

## AQI Facilitation Networks Still Active in Syria

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In its latest effort to target al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) financial and logistical networks operating out of Syria, the Treasury Department designated today four members of a key terrorist facilitation network. Such facilitation networks have long operated out of Syria and have been the target of periodic designations. As recently as December 2007, Undersecretary of the Treasury Stuart Levey called on Syria to "take action to deny safe haven to those supporting violence from within its borders." Today's designation suggests Syria still has far to go in this regard.

Known as the "Abu Ghadiyah" network and run by Badran Turki Hishan al Mazidih (aka Abu Ghadiyah), the group designated today controls the flow of much of the money, weapons, personnel and other material through Syria into Iraq for AQI. According to the Treasury Department, the network "obtained false passports for foreign terrorists, provided passports, weapons, guides, safe houses, and allowances to foreign terrorists in Syria and those preparing to cross the border into Iraq." Indeed, Badran reportedly received several hundred thousand dollars from his cousin, another member of the Abu Ghadiyah financial and logistical facilitation network, with which he supported insurgent activity targeting the U.S. military and facilitated the travel of AQI foreign fighters.

The Zarqawi organization has long benefited from a network of associates in Syria that it uses to facilitate travel to Iraq, and other logistics for members of its European network. According to Italian prosecutors speaking in 2003, "Syria has functioned as a hub for an al Qaida network" linked to Zarqawi. Transcripts of operatives' conversations "paint a detailed picture of overseers in Syria coordinating the movement of recruits and money" between cells in Europe and Ansar al-Islam training camps in northern Iraq. The cell's leaders in Syria facilitated the recruits' travel and provided their funding, while the European members gave false travel documents to recruits and fugitives, and monitored their travel. At least some of the recruits traveling to the Ansar camps stayed at the Ragdan Hotel in Aleppo for some time and later stopped in Damascus. Indeed, the Italian investigation revealed that Zarqawi's operatives in Europe acted on the instructions of his lieutenants in and around Damascus and Aleppo, including Muhammad Majid (also known as Mullah Fuad and described as the "gatekeeper in Syria for volunteers intent on reaching Iraq"), and two men referred to as "Abdullah," and "Abderrazak." For example, in one conversation, an operative assures a comrade that sending money via Fuad is safe, saying, "I have sent so many transfers to Mullah Fuad and they always got there, no problem." In another conversation, a senior operative assures his subordinate about funding, saying, "Don't ever worry about money, because Saudi Arabia's money is your money." [See Sebastian Rotella, "A Road to Ansar Began in Italy: Wiretaps are Said to Show how al Qaeda Sought to Create in Northern Iraq a Substitute for Training Camps in Afghanistan," The Los Angeles Times, April 28, 2003].

Syria remained a support hub for terrorist activity in Iraq, and in January 2005 the Treasury Department designated Sulayman Khalid Darwish for fundraising and recruiting for Zarqawi's organization out of Syria. Described as a member of the Zarqawi organization's Advisory (Shura) Council and "one of the most prominent members of the Zarqawi Network in Syria," Darwish prepared forged documents, recruited and dispatched terrorists, and raised funds for the Zarqawi network.

In December 2007, the U.S. Treasury Department took action against still more Syrian-based terrorist facilitators. According to information provided by the Treasury Department, for example, Fawzi Mutlaq al-Rawi - a leader of the Iraqi wing of the Syrian Ba'ath Party - was designated for providing financial and material support to Zarqawi's al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). The extent of the Syrian role in al-Rawi's activities is noteworthy. Al-Rawi was appointed to his position in the Syrian Ba'ath Party by Syrian President Bashar al-Asad himself in 2003. According to Treasury, the Iraqi wing of the Syrian Ba'ath Party "has since provided significant funding to Iraqi insurgents and al-Rawi's direction." Indeed, Treasury noted that al-Rawi "is supported financially by the Syrian Government, and has close ties to Syrian intelligence."

With the authorization of the Syria regime, al-Rawi twice met with a former commander of Saddam's Hussein's Army of Muhammad in 2004 and told the commander his group would receive material aid from Syria. In 2005, al-Rawi "facilitated the provision of \$300,000 to members of AQI," as well providing AQI vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, rifles, and suicide bombers, according to Treasury. In meetings with senior AQI representatives in September, 2005, al-Rawi and AQI leaders discussed operational issues, including conducting attacks against the U.S. embassy and concentrating attacks in the international zone.

While Syria has reportedly taken some measures to curb the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq, recently disclosed documents seized from insurgents in Iraq revealed that while fewer foreign fighters have been entering Iraq Syria remained the preferred route.