



## Is Al Qaeda Iraq a Threat to Sweden?

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The leader of al Qaeda in Iraq recently offered a bounty encouraging the assassination of a Swedish cartoonist and his editor for having published drawings deemed insulting to the religion of Islam. Omar al Baghdadi, in an audio statement said Lars Vilks, who "dared insult the Prophet", should be killed for a reward of \$100,000 and, if "slaughtered like a lamb", the killer will receive another \$50,000. In addition, he offered a Jihadi financial reward of \$50,000 for the murder of Ulf Johansson, the editor of *Nerikes Allehanda*, the Swedish paper that printed Vilks' cartoon on August 19.

In the context of Global Jihadism, this second cartoon drama -- after last year's Danish cartoon crisis - displays a dimension very relevant to the ongoing War on Terror. In-

deed, the identity of the threat issuer is important, because it is al Qaeda *in Iraq*. This development should send a significant message into the American and international debates about that conflict, especially as a significant faction within the US Congress, some of whom claim that Iraq is fighting only a civil war, is pressing for a rapid withdrawal of US troops.

What the "Jihad bounty" tells us loud and clear is this: al Qaeda's operation in Iraq is not, nor will it be, "only" about an American, Western or international presence. As the AQI press release shows, there is clear evidence that those who are beheading, killing, maiming, kidnapping and blowing up people and things in the Sunni Triangle and in

the rest of Iraq have an agenda of international violence.

Iraq is merely their launching pad.

Regardless of whether one admires the common sense or deplors the bad taste of the cartoons published this summer in the Swedish *Nerikes Allehanda*, or last year in the Danish *Jyllands-Posten*, why would al Qaeda Iraq -- and not international, European, or even Scandinavian al Qaeda -- initiate the release? Aren't the other branches ideologically "insulted" too?

The answer is simple: The Iraqi branch of al Qaeda is using a cartoon published in Sweden, "deep inside infidel land", to tell the world, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, that the emirate they want to build in Iraq -- with blood and death -- will have very long arms, capable of reaching Europe, America and beyond. Indeed, the logic of the release is not about "defending Iraq from occupiers" as claim many critics, but it's about punishing anyone who insults their religion anywhere around the world, with money -- and maybe suicide bombers -- coming from Iraq.

The Swedish cartoon, perhaps deemed offensive to devout Muslims, can be responded to in many forums and possibly in front of courts, depending on Swedish law. But al Baghdadi is telling us clearly that he and his ilk will determine whether an offense has taken place and, if so, how they will execute the offending artist as well as others involved and, as he said in his dec-

laration, punish the entire country and its financial interests around the globe too.

Thus, Al Qaeda Iraq is an *international* Jihadi operation which will -- and now has demonstrated clearly that it would -- strike thousands of miles away from Iraq to satisfy its ideological vision of the world. For if tomorrow another "insult" is seen in London, Paris, New York, or Moscow, the terrorists of al Qaeda Iraq will fund and direct violence against the offenders, their cities, their countries, and their financial interests throughout the world.

Therefore, because of a cartoon, a Van Gogh-like tragedy could occur in Stockholm, and companies such as Ericsson, Scania, Volvo, Ikea, and Electrolux, may be targeted -- either by al Qaeda or by homegrown Jihadists. Other artists around the world and millions of workers in companies originating in liberal democracies will be at risk because of the imagination (albeit sometimes very insensitive) of one man's free mind. This sort of freedom is what the Enlightenment has produced: free choice. And this is what al Qaeda Iraq is telling the world it can no longer have; there is no more free choice, and we will punish you if you exercise it, at our own discretion.

Vilks told The Associated Press that he can "only hope that Muslims in Europe and in the Western world choose to distance themselves from this and support the idea of freedom of expression."

His Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt told the 22 Sweden-based ambassadors from Muslim countries that he regrets the hurt it may have caused, but said that according to Swedish law it is not up to politicians to punish the free press.

Eventually some mainstream Muslims will -- understandably -- vehemently criticize the offense in the substance of the sketch, but will adhere to the norms of international law, particularly the freedom of press and expression. The issue, now becoming chronic, will generate debates in the Muslim world and internationally. But aside from this cultural clash, al Qaeda Iraq has just reminded us that indeed, it wants

and will use a launching pad to wage terror attacks worldwide.

Just remember that Sweden, unlike Denmark -- and certainly in opposition to the United States -- has steadfastly opposed the War in Iraq, doesn't have troops in the region and, ironically, funds many associations inside its own borders that promote Jihadism as an ideology. Swedish foreign policy already is the best Islamists could lobby for in the West. And yet, this Scandinavian economy is now menaced from as far away as Anbar province.

Just imagine if the Coalition surrenders the area -- not to an Iraqi democratic Government -- but to a full fledged Taliban-like regime.

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