



Spinning Zarqawi What three al Qaeda terrorists had to say about Zarqawi's and al Qaeda's cooperation with Saddam

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Now that Abu Musab Al Zarqawi is dead, perhaps the American press can also lay to rest the biggest myth about the mass murderer: that he had nothing to do with Saddam's regime prior to the war. It is not clear where this claim originated, but it is widely accepted. In the cover story for this month's *Atlantic Monthly*, for example, Mary Anne Weaver [writes](#), "In his address to the United Nations making the case for war in Iraq, Powell identified al-Zarqawi--mistakenly, as it turned out--as the crucial link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime."

Similar statements can be found throughout the coverage of Zarqawi's barbarous life. But this says more about the desire to keep Sad-

dam's reign separated from the rise of al Qaeda in Iraq's terror network than it does about the actual facts.

There is abundant evidence that Saddam's regime, at the very least, tolerated Zarqawi's existence in regime-controlled areas of Iraq prior to the war. Moreover, at least three high-level al Qaeda associates have testified to Saddam's warm welcome for Zarqawi and his associates.

Consider what a top al Qaeda operative, Abu Zubaydah, told his CIA interrogators after his capture in March 2002. According to the *Senate Intelligence Report*, Zubaydah said "he was not aware of a relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda." But, he added that "any relationship would be highly compartmented and went

on to name al Qaeda members who he thought had good contacts with the Iraqis." Zubaydah "indicated that he heard that an important al-Qaida associate, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, and others had good relationships with Iraqi intelligence."

Zubaydah's testimony has since been [further corroborated](#) by a known al Qaeda ideologue, Dr. Muhammad al-Masari. Al-Masari operated the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights, a Saudi oppositionist group and al Qaeda front, out of London for more than decade. He told the editor-in-chief of *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* that Saddam "established contact with the 'Afghan Arabs' as early as 2001, believing he would be targeted by the US once the Taliban was routed." Furthermore, "Saddam funded Al-Qaeda operatives to move into Iraq with the proviso that they would not undermine his regime."

Al-Masari claimed that Saddam's regime actively aided Zarqawi and his men prior to the war and fully included them in his plans for a terrorist insurgency. He said Saddam "saw that Islam would be key to a cohesive resistance in the event of invasion." Iraqi officers bought "small plots of land from farmers in Sunni areas" and they buried "arms and money caches for later use by the resistance."

Al-Masari also claimed that "Iraqi army commanders were ordered to become practicing Muslims and to adopt the language and spirit of the jihadis."

Just as Saddam ordered, many of Iraq's senior military and intelligence personnel joined or aided Zarqawi's jihad. Many of the more prominent supporters and members of Zarqawi's al Qaeda branch, in fact, came from the upper echelon of Saddam's regime. [Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri](#) (aka the "King of Clubs") and his sons allied with Zarqawi, as did members of [Muhammad Hamza Zubaydi's](#) (aka the "Queen of Spades") family. Zarqawi's allies included [Muhammed Hila Hammad Ubaydi](#), who was an aide to Saddam's chief of staff of intelligence, and some of his more lethal operatives served as officers in Saddam's military, including Abu Ali, ["Al-Hajji" Thamer Mubarak](#) (whose sister attempted a martyrdom operation in Jordan), Abu-Ubaidah, and [Abdel Fatih Isa](#).

These baathists, and others, have spilled much blood in Zarqawi's name. Their attacks were among "Zarqawi's" most successful, including an assault on the Abu Ghraib prison and the first attack on the U.N.'s headquarters. The latter strike was among al Qaeda's earliest, killing [Sergio de Mello](#), the U.N.'s special representative in Baghdad, in August 2003.

In addition to Abu Zubaydah and Muhammad al-Masri, a third high-ranking al Qaeda associate has explained Saddam's support for al Qaeda prior to the war. Hudayfa Azzam, who is the son of one of al Qaeda's earliest and most influential leaders, Adullah Azzam, gave an interview with Agence France Presse in August 2004 in which he

[explained](#) Saddam's support for al Qaeda's members as they relocated to Iraq:

"Saddam Hussein's regime welcomed them with open arms," Azzam explained, "and young al Qaeda members entered Iraq in large numbers, setting up an organization to confront the occupation." Al Qaeda's terrorists "infiltrated into Iraq with the help of Kurdish mujahideen from Afghanistan, across mountains in Iran." Once in Iraq, Saddam "strictly and directly" controlled their activities, Azzam added.

Curiously, in all of the coverage of Zarqawi's death there has been no mention of Abu Zubaydah's, Muhammad al-Masri's, or Hodayfa Azzam's comments. This is not entirely surprising. Many of the basic facts surrounding Zarqawi's early days in Iraq have been muddled by those vested in the notion that Saddam's Iraq never supported al Qaeda.

Even when al Qaeda terrorists themselves admit that Saddam offered them safe haven and support, their words fall on the mainstream media's deaf ears.

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