



## INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH

A Centre of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

# Monthly Informatics Report

## Developments in Arabic Online Sites

June 2011

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### Introduction

This report provides an analysis of significant developments and trends of online extremist websites and communities during the month of February. For the purpose of this report, extremist or jihadist websites refer to those propagating violence, or have members affiliated to terrorist organizations linked to Al Qaeda, such as Taliban and Al-Shabaab.

### Summary of Significant Developments

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- Al-Qaeda General Command (AQGC) announced Ayman Al-Zawahiri as its new leader in a statement released on 16 June 2011, and highlighted the organisation's seven principles.
- A forum member at the **Shumukh Islamic Network** posted a brief manual on how to make a poison with cyanide and skin conditioner. He encouraged readers to test the poison on rabbits which sparked a debate in the forum thread.
- A forum post entitled 'Fear and terror workshop: Individual terrorism' called for lone-wolf attacks on a list of targets connected to the Iraq war.
- Abu Ubaydah Abdullah Al-'Adam in his article, "The People's Revolution: The end of Tyrannical Rule?" expressed his optimism towards the revolutions that have swept the Arab world and its positive effects on the global jihad.

## Explanation of Sources

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In the Arabic-language online jihadist presence, a handful of forums make up the most important hubs for information exchange, propaganda distribution, strategic discussion, and theological and practical debate. Important materials and ideas appear on these websites first, before they are reposted on other virtual spaces of secondary and tertiary importance.

Most of these websites are password restricted, and all have a forum format. This means that content is posted by a wide member base, and not by a single website administrator. Terrorist and Islamist organizations maintain presence within these forums to post their materials there. In addition, any member can post materials, observations, comments, and questions.

Although forum administrators have demonstrated the existence of mechanisms for policing content and evaluating the veracity of statements, this process cannot be guaranteed consistently. Similarly, the authenticity of statements, documents, or remarks from terrorist and Islamist organizations which appear on these websites cannot be fully verified (to complete certainty).

Jihadist forum members identified in this document are known by their self-selected user names, which usually do not corroborate with their real names. Not all jihadist forum members are active terrorists or members of terrorist or Islamist groups and their remarks are of their own and do not necessarily represent the views of any particular radical group. In many cases, these remarks are valued by the counter-terrorism community as they provide a source in better understanding the opinions, ideas, and worldview of individual extremists. Comments selected for translation and use in this document are chosen because they represent the common views and posts appearing on these forums.

International participants using Arabic as a common language refer to the body of activities conducted by terrorists, radical Muslims, and their supporters on the Internet as “the online Jihad.” Members and participants in these forums do not necessarily reside in Arab countries. Further, they concern themselves with matters pertaining to the entire Muslim world. Hence, materials and issues discussed on these sites therefore do not pertain only to the Middle East/Arab countries. *Due to various security reasons, full URLs of sources are not disclosed.*

## User Statistics

Featured below are the percentages of multiple sites' total visitor access from a given country. The main objective of featuring this information on a monthly basis is to capture the country distribution of the visitors for each website. These observations will be compiled on a quarter-year basis to provide a deeper understanding on emerging issues within the larger jihadi community.

Collected from alexa.com,<sup>1</sup> the following data lists the number of visits from various countries to selected websites in terms of percentages. The following websites have been chosen because of the bulk of articles selected from them for this month's report. The data presented is for the top countries from which visits originate. They are gathered from alexa.com.<sup>2</sup> Data is available only for selected websites and is extrapolated from a sample of traffic captured from the website. With the immense volume amount of traffic in a whole month, only traffic occurring on a random day (27 June 2011) is used as a random sample for analysis. The true geographical locations of users may not be represented accurately as proxy servers mask the true origin of the countries.

### **as-ansar**

#### Ansar Al-Mujahideen Forums

*Percentage of a site's total visitor access from a given country:*

Italy: 22.0%
Egypt: 10.1%
Algeria: 8.1%
Ireland: 5.1%
Indonesia: 2.2%
Other: 52.5%

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<sup>1</sup> [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com) is a comprehensive web information company that provides traffic data and rankings for websites

**aljahad.com**

Global Jihad Network

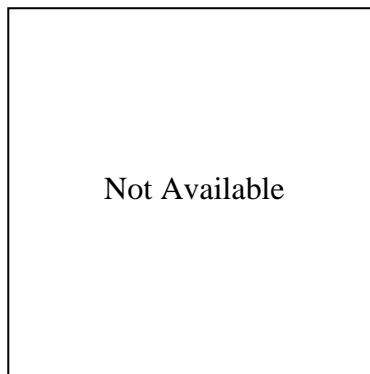
*Percentage of a site's total visitor access from a given country:*



**shamikh1.net**

Shumukh Islamic Network

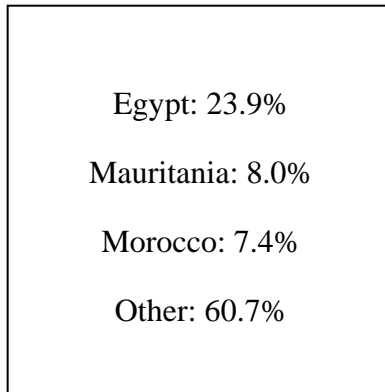
*Percentage of a site's total visitor access from a given country:*



**majahden.com**

Mujahideen Electronic Network

*Percentage of a site's total visitor access from a given country:*



## **Ayman Al-Zawahiri Announced as New Leader of Al-Qaeda**

More than a month after the death of Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda General Command announced Ayman Al-Zawahiri as its new leader in a three page statement. This document not only announced Al-Zawahiri as Bin Laden's successor but it also sought to affirm several Al-Qaeda principles. The statement affirmed Al-Qaeda's allegiance to Taliban to expel the American forces and its allies from Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda asserted its support of the revolutions sweeping the Middle East in order to topple corrupt and tyrannical regimes. It affirmed that true change can be realized only when all forms of occupation are dispelled and Shariah implemented. The statement pledged that Al-Qaeda will continue its jihad as well as calling and encouraging Muslims to join their cause by committing individual attacks on America, Israel and their allies. It also pledged that Mujahideen prisoners will not be abandoned and Al-Qaeda will continue with their efforts to release them. Following the statement's release, many terrorist and insurgent groups such as Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), issued statements pledging their allegiance to Al-Zawahiri and reaffirming their connections with Al-Qaeda and its principles.

As Al-Qaeda's number 2, it came as no surprise that Al-Zawahiri was appointed as the new leader of the organization. His ascension to leadership doesn't change the fact that countries are now even more vulnerable to lone-wolves attacks as Al-Qaeda's strategy have shifted from large scale, coordinated attacks to small scale, frequent attacks from individuals not necessarily affiliated to the group. The activities of Al-Qaeda seem to have been unfazed even though Al-Qaeda's central leadership appears to have been weakened severely as U.S. forces have launched dozens of strikes this year on suspected Al-Qaeda hideouts near Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. .

## **Cyanide and Skin Conditioner Poison Suggested**

'Abu Islam Al-Jihadi', a member at **Shumukh Islamic Network**, provided instructions on how to make a deadly poison by mixing cyanide with skin conditioner in his forum posting. He asserts that traditional weapons are not the only means to kill Americans and other enemies of Islam, and therefore suggested poisoning as the easiest method. Al-Jihadi proposed purchasing cyanide from drug stores and skin conditioners that open skin pores quickly and effectively. Instructions on how to make the poison was then provided. The instructions include mixing a small spoonful of cyanide with the conditioner and performing experiments on a rabbit as its blood pressure is close to that of a human being. Other further detailed instructions were also provided.

Postings on poisoning were not widely seen in the forums but the numbers have been steadily increasing in discussions. One unique posting from the middle of last year at the **E-Mujahideen Network** suggested poisoning American soldiers with large doses of an anticoagulant drug, and it has garnered a huge positive response from readers. There have also been postings in which authors and readers discussed about cyanide, its manufacture and delivery. Al-Jihadi's posting however is the first instance of improvised cyanide poisoning to be seen in the forums. With regards to the procurement of cyanide, most countries do not readily sell it in any drug or chemical substance related stores and cannot be easily obtained without proper authorisation and validation.

Al-Jihadi's forum post generated much discussion among members especially with regard to the rabbit test where a member questioned its permissibility and necessity. Many argued in favor of this test as it serves a greater good. This development on the use of drugs as weapons will be monitored continually.

### **“Fear and Terror Workshop” Targets U.S. Executives, Officials and Companies**

Early June, ‘Al-Asad Al-Thair’, an active member of the **Shumukh Islamic Network** urged readers to list the names of executives, officials and companies actively involved with NATO and connected to the Iraq War. In particular, greater emphasis was placed on those from the United States, Britain and France. He instructed that after determining and researching the names, readers should send the list to the leadership jihadi groups for approval and guidance in order to conduct attacks or other terrorist activities on the targets. Al-Thair also suggested sending explosive mails or parcel bombs to the targets. Individuals within the list of targets include the president of KBR, an American engineering, construction and military contracting company connected to the Iraq War. Other targets were added to this list by forum members which includes dozens of names and photos of U.S. military leaders, foreign officials, and contractors. Government officials and media figures were added to this list in latter contributions and discussions.

Al-Thair's post echoes the same message as released by Al-Qaeda's American spokesman Adam Gadahn, who called on Muslims in the United States to kill Americans and encouraged them to conduct lone-wolf attacks. Other forum members also contributed posts that reiterate Gadahn's message. Following Al-Thair's forum post, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security alerted law enforcement officials around the U.S. and other countries as a precautionary move. Whether the threat will progress beyond the discussion forums has yet to be ascertained.

## **Abdullah Al-‘Adam Expressed Optimism towards the Arab Spring**

Abdullah Al-‘Adam is widely known in the online jihad domain for his ‘creating terror’ program series published by Al-Fajr Media. He posted an article titled, “The Revolutions of Peoples: The End of Tyrannical Rule?” on the **Ansar Al-Mujahideen Network** in early June 2011. He expressed optimism towards the revolutions sweeping the Middle East, as well as their positive effects on the global jihad.

By way of introduction, Al-Adam’s post began by iterating of his realization before the Arab Spring that it would take decades to establish an Islamic state and implement Shariah. In this vein, he views the secular non-Islamic internal factors of a country and external, foreign influence as impediments towards this goal. He also iterated that the events that occurred after the 9/11 attack, namely the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the toppling of two autocratic regimes during the Arab uprisings, have expedited the process of achieving Al-Qaeda’s ultimate goal. He also listed seven results and effects of the popular uprising. He asserted that the uprisings have emboldened Muslims to stand up against tyranny and oppression; and negatively affected the West especially the United States’ propaganda, influence, and economy. Al-‘Adam believes that the Arab revolutions serve as an encouragement to the global jihadi movement to harvest the fruits of their efforts and it also adds to the constant and continuing call to jihad.

Al-‘Adam’s post is an example of online individuals attempting to assert the relevance of jihadi elements in the uprisings; and the hope and opportunities made available for the jihadi movement in these uprisings. This notion that the Arab Spring is pro-democratic and is not supported by jihadi elements is frequently emphasized in the media. However, jihadi leaders, forum members, and the online jihadi community, and ideologues have attempted to counter this notion with their own narrative which propagates their assessment, analysis, and affirmation that jihad had a role in influencing the uprising.