

The Ghosts of Sinjar in Tripoli and Benghazi

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Jan 10, 2013

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Articles & Testimony

In the wake of the Arab uprisings, radicalized individuals from previous periods and conflicts have returned to the stage.

A month ago, Ansar al-Shari'ah in Benghazi (The Supporters of Islamic Law; ASB), on its official Facebook page via its official media outlet al-Rayyah Foundation for Media Production, uploaded a poster (see below) promoting a demonstration on Sunday December 16 in Tripoli and Benghazi. The demonstration is in support of Libyans currently imprisoned in Iraq. In the past few months there have been other protests in support of Libyans in Iraq, too. Similarly, Ansar al-Shari'ah in Tunisia (AST) has also held demonstrations in the past for Tunisians that are imprisoned in Iraq. What's fascinating in this case is that the promotional poster contains names of ten individuals. At the suggestion of the blogger/tweeter that goes by the name of Around the Green Mountain, I cross-checked these names with the Sinjar Records to see if there were any matches.



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sharia-

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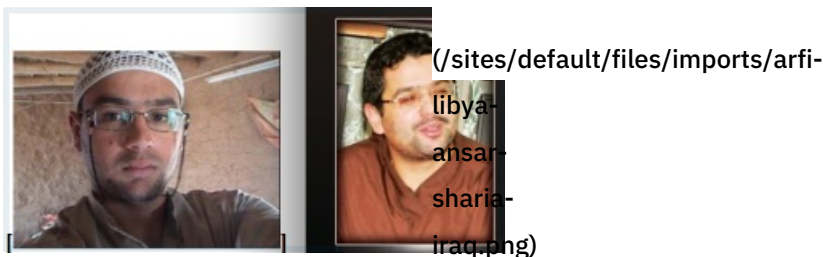
poster.jpg)

For background on the Sinjar Records see the Combating Terrorism Center's description in their [report \(PDF\)](#) (<http://tarpley.net/docs/CTCForeignFighter.19.Dec07.pdf>) that first analyzed these records: "In November 2007, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point received nearly 700 records of foreign nationals that entered Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007...The records contain varying levels of information on each fighter, but often include the fighter's country of origin, hometown, age, occupation, the name of the fighter's recruiter, and even the route the fighter took to Iraq. The records were captured by coalition forces in October 2007 in a raid near Sinjar, along Iraq's Syrian border."

When the raw data was [checked \(xls file\)](#) (<http://selectedwisdom.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Sinjar-Database-Watts-as-of-121508.xls>), four out of the ten names were a match (or had a part of the name): 'Adil Jum'ah Muhammad al-Sha'lali, 'Ali 'Uthman Hamad al-'Arfi, Hamzah 'Ali 'Awad, and Muhammad Saqr Muhammad. Some information about them:

- All created their own kunyas: Abu 'Umar, Abu Umar, Abu al-Qa'qa, Abu Hdayfah (listed in same order as regular names above)
- Three were from Darnah while the other did not list a city of origin;
- Three listed date of birth: 1981, 1982, and 1985;
- Two of them mentioned when they arrived in Iraq: October 2006;
- The same two brought with them 500 and 300 lira respectively;
- And a different set of two of them stated the work they wanted when joining the Islamic State of Iraq: martyr (which has not obviously come to fruition yet)

Two of the individuals also contained pictures in their Sinjar application for the Islamic State of Iraq. Below, you can see a comparison of the application photo from 2006 on the left and what I am assuming is a relatively recent photo of the same individual in Iraqi custody, which is from the above flier. There are slight differences due to aging and likely poor conditions in Iraqi prisons and the second picture looks closer in similarity to the before and after than the first one.



'Ali 'Uthman Hamad al-'Arfi: Joining the ISI (left) and During Iraqi Imprisonment (right)



Hamzah 'Ali 'Awad: Joining the ISI (left) and During Iraqi Imprisonment (right)

It is likely that the other six individuals that ASB is calling for their release were also fighters in the Islamic State of Iraq, but joined at a different time period or were not part of the registration/orientation in Sinjar. Reports from the

official Libyan news agency LANA suggest that after the most recent protests, Baghdad has been in negotiation with Tripoli to return the prisoners and have them serve out their time in Libya. Based on the current security dynamic in Libya, if these prisoners, among others I'm sure, are returned, can their sentences in prison be preserved? There is a good chance that due to the unstable nature swirling in the country, these individuals could be broken out of jail or, even worse, let free once back on Libyan soil due to the weakness of the government in the face of Islamist militias. Time will of course tell.

The above highlights that although some parts of the history of the jihadi movement and US understanding/interaction with these sources seems somewhat dated, as Leah Farrall always notes "what's old is new again." In other words, trends/older players return to the fore even if forgotten by analysts. This is especially the case in the post-Arab uprising societies where individuals from the 1990s scene have once again gotten back on the stage. All of this of course illustrates the importance in understanding the history, context, and evolution of the jihadi movement. Only focusing narrowly on the most recent developments will rob many of appreciating how and why events are occurring or repeating themselves.

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

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