

“Bring Them On!”

Al-Zarqawi Responds to Bush’s Call

Most of the world first heard the name Abu Masab al-Zarqawi on February 6, 2003 in Colin Powell’s presentation before the United Nations Security Council. Powell claimed that Zarqawi was a member of Al Qaeda and was directly linked to Saddam Hussein.

We now know that both these statements were false. Zarqawi did know Osama bin Laden, but there was tension between the two during their time together in Afghanistan. When U. S. forces overthrew the Taliban there, Zarqawi went home to Jordan and set up his own terrorist organization. His first major hit was the assassination of U. S. diplomat Laurence Foley in Amman in October 2002.

On June 17, 2004, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld stated that Zarqawi was “not Al Qaeda,” but Bush and Cheney continued to state that he was. Early in 2004 CIA chief George Tenet told a Senate committee that there was no connection between Zarqawi and Saddam.

Zarqawi did join Ansar al-Islam, a small group of Kurdish Islamists in Iraq, but they were in the north where Saddam had no control. In fact, this area was protected by American and British fighter jets. In March, 2004, NBC News reported the Pentagon wanted to take out the Ansar al-Islam base prior to the invasion of Iraq, but this idea was vetoed by the National Security Agency. Those studying documents discovered at this base and elsewhere in Iraq have not established any operational links among Hussein, bin Laden, or Zarqawi.

It has been claimed that Zarqawi established connections with Saddam while having his leg amputated in Baghdad in May 2002. The problem with this story is that Zarqawi walked on two natural legs until he was killed by a bomb outside Baghdad in June, 2006.

Zarqawi was able to set up his operations in Iraq because of the turmoil of the U. S. invasion. Critics of the war warned that radical Islamists would flock to Iraq and would target U. S. soldiers. Bush's response was to provoke them with "Bring them on!" a call that hundreds of foreign jihadists have enthusiastically answered.

After Zarqawi set up "Al Qaeda in Iraq" and offered his allegiance to Osama, it took a full eight months for Osama to acknowledge the group. Commentators have speculated that Osama did not approve of some of his tactics, and some have said that Osama did not like the fact that Zarqawi was just an uneducated thug. His tactics have also alienated many homegrown insurgents who resent foreign influence in their nationalist struggle.

Bush now tells us that we must stay in Iraq because it is the center for the War on Terror, but it is only because he has made it so. Saddam was so paranoid that he would not ally himself any other group or allow foreign fighters Iraqi bases of operation. Besides he was a secular Muslim, not a radical Islamist.

The death of Zarqawi will have little effect on the insurgency in Iraq. His goal to increase Sunni hatred against the Shias has been achieved. The Ministry of Interior, which has turned a blind eye to, or has supported hit squads that have attacked and killed Sunnis, has also intensified the civil war.

Bush administration refuses to face the fact that it now stands in the middle of an Iraqi civil war. The New York Times lays out the situation dramatically: "In May 2003, there were five recorded incidents of sectarian violence. In May 2004, there were 10. In May 2005, there were 20. Last month there were 250" (June 18, 2006).

At the Baghdad morgue alone more than 6,000 bodies have been counted in the first five months of 2006. Factoring deaths elsewhere, this rate is at least equal to those killed by Saddam's death squads. Bush says that we are fighting terrorists in Iraq so

that we don't have to fight them in Detroit, but why should innocent Iraqis die in a war on terror that we brought to their country?

Zarqawi had nothing to do with the growing crisis in Basra, a Shiite stronghold in the south that has previously been relatively calm. The new prime minister has declared a state of emergency there, but the lawlessness continues as British troops have retreated to their bases. Guns, rockets, and ammunition are pouring into Basra from Iran, and there is more talk about setting up a separate Shiite theocracy allied with Iran and financed by the huge oil reserves there.

The death toll of American troops has now exceeded 2,500 and total casualties have now reached 20,000. Only 60,000 of the 250,000 Iraqi troops are battle ready, and there is real concern that some of these units might take sides in the civil war rather than defend Sunnis and Shias alike.

The electricity level is below pre-war levels, even while demand for power is way up. Oil production is only 80 percent of what it was under Saddam, and troops and workers whose job it is to defend the pipelines are stealing much of the oil.

There is a very good chance that some day soon we will be evacuating Americans from the Green Zone, just as we saw people hanging from helicopters as the last Americans left Saigon in April of 1975.