

off some members. The formation of ISI did not end AQI's efforts to assimilate more Sunni insurgents.¹¹

ISI's creation had several putative motivations. It was an attempt to trigger splintering and encourage other Sunni insurgent groups to pledge alliance to ISI. Additionally, by claiming to be a state, ISI apparently sought to gain legitimacy. It was seen as attempting to take the military and political initiative from the other Sunni terrorist groups.¹² Less publicized, but probably more important, was AQI's attempt to unify Sunni Arabs into an Islamic state by force by cracking down on traditional smuggling and assassinating recalcitrant sheikhs.¹³

To accomplish its goals, ISI used brutal tactics. Sheikh Harith Zaher al-Dhari, son of the head of the al-Zouba' tribe, was assassinated, an act attributed to his organization's refusal to join ISI.¹⁴ Citing "fighters from various groups," *al-Hayat* reported that some 30 commanders of Kataib Thawrat al-Ishrin and al-Jaysh al-Islami were assassinated by AQI or killed in battles over arms caches in the al Anbar district, which AQI had been attempting to capture in prior months. Elsewhere, it observed, "al-Qaeda has waged a war of liquidation with the primary targets being the leaders of [1920 Revolution Brigades] and IAI" because ISI failed to convince these groups to unite under their own banner.¹⁵ In October, Sheikh abu Osama al-'Iraqi called on Osama bin Laden to denounce AQI for harming Sunnis and targeting jihad fighters from other Sunni factions, claiming that they had attacked the leaders of the faction known as the Ishrin Revolution Brigades. AQI

¹¹ For instance, in mid-December, the al Anbar branch of the Islamic Army in Iraq announced that it was joining ISI.

¹² The circular went on to note "several reports in recent months of fighting between Sunni nationalist groups and the jihadists . . . al Qaeda and its jihadist allies now face problems from fellow jihadists as well as Sunni nationalists."

¹³ Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "The New Iraqi Way of War," *National Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 23, June 9, 2007, pp. 36–43, p. 43.

¹⁴ Middle East Media Research Institute, *Continued Clashes in Iraq Between Sunni Jihad Groups and al-Qaeda*, Washington, D.C., special dispatch 1542, April 13, 2007b.

¹⁵ Lydia Khalil, "The Islamic State of Iraq Launches Plan of Nobility," *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 4, No. 7, March 27, 2007, p. 4.