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Citation

Meijer, R. (2005). Jihadi Opposition in Saudi Arabia. *Isim Review*, 15(1), 16-16. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/16974>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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Who are the 48 men on the two lists published by the Saudi authorities of most wanted terrorists (the "List of 19" and the "List of 26") and the list of the twelve who had died in the first suicide attack in Riyadh on 12 May by the al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP)? The place of origin and tribal background of the QAP members listed in these lists is highly diverse, but it is noticeable that at least thirteen lived in Riyadh, with nine of them in the Suwaydi quarter which appears to be the hotbed of the movement.

The social background of the members is more difficult to ascertain because not all lists contain the necessary information. Some have an upper-middle class background (their fathers being dentists, high-ranking civil servants, and police officers), and a few have a lower middle class background. Remarkably, quite a number were married, including those who lost their lives in the suicide bombings in Riyadh. One of the most striking features of the group is their youth with 27 being their average age. The four leaders who belong to the "second generation" of al-Qa'ida were in their early thirties, while most of their followers were younger, some of them as young as 22. Moreover, the average age of the members of one of the QAP cells, the "Khalidyya cell," located in Mecca, was only nineteen.

Educational Background

QAP also shows an interesting picture both in terms of the level and kind of education of its members. Whereas the non-violent Islamist movement is typically a student movement, only eighteen of the listed members had a higher education and only ten of these had acquired a degree. Quite a few did not even have a secondary school certificate. None of the four leaders of the movement finished secondary school.

The type of education of the QAP members is also remarkable. While supporters of Islamist movements very often have a background in

Since May 2003 Saudi Arabia has been the scene of an armed confrontation between al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP) and the State. The Saudi authorities issued three lists of suspects who were either wanted or already killed. These lists provide some insight into the background of QAP members and the nature of the organization.'

the technical and natural sciences or in medicine, this was the case for only two of the listed QAP members, while at least twelve had enjoyed a religious higher education. Most of them studied at the Imam Muhammad bin Sa'ud Islamic University in Riyadh. This rooting in religious studies also explains why the formulation and spreading of

ideology plays such an important role in this group. While most members were coined "foot soldiers" (*muqatilin maydaniyyin*), nine were called "sharia theoreticians" (*munazzarin shari'iyyin*). It was this small group of "intellectuals" that wrote the articles for QAP's bi-monthly internet-magazine, *Sawt al-Jihad* and, thereby, spread the group's ideas of jihad amongst a large audience.

Afghanistan

The one common characteristic of the QAP members was their connection with Afghanistan. Nearly half of the persons listed had been in training camps in Afghanistan and at a very young age. The first three leaders had gone there when still in their teens, and the third leader, 'Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, "Abu Hajir," when he was 17 years old. Later he became a trainer himself and left Afghanistan to fight in Algeria, Bosnia, and Somalia. The first leader, Yusuf al-Ayiri, was trained in Afghanistan during the early 1990s, while the second leader, Khalid Hajj, "Abu Hazim al-Sha'ir," had probably been there at a later date. At least ten from the younger generation either fought side by side with the Taliban or with Osama bin Laden in the caves of Tora Bora against the Americans when they were still in their teens or early twenties. It may very well be that these probably traumatic experiences, together with the Saudi endorsement of the American demolition of the Taliban, led them to add to their struggle against the "external enemy," the United States, a struggle against the "internal enemy," Saudi Arabia.

Finally, there has been considerable debate on the organization of al-Qaida. Some commentators regard it as a loose network with no central command structure. This evaluation may apply more to al-Qaida on the international than on the local level. For, although it is not clear how the Saudi "cells" are linked, the information available from the three official lists points to a hierarchical organization. It seems clear that the QAP had a leadership, a propaganda and a sharia committee, as well as subordinate military cells. This structure suffered, however, severe blows during the first clampdown. The ensuing disarray within the movement could account for the diversity in tactics, ranging from suicide bombings of foreign resident compounds to bombings of state buildings, to the random killing of foreigners in the street. To what extent the network is still able to mobilize its sympathizers is a moot point, but it seems unlikely that the attacks in Jeddah in December 2004 concludes the series clashes with the Saudi state.

Note

1. The information herein was collected from Arabic newspapers and corroborated with the information gathered from *Sawt al-Jihad*, the web-publication of QAP.

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A hooded man on an Islamist website purporting to be "Abu Hajir", 16 June 2004.

