

Meanwhile, the war rages on

Remade from murderer to martyr, Zargawi will keep inspiring violence

BY NIR ROSEN

While the long overdue death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the “sheikh of the slaughterers,” is hailed as a “good omen” by the American ambassador to Iraq, it is likely that conditions in Iraq will continue to worsen. Knowing who this man was and why he fought are key to understanding why.

Zarqawi was the most famous but not the most important fighter committed to defeating the American coalition and its Shia allies in Iraq. His martyrdom will mythologize him in a way that his arrest would have shamed him.

As a young man growing up in Jordan, he was a tattooed thug known for alcohol-induced brawling. Inspired by the men who were returning home from the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, Zarqawi made his way there, receiving both martial training and education in the ideology of jihad.

He returned to Jordan intent on overthrowing the monarchy, but quickly landed in jail. It was in prison where his star rose. Zarqawi organized both other aspiring jihadis and ordinary criminals from Jordan’s underworld and led them, defying the prison authorities. He was released in 1999 and set out for Afghanistan, where he found both Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban too moderate for his tastes. He set up a camp in western Afghanistan, then, after the 9/11 attacks, abandoned it for the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq.

Zarqawi must have been surprised when, in February 2004, Colin Powell mentioned his name at the United Nations, claiming he was the link between Al Qaeda, to whom Zarqawi did not belong, and Saddam’s regime, with whom Zarqawi had no relationship.

Zarqawi made his way south, deeper into Iraq from Kurdistan, only after the Americans removed Saddam. He rallied foreign fighters who had come in from Syria and Jordan before the war and called on his friends in Jordan to join him in attacking both Americans and Shias.

But — and this is crucial — Shias were Zarqawi’s favorite target. His ideology, known as Salafi Jihadism, views them as infidels, apostates and polytheists, worse

even than the Christians and Jews, deserving only death.

Unlike the majority of the Iraqi-led insurgency, Zarqawi was not fighting to free Iraq from the American occupier. He was fighting a cosmic battle against all the perceived enemies of Islam that would end when an Islamic emirate was reestablished, or in Judgment Day.

And so, with Zarqawi doing everything in his power to spark conflict by attacking Shia civilians — and welcoming the retribution against Sunnis — the war among Iraqis escalated.

Through it all, nobody has done more for Zarqawi’s reputation than the Americans themselves. The Americans sought to deny there was an Iraqi-dominated resistance to the occupation and attributed the attacks to foreign fighters like Zarqawi. That made him a hero to aspiring jihadis throughout the Arab world, who have flocked to join his cause or at least sent money.

Zarqawi’s final legacy is the civil war he helped spark. Expect to see a new group in Iraq, named after Zarqawi, claiming responsibility for major attacks against a Shia leader or large numbers of Shia civilians. Zarqawi’s war will not stop with his death.

Rosen, a journalist who has spent two years in Iraq since the fall of Saddam, is author of “In the Belly of the Green Bird.”

U.S. faces bigger insurgent threats, says ex-White House terror czar

BY RICHARD A. CLARKE

Myths about the life and death of Ahmed al Khalaylah, the man known as Zarqawi, are rampant, and the Bush administration is responsible for much of the confusion.

■ Myth One: The President, in a Rose Garden event yesterday, announced the death of “the operational commander of the terrorist movement in Iraq.” Actually, there is no one operational commander of the insurgency. Zarqawi commanded only one small organization, “Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.” He had several hundred insurgents, almost all foreigners — whereas U.S. military estimates of the insurgency range between 20,000 and 40,000, almost all Iraqis.

There are more than a dozen Iraqi insurgent groups, all larger than Zarqawi’s band. Yet Zarqawi was the only name of an insurgent leader ever mentioned by President Bush, Vice President Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. For obvious reasons, Zarqawi’s own publicity machine played along.

■ Myth Two: Zarqawi’s presence in Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion proved a link between Al Qaeda and the Saddam Hussein regime. The truth is that Zarqawi was not part of Al Qaeda until well after the war began.

Only after the U.S. invasion did Zarqawi rename his group as an Al Qaeda affiliate. Only in October 2004 did Zarqawi offer his loyalty to Osama Bin Laden.

■ Myth Three: The death of Zarqawi will significantly set back the insurgency. Remember, we were also told that the death of Uday and Qusay Hussein would weaken the insurgency. When Saddam was captured, many speculated that his arrest would diminish the fighting. Almost exactly one year ago, Cheney said that the insurgency was “in the last throes.”

Since those events and statements, the rate of insurgent attacks and the casualties from those attacks have steadily increased and are now at an all-time high.

■ Myth Four: The fact that the U.S. and Iraqi forces located and killed Zarqawi demonstrates the growing ability of the coalition forces. But Zarqawi eluded capture for more than three years. And his ability to survive for that long while launching many successful attacks demonstrates the lack of Iraqi popular support for the coalition. That lack of support was underlined by a Pentagon document released this week showing that only 26% of Iraqis recently polled indicated that they were better off now than they were under Saddam Hussein.

The insurgency in Iraq should not be understood as some group of terrorist organizations that existed prior to our invasion. Rather, what has been going on now for over three years is best thought of as two separate phenomena. First, large numbers of Iraqis are reacting to what they perceive as the occupation of their country by the United States. Second, much of the fighting in Iraq is now a conflict between two branches of Islam, Shia and Sunni.

Although we rightly celebrate Zarqawi’s death, it will not stop Iraqi Shia and Iraqi Sunni from murdering each other.

Nor will it change the fact that U.S. combat troops may be fueling the growing fire.

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WILLIAM BRAMHALL



ON POLITICS

BY CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Settle gay marriage debate the democratic way

On Wednesday, the Senate fell 18 votes short of the two-thirds majority required to pass a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. The mainstream media joined Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) in calling the entire debate a distraction from the nation’s business and a wedge with which to divide Americans.

Since the main business of Congress is to devise ever more ingenious ways to waste taxpayers’ money, any distraction from the main business is welcome. As for dividing Americans, who came up with the idea of radically altering the most ancient of all social institutions in the first place? Until the last few years, every civilization known to man has defined marriage as between people of opposite sex.

Partisanship and dimwittedness obscured the rather interesting substance of the recent Senate debate. It revolved around the two possible grounds for the so-called Marriage Protection Amendment: federalism and popular sovereignty.

Federalism. When one state, such as Massachusetts, adopts gay marriage, the Full Faith and Credit Clause of

the Constitution might reasonably be applied to require other states to recognize such marriages, and thus essentially force it upon the rest of the nation. Federalism, however, is meant to allow states the autonomy of social experimentation (as with Oregon’s legalization of assisted suicide) from which other states can learn.

It is not intended to force other states to follow.

Should the Defense of Marriage Act be overturned, that would justify a constitutional amendment to prevent one state from imposing its will on the other 49. But it has not been overturned. And under the current Supreme Court, it is unlikely to be. The Marriage Protection Amendment is therefore superfluous.

That leaves justification No. 2:

Popular sovereignty. Gay marriage is a legitimate social issue to be decided democratically. The problem is that imperial judges are legislating their own personal preferences, striking down popular will and calling it constitutional law. Most notoriously, in Massachusetts a total of four judges out of seven decided that the time had come for gay marriage. More recently, in Georgia

and Nebraska, judges have overturned anti-gay-marriage (state) constitutional amendments that had passed with more than 70% of the vote.

This is a rerun of the abortion fiasco: judicial fiat that decades later leaves the issue roilingly unsettled and divisive. This is no way to set social policy in a democracy. So why not have a federal constitutional amendment and smite the arrogant solons of Massachusetts, Nebraska and Georgia, and those yet to come, all at once?

Because it is an odd solution for a popular-sovereignty problem to take the gay marriage issue completely out of the hands of the people. Once the constitutional amendment is passed, should the current ethos about gay marriage change, no people in any state could ever permit gay marriage.

The solution to judicial overreaching is to change the judiciary, not to undo every act of judicial arrogance with a policy-specific constitutional amendment.

There is no need (yet) to disfigure the U.S. Constitution with a policy amendment.

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