

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

The Iraq War's Arabic YouTube ^[1]

Sunni insurgents in Iraq have found a way to get their message to the world. It's via Internet, of course, but just look at this, from a new U.S. Government report released today.

The message from the insurgents, who are responsible for killing more U.S. troops in Iraq than anyone, has something for all; including "camera ready" short video clips for the satellite TV news channels that can be turned around and put on the air with a minimum of editing; longer-form videos including a feature on the "legendary sniper of Baghdad... who reportedly has killed more U.S. troops than anyone"; poetry and songs for all ages, written texts and backgrounders for the printed press; you name it, all provided by "groups and individuals sympathetic to the insurgency."

It's the Arabic YouTube for Sunni insurgents, detailed in an investigative report titled "Iraqi Insurgent Media: The War of Images and Ideas; How Sunni Insurgents in Iraq and their Supporters Worldwide Are Using The Media." from the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

"We noticed this on the 'Net, and didn't see any public report on it," we were told by RFE/RL analyst Daniel Kimmage, who co-authored the report with another RFE/RL analyst, Kathleen Ridolfo. "We wanted to provide information on this phenomenon," through RFE/RL.

Kimmage calls the Sunni initiative "a decentralized network of sites without a central network. When you look at the sites in the aggregate tens of thousands are seeking them out. People are asking where to find the Sunni magazines and film clips. Messages are responding to point them toward primary destination points. There are banner ads providing long lists of videos for downloading."

Kimmage monitored Al Jazeera's use of some clips, which Al Jazeera clearly identified as being made available by insurgents. RFE/RL's monitoring of Al Jazeera found on its May 13, 2007 news broadcasts, the channel covered Al-Qaeda's "claim that it had captured three U.S. soldiers, played a tape by the Mujahideen Army showing the destruction of a U.S. Army Humvee, and detailed a statement by three insurgent groups blaming Al-Qaeda for the deaths of 12 of their field commanders."

The RFE/RL report also mentions "The Al-Rafidayn satellite channel is based in Cairo and broadcasts via Nilesat transmitters. Billed as an "independent" channel, Al-Rafidayn supports the Sunni Arab "resistance and acts as the mouthpiece for the Muslim Scholars Association and its head, Harith al-Dari. The channel is critical of the United States and the Iraqi government, as well as Iranian interference in Iraq."

A typical Web site lists hundreds of items, such as a large downloadable video archive, 11 songs "glorifying Jihad," magazines, and much more, including an online form for sending messages to others, often used for seeking or providing links to specific material. Many of the

sites have been disabled, we found.

Kimmage concludes in his report: "The reach of Iraqi insurgent media is global and seeks to promulgate a message that the resistance is conquering occupation forces in Iraq. ISI/Al-Qaeda has by far the largest reach and impact on would-be foreign fighters and its supporters, in part because of its ideology, which espouses a localized version of global jihad. The impact of its message across the Arab world can be seen in the numbers of Saudis, Egyptians, and Palestinians viewing their materials online."

Jeffrey Trimble, Counselor to the President of RFE/RL, told Worldcasting that the report has provided "shock value and tremendous food for thought. The State Department and the BBG (Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees U.S. international broadcasting) should observe the sophistication of the Sunni web initiative and analyze it to see how it may be countered." The U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors says it has no comment at this time.

Kimmage says he hopes to have started "a discussion about the changing media environment, to gauge its impact on U.S. public diplomacy."
