

Hubub in Hibhib: The Timely Death of al-Zarqawi

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Abu Musab Saddam Osama al-Zarqawi, the extremely elusive if not entirely mythical terrorist mastermind responsible for every single insurgent action in Iraq except for the ones caused by the red-tailed devils in Iran or the stripey-tailed devils in Syria, has reportedly been killed in an airstrike in Hibhib, an area north of Baghdad, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki announced today.

Zarqawi, the notorious shape-shifter who, according to grainy video evidence, was able to regenerate lost limbs, speak in completely different accents, alter the contours of his bone structure and also suffered an unfortunate binge-and-purge weight problem which caused him to change sizes with almost every appearance, was head of an organization that quite fortuitously dubbed itself "Al Qaeda in Iraq" just around the time that the Bush Administration began changing its pretext for the conquest from "eliminating Iraq's [non-existent] weapons of mass destruction" to "fighting terrorists over there so we don't have to fight them over here."

The name change of the Zarqawi gang from its cumbersome original - "The Monotheism and Holy War Group" - to the more media-sexy "Qaeda" brand was thus a PR godsend for the Bush Administration, which was then able to associate the widespread native uprising against the Coalition occupation with the cave-dwelling dastards of the bin Laden organization. This proved an invaluable tool for the Pentagon's massive "psy-op" campaign against the American people, which was successful in sufficiently obscuring reality and defusing rising public concerns about what many experts have termed "the full-blown FUBAR" in Iraq until after the 2004 elections. However, in the last year, even the reputed presence of a big stonking al Qaeda beheader guy roaming at will across the land has not prevented a catastrophic drop in support for President Bush in general and the war in Iraq in particular. Polls show that substantial majorities - even those still psy-oped into believing the conquest has something to do with fighting terrorism - are now saying that the war "is not worth it" and call for American forces to begin withdrawing...

Despite its fortuitousness, the reputed death of the multi-legged brigand came as no real surprise. After all, approximately 376 of his "top lieutenants" had been killed or captured by Coalition forces in the past three years, according to press reports, and some 5,997 lower-ranking "al Qaeda terrorists" have been killed in innumerable operations during that same period, according to Pentagon press releases. With the widespread, on-going, much-publicized decimation of his group, Zarqawi had obviously been rendered isolated and ineffective - except of course for the relentless series of high-profile terrorist spectacles he kept carrying out, according to other Pentagon press releases.

News of the reputed rub-out brought bipartisan praise. "This enormous victory in the War on

Terror is due entirely to the courage and wisdom of the president,” squealed Senate Majority Leader Lick Spittle of Tennessee. “He has seen us through when so many of the flag-burning destroyers of marriage wanted to cut and run. I think this president is the best president the world has ever seen, and if I am ever fortunate enough to be chosen as president by the American people – minus the three million or so whose votes will be discarded, lost, inadvertently mangled or just ignored, of course – I promise I’ll be a president just like him!”

“We must give credit where credit is due,” said Democratic Sen. Joe Biden, in a rare television appearance. “I have my differences with the way the Administration is conducting this war, but the elimination of Zarqawi is, I believe, a turning point, comparable to the capture of Saddam Hussein, the first Iraqi elections, the second Iraqi elections, the formation of the first Iraqi government and the formation of the second Iraqi government. This is not the end, or even the beginning of the end, but it is, I believe, the end of the beginning. And no, I didn’t plagiarize that. I made it up my own self.”...

With Zarqawi’s Bush-granted liberty reputedly at an end, the Pentagon moved quickly to confirm the identity of the man killed in Hibhib today. At a joint press conference with Prime Minister Maliki, U.S. Gen. George Casey said Zarqawi’s body had been identified by “fingerprints, facial recognition and known scars” after a painstaking forensic examination by Lt. Col. Gil Grissom and Major Catherine Willows.

In yet another amazing coincidence, the announcement of the death of Zarqawi or somebody just like him came just as Prime Minister Maliki was finally submitting his candidates for the long-disputed posts of defense and interior ministers, which then sailed through parliament after months of deadlock. The fortuitous death also came after perhaps the worst week of bad PR the Bush Administration has endured during the entire war, with an outpouring of stories alleging a number of horrific atrocities committed by U.S. troops in recent months.

Oddly enough, Zarqawi first vaulted into the American consciousness just after the public exposure of earlier U.S. atrocities: the tortures at Abu Ghraib prison in the spring of 2004. With story after story of horrible abuse battering the Administration during an election year, Zarqawi, or someone just like him, suddenly appeared with a Grand Guignol production: the beheading of American civilian Nick Berg. This atrocity was instantly seized upon by supporters of the war to justify the “intensive interrogation” of “terrorists” – even though the Red Cross had determined that 70 to 90 percent of American captives at that time had committed no crime whatsoever, much less been involved in terrorism, as the notorious anti-war Wall Street Journal reported. Abu Ghraib largely faded from the public eye – indeed, it was not mentioned by a single speaker at the Democratic National Convention a few weeks later or raised as an issue during the presidential campaign that year.

Today’s news has likewise knocked the new atrocity allegations off the front pages, to be replaced with heartening stories of how, as the New York Times reports, Zarqawi’s death “appears to mark a major watershed in the war.” Thus in his reputed end as in his reputed beginning, the Scarlet Pimpernel of Iraq has, by remarkable coincidence, done yeoman service for the immediate publicity needs of his deadly enemy, the Bush Administration.

It is not yet known who will now take Zarqawi’s place as the new all-purpose, all-powerful bogeyman solely responsible for every bad thing in Iraq. There were recent indications that Maliki himself was being measured for the post, after he publicly denounced American

atrocities and the occupiers' propensity for hair-trigger killing of civilians, but he seems to be back with the program now. Administration insiders are reportedly divided over shifting the horns to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's already much-demonized head, or planting them on extremist Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, or elevating some hitherto unknown local talent – or maybe just blaming the whole shebang on Fidel Castro, for old times' sake.

The announcement of the new bogeyman is expected sometime in the coming weeks

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