



© 2006 Evan Kohlmann (<http://www.globalterroralert.com> – info@globalterroralert.com)

When Zarqawi issued statements in September 2005 threatening to massacre any Sunnis or Shiites who dared to vote in U.S.-sponsored elections, the influential Iraqi Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) aimed a stinging rebuke directly at him:

“There is no religious basis allowing you to take your revenge on the innocent while ignoring the true criminals, nor are there rules stating that the innocent should bear the consequences for the acts of criminals... it is impossible for someone who claims to rely on the laws of Allah to make his decisions based on emotions and personal grudges. Such a dangerous statement only serves the most deadly wishes of our enemies—the desire to tear apart our country and to initiate a battle amongst the faithful... The best course of action for those who came to help eliminate the foreign occupation in our land is advocacy, not killing and annihilating the perspectives of others... we would like to remind Abu Musab al-Zarqawi that religion can be used to advocate and we ask him to retract all the threats he has made because they damage the image of the jihad and take away from the success of the jihadi resistance project in Iraq, and it increases the bloodshed suffered by innocent Iraqis.”²



The worst fears of Al-Qaida seemed to be coming true. The Iraqi Muslims who they had come to “save” were rejecting them as “troublemakers” and instead embracing “the peace of the enemy.” Stunned and outraged, Al-Qaida wasted no time in responding to this mortal affront. The group released a video of Zarqawi spokesman Abu Hamza al-Baghdadi (a native of Baghdad) who pleaded with his audience, “The [Sunni] Muslims are our family and the children of Al-Qaida who have shed their blood in the land of Mesopotamia in order to defend the word of Allah and to defend the honor and holy places of the Muslims. O’ Sunni people, how is it possible for us to sacrifice your blood and bodies without sacrificing our own?” Abu Hamza admonished the willingness of moderate Sunnis to abandon those who came from afar to fight on their behalf in exchange for shared rule with the Shiites:

“Anyone who attempts to distinguish between Iraqis and non-Iraqis with regards to jihad in the cause of Allah and helping to determine the destiny of the nation, then he would be mistaken. The true foreigner is the one who runs away from the land of courage and rests with the oppressors who toss him their scraps and leave him to sip at the remnants of

² <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0905/zarqawi-amsulema.pdf>.



© 2006 Evan Kohlmann (<http://www.globalterroralert.com> – info@globalterroralert.com)

their drunken binges. Conversely, those whose blood is shed in the cause of their religion and nation, then he is a true Muslim Iraqi... May Allah be our witness, we say to you that the fingernail of any foreign mujahid who is fighting in Mesopotamia beyond Shaykh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—may Allah protect him—is worth more than a country full of those who follow al-Sistani, al-Jaafari, al-Hakim, al-Sharastani, and Chalabi... anyone who forsakes his own country and comes to Mesopotamia in order to declare jihad in the cause of Allah and who remains steadfast in the Muslim homeland is superior to any Iraqi who runs away from battle, delivering himself into the hands of the oppressors and attempting to distinguish between the Iraqis and the non-Iraqis.”³

As the fall of 2005 progressed, events appeared to be following the same disastrous path for the foreign mujahideen in Iraq as they had taken for their brethren in Bosnia-Herzegovina a decade earlier. At the height of their military power in late September 1995, Bosnian Muslim forces suddenly halted their final offensive against Serb forces in the Vozuca region under pressure from U.S. and European diplomats and against the advice of foreign mujahideen commanders. The Arab fighters in the El-Mudzahedin Unit had not intended their sacrifices on the battlefield to be manipulated by Western policymakers to force Serbs and Muslims into peace negotiations. By ending the Bosnian war and putting the country on the road to recovery, the Dayton Accords effectively strangled the jihad in the Balkans. Thousands of mujahideen eager to avenge war crimes against Bosnian Muslims were instead being told by the latter group to abandon their abortive mission and return home. As the Arab fighters there noted bitterly in reflection, “the most hated thing for the mujahid is the peace of the enemy.”⁴ Only days before the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Accords creating peace in Bosnia, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s Al-Qaida faction in Iraq issued shrill warnings to its supporters that “the Crusaders are preparing for the new ‘Dayton’ conspiracy by forming an alliance with the fools amongst the Sunnis.”⁵

In the run-up to the Iraqi national elections in December, Al-Qaida began to disseminate propaganda pamphlets in central Iraq in a last ditch effort aimed at persuading Sunni Iraqis not to participate in any democratic referendum aimed at co-opting the jihad. One such pamphlet beseeched, “Do you know what participating in the elections means? ...your mere participation means that you have agreed to do as the Americans have demanded. In fact, if you participate, you are obeying the infidel leaders—Bush, Rice, and Kofi Annan. Do you want to follow them? Taking part in the elections means that you do not value the blood of your brother martyrs that has been spilled all across Iraq in order to defend the people, Islam, and the honor of our Muslim nation.”⁶ Another of the pamphlets admonished:

³ <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=33194>. September 21, 2005.

⁴ Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.”

⁵ <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=38817>. November 10, 2005.

⁶ <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=40709>. November 26, 2005.



© 2006 Evan Kohlmann (<http://www.globalterroralert.com> – info@globalterroralert.com)

control. Several of the perpetrators reportedly donned uniforms of Iraqi military and special forces personnel. Though the explosion caused no human casualties, it destroyed much of the ancient, sacred mosque. It was a carefully planned act of provocation—an atrocity that could not be ignored or brushed aside by Shiite militiamen with long-held, pent-up dreams of vengeance.

Al-Qaida and the MSC remained suspiciously quiet for several weeks following the mosque bombing, keeping up their attacks on Shiite militiamen and government officials but abstaining from comment as Iraq descended into a chaotic mess of tit-for-tat sectarian bloodshed. MSC representatives would later boast that “the mujahideen were already aware of the truth behind these deviant Shiites” and, thus, “proper preparations” had consequently been made.¹³ Finally, the silence was broken on March 14 when the MSC issued a much anticipated “statement on the recent events.” According to the communiqué:



Abu Ali al-Maqqisi, a ranking Palestinian Al-Qaida commander killed in Samarra in early 2006.

“...the deviant Shiites have begun a new phase. Their masks have come off and the truth behind their plans has been revealed... These deviant Shiites chose from the beginning to be in the same trench with the Jews and crusaders against the Muslims.... they have gathered their own [factions] together in a single infidel military force... The Muslims have observed them to be a separate religious sect, or nation, confronting the Sunni people, torturing us, violating our possessions and burning down our mosques without hesitation. Recent events have made clear the failure of any coming surrender, or the so-called ‘diplomatic operation,’ which the crooks claiming to be Sunnis rushed headlong towards, leading astray the general Muslim population. This surrender was intended to apply crusader laws completely... [The Sunnis] discovered that everything done in the name of democracy was supposed to bring peace, but instead evil appeared a few short hours later... As such, we attack them out of compassion for our people—the Muslims—so they may be aware of the nature of this campaign and its magnitude, and so they may know the reality of their enemy and what he seeks from them, and so they may mobilize all of their energies to support the jihad and rally around the mujahideen.”¹⁴

The statement triumphantly crowed that, as a result of the sectarian bloodshed following the bombing of the Al-Askariyya mosque, “the [Sunni] people discovered that there is no recourse except through confrontation and the use of weapons.”¹⁵

¹³ <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=57874>. March 2006.

¹⁴ <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=57874>. March 2006.

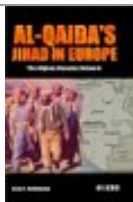
¹⁵ <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=57874>. March 2006.



© 2006 Evan Kohlmann (<http://www.globalterroralert.com> – info@globalterroralert.com)

Undoubtedly, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi still harbors dreams of spreading the jihad in Iraq westward through the Middle East, launching operations in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and beyond. Perhaps the shifting of responsibilities within the Mujahideen Shura Council to a growing share of native Iraqi hands will free his workload enough to permit greater focus on such grand schemes. However, it is a mistake to believe that Zarqawi has any intention of leaving Iraq anytime soon or, conversely, abandoning the jihad there. Before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Zarqawi was a captain without a ship—a mid-level dissident Al-Qaida commander on the run and considered too “volatile” by his superiors to be an effective organizer. Since then, Iraq has become the predominant engine driving forward jihad around the world—ideologically, militarily, and otherwise. The stubborn Jordanian upstart has always insisted he would stand by his mission in Iraq “until the black banner of al-Tawheed flutters in the sky over Iraq... or else we achieve martyrdom.” For Zarqawi to willingly surrender any part of his glorious jihad movement in Iraq—for him to take even one step backward—would be a defeat of staggering proportions. Rather, the Askariyya mosque bombing should serve as a tragic reminder of Zarqawi’s determination to adopt any means necessary in order to stop the “New Dayton” and safeguard the jihad that he regards as his own—even if that means deliberately sacrificing hundreds of innocent Sunni Muslims in a disastrous civil war pitting Iraqis against Iraqis.

Evan F. Kohlmann is an MSNBC terrorism analyst and author of the book, Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: the Afghan-Bosnian Network (Berg, 2004)



Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: the Afghan-Bosnian Network

"For Bin Laden's involvement in the Bosnian conflicts, see Evan F. Kohlmann, Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe." - U.S. 9/11 Commission Final Report (July 2004)

NOW ON SALE IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA