

Al-Zarqawi Death: Myth vs. Reality

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Theme: [Terrorism](#)

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The convenient emergence and sudden disappearance of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi signals an end of an era. Though Washington and London insist on telling us that the 'good news' don't necessarily mean an end to Iraq's bloodshed, the giddiness in British Prime Minister Tony Blair's voice, profusely conveys the greater hope that Iraq's occupiers pin on the killing of this obscure character.

As a young man, Al-Zarqawi's joined Afghanistan's Mujahidin militias against the Russian occupation in the 1980's. Following the Russian defeat, Al-Zarqawi returned to Jordan. He, like other returnees of various Arab countries clashed with his government and was sentenced to many years in prison for conspiracy charges to achieve a regime change. An amnesty by late King Hussein set him free after spending seven years in prison.

As odd as it may seem, certainty over the man's life, legacy and death ends right here. The rest, concluded with his dramatic demise is shrouded with inconsistencies, state propaganda and half-truths, for reasons that will become obvious.

It has been argued that al-Zarqawi took serious issues with al-Qaeda's ideological, tactical or other preferences. Most accounts seem to suggest an initial conflict between the two groups, a claim further validating by an alleged letter uncovered by the US military in Iraq in 2005. In the letter, addressed to al-Zarqawi, Bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri warned al-Zarqawi of carrying out more sectarian attacks against the Shia population, saying that such violence was eroding support for al-Qaeda.

By unveiling the letter, the Americans were hoping to establish their early claim that al-Zarqawi was in fact al-Qaeda's man in Iraq. Once again, both al-Qaeda and al-Zarqawi audio recordings popped up, almost stimulatingly to suggest that such an alliance was in fact struck.

Again, if true, this further undermines earlier allegations made by top US officials that such an alliance had always been there. Murky 'evidence' presented by former US Secretary of State Colin Powell to the United Nations in February 2003 was the first to propose such a connection, as if the man was foretelling the future. Powell concluded - in what was later widely recognized as 'hyped' if not altogether concocted US intelligence in the US administration's desperate attempt to find its proverbial 'smoking gun', thus justifying the war and invasion of Iraq - that Zarqawi was an associate of Bin Laden who sought refuge in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Powell's case for war had omitted as seemingly immaterial the reports that al-Zarqawi left Afghanistan in 2001 to join Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish Sunni group - fighting its own battles in northern Iraq. Al-Zarqawi apparently chose northern Iraq to avoid an imminent clash with

Iraq's security forces under Saddam Hussein, as secularist Saddam has historically clamped down on Islamic activists and had no room, nor need to accommodate them. Linking al-Qaeda to al-Zarqawi, then to Saddam's government was one of the most forceful arguments that the US administration used to sell their unwarranted war to the public. In retrospect, such an argument was yet another lie; like others, notwithstanding WMDs, and proved to be a concoction of the ever lucid imagination of US neoconservative zealots and their media allies.

But not that al-Zarqawi, or his myth has yet outlived its usefulness. To the contrary, the plot thickens when al-Zarqawi – that once petty criminal of the al-Zarqa town in Jordan – made his official entry to the Iraqi scene, turning almost immediately into a mythical menace, along with a few armed men battling two of the world's greatest forces: beheading foreigners, slaying Iraqi police recruits, assassinating government officials, blowing up religious shrines, attacking worshipers in Shia festivals, detonating up to three intricate car bombs stimulatingly, always managing to escape at the last minute, almost always unscathed. One of those miraculous escapes reportedly took place in the town of Falluja, where he was apparently hiding. Only after destroying most of the town and butchering thousands of its people, did Iraqi police, at the behest of their US commanders declare that al-Zarqawi managed to evade capture just minutes before a raid on his hideout.

Al-Zarqawi was the leader of 'Tawhid wal Jihad', an Islamic military group incepted specifically to battle Americans in Iraq. The group officially merged with Bin Laden's in 2004. Bin Laden named him the Prince of al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, and business carried on as usual with the world's most active terrorist now representing the world's most notorious terrorist group, joining hands in a relentless war against "Shia, Christians and Jews", as simplistically worded by BBC International world affairs analyst.

Al-Zarqawi or his myth, whether incidentally or by design, has perhaps served as the greatest propaganda tool ever utilized by the Americans, months before the invasion of Iraq and most likely long after his passing. He successfully alienated many anti-war camps throughout the world, notwithstanding many Arabs and Sunni Muslims who, rightfully, believed that his tactics were savage, un-Islamic and self-defeating. He gave rise to the widely circulated argument that the US' war is that between forces of civilization and forces of darkness, with an Arab Muslim male flawlessly representing the latter. He concurred the shaky allegation that the source of instability in Iraq was the presence of foreign Arab fighters, which helped sever inner-Arab ties and focused the pressure against Syria, accused of allowing such movement of fighters across its borders. He helped widen the chasm between Iraqis forces and sects, even those who believe in the legitimacy of their struggle against occupation.

While his death may indeed signal an end to various pretexts used and abused by the US administration, military and media, his absence nonetheless will have its rewards, however, temporary. One of which is the very rare opportunity that allowed Bush, Blair and US-installed Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki to declare the full formation of the 'first democratic Iraqi government' and the death of a menace, or a myth called al-Zarqawi, both at the same time: Western TV analysts happily jumped at the opportunity to analyze the relations between the two innocently timed declarations; US military generals displayed to journalists – for the sake of transparency of information – how al-Zarqawi was blown up; Iraqi police too put on a dancing and firing in the air show for the cameras; the oil market stabilized a bit and sighs of relief poured in from various world capitals.

Al-Zarqawi, or his myth has apparently outlived his usefulness. The Iraq conflict seems to be going in a new direction, though its success or failure is unknown. A new media menace will have to be concocted to suit new US policies in Iraq and around the region. Al-Zarqawi is dead; another al-Zarqawi is being born.

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