

## **Islamists Pledge Continued War on Coalition**

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Jaysh Muhammed group claims responsibility for attacks on Coalition targets, but denies any connection with al-Qaeda.

Jaysh Muhammed – the Army of Muhammed – one of the more prominent Sunni Islamist insurgent groups in Iraq, has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks on Coalition and other targets.

In an exclusive interview for IWPR, a man credibly claiming to be a spokesman for the group said it was not linked to the al-Qaeda network.

Like most such groups, Jaysh Muhammed refuses to speak publicly about its membership or leadership. But one man claiming to represent the group in the eastern town of Baaqouba did agree to speak to an IWPR contributor.

After arrangements made by an intermediary, the IWPR reporter was blindfolded, taken by a group of fighters to a safe area outside of town, and interrogated extensively before being allowed to ask questions.

The group's spokesman would only identify himself as a "mujahid" or holy warrior, but said that he had worked as a farmer before joining the insurgency.

**IWPR:** The United States destroyed Saddam Hussein's regime. Why did you declare war against it?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** Yes, the United States rid us of Saddam Hussein's regime. But they did not do it for the sake of the people of Iraq. Rather, they did it for the sake of Iraqi oil and to protect Israel's security.

There is another important reason [why we fight them] – ignorance of our traditions that are characterised by their tribal nature; and misbehaviour by elements of these troops towards the Iraqi people – random search operations in houses and the searching of women.

They also consider the Sunnis to be a minority, and this is wrong for we are an important part of Iraqi society.

**IWPR:** What is your position regarding the Iraqi Governing Council?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** Our position is clear – they are all spies, traitors, and agents for the Americans.

First, they do not represent the people of Iraq because they are not elected. They are appointed by their masters, the Americans. Second, the appointed Governing Council members were [in exile during the Saddam regime]. They do not understand Iraqis' suffering and Arab traditions. [They] were distorted by the Western life they lived.

**IWPR:** Your organisation is known as a military one. Do you have a political branch?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** Our political orientation is our good Islamic religion, and we have an Islamic party that supports jihadi movements.

**IWPR:** Do you mean the Islamic Party [a Sunni party with a seat on the Governing Council]?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** Of course not.

**IWPR:** So what is its name?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** I am sorry, I cannot answer that question.

**IWPR:** Do you receive support from foreign countries?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** No. But we receive support from honourable and good people in this country.

**IWPR:** What kind of support do you mean?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** Financial as well as moral support.

**IWPR:** What do you say about accounts of [non-Iraqi] Arab fighters being among you?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** There are some Arab fighters among us, but the US makes this into a bigger issue in the media than it really is. We are not so few as to need fighters from abroad. Those [Arab fighters] among us are few. They lived with us [before the war], and did not come from abroad after the war.

**IWPR:** Are you responsible for operations targeting the police?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** No. A Muslim must not kill a Muslim, no matter what.

**IWPR:** So, who is responsible?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** I do not know. But [attacks on the police] are an American plan to distort the image of the Iraqi resistance.

**IWPR:** Is there any relationship between you and the al-Qaeda network?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** No. There is no relationship between us and the al-Qaeda network, which has no role in our jihad.

**IWPR:** But the explosions in Kadhemiyah and Karbala suggest otherwise. [Two attacks on Shia shrines, killing over 180 people, have been blamed on an offshoot of al-Qaeda seeking to trigger a Sunni-Shia civil war.]

**Jaysh Muhammed:** We strongly denounce these organisations. As I said, a Muslim must not kill another Muslim.

**IWPR:** What does your organisation think of the transfer of sovereignty to an Iraqi government, scheduled for June 30? Will you continue your operations against American forces?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** Handing over of power to Iraqis is in theory a beautiful thing. In practice, it is merely ink on paper.

We will continue our operations against the Jews [term often used by Islamic groups to mean the Coalition]. More than one American official has stated that the American forces would stay even after the power handover.

I want to tell you something important – we are not after any power. Rather, we want to drive the occupying forces out of the lands of Iraq. We rely on the saying of the Prophet Muhammed, peace be on him - "Drive the polytheists from the Arabian peninsula." That is our goal.

**IWPR:** Let's say the Coalition forces left Iraq and transferred power to Iraqis. Would you participate in politics?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** We would go back to our lands and re-plant them. As you can see, most of us are farmers.

**IWPR:** What is your position regarding the kidnappings carried out by some groups?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** Kidnapping is an obligation. It is not prohibited by religion, if it is done to foreigners who cooperate with the occupation.

**IWPR:** What is your position regarding the explosion at the United Nations? [August 19, 2003 attack on UN, claimed by a group calling itself the "Armed Vanguard of the Second Army of Mohammed"]

**Jaysh Muhammed:** There is no real United Nations. It is an organisation completely controlled by the United States and its resolutions always serve US interests.

**IWPR:** Some say that the Sunni Islamist movement did not fight against Saddam, and stood by his side.

**Jaysh Muhammed:** This is wrong, and mere lies. If Saddam killed the first and second Sadrs [two leading Shia clerics killed in 1981 and 1999], he also killed many Sunni preachers. He fought us and sent our faithful to prison.

**IWPR:** Do you mean the suppression of the [radical Islamic] Wahhabi movement?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** We are not Wahhabi [term associated with puritan Islamic trend from Saudi Arabia, in Iraq carries connotation of intolerance towards Shia]. Rather, we are Salafis [more general term used to denote Sunni purist trend].

The answer to your question is yes.

**IWPR:** Any final word?

**Jaysh Muhammed:** We want to inform America that its attempt to stir up sectarian discord is a failure.

I also want to ask the Governing Council members who talk only about [Saddam-era] mass graves: are the 700 martyrs of Fallujah [the civilian death toll given by local sources for the April siege] not part of the mass graves as well?

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**Location:** Israel  
Iraqi Kurdistan  
Iraq

**Focus:** Iraq

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**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/islamists-pledge-continued-war-coalition>