



Thinking Like a Jihadist Iraq's Jordanian Connection *Nir Rosen*

Earlier this year, Muhammad Zaki Amawi and Marwan Othman el-Hindi, Jordanian-born U.S. citizens, and Wassim I. Mazloum, a Lebanese citizen, stood in a federal district court in Ohio, accused of conspiring to wage jihad against U.S. forces in Iraq. According to the indictment against them, Amawi had flown to Jordan last August carrying laptop computers that he intended to donate to the mujahidin in Iraq. Amawi, the indictment stated, had “unsuccessfully attempted to enter Iraq to wage violent jihad, or ‘holy war,’ against the United States and coalition forces.”

This was the first time that such charges had been brought in a U.S. court. But such cases have become frequent in Jordan in recent years, with increasing numbers of young men being tried for terrorist activities. The Marka military court in Amman, Jordan, has been the scene of a number of trials, and recently I observed several of these proceedings. One was the trial of four young men, ranging in age from 19 to 28, charged with conspiracy to commit terrorist acts and with the illegal possession of a Kalashnikov. The four had met frequently in the home of the 19-year-old ringleader in the city of Madaba, south of Amman, to talk of joining the jihad against the American invaders of Iraq. According to the prosecution, the ringleader had tried and failed to cross from Syria into Iraq at the time of the U.S. invasion. He and his friends then decided to attack Americans training the Iraqi police in Jordan, and began observing the routes the Americans took to and from work. The

ringleader purchased a Kalashnikov, which the four practiced firing. In the meantime, the ringleader made another aborted attempt to get into Iraq through Egypt. On his return to Jordan, one of his coconspirators introduced the group to three men, one of whom was a Saudi. The strangers agreed to help with the plot against the Americans. They exchanged phone numbers and met at a McDonald's where they continued planning the operation. The ringleader was introduced to a man called Shadi, who was to supervise the operation. Shadi gave him a mobile phone and he borrowed a video camera from a friend and filmed an intersection the Americans crossed. On August 31, 2005, just as they were preparing to execute their attack, the four were arrested, the film and Kalashnikov confiscated.

On January 2, the four paced with other prisoners in a cage in the Marka courtroom as their lawyers sat in the smoke-filled waiting room, laughing and complaining about how high their union dues were. All the prisoners were dressed in dark blue denim prison suits, with wool caps on their heads and slippers on their feet. Their beards were shaggy, as was their hair, which curled out of their caps over their ears. They were hard to distinguish from each other. Some had a dark stain above their brows. It was a *sima*, a sign of intense piety, acquired by kneeling and bowing forward, placing the forehead on the floor in prayer. One of the prisoners grinned at his father, who also had a *sima* on his forehead. The father was beaming proudly.

I asked the father if I could talk to him after the trial. "The verdict is already decided," he told me. "We can gain nothing by talking." One prisoner chanted the Koran. Another read a prepared statement naming two friends who had been in prison without trial for months. When the judge walked in, the prisoners squatted in disrespect. In classical Arabic, the 19-year-old ringleader angrily shouted at the judge, calling him an infidel. Being uncertain of the charges against him, the young man spoke to the judge after the hearing. "Are you the one who called me an infidel?" the judge asked. "I didn't call you an infidel," he answered, "your work is the infidel's work." The judge lost patience. "I won't tell you what the charge is. Go back to your jail," he said.

There were other cases. The Jordanian security service's apparent omniscience, a result of its extensive infiltration of tribal networks, extends to the Internet as well. Yousif Rif'at al-Daghestani, a 29-year-old Syrian welder was charged with "threatening to use violence to do terrorist activities causing general disorder and making terror between people." While working in Jordan last fall, the welder visited an Internet café in the city of Zarqa on November 18. "Because of the defendant's desire to cause terror and general disorder between people, he threatened to make violence to do terror activities in Jordan," the charges against him stated. Daghestani entered the website for Petra, the official state news agency, registering with the user name "911" and the password "bloud" [sic]. On the website's political forum he wrote: "If you thought that you finished us you are mistaken. Get ready for a new thing and a bigger explosion but in a more strategic place with many more infidels. I want to listen to the reply to this news and I wish that you reply quickly otherwise many infidels will die and I am asking a ransom of one million dinars and I am demanding the release of my sister Sajida [the surviving perpetrator of the November

9 hotel bombings in Amman]. Hahahahaha, death is coming to you infidels." Daghestani was arrested later that day.

On December 28, a van entered Marka through the main gate, circled around the back of the courthouse, and ten shackled prisoners were taken out and led into a cage in a courtroom full of security officers. The prisoners, all in their twenties and thirties, stood chatting, seemingly in good spirits, smiling and waving at the few relatives who sat in the back of the courtroom. The cage had a chain link fence around it, an innovation imposed after one prisoner threw his shoe at the judge while on trial for attempting to bomb Jordan's State Security headquarters. Other prisoners had been known to sing songs in honor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born terrorist, during their trials.

The ten were all from Irbid, a northern city by the Syrian border. Six of the ten were of Palestinian origin, their parents or grandparents having been expelled from their homes west of the border in 1948 or 1967. The charges against the ten stated that five other suspects had escaped capture. The men had met in the Qaqa mosque in Irbid's Hnina neighborhood, which they visited frequently. They had agreed it was necessary to fight the Americans in Iraq and planned to recruit others and collect money to go to Iraq via Syria. Late last July, they pooled their resources to purchase a Kalashnikov and ammunition. They sneaked into Syria at different times, some ferried by a friend who owned a school bus. In Syria, one of them met with a Tunisian who took him to an apartment where a Libyan and a Saudi were staying. They urged him to drive a car bomb, but he refused to become a "suicidal." Another one was invited to be a "suicidal," but he refused and returned to Jordan, where he was arrested. Two others made their way to Syria with the Kalashnikov and four magazines of ammunition. Once there, they argued and decided to return to Jordan, where they were arrested.

Three military judges in olive uniforms sat in the courtroom behind a long wooden bench. Behind them were framed pictures of the late King Hussein and his successor, King Abdullah. Two young soldiers with red sashes from their waists to their shoulders stood against the wall. As the chief prepared to read the charges, the prisoners erupted in unison, yelling fiercely, "Allahu Akbar, the way of God is jihad!" The judge waited for them to finish before reading the charges against them, which included possession of an automatic weapon with the intent to use it in illegal activity, initiation of illegal activities that could harm Jordan's relations with a foreign country, and illegally crossing borders.

When the judge got to the part about "a foreign country," he was interrupted by an angry prisoner, who shouted, "Infidel countries, not foreign countries!" The judge tapped his pen on the table for silence. One by one, he read the prisoners' names, asking how they pled. He was interrupted by a prisoner, who shouted, "This is a play. When is it going to end? We know that the verdicts have been decided and written in the files!" The judge tapped his pen impatiently.

"I am not guilty, you are guilty!" snapped some of the prisoners. "Jihad is not guilt," shouted another. "Is jihad in the way of Allah guilt? Fighting the Americans and Jews and infidels is now guilt? We are protecting the honor of our sisters in Iraq. Is that guilt? God is our master and you have no master. Your regime is rotten and it stinks. You and your regime and your ranks, you are all guilty!" The judge again tapped his pen and told the prisoners to answer without comments. "He who opens alcoholic bars is guilty!" said a prisoner.

At this point, the judge lost his temper, and angrily told the guards to take the loudest prisoner out of the cage and back to the van. Then he ordered the family members to leave the courtroom, as punishment for the prisoners' outbursts. After the mili-

tary prosecutor, also in uniform, informed the judge that he had no witnesses, the trial was postponed for a week. "Allah is our master and you have no master!" the prisoners shouted in unison. "He is the best master and the best supporter. America is your master and you have the worst master. Allahu Akbar!"

Afterward, I met with Hussein al-Masri, the lawyer for the accused men, who was dressed in an ill-fitting brown jacket and green pants, a red shirt, and a brown tie. "Now the law permits accusing people who only think or talk about terrorism," he told me. "It is not required to commit the act of terrorism, only thinking or speaking is enough. The prosecution accused the defendants of organizing terrorist activities in Syria, but they didn't do it."

The Purest of the Pure

The young men I saw on trial were Salafis. The word comes from "al-Salaf al-Salih," or the "virtuous predecessors," meaning the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and their followers. Salafis seek to purify Islam of innovations introduced over the centuries since the Prophet first received his revelations from God. They wish to return to a way of life within the Sunni tradition similar to that of the early Muslim community, basing their lives on the Koran and the *sunna*, or the recorded words and deeds of the Prophet.

Often erroneously called Wahhabis, a term some incorrectly use to describe the strict Saudi brand of Islam, Salafis argue that the Koran is the literal word of God and not subject to interpretation. They stress the importance of *tawhid*, the unity and oneness of God, and condemn examples of *shirk*, the belief that God might have partners. Any practice or belief not supported directly by the Koran or the *sunna* is *bid'a*, an innovation, and combating innovators is crucial to Salafis. Though traditionally Salafis have concentrated on peaceful missionary activities, some radical Salafis

engage in *takfir*, the act of naming someone a *kafir*, that is, an apostate who has renounced his religion and is therefore subject to death.

Thus, Muslims who believe the use of violence is justified against those who deviate from the true path are called *takfir*s. They believe that *jihad* is the “absent obligation,” the sixth pillar of Islam. Although the original meaning of “*jihad*” meant to strive or to struggle to improve oneself, to the young men on trial and others like them, *jihad* has come to mean holy war against the enemies of Islam. These *jihad*ist Salafis, or *takfir*s, were pouring into Iraq to fight the Americans and the Shias. To Salafis, Shias are beyond the pale, worse than Christians or Jews, and they are referred to as *rafidha*, or rejectionists, a pejorative equivalent to the word “nigger.”

Salafism found a home in Jordan beginning in the 1970s, when a Syrian cleric called Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani began teaching there at the invitation of the Muslim Brotherhood. Eventually, he settled in the city of Zarqa, north of Amman, to avoid persecution by the secular Syrian Baathists and began preaching about the need to purify Islam. Hundreds came to hear him speak, and he influenced the ranks and hierarchy of Jordan’s clergy. The regime felt threatened, and he was prohibited from speaking in public.

Unable to operate openly, Salafism became an informal underground movement. The late 1970s were a crucial period, as the leftist, secular, and nationalist projects in the Arab world appeared to be failing. Saudi radicals rose up against their regime, temporarily seizing the Mosque at Mecca. In 1979, the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, and the Iranian Revolution emerged as both a model for political Islamists and a threat to Sunni regimes. In the early 1980s, Arab regimes sought to rid themselves of radicals by dispatching them to Afghanistan.

Jordan was a promising environment for political Islam. The kingdom had been

ruled since the British created it in 1924 by the Hashemites, or Albu Hashem, descendants of the Prophet. In 1970, King Hussein fought an uprising of nationalist Palestinians, some of whom promulgated the slogan, “The liberation of Jerusalem begins in Amman.” The Muslim Brotherhood, previously disenfranchised, supported King Hussein, and the king rewarded its following by granting them control over the Ministry of Education, allowing them to indoctrinate generations of Jordanians. Founded by the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna in 1928, the Brotherhood sought to establish a Muslim state, though not through violence.

Radical Islam had received a needed boost from the Afghan *jihad* that began in 1979, but it was after the first Gulf War of 1991 that *jihad*ism became an international ideology. The Saudi government’s dependence on the American infidels to protect it from Saddam Hussein, and the U.S. presence in the holiest Muslim land, coincided with the *jihad*is’ increasing resentment of their own governments. Arabs who had fought in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation began returning home and sought to bring the *jihad* with them.

Following the Gulf War, Kuwait expelled hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, most of whom settled in Jordan. Returning Jordanian *jihad*is were repelled by the condescension of wealthy Palestinians to their poor country. One such *jihad*i was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who would later lead the Tawhid and Jihad Organization of Iraq, now known as al-Qaeda in Iraq. Other Palestinians brought with them a radical Salafist ideology.

Among them were Abu Muhammad al-Maqdasi, the most important ideologue for modern *jihad* today and Zarqawi’s former mentor, and Abu Anas al-Shami, who went on to become Zarqawi’s key cleric and religious adviser in Iraq. Maqdasi’s writings influenced those who carried out the 1995 bombings in Saudi Arabia that targeted

Americans, as well as the September 11 attackers.

Bringing Jihad to Jordan

Bordered by Palestine and Iraq, Jordan is caught between the two most important struggles in the Muslim world. On November 9, 2005, Zarqawi brought the terror home to Jordan when he dispatched four Iraqi suicide bombers to Amman, three of whom succeeded in detonating their explosive vests in three different hotels, killing sixty and injuring a hundred people. It was Zarqawi's third successful attack in Jordan. Each time he had used non-Jordanians, to avoid infiltration by Jordan's intelligence service.

The war in Iraq had changed everything in the Muslim world, creating both confusion and new certainties. The planners of the American war in Iraq hoped that the democracy they were certain would replace Saddam's dictatorship would spread to other authoritarian states. Nearly three years later, with religious parties dominating the Iraqi elections, Hamas winning the Palestinian elections, the Muslim Brotherhood increasing its power in Egyptian elections, and regimes in the region appearing unthreatened by democracy, it was radical Islam that experienced a renaissance, and jihad was resurgent.

Though only one of many complex factors influencing life in the Muslim world, the mosque has a vital role in the community. The call to prayer five times a day echoes through neighborhoods, serving to regulate life. The mosque is a place for men to meet to pray, study, talk, bond, and mobilize for collective action. The *khutba*, or sermon, is often a call to action, with the imam lecturing his flock about issues that matter to the community. Particularly in authoritarian states, the *manbar*, or pulpit, is a rare source of alternative authority. Likewise, in authoritarian states that restrict freedom of expression, the *khutba* is an important alternative source of information and views.

I visited Irbid's Hnina neighborhood to see if the Qaqa mosque could have been where the ten young men on trial had found their inspiration. The mosque is an inconspicuous white building with a small dome and tower, its interior unpainted cinder-block walls. Down the hill from its gated entrance was a small tiled bathroom for ablutions. When I visited, there were some 600 believers at prayer. The men kneeled, or bowed, or stood in individual silent prayer in rows along the white lines painted on the green carpet in a "fortified wall" as tradition stipulates.

The service was led by a sheikh who himself was called Jihad, though the name is not unusual. As the men completed their prayers, Sheikh Jihad stood up and began with a short prayer. "Thanks to Allah, supporter of Islam," he intoned, "for his victory and his humiliation of infidelity with his power and for managing all matters with his orders and deceiving the infidels with his cleverness, the one who estimates the days going over and over by his justice. Prayer and peace on the one who raises the flag of Islam with his sword."

This was no ordinary prayer and is not normally used, but it is the same prayer used in every message put out by al-Qaeda in Iraq. In his sermon, Sheikh Jihad urged his flock to go on the Haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, adding that Muslims who did not fulfill this obligation were as bad as Jews. The sermon concluded with a call to Allah to help mujahidin in their jihads.

The sheikh lived beneath his mosque with his family, and I waited on the steps in front of his door as he kissed and greeted well-wishers. He invited me to his guest room, lined with books on Islam. Green pillows covered the floor, and we sat down to drink tea that he brought in from the kitchen. The rest of the house was off-limits to me, lest I glimpse his wife. I could hear his children watching cartoons on television. Colorful plastic flowers, which seem to be a part of the décor of most Jordanian homes,

decorated the room. On one wall, Sheikh Jihad had hung an immense sword with a wide sharp blade. On its hilt were two skulls and ominous-looking spikes. Apparently, the 35-year-old sheikh took his name seriously.

Like most of the population of Irbid, Sheikh Jihad was of Palestinian origin; his family's town had been destroyed by the Israelis in 1967. He had been a cleric for ten years, after receiving a degree in *sharia*, or Islamic law, from a Sudanese correspondence school. "The *khutba* is a standard that measures the direction of people," he told me, adding that before his sermons had been much more political, especially in the beginning of the American war in Iraq, but after being arrested by the Jordanian authorities he was forced to moderate his tone. He complained that though many townspeople had gone to fight in Iraq, they were only close to Iraq in their words, not in their hearts. I asked him about the ten young men I had seen in court two days before, but he claimed never to have heard of them. He no longer explicitly advocated jihad in public at least, worrying that the November bombings in three Amman hotels had changed things in Jordan. "People were disgusted by it," he said, complaining that now things in Iraq were confusing.

Jibadi vs. Jihadi

Zarqawi's attack divided Jordanians. Many clung to the belief that it was the Israeli Mossad that was really responsible, others believed there were indeed Israeli spies in the hotels Zarqawi had targeted. Zarqawi, known as the "Sheikh of the Slaughterers," could trace his ideology to his mentor, Isam Taher al-Oteibi al-Burqawi, known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdasi, whom he had met in Pakistan. Maqdasi was a self-taught Palestinian cleric living in Kuwait. Like many Palestinians who relocated to Jordan, Maqdasi had belonged to an important Kuwaiti Salafi organization called Jamiyat al-Turath al-Islami, or the Society of Islamic

Heritage, led by the Egyptian cleric Sheikh Abdel Rahman al-Khaleq. Khaleq had come to Kuwait from Egypt in the 1960s, a period when many Egyptian Islamists moved to the Gulf to escape government persecution.

Upon arriving in Jordan in 1991, Maqdasi joined with Jordanian and Palestinian Salafis who had fought in Afghanistan. Maqdasi called his organization Tawhid (Monotheism), but later changed the name to Bayat al-Imam, or Oath of Loyalty to the Leader. Maqdasi traveled around Jordan with his book *Milat Ibrahim* (The Creed of Abraham), which was the most important source for Jordanian jihadis. The book, also available on Maqdasi's website, discusses some of the main duties of the followers of Ibrahim, such as avoiding improper worship of Allah and demonstrating enmity toward infidels until they returned to Allah.

The followers of Ibrahim also had to renounce impious tyrants, naming them and their followers as infidels. Such "tyrants" might include graves, a reference to the Sufi and Shia practice of visiting the graves of saints and revered imams. "Tyrants" could also include the laws made by men. It was one's duty to expose all such forms of worship and idolatry.

According to Maqdasi, democracy was a heretical religion and constituted the rejection of Allah, monotheism, and Islam. It was an innovation (*bid'a*) that placed the people (the "tyrant") above Islam. Only Allah could make laws, and Allah's laws had to be applied to apostates, fornicators, thieves, consumers of alcohol, and unveiled women. Maqdasi held that the regimes that ruled Muslims were un-Islamic and illegitimate. Therefore Muslims did not owe them obedience and should fight them to establish a true Islamic state.

Zarqawi had been jailed in Jordan in the 1980s for criminal activities. After he was released from jail he headed to Afghanistan in 1989, where various Afghan factions were now fighting one another. When he returned to Jordan, he sought out former

mujahidin he had met in Afghanistan, including Maqdasi. Zarqawi and Maqdasi were arrested and jailed in 1994. The Jordanian authorities placed all the Islamist prisoners together and in isolation from other prisoners. In this hothouse of radicalism, prisoners exchanged ideas and established trust with one another. Zarqawi and Maqdasi continued organizing jihadis until their release in a 1999 amnesty.

During his years in prison, the awkward and solemn Zarqawi began to bloom as a jihadi, while Maqdasi, despite the anger and violence of his ideas, avoided conflict. While Zarqawi's aggressive personality attracted the tough young men imprisoned with him, Maqdasi was relegated to a theological position, issuing fatwas. Their time together in prison was as important for members of the jihadi movement as their experiences in Afghanistan had been, bonding the men who suffered together. Shortly after his release, Zarqawi left for Pakistan, where he was temporarily arrested before making it to Afghanistan along with his key followers. Zarqawi was influenced by Egyptian jihadist thinking, which held that the leader should be based outside of his own country. Maqdasi opposed conducting operations within Jordan.

When he was in Afghanistan, Zarqawi found both al-Qaeda and the Taliban insufficiently extreme. Zarqawi also criticized Osama bin Laden for not calling Arab governments infidels and attacking them. For Zarqawi, the near enemy was the priority, while for bin Laden the far enemy was the priority. He condemned the Taliban for lack of piety, criticizing them for not being Salafis, for insufficiently imposing *sharia*, and for recognizing the United Nations, an infidel organization. He also condemned al-Qaeda for associating with the Taliban. Zarqawi established his own camp in the western Afghan city of Herat, near the border with Iran. Following September 11, Zarqawi left Afghanistan for autonomous Kurdistan in northern Iraq, where he linked up

with the terrorist group Ansar al-Islam in a region outside of Saddam's reach. With Saddam's fall in April 2003, Zarqawi had a new failed state to operate in. In summer 2003, he claimed responsibility for the devastating attack against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Zarqawi allied himself with Ansar al-Sunna, a reconstituted Ansar al-Islam, composed mostly of Iraqis. His own group, Tawhid and Jihad in Iraq, was made up of some 1,000–1,500 mostly foreign fighters.

Zarqawi's inner circle was made up of his close friends, none of whom were Iraqis. Their plan was to turn Iraq into hell for all its residents, to prevent an elected government from taking power, and to create a civil war between Sunnis and the hated Shias. Zarqawi's group was responsible for the gruesome videotaped beheadings of foreigners and of Iraqis accused of collaboration.

In his various written and taped communiqués Zarqawi elaborated on his ideology. He condemned the people who "held the stick in the middle." They were not fighting for their nation. They were waiting for the fight to end so they could join the victor. Godly people were carrying the flag of Islam high and raising their heads in humiliating times. He denounced Muslims who criticized the beheading of the young American Nicholas Berg. They were cowards who were not fighting the infidel and did not know how glorious it felt to fight *jabiliya* (pre-Islamic ignorance). Zarqawi lamented that Muslims were being tortured in Iraq as well as in Palestine, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Chechnya, and yet all the Muslim nation could do was to weep and protest. Such demonstrations had done nothing for Afghanistan, and now Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban, was hiding in the mountains. The Muslim nation had done nothing to defend the chastity of the women of Sarajevo, Indonesia, Palestine, and Iraq. Zarqawi swore that so long as he and his men had dignity and honor they would not sleep or

spend time with their wives while other Muslim women were under attack.

The Mind of a Jihadist

Maysara al-Ghareeb, who was Zarqawi's information minister and has written a history of Zarqawi's experiences in Iraq, said that he was depressed when he tried and failed to make a difference in Iraq and thought of leaving, but then he met Zarqawi and hope arose from the "cemetery of desperation." Ghareeb views conflict and fighting as the natural state of the world. Modern history was a chain of struggles and competition for power, and good intentions could do nothing to affect power. Power ruled international affairs and diplomacy was just the language of power hidden by a soft mask. Defeated countries always had to conform to the system the victor imposed on them, and America's current method for dominating the world was by calling for the protection of human rights.

Using the drug war as an excuse, America had occupied Panama and arrested its president, while it had been trading drugs with the Chinese for a hundred years. It used a humanitarian pretext to justify its invasions of Iraq and Somalia. America claimed to be fighting a war on terror, but it had engaged in terrorism when it dropped nuclear bombs on Japan. But all unjust powers will have their day of judgment. Western civilization was immoral. Its primary motive was money, with the ends justifying the means. In general, infidels had no God but money. Western civilization consisted of looting, genocide, and drug dealing.

The infidels were punishing Muslims everywhere. Muslims were thus commanded by God to fight the infidel in their home states. The Muslim world was being dominated and suppressed by a system of divide and conquer imposed on it. The infidels prevented cooperation among Muslim countries and supported secular powers. They had established a Jewish state in the heart

of the Arab world. They destroyed the economies of the Muslim world by encouraging educated people to emigrate and by buying up natural resources at low prices. They instigated inter-Muslim disputes, selling weapons to the belligerents and then taking over reconstruction and profiting from it. They forced poor states to remain in debt and thus controlled them.

The Shias had been harming Sunnis from the beginning of Islamic history, Maysara al-Ghareeb said. He trusted Zarqawi's approach to the Shias because Zarqawi had a lot of experience fighting going back to Afghanistan. Why should Muslims fight the Shias? Were they not also Muslims? No, he said. Their Islam was a decoration and they were hypocrites. Shias hated Aishia, the wife of the Prophet. It was Shias who had helped the Americans in Abu Ghraib prison. Shias prayed differently. In Shia Iran there were Christian churches and Jewish synagogues but no Sunni mosques.

All Shias were vicious people, and once they ruled Iraq they would fight the Sunnis. Democracy was like a sleeping pill given to the Sunnis so when they woke up they would be excluded from Iraq. The Shias were the slaves of the Americans in Iraq. They were attacking Sunnis, and hence Zarqawi's movement would attack them. Though innocent people may have died as a result of Zarqawi's operations, many more would have died at the hands of the Americans if they had been left unchallenged.

The Gates of Heaven

On September 11, 2004, Zarqawi addressed the Muslim nation. Jihad had been declared and the gates of heaven were open. If the men were not willing to fight, they should let their women take up arms and the men should take up cooking.

After Zarqawi renamed his organization al-Qaeda in Iraq, its ideology and purpose was elaborated by Abu Maysara, who was probably his information minister Maysara al-Ghareeb. They would not spill a drop of

Muslim blood unjustly, Abu Maysara explained. But it was necessary to kill Americans and their “collaborators.” They were fighting to restore the caliphate to Baghdad as it had been in the days of Harun al-Rashid and to kill impure Muslims who collaborated with the infidels fighting under the cross of the Crusaders. They were not fighting for Iraq as a nation, but for Islam as a nation. Abu Maysara praised the foreign fighters who had left their families and homes to protect Iraqi Muslims from the invaders. Martyrdom operations, as he called suicide bombers, were sanctified by Muslim scholars, and defending Islam was even more important than defending the lives of Muslims.

Following the invasion of Iraq, Zarqawi’s mentor, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdasi wrote a letter addressed to the Sunnis of Iraq. God had blessed them, he said, by ridding them of Saddam Hussein, whose criminal regime had oppressed and humiliated them for decades. Infidels who showed no mercy had defeated Saddam, and they sought only to inflict evil and humiliation upon Islam and Muslims. They had come to change the Islamic values of Iraq’s Sunnis and to steal the country’s resources. The infidels had come to achieve their own interests and those of their allies, the Jews. Israeli intelligence agents were now looting Iraq under the guise of reconstructing it. Maqdasi warned Muslims against allying with the Baathists after God had gotten rid of them because their new declarations of jihad and Islam were mere deceptions. Sunnis should not join the Governing Council because it was an American creation, and if they did they would be sent to the fires of hell. The Americans were preparing an infidel constitution that would govern them according to Jewish and American wishes.

Maqdasi warned Sunnis against alliances with the rejectionist Shias, who allied themselves with the Americans just as their ancestors had allied with the Mongols who destroyed Baghdad in 1258. The Shias called

the jihad terrorism and encouraged the American enemies to oppress Sunnis. Shias sought the ruin of Sunnis. He called on Iraq’s Sunnis to protect their “Muslim supporters” who came from around the world motivated by “Islamic brotherhood, religion, and passion for Islam and its people.”

Arab satellite channels were the agents of the West, Maqdasi said. They focused on Saddam’s crimes, his mass graves, and prisons as if other criminal governments that are agents of America are not like Saddam. American media focused on Iraqis looting to show the world that the Iraqis were thieves that America would civilize. He condemned American hypocrisy. If all the Palestinian homes Israel had destroyed were piled up on top of each other, he wrote, “you will wonder how many twin towers they will be equal to.”

Extremist vs. Extremist

Even as he focused on jihad in Iraq, Zarqawi reserved a special hatred for the Jordanian monarchy and its security forces. His confrontation with Jordan culminated in the November 9, 2005, attacks, dubbed by Jordanians as “our 9/11,” in which almost all the victims were Jordanians.

Zarqawi’s extreme methods in Iraq and Jordan had begun to worry Maqdasi even before this event. In July 2004, Maqdasi’s website offered advice to Zarqawi. He warned against exploding cars, setting off roadside bombs, and firing mortars which caused Muslims to be killed. Jihadi hands had to be clean of innocent blood, he said. Maqdasi said that Muslims who worked for the infidels should not be killed unless they helped the infidels harm Muslims. Maqdasi also warned Zarqawi not to attack churches because it would encourage infidels to kill Muslims.

A month later, responding to attacks for his criticism of Zarqawi, Maqdasi qualified his statements. “I tried to increase the stature of my brothers’ jihad and their morals,” because he wanted the jihad to

maintain its pure image “and for its fruits not to be wasted.” His advice was meant exclusively for the “mujahidin zealous for their jihad” in the front lines because they had left their countries, families, and money to glorify Islam. He criticized those who used his message of advice to discredit the mujahidin. He had written his advice for those who advanced Islam and “screamed for it like bereaved mothers” when Islam was insulted. It was they who were defending their religion by responding to the call to jihad. He condemned those who wrote that the decapitations in the Iraqi jihad were illegitimate or said that the mujahidin had no mercy. God has sent Muhammad as a messenger of mercy but the Prophet’s mercy could not reach the world without the defeat and decapitation of criminals who obstruct his mercy. Decapitating the enemies of God was legitimate: even the Prophet had done so. Beheading was the only legitimate means of dealing with those who understood only the language of blood and the logic of power.

In July 2005, Maqdasi was released from prison, where he had been held on the charge of possessing explosives. In his defense he had argued that ideas were his only weapon. On his release, Maqdasi was permitted by the Jordanian authorities to give interviews to the press. He said that although he still believed in *takfir*, he disagreed with Zarqawi that all Shias were infidels. Referring to the thirteenth-century thinker Ibn Taimiya, he said that only ignorant Shias were infidels. It might be permitted to kill Muslims, he said, but Zarqawi had gone too far. Zarqawi responded publicly to Maqdasi, saying that they had not started the killings. The Shias in Iraq were to blame for killing Sunnis, for violating their mosques and their homes. They were disguising themselves as policemen to carry out the orders of the Crusader Americans. Zarqawi denied Maqdasi’s accusations that his group was killing Christians or innocent civilians.

Maqdasi opposed Zarqawi’s attempts to conduct armed operations within Jordan. Failed attacks had led to the deaths and arrests of members of their organization and wasted money, he said, all because Zarqawi was a poor planner and administrator. In saying these things, Maqdasi was trying to divert blame from Salafist ideology itself and casting doubts upon Zarqawi’s ability to lead the jihad. Maqdasi claimed that weapons he had been accused of possessing were for operations inside Palestine against the Israelis and that operations in Jordan should be limited to proselytizing. “I chose to stay in the country to handle the proselytizing that we began and I hope to move it west across the river, where I have hopes and ambitions,” Maqdasi said, referring to Israel. Maqdasi opposed operations that targeted civilians, the unarmed, and the innocent. It was unwise to place bombs in public areas such as markets because this distorted the image of Islam and colored the hands of the mujahidin with the blood of the innocents. He condemned Zarqawi’s kidnappings and filmed beheadings which made the mujahidin look like slaughterers who enjoyed killing people without restraint. “Martyrdom operations,” or suicide bombers, should not be the primary means of jihad.

From Reformer to Jihadist

Not all Salafis engage in violence. Salafism can be divided into at least three types: traditional, reformist, and jihadist. Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, who brought Salafism to Jordan in the 1970s, was a traditionalist who eschewed political activism, preferring to focus on theological issues and obey the tradition that demand fealty even to unjust rulers. Reform Salafism was established to counter jihadist Salafism. Both reformists and jihadists seek to change society. The only important dispute between them is over how and when to declare a Muslim an infidel and whether jihad can be waged against un-Islamic rulers. Reformists seek

change through education, viewing violence as counterproductive.

Last December, I went to the Dar al-Atharia (House of Heritage) bookstore, in Amman's Abdali neighborhood, in search of reformist and traditional Salafi literature. Minivans and taxis blocked traffic in the crowded streets. Many vehicles had a large sticker pasted on their rear windows. Beneath the *shahada*, or testament that there was no god but Allah, and Muhammad was his prophet, written in ornate calligraphy, was a large curved sword stretching from one side of the window to the other. It was not a symbol of peace.

Once inside the bookstore, I picked up a copy of *Iraq in the Speech and Heritage of Strife*, published in Dubai in 2004, written by Abu Obeida Mashhur bin Hassan al-Salman. "We are now under continuous and high waves of *fitna* (internal strife)," the author said, and Iraq was the center of strife, as the Prophet Muhammad had predicted, and from it earthquakes would come and the horn of the devil would appear. The author warned that Shias who pretend to speak Arabic would oppose the fortunes of Iraq. Shias were extremists who cursed the companions of the Prophet, and without them there would be no strife in the Muslim world.

According to Zaid bin Muhammad bin Hadi al-Madkhali, the author of *Terrorism and Its Bad Influence on Individuals and Nations*, published in Egypt in 2003, "There is a terrorist group that pretends to love the prophet Muhammad's descendants." He is clearly referring to Shias. "They are one of the most deceptive groups and one of the most terrorizing with their corrupted ideologies and crooked ideas. They are not connected to Islam, they are against Muslims, they are the rejectionists." While the author does condemn a few Sunni acts of terrorism, such as the attempted assassination of Saudi Arabia's founder, the seizure of the Mosque at Mecca in 1979, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, and the bombing of the

Khobar Towers, which was directed at Americans, he reserves most of his wrath for Shias. Referring to a Shia protest in Saudi Arabia that had turned violent, he writes of "the devil's battle made by the deniers, the followers of Iran."

The bookstore hides its jihadist and *takfiri* books, which are officially illegal. But they are available under the table, along with films of attacks against Israeli and American forces. On the bookstore's window was pasted a notice advertising a weekly Salafi lecture in the Wihdat neighborhood. My taxi driver got lost searching for the mosque in question, but we finally found it in an alley behind Wihdat's main street with its neon-lit shops. Inside, some five hundred men, young and old, some in sports clothes, some in traditional dress, listened attentively to a cleric who was giving an anodyne sermon on the basics of Salafism and the importance of the concept of God's oneness and unity. Yet the distance between this brand of Salafism and the jihadist variety is often not great.

One of Jordan's most important reformist leaders, Omar Yusuf Jumaa, known as Abu Anas al-Shami, was to die in battle in Iraq. Although Maqdasī was the spiritual father of Zarqawi's movement, providing the religious jurisprudence to justify the group's activities, Abu Anas was to become its spiritual leader in Iraq. Another Palestinian who moved to Jordan following the 1991 Gulf War, Abu Anas was born in 1969 in Salmiya, Kuwait, to a family with Jordanian citizenship. One of seven children, he was given a strong education in classical Arabic, and disliked the dialects, using the formal classical Arabic in conversation, even when joking. He studied Islamic theology in Saudi Arabia from 1988 to 1991, at a school where a pure Islam without any innovation was taught and the importance of jihad was stressed. He was highly influenced by the works of Said Qutb of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood but claimed he had learned from the mistakes

the *ikhwan* (brotherhood) had made when it became institutionalized and reached an accommodation with the state.

In Saudi Arabia, Abu Anas met many former mujahidin who had fought in Afghanistan. In summer 1990, he went there with a university friend, where they trained for three months, learning basic military skills. Abu Anas swore an oath to the camp commander that he would never use his skills against fellow Muslims. From Afghanistan, he went to Jordan with two military experts who would later become key comrades of Zarqawi in Iraq. In Jordan, he led the Murad mosque in the Sowailih neighborhood of Amman, becoming an important leader of the Salafi movement in Jordan. He returned to Saudi Arabia often, where he was influenced by the radical clerics Sifr al-Hawali, Salman al-Awda, and Nasser al-Omar, whom he viewed as true Salafi leaders. (These men were later arrested by Saudi authorities.) In the 1990s, Abu Anas spent a year and a half in Bosnia, where as many as four thousand foreign mujahidin were seeking martyrdom fighting Serbs and Croats.

Abu Anas, who had lamented the lack of charismatic leadership in the Muslim world, rejoiced at the September 11 attacks, which “awoke the sleeping hope and motivated youth.” Married to a Palestinian woman and the father of three, he worked at an Islamic charity until it was closed by the Jordanian authorities. He then took a job at the Imam Bokhari Center, which he co-founded. Bokhari was a ninth-century theologian important to the Salafi movement who had compiled the Prophet’s purported sayings. One such was “I wish that I could be killed for the sake of Allah then revived, then killed, then revived, then killed then revived, then killed.”

Abu Anas opposed conducting military operations in Jordan, but he supported the Iraqi jihad. Like Zarqawi, he looked to the thirteenth-century scholar Ibn Taimiya as his model. Ibn Taimiya had led his people

against the Mongols and explained that even though the Mongols were nominal Muslims, because their actions were un-Islamic they could be slain as infidels. Abu Anas was a quiet man who fasted often and prayed at night; every month he would spend a week sequestered in his mosque. A friend said that “the key to his personality was his kindness and high morals. He was a great scholar. He was very active in his *dawa* and had great integrity. He cared a lot about Islam and Muslims.” This friend said, “We were in our car and saw an Egyptian asking for a lift on the road. Before he got in the car Abu Anas asked him, ‘Do you pray?’ The man said no. Abu Anas said, ‘What if the angel of death came down to us while we are riding in this miserable car, what would you tell him?’”

In March 2003, Abu Anas was arrested by the Jordanian authorities after he accused the country’s ruling family of turning Jordan into an American camp. He condemned the American-led war in Iraq as a war against Islam. After his release from jail, he called upon his followers to demand that the government stop assisting the Americans, and he encouraged young people to go to Iraq to fight. Even though his reformist Salafi movement had been created in opposition to jihadis, he found his position untenable and decided to join the jihad in Iraq. “You can’t face God in the afterlife if you don’t fight,” one friend recalled him saying. “If you are my imam, lead me,” he would say to justify his decision to join the battle, repeating a Salafi motto: “The sincerity of our call is proven by the death of our leaders.”

The Road to Falluja

Abu Anas told friends he was going to Saudi Arabia to work, but they soon recognized his voice and signature in the announcements of Zarqawi’s Tawhid and Jihad in Iraq. Many of his students followed him to the battlefield. In late 2003, Abu Anas assumed the position of Sharia Council man-

ager and spiritual leader of Zarqawi's movement. He was responsible for issuing fatwas, especially those justifying and ordering the execution of foreigners. He also conducted ceremonies and wrote Zarqawi's communiqués.

In Falluja, Abu Anas lectured his followers, and they recorded his sermons. He explained that it had been decided to use Falluja as a safe haven because after a year of jihad they were "hiding in the day, sneaking like a cat at night." He fought in the first battle of Falluja and was wounded on April 7, 2004, losing his hearing in one ear. He had urged Zarqawi not to come to Falluja to avoid being caught by the Americans. There are videos showing him sermonizing, analyzing verses in the Koran that discussed jihad against Jews and Christians, using Ibn Taimiya's interpretations to defend his positions. He condemned Arab leaders as infidel, tyrannical, and blasphemous. Political parties were against God himself. Iraq's army and police were tools in the hands of the tyrants. Killing them was justified, even if it meant also killing the devout. He explained this by analogy. If the Americans tied a Muslim man to a tank and were attacking you, you were justified in destroying the tank, even if it meant killing the Muslim. This was the jihadist concept of *turus*, or shield, meaning that Muslims used as shields by the Americans were legitimate targets. It was better that Muslims died in the path of jihad than at the hands of the Americans. God also ordered the killing of good people, if they were in the way and it was necessary.

Abu Anas complained that some Muslim scholars condemned the September 11 attacks for causing the deaths of innocent people. However, these same scholars did not complain when Muslims killed other Muslims in the Afghan civil war. The important thing was that Muslims should not associate with unbelievers. It was even better to kill a Muslim who had abandoned his religion by helping the Americans than it

was to kill an American. People who served the Americans were "holding the stick in the middle," but there could be no compromise. If you believed in jihad, you had to join the jihad.

Their success in the battle for Falluja in April, Abu Anas said, was due to divine intervention rather than a superior military. Street fighting required bravery, he said, which the American soldiers did not possess. Falluja, a small, quiet town, where four contract workers were lynched, had become a nightmare for the Americans. He denied that the burning, dismemberment, and hanging of the four contractors had caused the American incursion. He claimed that they were "security officers and war planners," as evidenced by the identification cards they carried and the maps of Falluja found in their possession.

During the battle, Abu Anas urged on his followers from the loudspeakers of Falluja's Furkan mosque. He was furious when he heard other mosques calling for a curfew rather than jihad. These were the same people, he exclaimed in wonder, who had called for jihad before the war had ended, and once Saddam had lost they had gone quiet. He returned to the mosque and repeated his call for jihad. He even tried to throw a grenade, but it failed to explode, and he joked that the fuse must have been made in Iraq. When, in avoiding American fire, he lost his slippers, Abu Anas mentioned being teased by Zarqawi for wearing old slippers and for refusing to replace them, but he explained that a friend in Saudi Arabia had given them to him. That night, he wrote a humorous letter to Zarqawi, letting him know that he had lost his slippers.

After Abu Anas was killed by in a targeted assassination by U.S. forces later that year, in September, his disciples produced a video about him. The DVD opens with an image of a sunlit lake, with a narrator saying, "To do jihad and die on the same day is better than to live for sixty years praying to God." The video described the close friend-

ship between Abu Anas and Zarqawi, and it showed Abu Anas standing behind the American hostage Nicholas Berg prior to his execution. “The first day we arrived we started the jihad,” the narrator recalled. “He was a soldier, a caller for Islam and an issuer of *fatwas*. He moved throughout Iraq and the women of Iraq cried for him when he died. People should believe that we are real fighters because we are losing our leaders and our leaders are in the front lines and they are dying.” In April 2005, Zarqawi’s jihadis conducted a two-day offensive against the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. The attack included rockets, mortars, and suicide car bombers. Al-Qaeda in Iraq named the attack the “Battle of Abu Anas al-Shami.”

The Jordanian Connection

The war in Iraq galvanized young admirers of Zarqawi, Abu Anas, and other mujahidin, who frequented jihadist websites and Internet chat rooms where they could watch filmed encomiums to their heroes and violent depictions of their latest exploits. The young men on trial in Jordan when I visited may have failed as jihadis. But perhaps more important than the success or failure of their quixotic and ill-planned schemes is the fact that they have become thoroughly indoctrinated in jihadist thinking in the time they have spent in Jordanian prisons.

“Most people here hate and hate and hate the U.S. administration,” Samih Khreis, a lawyer and high-ranking member of the Jordanian Bar Association, tells me. “And most people, if they had the opportunity to blow up the White House, they would.” Khreis often represents Jordanians accused of terrorism, and his clients have included Azmi al-Jayusi, a close Zarqawi associate. Khreis remembers seeing mujahidin recruiters on the streets of Amman in the 1980s, working with the approval of the Jordanian government to sign up young Jordanians for the jihad in Afghanistan. “Governments taught them these Salafi *takfiri*

ideas to encourage them to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan,” he said, “and after they returned they compared their governments’ conduct with they had been taught, and according to this thinking the governments were infidels. The magic is turned against the magician. When they were against the Soviets they were good, but against the U.S. they are terrorists?”

Although in the past most recruits were uneducated and poor, Khreis said, “after the war in Iraq, many educated men joined, like engineers. This was new. Most men going to Iraq now are educated men from Irbid, and most are Jordanians. They come from good families.” He added that most families of accused terrorists were proud of their sons. Khreis’s youngest client was an 18-year-old jihadist hopeful. “I take these cases because the American government is against them, and I am not with the U.S., and the Jordanian government wants to satisfy the U.S.” Like many Jordanians, Khreis believes Zarqawi was not responsible for the hotel bombings in Amman. “The hotel bombings were perpetrated by the Mossad, maybe the CIA is involved. There is a secret agreement between the Jordanian government and the U.S. to bring American forces here to attack Syria, so they want to prepare people for the attack on Syria.”

A June 2005 Pew poll found that 60 percent of Jordanians trusted Osama bin Laden and 50 percent supported violence to get rid of non-Muslim influence. The report stunned the Jordanian government. “We said, no way, our people are not like that,” a palace insider told me. But when the Jordanian government conducted its own research, it got similar responses. “Even if we assume the Pew poll is exaggerated—maybe 25 percent trust [bin Laden] very much and 35 percent trust him somewhat—if Zarqawi wants to recruit here, how many does he need? Even if one-half of 1 percent join, he’s ok.” Despite the support for Zarqawi and bin Laden in the polls, the insider does not see this as a true radicalization of Jordanian

society. It merely reflects the widespread feeling that whatever hurts America is good. "When it comes to Israel we are helpless," he said, "Hundreds of millions of Arabs, and we can't hurt Israel or America, so we can be happy with what is happening to America in Iraq."

He also blamed the Jordanian government's tolerance of Salafism. "This is appeasement on the part of the security services. The Catholic Church got them to ban the *Da Vinci Code*, but in Abdali you can buy Salafi books. They have been turning a blind eye since the 1970s." He added that the requirements for studying Islamic law in the University of Jordan were lower than for any other subject.

"*Sharia* students are the ones who get the worst scores and can't get into other schools, the ones with no critical thinking skills. The *sharia* school in the university accepts the dumbest students. They tell them 'if all other majors are closed to you, become a preacher.'" There are over three thousand mosques in Jordan, he tells me, but a tenth of them lack a regular imam, which means "anyone can stand up and do the Friday sermon." In addition, he said, "1,450 imams earn less than 100 dinars a month, so you can buy them easily. So the quality of the preachers is low."

Muhammad Abu Rumman, a Jordanian journalist specializing in Islamic movements, and a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, attributed the attraction of Salafism to "*al-ibbat*," or hopelessness. "The political environment and conditions make people feel bad," he says. "They have no hope for the future with the political system here, so they try by themselves to do what the government cannot do. They are victims of conditions in Jordan and the Arab world. Political consciousness is born in bad political, economic, social conditions. There is no religious reform. Religious understanding is not supporting democracy and human rights. It always says all the bad things are because we are far from Islam and we don't

obey Allah so the U.S. invaded Iraq." He explained that the Muslim Brotherhood, which was Jordan's only opposition movement but which has refrained from questioning the government's legitimacy, "represents the middle class and shares in the system and government, but in their religious speech they use the same language as Salafis. These youth do what people say and don't do. We all speak of Iraq. The preachers speak of Iraq, and of jihad in Iraq and Palestine. The king would be in danger if he tried to stop this. All of the society speaks the same language."

Hassan Abu Haniyeh, a Jordanian researcher specializing in Salafism and a former reformist Salafi himself, agrees. "The main motivation for terrorists is unemployment and poverty. The people are between the hammer of the Americans and anvil of exclusion from participating. If you opened an office for volunteers for the jihad in Iraq here you would take a million and from the rest of the Arab world you would take millions."

Abu Haniyeh complained that the American project of reform in the Arab world had given democracy a bad name. "The U.S. terminated us, the reformers," he said, "because now the word 'reform' is a bad word, an American word. If people hear the word they think of Iraq, which became a model of violence. And now the reformers are isolated from people, people don't like them. The reform project has become empty from the inside because the replacement of our regimes is very terrifying, so there is nothing left, only extremist talk."

Yasar Qatarneh, a sharp, raucous, slightly overweight man who jokingly calls himself an Islamist, likes to provoke. He is on a strict diet, looking forward eagerly to his "free day." Qatarneh runs Jordan's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, a think tank within the Jordanian government funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Terrorism is linked to events on both sides of the border," he says. "For 50 years, Islamist

activists and politicians were the regime's main source of legitimacy." Now the chickens had come home to roost. "We have to draw a line which Zarqawi, goddamn him,

blurred. It was very legitimate to fight occupation. Zarqawi blurred the line and now you can't distinguish if what he does is terrorism or freedom fighting." ●