Islam Brigades
2		Al-Ansar	11		The Jihad Media Battalion
3		Al-Malahim	12		Hizb Al-Islam of Turkistan Media Center
4		Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	13		Leemedia Network
5		Al-Yaqeen Media	14		Manba' Al-Jihad
6		Islamic Party of Turkistan	15		Nida Al-Jihad Center for Media Production
7		Jaysh Al-Islam	16		Taifetul Mansura
8		Abdullah Azzam Brigades	17		Jama'at Al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad
9		Kataib Siham Al-Haqq			

Figure 2: Secondary jihadi media producers and distributors

ردود المنتدى	أخر تحديث	التصنيف	مواضيع المنتدى : منتديات ومسابقات ومراسلات المناهجين
577	26	مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس	مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21] مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21] مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21]
1,706	30	مؤسسة جبهة القوي	مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21] مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21] مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21]
316	14	مؤسسة سفينة المصطفى	مؤسسة سفينة المصطفى [21] مؤسسة سفينة المصطفى [21] مؤسسة سفينة المصطفى [21]
361	23	مؤسسة جبهة القوي	مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21] مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21] مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21]
1,328	29	مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس	مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21] مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21] مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21]
643	25	مؤسسة قاضي القضاة	مؤسسة قاضي القضاة [21] مؤسسة قاضي القضاة [21] مؤسسة قاضي القضاة [21]
2,295	43	مؤسسة قاضي القضاة	مؤسسة قاضي القضاة [21] مؤسسة قاضي القضاة [21] مؤسسة قاضي القضاة [21]
900	38	مؤسسة جبهة القوي	مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21] مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21] مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21]
4,816	52	مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس	مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21] مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21] مؤسسة كوفية للتحسيس [21]
2,811	41	مؤسسة جبهة القوي	مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21] مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21] مؤسسة جبهة القوي [21]

Figure 3: A snapshot from Al-Fallujah jihadist forum

Usage of Traditional Media Content Distribution

Though the secondary jihadi news outlets (SJNO) appear to brand the media as their own, the evidence raises doubts regarding the actual independence of these organizations. As autonomous local media producers and distributors with a limited budget, we would expect SJNO to utilize only low cost and free technologies such as video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube and LiveLeak), third-party websites (i.e. free file-hosting websites), and blogs to distribute their own material independently – particularly in the era of Web 2.0-3.0 publication technology,¹ and widespread interactive social media platforms. Yet, often SJNO have their films and texts distributed simultaneously, by multiple outlets, via expensive broadcast channels.



Figure 4: Al-Rai TV broadcast of Al-Ansar



Figure 5: Al-Zawraa TV broadcast

A case in point is Zawraa TV,² which later became Al-Rai TV.³ This Syrian-based channel, owned by Mish'an Al-Jabouri,⁴ transmits looped satellite programming focusing mainly on pro-Sunni, anti-Shi'ite propaganda, and broadcasts 24/7 footage, including violent attacks by local jihad organizations against U.S. soldiers. The channel makes no effort to hide its affiliation with the jihadi groups, as logos of the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI) and other jihad organizations periodically appear on its footage and films.⁵ Clearly, relations between Al-Rai and the SJNO whose products the channel broadcasts are not the typical economic relations one would expect to find between a commercial TV station and an advertising entity or small news organization. If Al-Rai TV were true commercial for profit television, broadcasting through it would have not been economically feasible for the SJNO. The fact that the channel mostly devotes itself to broadcasting SJNO video suggests that the relationship between the two is more intimate.

The Presence and Significance of Metadata in Jihadi Archives

The presence of metadata in the jihadi film archive is another indication that the videos are intended for broadcast, and not merely for online circulation. Metadata, which is attached to films, consist of digital information intended to describe and identify the media, similar to information a library would attach to a book in its catalogue to describe and identify it. In the case of jihadi films, the metadata usually consist of the media title, a short abstract, the name of the organization, the date of the event, the film's duration, the logo of the producing organization, and other information.

Adding such data in post production is an extremely time-consuming undertaking, considering the hundreds of films jihadists produce annually. Such an effort would only make sense in the context of a well-established archival and information managed system, as is typical of a larger media organization. For large digital archives, metadata are crucial, as they allow easy access to the films in the future and provide a brief summary of each one's content so that there is no need to look at the film itself. For local media branches, creating metadata would be waste of time and resources, just as creating a full cataloging system would be entirely unjustifiable for the private individual with an average-size home library.

The Formatting and Packaging of the Jihadi Films

Evidence of how the jihad films are packaged and produced further supports the assumption that these videos are designed for broadcasting, and thus are most likely created by large media organizations. Videos of IED attacks, for example, have all the necessary "ingredients" for primetime broadcasting. They are high quality; they are very short (up to 90 seconds); and they include all the crucial background information about the organization carrying out the attack as well as about the attack itself. In a sense, they are created as self-contained products made to fit a very rigid television programming schedule. Such a format would be unnecessary if the films were intended for distribution in cyberspace, where video clips can be uploaded and viewed in many formats, lengths, and qualities.

Another feature which makes it unlikely that the videos are produced by local media branches is the fact that their content is produced in multiple languages (i.e. Arabic, English, French, German, etc.), packaged in varying formats (i.e. Windows Media Player, Quick Time, RealPlayer, etc.) and recorded for diverse narrowcasting⁶ and audiences (in a wide range of formats and sizes, for high-speed Internet, dialup connections, embedded use, and mobile devices). Such complex, professional, and very expensive production would be prohibitive for field jihad outlets. Moreover, for local jihadi groups which simply wish to publicize their successes, such cutting-edge production would be superfluous, as they could achieve their goal by relying on video-sharing sites or jihad forums for posting their films.

The Uniformity of the Jihadi Films' Media Structure

The uniformity of the various media elements, such as titles, credits, transitions, and duration, also indicates that the material is produced under the auspices of one or more large, centralized, and standard-conscious organizations. The following video clips, presenting IED attacks, illustrate some of these uniform elements.

 Media Outlet: Al-Furqan Media Production			
Clip Number:	1	Clip Number:	2
Clip Title:	Destroying a US Hummer in Ramadi	Clip Title:	IED vs. 2 Iraqi Army Humvees - Baghdad
Duration:	01:04	Duration:	01:05
Release Date:	28/01/2007	Release Date:	22/08/2008
			
Clip Number:	3		
Clip Title:	IEDs on American Foot Patrol - Anbar		
Release Date:	18/05/2007		
Duration:	01:08		
			

 Media Outlet: Al-Ansar Media Foundation			
Clip Number:	4	Clip Number:	5
Clip Title:	<u>IED US Tank - Ninawa Province - Mosul</u>	Clip Title:	<u>IED on an Army Hammer - Mosul</u>
Duration:	00:58	Duration:	01:03
Release Date:	28/12/2008	Release Date:	03/01/2010
			
Clip Number:	6		
Clip Title:	<u>IED vs. US Minesweeper - Ninawa Mosul</u>		
Release Date:	28/12/2008		
Duration:	00:52		
			

 Media Outlet: As-Sahab Media Production			
Clip Number:	7	Clip Number:	8
Clip Title:	<u>IED on Afghan Army Car- Metshedad</u>	Clip Title:	<u>Powerful IED Strike Destroys US Humvee</u>
Duration:	01:00	Duration:	00:43
Release Date:	26/03/2008	Release Date:	07/08/2008
			
Clip Number:	9		
Clip Title:	<u>Powerful IED Strike Destroys US Humvee</u>		
Duration:	00:43		
Release Date:	07/08/2008		
			

 Media Outlet: Al-Andalus Media Production	
Clip Number:	10
Clip Title:	<u>Three IEDs on the Algerian Army</u>
Duration:	08:04 (3 movies 1.15 minutes each)
Release Date:	14/10/ 2009
	

Clip #	Introduction	Special Effects	Titles	Abstract	Captions	Transitions	Clip Length	Logo Placement	Credits
1	x	x	x	x	x	x	64 seconds	x	x
2	x	x	x	x	x	x	65 seconds	x	x
3	x	x	x	x	x	x	68 seconds	x	x
4	x	x	x	x	x	x	58 seconds	x	x
5	x	x	x	x	x	x	63 seconds	x	x
6	x	x	x	x	x	x	52 seconds	x	x
7	x	x	x	x	x	x	60 seconds	x	x
8	x	x	x	x	x	x	43 seconds	x	-
9	x	x	x	x	x	x	88 seconds	x	x
10	x	x	x	x	-	x	75 seconds	x	x

Figure 6: Video clip elements

As can be seen in Figures 7a and 7b, a comparison of films of similar genre (attacks using IEDs), produced by three ostensibly distinct and geographically remote jihadi media outlets, reveals a high level of similarity. The films' length in all cases is approximately 90

seconds. All clips open with high impact and artistic logos and animation. Each frame's duration prior to the transition is carefully timed, with the initial intro followed by special effect screens and the clip title.

Source	Logo & Branding	Special Effects	Titles & Captions
Al-Tawhid W-Al-Jihad (Gaza)			
Al-Furqan (Iraq)			
Al-Andalus (Algeria)			

Figure 7a: Video editing, production, and structure

Event Title:	<u>IED on an American Hummer</u>	Event Title:	<u>Shooting a F16 US Plane</u>
Event Date:	14/11/2006	Event Date:	27/11/2006
Publication Date:	23/05/2007	Publication Date:	13/09/2007
	 <u>Mario D. Gonzalez</u>		 <u>Troy Gilbert</u>

Figure 8: Media event date vs. media event publication

Is There a Global Jihadi Media Policy?

Evidence suggests that media jihad follows a global policy. For example, a "Media Exuberance" document released by the Al-Boraq media group on September 21, 2006 indicates that jihad media production abides by legal mandates and guides regarding plagiarism, alteration of content, source crediting, and media

usage. This strongly implies the existence of an umbrella organization which sets rules and professional standards aimed at better message control and brand building, and reinforces further the trans-regional production/supervision theory.⁷

Centralized or Independent Media Production?

The frequent adherence to traditional content distribution of jihadi media, as opposed to reliance on low cost or free Web 2.0-3.0 publication platforms such as wikis, blogs and mashups, as well as the creation of metadata, the expensive and sophisticated contents packaging, the uniform appearance of the various media elements, the staged publication schedule, and the apparent global jihad media policy all suggest that what is ostensibly a production by local and independent jihad media entities could in fact mask a spoke and hub centralized organizational structure.

In this scenario, a patchwork of regional field offices and cells maintain territorial presence in various parts of the world, (Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Gaza), collecting raw footage. They upload the raw media to centralized media studios – either state-sponsored or private – which process and brand it accordingly, and distribute it to the appropriate regional media outlets. The production and branding, however, is virtual, and is carried out remotely in well-equipped and safe locations.

this point. According to information in the media, regional Al-Furqan teams gathered the raw material from various provinces in Iraq and passed it on to a larger Iraqi Al-Furqan media hub for processing. Surprisingly, this media hub, which contained an enormous amount of media storage equipment, (65 hard drives, containing terabytes of electronic files, 18 thumb drives, over 500 CDs, and 12 standalone computers), did not have the proper editing equipment that one would expect to find in a media center that creates films on the advanced level of the Al-Furqan videos.⁸

The captured equipment, (details of which were reported by the spokesman of the multi-national force in Iraq), appears to be more for field packaging and distribution of copies of existing product rather than for creating the master media itself. This equipment could not have independently produced the Al-Furqan films, which contain blue-screen editing, multi-frame

The 2007 arrest of members of the Al-Furqan media organization by U.S. forces may demonstrate

overlays, spliced third-party archival material, usage of multiple soundtracks, and the ability to blur selected facial features—editing features and techniques which require sophisticated equipment usually only found in larger production studios.

The case of Said Namouh, a Moroccan-born Canadian citizen arrested and convicted as a member of the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), offers important insight into how local jihadi news is produced in more of a global fashion.⁹ According to the court documents, Namouh spent countless hours translating, mixing, repackaging, and distributing numerous videos from diverse geographical locations that included images of attacks against coalition soldiers and of suicide bombings.¹⁰

After his arrest, investigators found videos and other propaganda materials on his computer. It emerged that he had been in charge of publishing video and materials related to Iraqi, Austrian, German, and Gaza terror activities (such as the kidnapping of BBC journalist Alan Johnston¹¹ by a Palestinian group known as the Army of Islam).¹²

The question, however, remains: Who are the state(s) sponsors or large commercial news

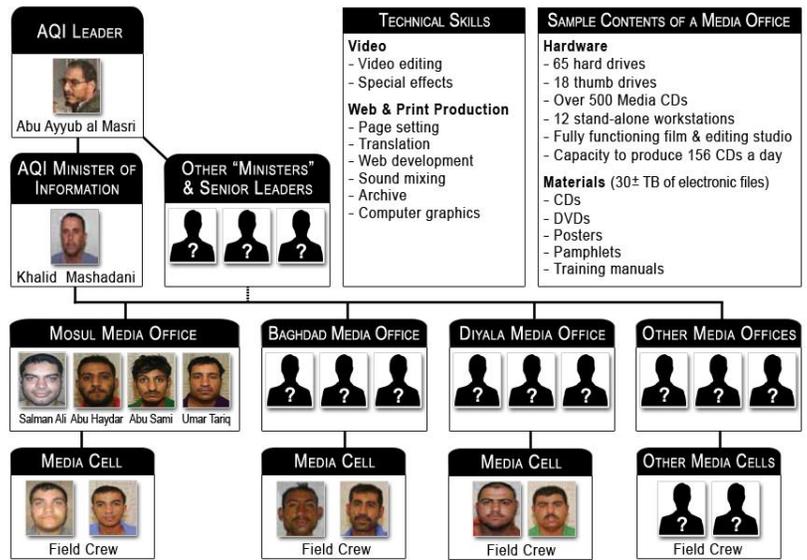


Figure 9: Structure of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) media organizations

organizations behind these global media productions? The data at hand does not provide a single answer. Nevertheless, the cases of Al-Zawraa TV and Al-Rai TV provide important hints of how international media and news outlets that utilize multinational satellite broadcasting networks are operating in the service of jihadi organizations, undoubtedly with the full approval or perhaps even the active sponsorship of jihadi-sympathetic states.

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¹ i.e. Wikis, blogs, and mashups. Mashup is an architecture for content aggregation often from multiple non related sources into a single presentation framework.
² Al-Zawraa TV, the pro-Sunni satellite television channel owned by former Iraqi MP Mish'an Al-Jabouri, broadcast via satellites operated by the Riyadh-based Arabsat.
³ Al-Rai TV broadcasts from Syria via the Eurobird 2 satellite, which belongs to the European Eutelsat company, as well as via the Atlantic Bird 4 satellite, which also belongs to Eutelsat, but was leased in September 2005 to the Egyptian Nilesat company, and is now called Nilesat 103.
⁴ Channel owner Mish'an Al-Jabouri is known to have close operational and financial links to insurgency groups in Iraq.
⁵ See MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 2054, "In the Footsteps of Al-Zawraa TV, a Channel Affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Saddam Regime Broadcasts Anti-U.S. Terror Attacks – This Time from Syria," September 17, 2008, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/3123.htm>
⁶ Dissemination of information (usually by radio or television) to a narrow audience, not to the general public.
⁷ See a September 21, 2006 study by the Al-Buraq media group titled "Media Exuberance." <http://alboraq.info/showthread.php?p=17151>
⁸ http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/10/us_targets_al_qaedas.php
⁹ <http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=277590>
¹⁰ <http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=277590>
¹¹ http://globaljihad.net/view_page.asp?id=359
¹² http://globaljihad.net/view_page.asp?id=359