



The Face of Iraqi Terrorism

(Published in [Weekly Standard](#), A new study shows where the foreign fighters in Iraq are coming from. Care to guess? 03/04/2005)

Stephen Schwartz

Colaboraciones n° 278

March 9, 2005

For months, a behind-the-scenes, seldom-mentioned debate has raged in the West, over the origins of the "foreign fighters" attacking the U.S., coalition, and local anti-jihadist forces in Iraq. Some, including Saudi dissidents like Ali al-Ahmed of the [Saudi Institute](#) and myself, have suspected Iraq's dangerous southern neighbor, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, of being the main source.

Our evidence often seemed thin. We cited the repeated calls by hundreds of Saudi clerics for volunteers to go north of the unpatrolled border to kill themselves and others. We circulated translations and photographs of Saudi "martyrs" whose biographies appeared in the kingdom's print media and on websites.

But official opacity was maintained in the West. In mainstream media and government statements, the jihadist killers were never identified, beyond noting that they were foreign.

Now we have real evidence, and the verdict still points south of the Iraqi border.

The Global Research in International Affairs Center in Israel, a highly reputable and reliable think-tank, has published a paper titled "Arab volunteers killed in Iraq: an Analysis," available at [e-prism.org](#). Authored by Dr. Reuven Paz, the paper analyzes the origins of 154 Arab jihadists killed in Iraq in the last six months, whose names have been posted on Islamist websites.

The sample does not account for all jihadists in Iraq, but provides a useful and eye-opening profile of them. Saudi Arabia accounted for 94 jihadists, or 61 percent of the sample, followed by Syria with 16 (10 percent), Iraq itself with only 13 (8 percent), and Kuwait with 11 (7 percent.) The rest included small numbers from Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Algeria, Morocco (of which one was a resident in Spain), Yemen, Tunisia, the Palestinian territories (only 1), Dubai, and Sudan. The Sudanese was living in Saudi Arabia before he went to die in Iraq.

The names of most of the dead appeared on the websites after the battle of Falluja, and they were all supporters of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and al Qaeda.

Of the 94 Saudis, 61 originated in the region of Najd, known as the heartland of the Wahhabis. The total of 154 included 33 suicide terrorists, of whom 23 were Saudis (with 10 from Najd). Given that Najdis make up 43.5 percent of Saudi suicide bombers in Iraq, and 65 percent of all Saudi jihadists on the list, Paz concludes that the "Wahhabi doctrines of Najd--the heart of Wahhabism--remain highly effective."

Paz emphasizes that "the support for violent Jihad in Iraq against the Americans was encouraged by the Saudi Islamic establishment." But he also offers some interesting observations:

- "Jihadi volunteers constitute a significant portion of the Sunni insurgents," suggesting that referring to the

terrorists as if they represented Sunnis in general, or were merely guerrillas opposed to a foreign invader, is inaccurate.

- "Another element to note is the relatively small number of Iraqis involved in the fighting on behalf of the Zarqawi group."
- "Particularly striking . . . is the absence of Egyptians among foreign Arab volunteers [in] Iraq, even though Egypt is the largest Arab country, with millions of sympathizers of Islamist groups." Paz notes that Egyptians were previously prominent as fighters in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Chechnya. He ascribes the failure of Egyptians to enlist in the Iraqi jihad to a combination of the decline of Islamist influence in Egypt, effective Egyptian government action against jihadism, and orders from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt not to participate physically in the Iraqi jihad.

The predominance of Saudis in Iraqi terrorism also goes a long way toward explaining the other fact that Western media and government have been reluctant to admit: the role of Wahhabism as an inciter of violence against Shias. Wahhabis hate Shias even more than Christians and Jews, because, as Saudi schools (including those like the Islamic Saudi Academy in the United States) teach, Christians and Jews have their own religions that are openly opposed to Islam, but Shias want to "change Islam," which

the Wahhabis consider the personal property of the Saudi rulers. Few in the West seemed to notice earlier this week when 2,000 people assembled in Hilla, near Baghdad, to protest a car bombing that killed at least 125. The demonstrators [chanted](#) "No to terrorism! No to Baathism and Wahhabism!"

Paz concludes his study with words difficult to surpass for their clarity and relevance: "The intensive involvement of Saudi volunteers for Jihad in Iraq is ... the result of the Saudi government's doublespeak, whereby it is willing to fight terrorism, but only if directly affected by it

on its own soil. Saudi Arabia is either deliberately ignoring, or incapable and too weak, to engage in open and brave opposition to Jihadi terrorism outside of the Kingdom... Their blind eyes in the face of the Saudi Islamic establishment's support of the Jihad in Iraq may pose a greater threat in the future, as the hundreds of volunteers return home."

Only one thing needs to be added: it's time to close Saudi Arabia's northern border, silence the jihadist preachers, and cut off the financing of international Wahhabism.

Stephen Schwartz is the author of *The Two Faces of Islam*.

