Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS Study Guide

Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS by Joby Warrick

BOOKRAGS

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Summary

The “black flags” of this book’s title refer to the banners carried by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – the group of extremists sometimes called Daesh, sometimes the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, but most frequently referred to as ISIS. These flags, and the territory they currently fly over in Iraq and Syria, are considered a fulfillment of an old Hadith prophecy about “mighty men” who would one day establish an Islamic caliphate and set up a final confrontation with the non-believers. Since their confrontation, with not only “infidels” non-Muslims but their more modern, tolerant Muslim neighbors is ongoing, Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS focuses primarily on the ideology, and the mistakes, that have contributed to the ISIS presence today.

As such, aside from their appearance in the prologue, the names “ISIS” and “Islamic State” do not actually appear until two-thirds of the way into the book. The beginning and central passages of Black Flags focus primarily on the life and ideas of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian terrorist whose presence in Iraq and ties to al-Qaeda were used as justification for the 2003 Iraq invasion. Zarqawi was, in fact, never aligned with the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, but upon Saddam’s fall disgruntled Sunni Muslims flocked to him, as he carried out appalling attacks on not only foreign troops, but Shiite Muslims and even Sunnis who did not share his beliefs.

His attacks stirred sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni in the years that followed, turning Iraq into a quagmire that claimed more than 4,000 American lives and perhaps 20 times as many Iraqis. He also proved the master of chillingly effective propaganda, videotaping himself decapitating an American civilian and making himself a folk hero to Muslims around the world, outraged by the invasion and the torture of Iraqi detainees. Outside of his native Jordan for much of his adult life, he nonetheless schemed to punish his country of birth for its liberalism and peace with Israel, ordering the successful assassination of their U.S. ambassador and a grisly hotel bombing that is still Jordan’s worst incident of terror, plus other attacks that were thwarted.

Zarqawi’s savagery eventually turned collaborators against him, restricting his operations until the day the U.S. military tracked him to his compound and killed him with an airstrike. Years later, though, those who had served under him would return, rebranded as the Islamic State and determined to take advantage of chaos in the Syrian civil war, as well as continued Shia-Sunni feuding in Iraq. Taking advantage of the Syrian government’s mishandling of protestors – much as Zarqawi took advantage of U.S. mistakes in Iraq – the tattered remnants of Zarqawi’s terrorist cell rebuilt themselves as an army, taking Zarqawi’s media self-promotion prowess to new heights while maintaining his barbarism.

The book concludes in the present day, with ISIS firmly entrenched in its Iraqi and Syrian territories, sending stark warnings to its rivals through videotaped executions. Its actions, however, have united much of the Muslim world against it, with clerics who once inspired its actions now condemning it, and with its neighbors committed to rolling back its gains.

Prologue

Summary

The Prologue begins in a Jordanian prison in early 2015, where failed Iraqi suicide bomber Sajida al-Riashawi has been held captive since botching her part in the November 2005 Amman bombings. Jordan's King Abdullah II has ordered Rishawi to be hanged because ISIS – short for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria – have called for her freedom in exchange for the release of a Jordanian pilot the terrorist sect has recently taken hostage. Rishawi is mockingly referred to by some Jordanian authorities as "Zarqawi's woman," because she undertook the 2005 mission ordered by the late Jordanian terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Sixty died in these attacks – carried out by three suicide bombers – in Jordan's worst-ever incident of terrorism. Rishawi's bomb, however, failed to detonate, resulting in her fleeing the scene and her eventual capture. In doing so, the book draws a connection between the Jihadist organization founded by Zarqawi – the precursors of ISIS – and the Islamic State's activities in the present day.

The narrator turns to the effort to defeat Zarqawi and his successors in ISIS, as told from the perspective of Abu Haytham, the leader of Jordan's counterterrorism unit. Abu Haytham is emotionally scarred from having witnessed the immediate aftereffects of the Amman bombing, particularly the bodies of two young girls, the same age as his daughters. Abu Haytham took part in the investigation that followed, including the interrogation of Rishawi. Though she – due to either ignorance or unwillingness – never offered any help to Jordanian authorities, the civilian targets, suicide bombers, and coordinated bombings were all trademarks of Zarqawi's organization, then known as al-Qaeda in Iraq. Abu Haytham had a long connection to Zarqawi, a local thug who had turned into a hardened jihadist after departing Jordan in the late 1980s to fight communists in Afghanistan. After a failed terrorist plot in Jordan, Zarqawi spent several years up to 1999 in a particularly harsh Jordanian prison, where he established himself as a leadership figure among other inmates.

Abu Haytham had interrogated Zarqawi in 1999, after the latter had benefited from a general amnesty and made plans to depart the country. Zarqawi's travels took him to Afghanistan, and then to Iraq, ironically making him the crucial link, in the George W. Bush administration's eyes, between the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Saddam Hussein regime. Their subsequent invasion of Iraq and overthrow of Saddam would elevate Zarqawi yet again, this time to the leader of a group that used the al-Qaeda label but had a mission distinct from Osama bin Laden's: the overthrowing of regimes in the Arab world and establishment of a caliphate. After the Amman bombings, Jordanian and U.S. authorities doubled down on their efforts to destroy Zarqawi, culminating in his death in a bombing raid in June 2006. His followers, however, would spend the next several years rebuilding, eventually reemerging as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or by the Arabic acronym Daesh; they would seize control of territories across several Middle Eastern countries and claim

Zarqawi as their “sheikh.” This, they believed, is was the culmination of a prophecy from the Hadith that spoke of the “black flags … led by mighty men” (8) that would come; the result, they believed, is was the establishment of a caliphate across the Muslim world and final defeat of the West.

The focus turns to Jordan’s King Abdullah II, traveling to Washington at the time of the demand for a prisoner swap. Abdullah traveled to Washington to plead for help, both in defeating ISIS, but also in dealing with refugees from the civil war in neighboring Syria. This visit was only one of many in which Jordan’s king had called upon Washington for help in acquiring munitions to defeat ISIS, only to be rebuffed despite his nation’s numerous aerial missions against the terrorist state. During a meeting with Senator John McCain, ISIS made good on its threats against the captive Jordanian airman, and Abdullah was summoned to watch a video of them burning him alive. Abdullah left Washington without any further commitment from his giant ally, but with a new determination to wage war on Zarqawi’s successors. This began with the execution of two prisoners long on death row for carrying out missions from the deceased terrorist leader – one of whom was “Zarqawi’s woman.”

Analysis

The Prologue begins after 2014 – the year in which ISIS rose to international prominence after seizing Iraqi territory and sending Iraqi local security forces fleeing. Sajida al-Rishawi will be an unfamiliar name to many readers at the beginning of this story, but by starting with her, as well as the stories of Abu Haytham and King Abdullah II, the author positions the fight against ISIS as the continuation of a longer-running conflict; through Rishawi and the Islamic State’s demands for her release the author draws a direct connection between the deeds of ISIS and those of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Islamic State’s spiritual founder. Also, by telling the story of the 2005 Amman bombings and Abu Haytham’s recollections of their civilian casualties, the Prologue foreshadows the deeds to come, in Zarqawi’s indifference to loss of human life in Iraq, the al-Nusra Front’s suicide attacks in Syria, and in the brutality of ISIS in both countries.

There are references to a much broader conflict with Islamic fundamentalism and the terrorism it produces – particularly in references to Afghanistan, where the Taliban rose from the ashes of the failed Soviet occupation, and where Osama bin Laden approved the 9/11 terror attacks. Yet the Prologue introduces Zarqawi as a pivotal figure, one with methods and objectives distinct from Bin Laden’s, and whose methods and objectives can be seen in the Islamic State’s cruelty and conquests today.

ISIS, as its name indicates, occupies territory in Iraq and Syria, yet it is Jordan, which borders Iraq and Syria, that emerges as a central location in this Prologue. As stated in their king’s pleas for help from Washington, Jordan has been a central player in efforts to curtail ISIS, but also a breeding ground for the organization, as Zarqawi is himself Jordanian, made his first forays into jihadism there, and it was through his time in a Jordan prison that he became, in the author’s words – “a battle-hardened religious

fanatic who happened to excel as a leader of men" (7). Years later Zarqawi and his legacy – as demonstrated by the Amman attack and the brutal execution of the pilot – continue to haunt Jordan.

It is also in the prologue that the "black flags" of the book's title are introduced. The quote from the Hadith states that "black flags will come from the East, led by mighty men, with long hair and beards, their surnames taken from their home towns" (8). As established by later chapters, Zarqawi was born Ahmad Fadeel al-Nazal al-Khalayleh and raised in Zarqa, Jordan, later assuming the name "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi," meaning "Abu Musab from Zarqa." These flags will grow in importance as the story progresses. Differing objectives are key in distinguishing Zarqawi, and ISIS, from Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Zarqawi sought the establishment of a caliphate now, whereas al-Qaeda sought to set one up after driving Western influence out of Muslim-held lands. This presages not only ISIS, but the gulf that will eventually arise between them and other Muslims, including al-Qaeda itself.

He also introduces Syria's King Abdullah II, the long-suffering king of Jordan. Abdullah's unsuccessful entreaties to Washington for more help foreshadow the failures that will be documented later in the book, as the U.S. administration's unwillingness to give Jordan the munitions it needs to combat ISIS will be reflected in their unwillingness to take the rise of ISIS seriously in 2014, as well as their failure to comprehend the consequences of overthrowing the Saddam's dictatorship. Abdullah will emerge more fully as a modernizing Muslim leader in later chapters, but the Prologue establishes perhaps his most important role: as a bridge between the region and the U.S., exerts enormous influence on a Middle Eastern region it consistently misunderstands.

Vocabulary

warrant, hijab, assent, mocking, notoriety, infamous, jihadists, Allah, macabre, brigadier, counterterrorism, operatives, interrogation, botched, foothold, miscalculations, territorial, evoking, seared, bleating, exuberant, haphazardly, acolyte, theocracy, caliphate, adversaries, lawless, moderate, engulf, mujahid, sheikh, audacity, prophetic, surnames, instigators, cataclysmic, brazen, charade, bolster, monarch

Book I, Parts 1-2

Summary

In Part 1 readers learn of the al-Jafr prison, in the southwestern desert of Jordan, which from the days of British colonization after fall of the Ottoman Empire had housed especially dangerous inmates. Jordan would later use the facility to incarcerate militants and radicals, who were kept in inhospitable conditions and received regular beatings and torture from guards. After abandoning the facility in 1979, Jordan revived it in 1998 to house a group of anti-government forces.

The book tells the story of the facility through the eyes of Basel al-Sabha, a young physician assigned to the facility there. Sabha was initially warned about one inmate in particular: Abu Muhmmad al-Maqdisi, an Islamic scholar who provided the radicals with intellectual justification for their violent acts and whose renowned persuasion skills earned him comparisons to Rasputin, the infamous early twentieth-century mystic who held the Russia royal family under his sway before the communists came to power. Yet it is another inmate, a man with a conspicuous scar on his arm, who captured his Sabha's imagination through his ability to direct other prisoners without words, leaving a stunned Sabha to wonder what kind of person "can command with only his eyes" (18).

Sabha learned the histories of the individual inmates, some of whom had turned to radical Islam after undistinguished lives of street crime, while others had fought in Afghanistan against the Soviet invasion of the 1980s. Having returned to Jordan, they sought to attack symbols of Western corruption and tolerance of Israel – whom Jordan had just made peace with – but failed. Now together in prison, their harsh conditions and Maqdisi's ideology bonded them together, with Zarqawi – the commanding presence that had left Sabha so shaken – serving as Maqdisi's enforcer.

In time Sabha developed a rapport with Maqdisi – who, in a prison full of street thugs and crude revolutionaries, seems to appreciate the young physician's education – and found him to be a charming, agreeable presence. However, Maqdisi was convinced – and had convinced many others – that democracy and secular governments were heresies and those upholding them are infidels who must be defeated. Zarqawi's past as a street brawler and combatant in Afghanistan contrasted starkly with Maqdisi's learned, almost retiring demeanor. Though Zarqawi followed Maqdisi loyally, his newfound piety did not soften the enforcer's harsh outlook and violent tendencies; it merely made him an especially effective enforcer of strict Islamic law and an even more threatening presence for the prison guards.

However, there was more to Zarqawi than his violence and hostility. Sabha would notice Zarqawi's devotion to his mother and sisters, expressed through letters, poems, and the way he meticulously cleaned his room and clothing when they visit. This devotion also manifested itself in how Zarqawi dotes over fellow inmates who have become sick or injured. He took special care of Eid Jahaline, a double-amputee who lost both legs in a

botched suicide bombing, assisting him with eating, changing clothes, and even trips to the toilet, as well as helping Sabha administer medication to calm Jahaline's frequent psychiatric breakdowns.

By the winter of 1998 Zarqawi had become more revered among the inmates than Maqdisi, who lacked the enforcer's credentials on the streets or the battlefield. Zarqawi also became more comfortable around Sabha, who arranged for Zarqawi to visit his private clinic outside the prison so that he may be tested for diabetes. It is there that the doctor asked about the scar on Zarqawi's arm, which the militant revealed to have been a tattoo from his days as a common thug, which he hacked away after his conversion to Islam.

Zarqawi casually related this story to the horrified doctor, noting that tattoos are forbidden under Islam. The author parallels this fervor to that of Ikhwan (translated "Brothers"), Bedouin raiders who helped Ibn Saud defeat his enemies and establish the Saudi Arabian kingdom in the 1920s. The author notes that the Ikhwan had sought to purge the region of Western influences, and to destroy all Muslims who allied with Westerners. The Ikhwan cut a bloody trail through Iraq and Jordan before they were wiped out by the British colonizers just outside Amman. The author then notes that the "fierce hatreds" of the Ikhwan had not died out with them, but were carried out by numerous other groups in the Middle East that followed.

Part 2 begins with Jordan's King Abdullah II, son of the long-serving King Hussein. In 1999, just two weeks before Hussein's death Abdullah, a career military man, received instructions that he was to take the throne. This meant leapfrogging Prince Hassan, the brother of King Hussein who had been appointed crown prince in the 1960s when war and assassination attempts made it appear Hussein might not live long enough to see his children reach adulthood.

Abdullah, not quite 37 when his father's announcement came, had climbed through the military to the rank major general, and had little taste for politics. This, Hussein would announce, was a critical advantage, as he publicly announced to his younger brother that other members of the royal family had demonstrated too much greed and social ambition to be trusted with the throne. Just weeks after the announcement Hussein died, leaving an overwhelmed Abdullah to preside over a government he barely understood.

Hussein's death at age 63, after 47 years of rule, was met with an outpouring of public grief, but also a reminder of the vulnerability of the position. Abdullah I, the first king of the nation, was assassinated in 1951 and Hussein took office a year later when his father, Talal I, abdicated for health reasons. Hussein would survive numerous attempts on his own life, as well as regional concerns: one of his funeral attendees, Syrian lead Hafez al-Assad, had been an intense regional rival of Hussein's. His survival, along with his taste for fast cars and thrill-seeking, only enhanced his mystique among the public, however.

Abdullah II, despite his military discipline, is said to have shared his father's thirst for adrenaline rushes, at least once resulting in him receiving a warning from the police while at military academy in Britain. Upon assuming power, he moved assert control the domestic and foreign situations, firing or demoting officials loyal to rival family members, and befriending Bashar al-Assad, heir to his father's Syrian rival, upon the younger Assad's ascension in 2000. Much as Hussein had sought to maintain power through careful balance – making in peace with Israel in 1994 while praising and promoting the conservative Muslim Brotherhood – Abdullah met Muslim Brotherhood leaders early in his tenure and agreed to free members of their organization who had been jailed following a protest.

Yet the book describes Jordan as facing a long-standing obstacle in the form of militants not so easily placated. First were the Ikhwan, who threatened the country less than a decade after the Emirate of Transjordan – the current Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's predecessor – was founded in 1921. Though not themselves Islamist, uncompromising Palestinian nationalists in the 1960s launched attacks on the military and attempted to assassinate the king. In the 1980s, Palestinian clashes with Israel would prompt young Jordanians to join the fight against the Zionists, while others, like Zarqawi, would depart for Afghanistan to fight the Soviets and return home radicalized.

Abdullah, like his father before him, attempted to kill such movements not just with force, but with kindness, by promoting moderate Islamists to positions of privilege and granting favors. One of these was a March 1999 pardon of political criminals, in the tradition of previous kings, including nonviolent offenders, but also those who had fought in the "holy war" against the Soviet occupiers in Afghanistan. Unbeknownst to him at the time, one of those freed was Zarqawi, the beneficiary of a policy carried out based on past deeds, but which had not thought to vet recipients based on the intensity of their jihadist zeal.

Analysis

At the end of Part 1 the author notes that a prisoner of Jordan's prisons can easily be released if political considerations dictate it. This is another example of foreshadowing, suggesting that Zarqawi's radicalism could not be contained in a prison cell, even one as harsh and isolated as al-Jafr's. At the same time, the comparisons to the Ikhwan and others unable to either compromise with the West or accept tolerate those Muslims capable of compromise, suggests that radical jihadism would have emerged in the future, even without Zarqawi. The prison enforcer was, after all, just one of many radicals in the al-Jafr prison, and was not even the acting leader of the men there.

Zarqawi did, however, practice a unique brand of Islamic terror, and this incident did demonstrate the qualities that would make him an especially feared terrorist leader after his release; one that could continue to command loyalty from beyond the grave. Though lacking the intellect or education of Maqdisi, Zarqawi's fervor is suggested by the stories of his brawling, violent youth and willingness to join the anti-communist struggle in Afghanistan. The section demonstrates that conversion to Islam did little to change his

demeanor and propensity toward violence, but did give him a cause to direct his rage and talent for leadership.

Yet, had Zarqawi been merely tough and possessed with the ability to intimidate others, he probably could not have commanded and inspired others to give their lives and call him “mujahid sheikh.” Therefore, this section includes stories of his devotion to family members, and especially to fellow jihadists. His willingness to ensure their physical well-being, but also their dignity in prison, coupled with his refusal to excuse himself from Islamic law’s prohibitions – hence the tattoo-removal story – demonstrate a depth of conviction fellow inmates, and eventually an entire Islamic army, would rally around.

King Abdullah’s background, coronation, and early days as monarch in Part 2 set him up as the opposite of Zarqawi in the struggle for the future of the Muslim world. Abdullah was a modernizer and secularist, and he believed continued prosperity depended on peace, including with the West. Abdullah, Part 2 demonstrates, is presiding over a kingdom that struggled with militancy, prompted by religious motivations but also secular Palestinian nationalists. Though he became the focus of nation’s attention upon his coronation, the chapter focuses on Abdullah’s loneliness upon assuming the throne, without his father’s advice or anyone capable of understanding the burden he bore as head of a country amid so much instability.

This section paints Abdullah as a capable leader, perhaps due to his military career, swiftly eliminating or placating threats to his rule within his own government and family, and quick to start fresh with his neighbors in Syria and the Islamists in his own country. However, despite his abilities, the haze of confusion hanging over Abdullah sets the reader up for an environment where crucial mistakes happened: namely, the release of Zarqawi. Designed to ease the concerns of those with religious motivations, the decision would ultimately haunt Jordan in the form of a lethal new terrorist strain responsible for the 2005 Amman bombings and other incidents. In this book many events were triggered by mistakes - especially by governments - and shaped events to come; between this seemingly pragmatic decision and the long string of radicals dating back to Ikhwan, the author seems to ask readers whether some mistakes are inevitable.

Vocabulary

quarantining, militants, zealots, contagion, tunic, screeds, communal, privations, purists, creed, austere, inculcated, fatwa, inflammatory, denounced, secular, resonance, ideologues, heresy, infidels, congeal, interrogators, buttressing, nuance, slavishly, ethereal, kafirs, al-takfiris, cajole, professorial, diaspora, elliptical, haram, dignitaries, sectarian, cerebral, groused, sovereignty, intifada, forebears

Book I, Parts 3-5

Summary

Part 3 opens with the interrogation of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as he sought to depart from Jordan in mid-1999 on the pretense of traveling to Pakistan to begin life as a honey merchant. Here Abu Haytham, head of the security service known as the Mukhabarat, greeted the terrorist extraordinaire in the making. Haytham had been monitoring Zarqawi and his plans for departure for weeks and here exercised the intelligence service's prerogative to hold an emigrant for up to three days if they believed there were a security risk.

Abu Haytham and Zarqawi had a history, even in 1999: the officer had taken part in the raid in 1994 that had nabbed the militant just before he carried out a plan to attack Israeli troops at the Jordan-Israel border. He recalled the thug attempting to pull a gun on the officers who stormed his apartment before he was restrained, his glowering at them through matted hair and torn clothing while they transported him to agency headquarters, and his answering of their interrogations by calling them "infidels" and cursing. Long periods of questioning ultimately netted nothing.

Abu Haytham had, in fact, been well-aware of Zarqawi even before his arrest in 1994, as the man formerly known as Ahmad Fadil al-Khalayleh had defied his respectable family and religious mother to venture into a life of heavy drinking, drug dealing, and even, as the author puts it, sexually "[forcing] himself on younger men as a way to … assert his own dominance" (50). His mother, Dallah al-Khalayleh, eventually enrolled him in religious classes at a local mosque. The "man from Zarqa" quickly stopped drinking and began attending mosque, while absorbing propaganda videos on the wars being fought by Muslims in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The mosque was raising funds to support the Muslims fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan at the time, and when it called for volunteers to fight the Soviets, he quickly joined.

His guilt over his past life became evident, as he cried aloud while leading his compatriots in reading the Koran – an overt display of emotion most Arab warriors avoided – asking a cleric to pray for his forgiveness while on pilgrimage to Mecca, and fighting with bravery in Afghanistan which suggested he had little value for his life. By the time Zarqawi made it to Afghanistan in the early 1990s, the Soviets were gone, and the Muslim militants were fighting a teetering socialist government there. Nonetheless, the success of the Afghanistan mujahedeen in driving out the Soviets convinced Zarqawi of the potential for holy war, a mindset he brought home with him to Jordan in 1993.

Gone for four years, Zarqawi fit in poorly in his now modernized, largely secular nation of birth. What was worse, King Hussein's negotiations with Israel were well underway and would lead to official relations in 1994. Outraged, Zarqawi would connect with the intellectual-yet-radical cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and with fellow veterans of

Afghanistan they would form Bayat al-Imam ("Oath of Allegiance to the Prayer Leader"). Their plot on their Israeli targets came in response to Jewish extremist's lethal attack on Muslims in Hebron, the West Bank, though the Mukhabarat disrupted the plan through the raid Abu Haytham took part in.

Back in 1999, the intelligence service pondered what to do with Zarqawi and his request to leave the country. Alternating in interrogation sessions with his supervisor Ali Bourzak – nicknamed the Red Devil – Abu Haytham used a variety of means to provoke Zarqawi into abandoning his alibi of leaving Jordan for Afghanistan. These included smoking in front of him, debating him on the Koran, and even bringing up his tribal roots, a sore subject among many in the Jordanian countryside. Ultimately, however, they discovered no evidence of an imminent danger, and released him to travel to Pakistan.

Part 4 transports readers to the end of 1999, where the Mukhabarat had intercepted a terrorist plot originating in Afghanistan and transmitted to an Islamist based in Jordan. The resulting raid would pick up sixteen militants, bomb-making supplies and manuals, and directions to carry out the attack on New Year's Eve. By mid-December, Jordanian and American intelligence agents would discover the full details of the Millennium Plot, which would have resulted in a serious of attacks in the country, but also on an Israeli border crossing and even the Los Angeles International Airport. The targets within the country had included the Amman Radison, but also Christian and Jewish shrines, making clear their goal of disrupting the nation's tourism industry and making the country unwelcome to visitors. Documents seized by intelligence services would reveal more names involved in the planning of the attack, including Zarqawi, who would be convicted of the plot in absentia.

Zarqawi had gotten stuck upon arriving in Pakistan, as its government hindered his plans to travel to Chechnya and join their Muslim fighters' conflict against Russia. After Russia crushed the Chechen Islamists and his visa expired, Zarqawi ventured over the border to Afghanistan. He hoped to meet Afghanistan's most infamous refugee, Osama bin Laden, but the al-Qaeda leader would not deign to see him, instead sending a surrogate to the guest house where Zarqawi was forced to wait for two weeks. Ultimately he would not be allowed to even join al-Qaeda, instead given startup funding and encouraged to travel to the Levant (namely Iraq), where he could establish his own organization aimed at eventually toppling Israel.

Zarqawi quickly established a "mini-Islamic society" near the Iranian border, instructing a few dozen followers on the Koran and weapons training. The attacks of September 11 would change this, as the subsequent U.S. attacks on al-Qaeda and its Taliban allies would prompt Zarqawi to return to Afghanistan. Once he and his band connected with al-Qaeda leaders in the southern metropolis of Kandahar, however, they were nearly killed by a U.S. bombing raid that seriously injured Zarqawi. The Taliban lost Afghanistan's capital, bin Laden fled to Tora Bora, and Zarqawi retreated to Iraq with a few followers and an intense desire for revenge on Americans for his injuries and bombings he witnessed. There, he began preparing, having heard that the U.S. was planning an invasion to depose Saddam Hussein.

Part 5 briefly introduces Laurence Foley, a midlevel diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in Jordan. After a multi-decade career in the foreign service, Foley maintained a comfortable and undisturbed schedule in Jordan even after the 9/11 attacks, right up to morning of October 28, 2002, when he was shot dead by a single assailant. The author then introduces Nada Bakos, a CIA analyst who was tracking the movements of Zarqawi. While looking to establish whether Zarqawi was behind Foley's assassination, Bakos came under pressure from the Bush administration to use Zarqawi's past and his residence in Iraq as the link between al-Qaeda and Saddam.

Visits, and a series of pointed questions, from Vice President Dick Cheney in the fall of 2002 made it clear that the administration was planning on establishing a link, and that a failure to establish one would be viewed as a shortcoming of the CIA's. Reports clearly establishing that Saddam, a secular dictator and opponent of Islamists, had not worked with Zarqawi or al-Qaeda prompted anger from administration figures, however, and the assassination of Foley increased the pressure to find a connection.

Eventually, the Mukhabarat received a tip about a suspicious Libyan visitor, ostensibly there to help a Jordanian business partner. Intelligence services concluded that the Libyan was a veteran of Afghanistan with suspicions of al-Qaeda sympathies, and his partner a Palestinian with jihadist proclivities. A raid by the security service caught the two and discovered a cache of weapons. Following a brief interrogation the Libyan, Salem Ben Suweid, yielded and confessed to the assassination. Taken to the scene of the crime Suweid explained his planning and execution in detail, then said that he carried it out "for al-Qaeda and for Zarqawi" (84).

Analysis

These sections go into greater detail about the life of Zarqawi, from his roots as a small-time criminal to his religious devotion and desire for jihad. The book does not dwell upon the details of his pre-conversion criminal history, yet they are significant. For one, his drinking and smoking eventually transformed into his – and the Islamic State's – extreme aversion to both practices. For another, his violent tendencies appeared extreme from the beginning: there is no indication elsewhere in the book that Zarqawi was homosexual, so his "conquest" (50) of other men appears directed by pure malice, which after his conversion would simply be redirected at new targets.

And there would be many such targets: disappointed that the Soviets had already departed by the time he reached Afghanistan, Zarqawi nonetheless embraced the fight against the secular government, and continued in his zeal upon returning home, hence his plot against Israeli targets prior to his arrest and continued plots against Jordan after his departure.

This is well before Colin Powell's 2003 UN speech, which used Zarqawi's presence in Iraq as evidence of Saddam's ties to al-Qaeda, yet it is clear even at this point that Zarqawi was a figure who commanded devotion from radicals and attention from others. Abu Haytham had watched him for years, yet was unable to prevent him from leaving

Jordan. The CIA also had an analyst devoted to tracking his movements. And though Zarqawi was unable to secure a meeting with Osama bin Laden, the assassination of Laurence Foley, and the failed plots against tourist destinations in Jordan and elsewhere demonstrate his ability to command Islamists across borders.

These attacks also demonstrate a continuing theme in his mission: an abiding hatred of the Westernization in his home country and other parts of the Islamic world. Though adept at using modern weaponry, the book indicates that Zarqawi was otherwise most comfortable in situations untouched by modernization, such as prison, Afghanistan, and the rural northern areas of Iraq. His ability to command the loyalty of other Muslims suggests not just his own leadership qualities, but a general tension they felt regarding the modern world. This tension will continue after Zarqawi's time has passed, leaving readers to consider whether modern ideas are ineffective for converting jihadists, who merely adapt modern weapons to spread their ideas.

Vocabulary

apiarist, spluttering, concocted, kafirs, forays, aptitude, shahid, incarnation, filial, parrying, halal, itinerant, apostate, autonomy, enclaves, ebullient, nexus, cajoled, abayas

Book I, Part 6-8

Summary

Part 6 opens in the northern section of Iraq that served as the hideouts of the Ansar al-Islam militants. The area was the site of Saddam's notorious nerve gas attack on Kurdish villages, resulting in several thousand deaths and an enduring sense of disorder, as local militias and warlords continued to fight each other and Saddam's forces. CIA operatives gathered in the region in the summer of 2002 to monitor the Ansar al-Islam group, which had already established a base where it enforced its strict version of Islamic law by time Zarqawi arrived. The CIA team discovered that militants had an enormous stockpile of poisons; it was unclear whether they knew how to weaponized them, but their lethal intent was clear, as demonstrated by their experiments on local stray dogs.

The CIA was surprised to discover another group of intelligence operatives in the area, these representing the Iraqi government. This indicated that Saddam's government was just as wary of the Ansar al-Islam group as the Americans, but the CIA team leader noted that, at the very least, a group with al-Qaeda-connected operatives were working in Iraq and plotting to use chemical weapons. A potential attack on the camp in advance of the Iraq invasion was discussed but nixed for fear it could complicate plans for the attack on Saddam's forces.

This section then shifts King Abdullah, the object of Washington's entreaties for help in its upcoming invasion of Iraq. Despite his support for the invasion of Afghanistan and the effort to track down Osama bin Laden, Abdullah issued scathing press statements on the Bush administration's plans for Iraq, warning of unforeseen consequence. But unlike his father, who bluntly opposed the first Gulf War and saw relations with the U.S. deteriorate, Abdullah ultimately accepted the Patriot Missile defense shield and undisclosed support in covert operations. Abdullah framed this as defense of his country from Iraq's SCUD missiles during the invasion, though the U.S. placed them there to defend Israel from Saddam's weapons.

Part 7 begins with Colin Powell's speech to the UN Security Council in February 2003, in which he claimed that Saddam Hussein "harbor[ed] a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi" (95). CIA officials, including Nada Bakos, listened to this in disbelief, and to another line in which Powell stated that "Baghdad has an agent in the most senior levels of [Ansar al-Islam]" (96). The CIA knew of no such person.

In addition to making a case for the war which would eventually collapse, Powell's naming of Zarqawi before the world – and attributing the death of Laurence Foley to him – made the man from Zarqa famous. On Web sites promoting their causes, jihadis touted his exploits, and his fame extended throughout the Arab world. Abu Hanieh, a former Islamist, credited Zarqawi's new fame for an increase in al-Qaeda membership.

Then, a week after the invasion of Iraq began, the U.S. launched an attack on the Ansar al-Islam camp, killing and capturing dozens and laying waste to its facilities, including those used to make poisons. By then, however, Zarqawi had already headed to Baghdad.

Analysis

Part 5 has already established that the Bush administration was determined to make a case for the invasion of Iraq, and introduces their irritation when confronted with evidence to the contrary. The slim Parts 6 and 7 reiterate this point, as intelligence officials were confronted with clear evidence that Zarqawi was regarded with as much suspicion by Baghdad as by Washington. Despite this clear evidence, Zarqawi was introduced to the world through Colin Powell's speech in 2003, presented as evidence of Saddam's ties to al-Qaeda. CIA operatives, namely Bakos, express frustration at having intelligence distorted or – in the case of the fictitious Baghdad operative in Zarqawi's ranks – made up. To top it off, when presented with a clear opportunity to eliminate Zarqawi, officials balked, because eliminating the secular dictatorship of Saddam was clearly a greater priority.

That he generated distrust from both Saddam and the Americans was not just an indication of Zarqawi's fearsome reputation, however. Throughout this book, in the lead-up to the Iraq War and particularly after it, there was a clear failure by the U.S. administration to understand the realities in Iraq and surrounding Islamic extremism. A late 2004 New Yorker article quoted an unnamed Bush administration official as scorning the "reality-based community" who studies facts before making decisions, and claimed that, as an empire, the U.S. could "create our own reality."

This foreshadows the events of Book II, in which it became clear that the reality they created was one ripe with opportunities for Zarqawi. The author is clearly establishing Zarqawi as a threat with lethal intent – this is not the last readers will hear of poisons being tested on dogs – but also establishes that his reach would have been far more limited without the administration's reality-making blunders. It would not be until 2007, after the Bush administration suffered its first serious political losses in congressional elections, that it adapted to the truth of the Iraq they created.

Vocabulary

proxies, theocracy, ricin, harbored

Book II, Parts 8-10

Summary

Part 8, the first in Book II, begins weeks after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's rule due to the American invasion. Nada Bakos, interrogating a former senior intelligence official under Saddam, found her repeated queries about any ties between his organization and Zarqawi's ineffective, as the despondent man did nothing but cry throughout questioning. This was just one of many failures throughout Iraq, as none of the weapons of mass destruction, used in part by the Bush administration to justify the invasion, could be located. Furthermore, no ties to al-Qaeda were evident, and the populace was quickly losing patience with the American presence. Eventually Bakos found a successful interrogation strategy: informing the official that he could speak to his wife for the first time since his capture. However, the resulting information was hardly satisfying: Zarqawi never worked with Saddam, he said.

The section then turns its focus to Iraq's Jordanian Embassy on the morning of August 7, 2003, where dozens of locals lined up to apply for visas. The previous day a handwritten note warning of an impending attack had been found at the complex, prompting more security but also incredulity: an attack on a fellow Arab state's embassy was at the time unheard of. Yet, a passenger van arrived at the gate, parked, and preceded to detonate the explosive inside, resulting in catastrophic damage to embassy and seventeen deaths. Coupled with suddenly more routine attacks on American soldiers making their daily rounds, the U.S. appointed Coalition Provisional Authority saw the start of a new danger, as well as a new despair among the Iraqi public, despite administration officials' efforts to assure the public of progress.

A second attack on August 19 claimed the life of Sergio Vieira de Mello, a Brazilian UN official overseeing the UN mission in Iraq. This time a flatbed truck targeted the building where Vieira de Mello worked, killing him and twenty-one others. A suicide bomber's body was eventually recovered, along with wiretapped phone calls making vague references to the event. On August 29 there was an even worse attack, as Shiite cleric Ayatollah Mohammed Bakir al-Hakim was targeted by a pair of car bombs in the central city of Najaf. Hakim – an opponent of Saddam who preached a message of unity among Muslims – was killed along with eighty-four others in the bombings. Through intercepted calls and SIM cards discovered on an arrested militant, Zarqawi's links to each attack – designed to strike at the hopes for a united post-Saddam – became clear.

In Part 9, officials within the Bush administration, a few weeks after the UN bombing, growing irritable with the situation in Iraq – particularly with a CIA report that describing the increasing number of attacks as an "insurgency." About four months had passed since President Bush's "mission accomplished speech," but now more than ten soldiers a week were being killed and waves of foreign fighters were pouring into the country. The Bush administration labeled the CIA report "negative," and the use of the term "insurgency" remained taboo for months to come despite the facts on the ground.

This section then lists several Bush administration decisions in the aftermath of Saddam's fall that contributed to the insurgency. There had been no action to halt widespread looting after the fall of Baghdad, making Americans appear indifferent to the losses at museums, government offices, and even construction sites. The decision to dissolve the army and outlaw members of Saddam's Baath Party from "positions of authority" (118) devastated the civil service and sent legions of disgruntled former officials into unemployment without so much as a pension. Many of them ultimately joined Zarqawi.

In November, after several more fatal bombings, the CIA's Baghdad station chief doubled down on the use of insurgency to describe the events unfolding in Iraq. Again, the Bush administration and military command were uninterested in hearing Iraq described as such, and within weeks the station chief was relieved of duty.

Focus then shifts to Zaydan al-Jabiri, a tribal leader near Ramadi, in central Iraq. In April of 2003 Zaydan attempted to defuse tensions after a demonstration by locals against the U.S. presence turned violent, resulting in seventeen deaths and seventy wounded. After explaining to the American authorities that tribal rules insisted on compensation for those killed, Zaydan was outraged when the U.S. was willing to pay no more than $3,000 per death, leading him to believe "the Americans had no good intentions" (123). Zaydan had long been an opponent of Saddam, having backed a coup ten years earlier that nearly resulted in his execution when it was discovered. But having seen the de-Baathication campaign effectively turn power over to the majority Shiite Iraqis and disenfranchise the Sunnis, American officials botched attempts to communicate with tribal leaders, and the growth of Zarqawi's reputation, Zaydan became convinced that the Americans could not succeed.

Part 10 begins with Zarqawi composing a letter to bin Laden in January 2004, asking for his support. In the letter he pours scorn on the "cowardly" American troops, but also the Sunnis who lacked battle experience and willingness to directly confront the foreign invaders. His greatest venom, however, was directed at the Shiite majority, "a sect of treachery and betrayal throughout history and throughout the ages" (127). The author writes that, even though Bin Laden had largely supported unity of Muslims and avoided attacks on Shiite non-combatants, Zarqawi made clear his plan to attack more Shiite targets, setting off a sectarian conflict that would force Shiites and Sunnis into conflict with one another and destroy U.S. plans for Iraq.

The book then shifts to February, where Brigadier General Stanley McChrystal waited for word from his men about the results of a raid on Fallujah townhouse. It was one of a series of raids carried out in Fallujah designed to disrupt the insurgent activities. Later, they would learn that Zarqawi had been in the very block they were raiding, and that this would be the closest they would come to the man from Zarqa for the next two years. During the raid McChrystal had an opportunity to scan the faces of residents in the neighborhood, detecting a kind of curiosity from children, but anger and hatred from women, exasperated at having their homes raided and belongings searched.

McChrystal, the product of a military family with a talent for solving organizational problems through shakeups, was tasked with forming a counterterrorism network inside the country. Noting the absence of any kind of counterinsurgent strategy in place – as well as careless handling intelligence – McChrystal began the process by having his commanders read up on 1960s-era literature on the French counterinsurgency in Algeria. Along the way he began to appreciate the cunning of Zarqawi, who had built a remarkable network of his own in just a year inside Iraq, and was already succeeding in undoing the multicultural fabric of Iraq, one in which Sunnis and Shiites had largely coexisted.

This point was driven home by the March 2 attack on Shiite worshippers commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn Ibn Ali, the prophet Muhammad's grandson. A wave of suicide bombings and mortar shellings resulted in nearly one-hundred-eighty deaths and several hundred more injuries. In the aftermath, leading Iraqi Shiite cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani blamed the Americans for the collapse of security. Others went further, blaming Americans directly for the attacks themselves.

Analysis

The fruits of the Bush administration's lack of planning, hinted at near the end of Book I, are revealed in these three chapters. Convinced that Saddam needed to be ousted, and that it was sufficient to manufacture the intelligence to justify the decision, the author establishes the consequences of the Bush administration and its refusal to deal with the facts on the ground. Interestingly, the author suggests that the eventual insurgency may have been avoidable, as the initial reaction to the invasion was, as Dick Cheney famously predicted, welcoming. The decisions to dismantle the Baath bureaucracy and military, the lack of a plan to prevent looting, and the botching of early overtures to tribal leaders are depicted as having undoing a potential peace.

But how strong was such potential to begin with? Here the dynamics within the Muslim world – namely between Shia and Sunni Muslims, emerge as a theme. Iraq is notable for being majority Shia – at a little more than 50%, compared to a little more than 40% Sunni – yet for more than two decades Sunnis were privileged under the rule of Saddam Hussein. With the collapse of the regime there was a very serious question of how the two sects would interact; Zaydan distrusted the Shia as agents of Iran, yet the book indicates that the two strands of Islam had been forced to get along under Saddam, integrated through civic life and bonded through their shared struggle in the war with Iran in the 1980s.

However, the collapse of Saddam's regime presented the Shiites with an opportunity to seize more influence for themselves, and there was a question of whether they would seize it and seek reprisals against Sunnis or attempt to rule Iraq by consensus. Zarqawi's mission in the early days of his insurgency was not only to attack the foreign presence in the country, but to attack the possibility of the two sects of Islam working in harmony. As he makes clear in his letter to Bin Laden, by attacking popular Shia clerics

as well as Shia worshippers his goal was to disrupt the potential for harmony, incite reprisals by Shiites, and further erode confidence that the U.S. could maintain security.

We will never know what might have happened with more careful decision-making in the early days of the occupation. But the author also demonstrates that these decisions were compounded by their refusal to accept that an insurgency was even happening, much less that it sought to instigate sectarian violence. This failure had severe consequences for Iraq, and its neighbors, long after Zarqawi had been eliminated. By the end of Book II the author will leave readers wondering whether these oversights, and Zarqawi's actions, have driven a permanent wedge into Iraqi society – and beyond.

Vocabulary

cradled, mottled, underpinnings, gleanings, abhorred, remnants, sleuths, minbar, reverberated, insurgency, conjunction, overdrawn, bureaucrats, illicit, ineptitude, antipathy, ambivalence, bile, sect, unadulterated, prostrate, unflinching

Book II, Parts 11-13

Summary

In early 2004, just after the February death of his beloved mother, Zarqawi set in motion a plan that, had it succeeded, would have dwarfed previous attacks. Covertly sending Azmi al-Jayousi, a Palestinian associate of Zarqawi's since Afghanistan, into Jordan, Zarqawi's plan involved a massive bomb in the heart of Amman that would have released a cloud of poison gas. Jayousi, an experienced maker of explosives since Afghanistan, had been at the notorious Ansar al-Islam camp in Iraq that had caught the attention of the Americans ahead of the invasion, testing poisons on dogs.

Having snuck inside the country, Jayousi went to work with associates acquiring the chemicals and vehicles they would need to carry out their plot, as well as intelligence on potential targets. Careful at first, Jayousi eventually dropped his guard, sending one of his men to fetch his wife and the children he had been separated from for years. Noticing the sudden disappearance of the family of a Zarqawi associate, as well as reports of suspicious individuals spending large amounts of money on oddly specific grocery lists, the Mukhabarat nabbed one of "shoppers," an intermediary with no idea who he was procuring supplies for.

Abu Mutaz, a gifted intelligence field operative with an expansive knowledge of the Koran – despite little religious fervor of his own – used his talents for interrogation and wide personal network to track the plotters. It eventually led them to a garage and warehouse recently rented to several suspicious men with a large truck. A raid on the warehouse discovered explosive materials and a truck intended to be used to barrel into a building prior to detonation. Other raids followed, including one on an apartment building that resulted in the capture of Jayousi. The attack they had been plotting was essentially completed and only days from execution.

Abu Mutaz's interrogations coaxed all the remaining details of the plot from Jayousi, as well as his declarations of loyalty to Zarqawi. His explanations were then broadcast throughout the country and transmitted elsewhere in the Arab world. This prompted a reply from Zarqawi, who insisted that stories of a "dirty bomb" were lies, and that his targets in Jordan were specifically military. Jordanian intelligence officials, however, were convinced that Zarqawi would continue to dream up grandiose attacks, hoping to leapfrog Bin Laden in importance.

Part 12 depicts how Zarqawi's stature indeed increased, but through a single killing – that of Nicholas Berg. Berg, a young, eccentric entrepreneur who wholeheartedly supported the intervention, had arrived in Iraq in December 2003 with the hopes of establishing his communications startup after a similar venture failed in Kenya. Returning in February 2004 and traveling freely about the countryside, offering to inspect communications towers for potential repairs, Berg was detained in March by Mosul police convinced he was a spy. Eventually released on April 6 when his parents

became concerned about his departure and raised complaints through the State Department, Berg began making arrangements for his departure when he disappeared on April 10.

On May 8 his decapitated body was found, followed days later by the horrific video of Zarqawi, citing the U.S. military's inhumane treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, cut the head off the still-living Berg and called on other Muslims to join the jihad rather than "sleep[ing] soundly while Islam is being slaughtered" (156) and fellow believers were being abused in Abu Ghraib. This video would be downloaded and watched by viewers around the world.

Three days after the video's release, Zarqawi announced the formation of the "al-Tawhid wal-Jihad" (Arabic for "Unity and Jihad") group, which would unite Islamic insurgents under Zarqawi's leadership. His actions acquired the disdain of many Islamic intellectuals – even al-Qaeda, worried that it might make fund-raising harder – but attracted legions of working-class Muslims in Iraq and elsewhere. It also gave Zarqawi a new nickname: the "Sheikh of Slaughterers."

Part 13 starts with the efforts of Robert S. Ford, a multi-lingual career diplomat whose reputation for enthusiasm and hands-on diplomacy had not been rewarded during his stay in Iraq. In June 2004 Ford had, despite his frustrations about Iraq and lack of hope for its future, been tasked with helping establish an interim Iraqi government that would allow the Americans to begin withdrawal. They had a leader, in long-time Shia exile Iyad al-Allawi, but needed Sunni participants to give the government a sense of legitimacy.

Meanwhile, the book shifts again to the tribal leader Zaydan al-Jabiri, broker of failed talks between the Americans and the tribes a year earlier. Zaydan noted how the unpopularity of the Americans, over incidents such as the accidental bombings of civilians, had led Sunni tribes to accept foreign insurgents into their midst. Though the insurgents regularly seized "taxes" from the locals by force and enforce bizarre rules – for example, forbidding the open display of cucumbers and tomatoes on the same wall because they resemble male and female genitalia and therefore should not mix – many locals accepted their presence because they wanted protection and were tired of the foreign intervention. Zaydan himself refused, unimpressed with the criminals among the insurgents, their regular kidnappings to raise ransom money, and Zarqawi's demand for pledges of support from the tribes.

The U.S. raised the bounty on Zarqawi's head to $25 million in July 2004. This prompted a celebration from the insurgent leader, who was now equal – at least in monetary amount – to Bin Laden himself. More gruesome videotapes follow, with kidnapped victims from Bulgaria, South Korea, and Egypt murdered on film, and ransomed victims telling of the excruciating torture and killings they witnessed. Zarqawi was openly defying Koranic commands against suicide by promoting suicide bombings, claiming that his tactics were not only effective, but that those who participated would play a role in sparking a final confrontation between Muslims and non-believers, claiming their flames would "consume the Armies of the Cross in Dabiq" (170), a town in northern Syria.

At least one former supporter began to express disagreement; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the scholar whose teachings had so inspired Zarqawi in Jordanian prison became vocally critical of his former pupil's tactics, particularly the targeting of non-combatants. Posting a letter to his own Web site, Maqdisi also condemned the man from Zarqa for suicide bombings, for killing Muslims merely because they had worked with non-believers, and for blowing up Shia mosques. In Jordan, King Abdullah began meeting with Islamic leaders and clerics, hoping to see a statement drafted from Muslims across its branches and across national boundaries.

The first came in November 2004, when Jordan's chief justice condemned "extremism, radicalism and fanaticism" as, he said, their Muslim forefathers had (173). Over the next year, the so-called "Amman message" was endorsed by 500 scholars and seven Islamic assemblies in dozens of countries. The violence continued, however, and in late September Zarqawi finally received the personal endorsement of Osama bin Laden, who commanded that the jihadis obey Zarqawi and halt the upcoming Iraqi elections.

Analysis

The increasing stature of Zarqawi, and his means of increasing it, are recurring themes in these sections. A brutal tactician whose methods were justified in his own mind, Zarqawi plotted catastrophic damage on his native country, in a plan that failed due to its complications. He later found much more success – and even the much-sought endorsement of Osama bin Laden – through the much less complicated, yet still horrific, murder of Nick Berg. The filming and transmitting of Berg's execution through the internet transformed Zarqawi into a folk hero of sorts, and these methods were then contAt the start of Part 11 the author reaches back to the beginning of the book to remind us of Zarqawi's intense devotion to his mother; along with jihad, one of the two great passions of his life. The book suggests, however, that by this time the insurgent was completely devoted to his mission, passing up on an opportunity to honor his mother's death to plan a grand strike at his nation of birth. This determination, the ruthlessness he displayed in that plot and then in the Berg killing, combined with his flair for promotion make him an exceptionally dangerous enemy, and will be adapted later by his successors.

The author, however, also introduces some of Zarqawi's weaknesses, which eventually undermined the Islamic State. One was his failure to anticipate the reactions to his attacks; he seemingly saw how the dirty bomb attack would have been perceived, but only after the widespread death toll it would have inflicted on Jordanian civilians was thwarted. In later attacks Jordanian authorities – and Zarqawi – were not be so lucky.

Another weakness of Zarqawi's organization was those he relied upon to carry out his plots. His would-be bomb-maker – apparently the one testing poisons on stray dogs at the end of Book I – demonstrates a weakness for sweets and for his wife, undermining his ability to carry out Zarqawi's elaborate dirty bomb plot. But the real weakness was becoming evident in the Iraqi countryside, where mistreatment by the criminal and extremist elements in Zarqawi's organization were beginning to wear on the patience of

the tribes. Where they had once relied on Zarqawi from protection – especially from the Shia – the author demonstrates that it was during this time that they grew impatient with his associates; their mistreatment, along with increasing disdain for Zarqawi's tactics, foreshadows a gradually change in the tide of the insurgency.

However, Zarqawi's image-management was a balancing act; the disruption of the dirty bomb attack on Amman prompted him to deny that civilians were ever the targets of his attacks. This indicates that he was aware of the sensibilities of Muslims – whose holy book forbade them from taking innocent life – even if he could justify such attacks to himself and his followers. Zarqawi continued to misjudge the reactions to such acts, as would his followers.

Vocabulary

absentia, eviscerate, audacious, polyglot, prudence, brusque, pacifism, inducement, communiqué, heterodox, raze, jurisdiction, demurred, protégé, apostate

Book II, Parts 14-16

Summary

The efforts by the American side to generate a new government were complicated, Part 14 demonstrates, by the unwillingness of Sunnis to take part. Sunnis participating in politics or local government had been targeted, either killed or having family members kidnapped and only released when they agreed to stop taking part. Long-suffering diplomat Robert Ford met with Tariq al-Hashimi, a leader in Iraq's largest Sunni party. Asked why he and his party were not taking part in the upcoming elections of January 2005, Hashimi told Ford that he and other Sunnis were not willing "to get themselves killed" (177).

It was not just the lack of security from Zarqawi's band, Hashimi told him, but Shiite gangs and police had been targeting Sunnis and driving them from their homes. Raids on Sunni homes were often aimed at the wrong targets and ended up enraging Muslims who had their private property violated and had strange men in the private quarters where women and children resided, a cultural taboo. Unable to recruit participants, Ford and others urged that the elections be called off, but the Bush administration was adamant on handing more autonomy to Iraqis to demonstrate progress in the face of mounting casualties. The result was, as expected, low turnout among Sunnis and disproportionate representation among Shiites and Kurds. Hashimi was eventually prodded into participating to give Sunnis a voice, and in response, his sister and two of his brothers were killed in separate attacks.

Yet, an increasing number of those in the provinces, having evidently grown tired of the foreign fighters, began sending tips to authorities about Zarqawi and his associates, resulting in at least one occasion in which he narrowly avoided capture. The insurgent leader, however, continued making videos in which he spoke of plans for a caliphate that would one day rule all Muslims. Bakos, watching his videos, noted his messianic complex and his confidence in simply overruling inconvenient Islamic teachings – including those against killing innocents.

Others were not so quick to endorse his amendments, however: al-Qaeda number two Ayman al-Zawahiri crafted a 6,000-word "performance appraisal" (185) of Zarqawi around this time. The letter, intercepted by the CIA in July 2005, blamed him for damaging the jihadi brand with his suicide bombings, attacks on Shiite mosques, and videotaped executions. Two weeks later Zarqawi wrote a response, ostensibly aimed at erstwhile compatriot Maqdisi but clearly an answer to Zawahiri as well: all Rafidha ("those who refuse" in Arabic; i.e. Shiites) were to be targets, as were all those who did not join in the war on the Shiites. Bakos, seeing continued growth in Zarqawi's organization from foreign fighters entering Iraq, was convinced that Zarqawi no longer felt he needed Bin Laden's help.

In late June 2005, President Bush received an intelligence briefing on Iraq, along with an introduction to McChrystal, who promised the president that he would track down Zarqawi and bring him in – preferably alive, for questioning. McChrystal's unit had been successful in targeting some of the men from Zarqa's lieutenants, killing and capturing some, but the leader himself continued to elude them. They learn that many of his suicide bombers were recruited from outside Iraq by Zarqawi's propaganda, and that members inside the organization guided these jihadis through training and indoctrination, not seeing any Iraqis until just before their bombs detonated, and never seeing Zarqawi in person.

Zarqawi's own whereabouts were never clear to anyone but a handful of top lieutenants, and he appeared to constantly be on the move. However, through an exhausting schedule, McChrystal's team maintained ongoing raids on suspected jihadis, pouring over the intelligence they acquired and using it to launch their next raid. Daily video footage from surveillance cameras captured the scenes from above as well, leading to new information and the gradual depletion of Zarqawi's organization. Hundreds under Zarqawi's command had been killed or captured by November 9, the day of the Amman bombing.

Part 15 deals with the Amman bombing itself. Sajida al-Rishawi, introduced in the book's prologue, returns to the author's focus under interrogation from Captain Abu Haytham. Much as foreign fighters were recruited to carry out missions inside Iraq, Rishawi and her compatriots had been Iraqis recruited to carry out the most devastating suicide attack in Jordan. She had followed her brothers into the ranks of al-Qaeda in Iraq after they were killed (Sunni custom demands that slain family members be avenged) and told she would be sent on a mission honoring her wish to kill Americans. She was married to one of her compatriots by one of Zarqawi's hand-picked clerics to avoid violating the hard-line Islamist prohibition on women traveling without a close male relative.

Fitted with a suicide vest just before her mission, Rishawi arrived at the hotel and attempted to detonate her vest first. When it failed, her partner gestured for her to leave, then detonated his own. For the next several hours she wandered through the city, generating attention for her confused behavior before arriving at the home of her sister-in-law. Taken by the Mukhabarat there, her confusion continued during her interrogation, as it dawned on her that she had carried out an attack on a civilian target in Jordan, and that despite what she had been told, Americans had not been there.

In fact, the nature of the assignment changed perceptions of Zarqawi's mission, as Muslim leaders and commoners alike turned out to denounce him and his organization. Having inspired fandom and devotion among poorer Jordanians, the mood toward the man from Zarqa turned overwhelmingly negative as reports of a wedding bombing and exclusively non-combatant targets spread through the media. King Abdullah, furthermore, saw taking Zarqawi down as a personal mission, and began sending special Mukhabarat teams into Iraq to help the Americans break of al-Qaeda cells.

Zarqawi responded to the outcry by insisting, much as he had after the failed chemical weapons attack, that his intent had been distorted. He claimed the real targets were foreign intelligence operatives and the Muslims who died had been accidental; “collateral damage,” in fact (200). Another reprimand arrived from al-Qaeda, demanding that Zarqawi get permission for major operations. Zarqawi formed the Mujahideen Shura Council to make decisions by committee, rather than by his word alone.

His definitive response, though, came in an early morning in February 2006, when his men bombed a revered – yet, at the time, empty – Shiite shrine in Samarra. The destruction of the shrine left no innocent victims this time, but succeeded in setting off a wave of Shia-Sunni violence in the city, resulting in 1,300 deaths. Previously shaken by the response to the Amman bombings, and now exultant Zarqawi began another media blitz, with photographs of him firing his weapon, meeting his military council, and studying maps in preparation. With the man from Zarqa rediscovering his confidence – and the U.S. military’s discovery of an underground facility where Shia policy tortured Sunni captives – it again appeared Zarqawi’s hopes for an Iraqi war zone were coming to fruition.

Part 16 starts with the arrest of Zaid al-Karbouly, a customs officer on the Iraq-Syria border secretly on Zarqawi’s payroll. Long instrumental to the terrorists for providing information on shipments to raid, Karbouly was nabbed during one of his regular shopping trips to Jordan in early 2006. Under interrogation from Abu Haytham and the Red Devil, Karbouly readily confessed to past crimes, apparently happy to be in Jordanian custody and out of al-Qaeda in Iraq’s grasp. Sickened by Zarqawi’s crimes – and increasingly, his own – Karbouly began sharing information about supply lines and the operatives he had encountered.

On April 8, McChrystal’s team caught word of a convoy of vehicles entering the village of Yusufiyah, south of Baghdad. A pair of raids ensued – one resulting in a firefight and insurgent casualties – and information gleaned there indicated that the insurgents there had had close contact with Zarqawi. Patrol of the area near Yusufiyah continued, and interrogations of Karbouly continued to reveal information about smuggling routes employed by Zarqawi. Interrogation of one English-speaking detainee from the Yusufiyah raids yielded information that Zarqawi had an Iraqi spiritual adviser named Sheikh Abd al-Rahman, with whom he met every week to week and a half.

McChrystal’s team monitored Rahman’s home in the weeks to come, culminating on June 7, when Rahman suspiciously left his home, swapped vehicles – twice – then traveled to Baqubah, a poly-ethnic city northeast of Baghdad that the team had earlier been told might be Zarqawi’s base of operations. Upon arrival, the imam was greeted by a solidly built figure who, from the distance their cameras could film him, matched the profile of Zarqawi. A team of Delta commandos stationed 40 minutes away in Baghdad were ordered to deploy to the site by helicopter, but in the time it took for them to arrive McChrystal’s team ultimately concluded that it must be bombed by jet fighter rather than risk Zarqawi escaping.

Twenty minutes later, the Delta team arrived, in time for a mortally wounded Zarqawi to see them in person before passing away. His death sparked celebrations among U.S. officials and Amman residents, protests in his hometown village, but indifference among the tribes in Ramadi, including Zaydan al-Jabiri. By this point, Zaydan concluded, the violence that the Jordanian Zarqawi brought to Iraq had become “more insidious and homegrown” (220).

Analysis

The failed bombing of Amman aside, prior to this point in Zarqawi’s operation had been virtually flawless, and those of the Americans had been painfully inept. However, in the final three sections of Book II the author indicates that his jihad had a high-water mark. Despite the U.S. administration’s failure to plan properly for the invasion of Iraq, its military, particularly the unit under McChrystal, began adapting to his methods, crafting strategies that put Zarqawi on the defense and made planning harder. Their strategies also benefitted from an increasing distaste for Zarqawi’s actions and associates.

The author prepares readers for this section through Zarqawi’s self-justifications after the failed dirty bomb attack in Part 11, yet it is nonetheless surprising how he failed to anticipate the reaction to deeds. This can be seen not only the universal condemnation of the Amman bombing, but also his betrayal by his guilt-stricken border agent Karbouly. The Sunnis, gradually losing influence in a nation where the majority Shia were tired of being targeted by Zarqawi, were beginning to turn on him as well.

Together, all of these factors gradually squeezed Zarqawi, finally leading to the information that resulted in his death. However, as the final section of Book II indicates, Zarqawi’s deeds left a lasting infection on Iraq. The sectarian tensions in the country were now past the point of fully healing, and Zarqawi had shown how a bold act of violence against foreign forces could inspire legions of followers. The broader war in Iraq had also left damage to the entire Middle East, motivating Muslim malcontents in other countries to action. Zaydan’s ruminations at the end of Book II clearly foreshadow the rise of something just as bad as Zarqawi in the years to come, only this from someone Iraqi-born.

Vocabulary

tantamount, kaffiyah, narcissist, pretext, admonishment, incontrovertible, insidious

Book III, Parts 17-18

Summary

The diplomat Robert Ford returns in Part 17, though the setting is now 2011, when Ford was on yet another assignment taken begrudgingly: as U.S. ambassador to Syria. The early pages demonstrate why, as this was when the “Arab Spring” was underway, and protestors who supported President Bashar Assad were staging an attack on the U.S. embassy. From inside the facility, flanked by armed U.S. marines, Ford watched as the pro-Assad protestors storm the embassy and begin rattling doors and windows. Ford waited, hoping they would go no further, which might prompt the American marines to open fire.

Here the narrator describes the origins, of Bashar Assad’s regime. Like King Abdullah II, Assad inherited his position from his father by surprise, having studied abroad to become an ophthalmologist, before he was drafted into the role when his older brother Basel – long-time President Hafez al-Assad’s oldest son – died in a car accident. Like Abdullah, Assad also acted as a reformer upon taking power in 2000, freeing dissidents and instituting new political freedoms.

In late 2010 the U.S. appointed Ford as ambassador to Syria after five years without one. But as Syria still was known as a police state Ford, who since his previous work in Iraq had gone on to an ambassador’s post in Algeria, did not want the Syrian position because he knew it would mean “fighting with the Assad government all the time” over its human rights record (227). Ford nonetheless took the position and began butting heads with Assad over human rights almost immediately.

Just two weeks after Ford’s first discussion with Assad, the Arab Spring kicked off, toppling the leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, and eventually Libya. Protestors in Syria, united in their concerns over the economy and government corruption, turned out in a display of unity across faiths. Assad, feeling that a conciliatory approach doomed the Egyptian regime of Hosni Mubarak, sent his security forces to crush dissent, resulting in numerous deaths and detainees sent to be beaten and tortured in prison. With much of the rest of the country united against him, but his Alawite Shia sect in control of the nation’s military, Assad’s Syria settled into a lengthy civil war.

In July 2011, while the Obama administration debated whether to call on Assad to resign, the Syrian dictator prepared to send troops into the city of Hama, a hotbed of anti-government protests in the northwest. Ford made a critical decision at this point to slip into the city, along with the French ambassador, to speak with protestors and encourage them not to become violent, noting that Iraq had left the U.S. with no taste for intervention. Greeted warmly by protestors, Ford’s visit was treated as a provocation by the state, though its threats to move against Hama were not carried out.

The response instead came in the form of the attacks on embassies, including the incident at the start of Part 16. Though largely limited to property damage and threatening gestures – including gunshots – the attacks did result in Secretary of State Hillary Clinton denouncing the Syrian president, claiming he had "lost legitimacy" (235). In August Obama followed by finally calling on Assad to step down, but took no further actions to enforce this call. Assad, despite the civic nature and interfaith makeup of the anti-government protestors, made a fateful decision: denouncing his opponents as takfiris – Islamic radicals.

In Part 18 Assad's response to the Arab Spring is contrasted with that of Abdullah II's, who reacted to Jordanian protests by moving against entrenched elites, such as the wealthy and members of the royal family in his own society and demanding reforms he had not previously been secure enough to make. Given their similar backgrounds and cordial relationship – a contrast with the openly hostile relations between their fathers – Abdullah, in the fall of 2011, attempted to advise Assad on what to do next. Assad brusquely rejected his Jordanian counterpart's requests, leaving Abdullah and his aides to wonder how the implosion of their neighbor would affect them.

Despite the popular uprisings against him, the Jordanians knew that Assad enjoyed the ongoing support of long-time partners in Russia and in Iran. Attempts to convince Assad to depart Syria for a comfortable exile failed. Then the opposition to Assad began to swell with former inmates of Assad's jails, the beneficiaries of a general amnesty in the early part of the uprising. In a bit of cynical strategizing, Assad had freed some known Islamic militants, including those who once worked with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Events in Syria were greeted as signs of hope by Zarqawi's former associates in Iraq, who now called themselves the Islamic State of Iraq. Years after the death of the man from Zarqa, they were now led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (birth name Ibrahim Awad al-Badri) an Iraqi professor of Islamic law known for strictness in attention to detail and observance of custom. Though his organization has been on the run and unable to carry out the large-scale attacks it did under Zarqawi, Baghdadi had taken the Arab Spring as an opportunity to become more vocal about his plans for an Islamic Middle East.

The book then explains the aftermath of Zarqawi's death, as new U.S. troops brought in by the "surge" of 2007, armed with new tactics and supported by Sunnis now tired of the foreign jihadists, carried out raids killing al-Qaeda in Iraq operatives daily. The result was a steep drop in casualties, both among American troops and the Iraqi public. Despite continued distrust between Iraq's Shia and Sunnis, the U.S. began withdrawing troops.

Back in 2011, a year after taking the helm of the Islamic State, Baghdadi looked to Syria for encouraging developments.

Analysis

Book II having ended with the death of Zarqawi, and with his former associates now leading an organization that was a shell of what he commanded, Book III begins by taking a detour into Syria. Having earlier explored the background of King Abdullah II in Jordan, the events of the Arab Spring are an opportunity for the author to explore the past of Bashar al-Assad, another secular leader who came to office by surprise and who seemed keen to take magnanimous steps at the outset of his rule.

Yet in Part 17 the reader can see that Assad, and his government, contrast starkly with that of Abdullah and Jordan's. Having taken office in a relatively open and tolerant country – albeit one with conservative factions and institutions – Abdullah's early efforts to make peace with factions in the country now looked like the first steps in a process of long-term reform. With the arrival of the Arab Spring, he used popular uprisings to take steps he had been hesitant to do in Part 2: seriously roll back the power of the aristocrats and the wealthy.

With Assad, the ruler of a country with a much more repressive history, by the time of the Arab Spring the trajectory appears quite different. The common theme in his release of political prisoners after coming to power and his ruthless suppression of dissent after the 2010 uprisings is his prioritization of his own power, not his interest in reforming. This self-interest will result in a serious of steps, from the branding of the protestors – largely a civic-minded, inter-faith alliance at this point – as radicals to the release of actual Islamic extremists from prison, designed to ensure his survival as his country suffers.

Part 18 details a series of events in Iraq developing in parallel to the Syrian civil war, as the remnants of Zarqawi's old organization have reformed themselves under the banner of the Islamic State and the leadership of the Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Little is said about Baghdadi in this chapter except that he was a scholar who happened to share much of Zarqawi's old ambitions. However, the book notes the plummeting popularity of his organization following the death of Zarqawi, the Sunnis of Iraq turning their backs on the jihadists, and the eventual withdrawal of the U.S.

These events may seem to have little relevance to those taking place under Assad at the time, but the author repeatedly notes that Baghdadi was looking to the events of the Syrian civil war in the hopes of a breakthrough. In doing so, he prepares the readers to watch for events in Syria in the coming sections that will reward Baghdadi's patience.

Vocabulary

vindictive, souks, jettisoned, inshallah, indispensable, jubilantly

Book III, Parts 19-20

Summary

Part 19 tells the story of a scouting party sent by Baghdadi into Syria six months after the uprising against Assad began. There, they encountered an environment much like what Iraq had been at the peak of Zarqawi's organization – lawless, violent, and chaotic – only this time with no American military presence. The party consisted of less than ten men, but it found a new militia – Jabhat al-Nusra (Support Front for the People of Greater Syria) – an inoffensive-sounding name implying support for the Syrian resistance but designed to expand the Islamic State's influence.

Baghdadi would regularly communicate with this cell group in Syria, and Part 19 uses his correspondence with them as a window into his personality and world view. Baghdadi, like Zarqawi, differed from al-Qaeda in believing that the foundation of a caliphate came first, before Muslims had expelled non-believers from their lands. He also shared Zarqawi's brutal excesses, despite a much more mundane early life than the man from Zarqa. Baghdadi was, the book says, a quiet man with few outstanding characteristics, other than his intense interest in fiqh, or legal interpretations from Islamic holy works.

Originally from Samarra, north of Baghdad, the future leader of ISIS was part of the al-Bu Badri tribe, part of the ancestral line of the prophet Muhammad. After his mandatory – but not particularly noteworthy – stint in the Iraqi army in the 1990s he moved to Baghdad to study Islamic law, and gradually became more and more fundamentalist. Baghdadi was working to complete a doctorate on the subject when the U.S. invasion launched in 2003, prompting him to join an insurgent cell. Captured, he was sent to the U.S. detention center Camp Bucca. There, U.S. officials later acknowledged, the mingling of Islamic fundamentalists with moderates created a "jihadi university," where the knowledgeable Baghdadi thrived until his release in December 2004 to ease overcrowding.

After this, Baghdadi married, began a family and completed his doctorate. However, when his former organization fell under the advisory council that Zarqawi completed in 2006 (see section 15), his advice was sought on matters of Sharia law. After Zarqawi's death, the remnants of his former organization renamed themselves the Islamic State, now dominated by former officers of Saddam's army, and Baghdadi was tapped to ensure fidelity to Sharia law throughout the organization. In 2010, when the senior leader and minister of war for ISIS were wiped out in a single missile attack, Baghdadi was left at the top. He quickly gained acceptance in his role thanks to his willingness to use his academic background to justify brutal tactics, and his bloodline made him a credible head of a caliphate.

This section interweaves Baghdadi's story with a return in focus on the Syrian civil war and Washington's wrangling over how to address it. The growing size of the Free Syrian

Army in 2011 failed to dislodge Assad, and the U.S. lacked the influence it had over Egypt to rein Assad in, nor could it pass a resolution at the United Nations, as it did prior to its Libya intervention, thanks to Russia's veto power as a permanent member. The administration still had no desire to intervene militarily, and saw at least one advantage in the continuing conflict: a continuing drain on the resources of Assad's ally, Iran, in propping up Assad.

The scene then shifts to Washington, where a 27-year-old Syrian immigrant Mouaz Moustafa, met with congressmen and their staff to encourage support for the anti-Assad resistance. Living in America since age 11, Moustafa had experience working as a congressional staffer and had since been recruited by opposition forces – first Libyan, then Syrian – to speak on their behalf in Washington. Moustafa related his conversations with Syrian protestors, one of whom had noted a change in the protests: once an interfaith alliance that even included some Alawite Shia, had gradually turned sectarian, as Sunni and Shia had turned on one another, and Sunni protestors were now vowing to send "Christians to Beirut" and "Alawites to their coffins" (265).

In Part 20, the al-Nusra Front released its first "promotional video" in January 2012, advertising its capabilities. This followed a synchronized car bomb attack, in the Zarqawi mold, outside of government security offices in Damascus weeks earlier, which killed more than forty people. Despite the protests of the Free Syrian Army, the attacks by the al-Nusra Front continued, claiming that not only were their efforts aimed exclusively at the regime – not civilians – they were more effective than the tactics employed by the moderates. Soon, much as in Iraq, such efforts began drawing recruits from elsewhere in the Arab world, and wealthy Arabs from outside Syria began sending in monetary and other forms of aid to the al-Nusra Front's cause.

In the summer of 2012 Islamists in the Syrian civil war began crossing into Jordan, planning to commit terrorist attacks in Amman. The Mukhabarat, using their network of informants, watch this development, moving to arrest the militants not long before their plan was to be executed. A Jordanian engaged Islamists in a firefight, killing several of them but losing one of their own – Jordan's first casualty due to the Syrian civil war. King Abdullah stepped up efforts to enhance border security, not just to keep out militants, but to ensure that refugees from the conflict next door entered in an orderly manner. Abdullah gradually envisioned Syria deteriorating into a divided country, with sections controlled by Assad, by Islamists, and Kurds.

The U.S. State Department had become aware of thousands of young Muslim men traveling to Syria from Western Europe. Islamists, led by the al-Nusra Front, had occupied many villages and insisted on governing them under Sharia law – though they had avoided acts of extreme brutality that earned Zarqawi the disdain of the Arab world. The State Department began to wonder if Syria would be the site of the first new government that was "al-Qaeda in all but name" (277). Secretary of State Clinton got behind a CIA plan to train and arm rebels to overthrow Assad and retake territory held by Islamists, but the plan was rejected by President Obama, wary of drawing the U.S. into the conflict.

Analysis

Events in Syria are taking place quickly in this section of the book, forcing the author to tie together multiple strands of events in the span of a few pages – especially in Part 19. The growth of the al-Nusra Front, the background of Baghdadi, and the halting efforts to depose Assad are each described as assorted actors attempt to gain a foothold in Syria. Part 20 further introduces Mouaz Moustafa, who served as a bridge between the Syrian rebels – excluding the Islamic extremist factions – and the U.S. government.

The author's handling of Baghdadi is to introduce him as very different from Zarqawi. Baghdadi was quiet, unimposing, and unaccustomed to combat, as opposed to his charismatic, adventurous predecessor. Yet it could be argued that he combined the most dangerous characteristics of Zarqawi – his ruthlessness and flair for publicity – with those of Maqdisi – Islamic scholarship and powers of persuasion. Though this section of the book shows the new Islamic State in an incubation period while it recovered from Zarqawi's elimination and the loss of support from Sunni tribes, over time these qualities made Baghdadi a more adaptable, and more accomplished, threat than Zarqawi was.

Of course, part of this success was due not to Baghdadi's gifts, but to U.S. actions. The book depicts the U.S. as operating behind a veil of confusion and uncertainty; despite having killed Zarqawi and calmed sectarian violence to a sufficient degree that they could withdraw from Iraq, the mistakes of the early days in Iraq continued to haunt Washington. Barack Obama was hesitant to get involved in new conflicts he saw brewing in the Middle East, even if such involvement was limited to expressing an opinion about who should rule. The book does not clearly argue what would have happened if the Obama administration had not been so hesitant to take action against the Assad regime, but does indicate that this hesitance allowed Assad to stave off the revolution, and the deteriorating environment is clearly one that an opportunistic group, similar to Zarqawi's could capitalize on.

Vocabulary

auxiliary, gratuitous, jurisprudence, pedigree, salutary, provisos, partisans, shabiha, contours, landlocked, atrocities, imams, pensive

Book III, Parts 21-22

Summary

At the beginning of Part 21 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi arrived in Syria to take over territory occupied by Islamists. He stationed his lieutenant Abu Wahib, a flamboyant personality obsessed with emulating the appearance and actions of Zarqawi, in charge of ensuring access to the Syrian border. Abu Wahib demonstrated his affinity for Zarqawi's tactics in early 2013 by videotaping himself coldly executing truck drivers in the area under suspicions – unproven – that they were Shiites. The behavior of Abu Wahib contrasts starkly with the al-Nusra Front, who had eschewed such methods.

In April 2013, Baghdadi posted an audio recording claiming that the name "al-Nusra Front" had been dismissed, and declaring the new Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (which may be translated as "Levant") had taken its place. The al-Nusra Front's leader, previously dispatched to the region by Baghdadi, disagreed and appealed to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to mediate. Zawahiri rebuked Baghdadi for attempting to merge with al-Nusra without his approval. He ordered Baghdadi to step down for one year and commanded Muslims not to take the lives of other Muslims.

Baghdadi ignored Zawahiri and began building his organization within Syria, establishing branches in much the way a state would function. He ordered a new wave of attacks in Iraq, propelling violence to its highest point since Zarqawi's peak, taking lives everywhere from sporting events to elementary schools. Having launched operations in the previous year to free Islamists from Iraqi prisons, Baghdadi's swelling ranks attacked towns held by other Islamist groups, including al-Nusra Front, in Syria, slaughtering those who did not surrender or leave. Even a mediator sent by Zawahiri to prevent conflict between the Islamic State and al-Nusra was killed by suicide bomber in Aleppo, in an act that, while not claimed by Baghdadi's forces, turned al-Qaeda against the Islamic State for good.

Raqqa, in eastern Syria, became the capital of ISIS. After a week of fighting and bloodshed ISIS fighters drove out the Free Syrian Army, announced a list of prohibited behaviors, and began enforcing their laws through public executions, followed by the crucifixion or decapitation of the bodies. Daily religious observances were mandatory, smoking and drinking were banned, and women were not allowed to leave their homes unless completely covered. Children were forced into mandatory religious training, and orphans were sent to camps to learn how to shoot and carry out suicide missions.

Fighters from fifty countries arrived to join ISIS, with their numbers reaching nearly ten-thousand. ISIS displayed such confidence that it sent a representative to one of Mouaz Moustafa's meetings in Syria with anti-Assad fighters. Continued administration unwillingness to take a more active role in the conflict prompted resignations in the State Department, including from Robert Ford in 2014, frustrated by the lack of action

and by congressional inquiries in which he took the blame for the administration's Syria policy.

Part 22 takes place in late spring 2014, as ISIS fighters streamed into Iraq, overwhelming four Iraqi army divisions and seizing nearly one-third of its territory. They took advantage of continuing conflict between the Shia-led Iraqi government and the Sunni tribesmen, including the tribe of Zaydan al-Jabiri, who had witnessed so much of the conflict first hand in Book II. Earlier, when the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki sent security forces into the region to suppress a revolt by the tribes at the end of 2013 ISIS joined in, quickly taking the city of Fallujah.

Tribesmen such as Zaydan insisted that this was a tribal affair and that ISIS were different from Zarqawi who was, after all, not even Iraqi. Zaydan, long believing that Iraq's Shia government was doing the work of Iran, insisted that Baghdadi was not a terrorist, but was defending Sunnis from "the Persians" (299). ISIS, however, began taking revenge on those who had helped the Americans in their opposition to the Zarqawi organization, killing their associates and destroying their property.

In February 2014 director of national intelligence James Clapper and chief of the Defense Intelligence Agency James Clapper included ISIS in their regular threat assessment report before congress. Flynn predicted that ISIS would try to take more territory in Iraq and Syria, noting that Baghdadi was doing a better job of not alienating Iraqi tribes with his tactics. In June they attacked Samarra, Baghdadi's hometown, overwhelming the army. A similar result took place in Mosul, when an invading force of 1,500 ISIS fighters, aided by terrorist cells inside the city, drove out an army of 10,000. Only before they reached Baghdad were they stopped by the Iraqi military.

Now in command of a swath of territory in Iraq and Syria, as well as oil wells, factories, and hundreds of millions in cash, Baghdadi appeared in Mosul in July. He thanked those who had helped him establish his caliphate, then decreed that Muslims throughout the world should obey him, and that those who did would "conquer Rome (i.e. the Christians) and own the world" (305).

On the day of the fall of Mosul, Abu Haytham sat in his office, communicating with Mukhabarat operatives about the day's events. He blamed the success of ISIS on conditions created by the Iraq War, but also on governments in the region who had failed to respond to their people's concerns, and credited the Islamic State for exploiting that discontent. ISIS chapters had been declared across Muslim countries in Africa and Asia from Nigeria to Pakistan, and though their rule was even more tyrannical than the governments they replaced, Abu Haytham could do nothing but help secure his own country's defenses.

Analysis

In Part 22 the author demonstrates that the sudden rise of ISIS in 2014, as it quickly rolled back Iraqi forces and established its territorial stronghold, was in fact planned well

in advance and the product of continued Shia-Sunni feuding. Yet the last chapters of the book move quickly, with Baghdadi suddenly emerging with an entire army fully armed and capable of dispatching larger – if less convicted – forces. While this is evidence that ISIS did not appear like – in the author's words, "a fierce desert storm that appeared out of thin air" (296), it does demonstrate how quickly the Islamic State's plans fell into place.

And so, just eight years after Zarqawi's death his successor organization succeeded in carving out its own territory in Iraq and Syria, making his dream of an uncompromising Islamic caliphate a reality. At Baghdadi's speech declaring his new caliphate, the author carefully notes the militant leader's black garb and attention to dental hygiene (304), noting that these were in keeping with the prophet Muhammad's behavior and teaching. His remarks about "overcoming Rome" (305) remind of Zarqawi's promise that Muslims would defeat the "armies of the cross" in Syria.

Seeing how ISIS rewarded tribal support in the fight against the Shia Iraqi government – by destroying the property and executing the men of a tribal leader who previously opposed Zarqawi's organization – may hint at the eventual defeat of ISIS, as the cruelty in its DNA may make it incapable of governing, much less coalition-building. Yet the book cannot outline a clear means of its defeat, nor offer much hope for the kind of region its defeat would leave behind.

Bringing the book full circle are Abu Haytham's remarks at the end, at how extremists "sometimes get sick, but they never die" (307). The early sections invoked the Ikhwan as examples of the fundamentalism that has plagued the region since the post-World War I order. However, since the U.S. intervention in Iraq it now appeared the Middle East was caught in a cycle of conflict between branches of Islam, and between corrupt secular dictators who drive disaffected Muslims into the arms of extremists who, as Zarqawi and the al-Nusra Front have argued, use methods that seem to work. Bashar al-Assad and Nouri al-Maliki were both Shia rulers who would seem to have lost any hope for ruling their Sunni populations in good faith. The book leaves us to ponder whether future leaders of divided Muslim nations will be similarly incapable of meeting the needs of the public, and thus vulnerable of seeing their people fall under the sway of a radical message.

Vocabulary

rivulets, rebuke, vetted, miswak, caliph

Epilogue

Summary

Muath al-Kasabeh, the captive Jordanian fighter pilot first seen in the book's prologue, was led onto a film set so that he could recount his story. It was January 3, 2015, and Al-Kasabeh took part in an aerial mission against ISIS on December 24 when his plane crashed near Raqqa. After telling of how his mission went wrong and he was captured, Al-Kasabeh was placed in a cage and set on fire. The cage was then buried by a backhoe under concrete and dirt, and the video – a far superior production than those Zarqawi once posted for the world to see – listed the names of other Jordanian pilots and the bounties ISIS has placed on their heads.

The Epilogue lists a number of other brutal killings ISIS has filmed, from aid workers to foreign journalists to soldiers. Al-Kasabeh's, however, set off a torrent of protest in the Islamic world, as the burning of a human being had long been considered taboo. The Saudi grand mufti declared them "enemies of Islam" (311). Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Zarqawi's former mentor, condemned ISIS and called on Muslims across the world to "defend Islam and make clear that this is not from Islam" (313). Just before the pilot's execution, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi told a gathering of Sunni religious leaders that a reformation to reclaim the faith from extremists was necessary.

King Abdullah, responded to the atrocity with increased airstrikes on ISIS, something Jordan had been hesitant to draw attention to for fear of inciting more attacks on them. Upon his return to Jordan from Washington, he met the pilot's father, walking hand-in-hand with him wearing traditional red-and-white garb representing the monarchy and tribal traditions. Additional bombing missions from Jordan were prepared.

Analysis

In the Epilogue, the author does little to soften the bleak conclusion to Book III, following it with the execution of Al-Kasabeh, first mentioned in the Prologue. However, the book shifts its focus away from ISIS and toward King Abdullah, who met the pilot's father and ordered more raids. Combined with condemnations of the pilot's immolation – including from Zarqawi's erstwhile mentor Maqdisi – the book indicates that the continuing problem of ISIS will be met with determined opposition, from clerics aghast at its representations of Islam to secular Arab governments like Abdullah's.

With these touches the author introduces a paradox at the heart of the new strain of Islamic radicalism ushered in by Zarqawi and carried on by ISIS: their attention-grabbing methods assure them a following, but also assure them an opposition. Abu Haytham's bleak assessment at the end of Book III indicated that eliminating such radicalism may be impossible; with this Epilogue, the author suggests that it would be

just as impossible for ISIS to see its goal – a universal caliphate, or one covering even the entire Middle East – come to fruition.

Vocabulary

gauntlet, preamble, juxtapose, countenanced, sanctify, treatise, fulcrum

Important People

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, birth name Ahmad Fadeel al-Nazal al-Khalayleh, began his life as a violent, petty criminal in Zarqa, Jordan. Having embraced fundamentalist Sunni Islam, as encouraged by his mother to curb his lawbreaking, Zarqawi (literally, "the man from Zarqa") came to embrace jihad against non-Muslims, Shiites, and even insufficiently devoted Sunnis as a way of embracing his new piety along with his fundamentally violent nature. After brief stints in Afghanistan fighting its socialist government in the early 1990s and then in a Jordanian prison for a terror plot, Zarqawi eventually settled in Iraq just prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003.

After the U.S. invasion ousts long-time dictator Saddam Hussein, Zarqawi began carrying out terror attacks designed to hinder the reconstruction of the country, and also targeted Shiites in an effort create conflict between the two major sects of Islam in Iraq. His efforts drew support from Sunnis in Iraq disenfranchised by the fall of Saddam, as well as those outside Iraq outraged by the American invasion. His notoriety reached its highest point after he decapitated Nick Berg, an American entrepreneur, in 2004, filming the grisly incident and posting it on the internet.

Zarqawi's criminal background is emphasized throughout the book, contrasting him with terrorist from wealthy backgrounds, such as Osama bin Laden, and those who used an intellectual bent to justify their extremism, namely Abu Muhmmad al-Maqdisi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. These violent tendencies, it is implied, resulted in Zarqawi taking a uniquely brutal approach to his jihad, namely his targeting of Muslims, especially Shiites, who were not combatants. This approach earned Zarqawi enemies, including within the ranks of fundamentalist Islam, but also attracted devotion from militants outraged by the treatment of Muslims by foreign powers who believed Zarqawi's methods were uniquely effective. As a result, these methods remained popular after Zarqawi was tracked and killed by U.S. forces.

Abdullah II

Other than their shared Sunni roots and country of origin, King Abdullah II of Jordan was Zarqawi's opposite in almost every sense. Born into a privileged royal family but off-put by politics, Abdullah's lack of political ambitions and successful military career lead his father, the long-serving King Hussein, to appoint him as successor. As his father seemingly anticipated, Abdullah took the royal responsibilities very seriously, seeking reforms when possible and to make peace, both with troublesome neighbors and domestic factions.

However, the continued problem of extremism, primarily by Zarqawi and his successors, revealed Abdullah's toughness, as he ordered decisive actions against Zarqawi and

ISIS in response to their killings of Jordanians. He continually demonstrated foresight, anticipating in 2002 that the U.S. invasion of Iraq would have unanticipated and calamitous consequences, and in 2013-2014 that ISIS was growing into a force that Syria and Iraq might not be able to suppress. In both cases, however, his warnings were not heeded by the U.S., which proceeded with the invasion and failed to respond to the Islamic State's threats before it had conquered a vast stretch of territory.

He and Zarqawi were, in a sense, both reactions to existing institutions in the Middle East that ruled over Muslims without representing their interests. Both also were shaped by foreign powers, namely the U.S., that exerted influence over the Middle East without fully understanding the consequences. Abdullah's responses to both were diametrically opposite to Zarqawi's however; domestically he chose liberalization and reform instead of fundamentalism and violence, and in dealing with West he chose cooperation and entreaties for assistance.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi inherited the organization Zarqawi founded, adapting his methods and working toward his goal of an Islamic caliphate and final confrontation with the West. While Zarqawi had combat experience in Afghanistan and established authority over fellow militants in prison, Baghdadi exercised his authority through his extensive knowledge of Islamic law. Rising through the Islamic State's ranks thanks to his ability to justify its methods intellectually and theologically, Baghdadi proved an adept tactician as well, building his ranks by freeing prisoners and establishing seed organizations in the midst of the Syrian civil war.

Though just as accepting as his predecessor of controversial methods, including attacks on civilian targets and the filming of gruesome executions, it is implied that Baghdadi had learned from Zarqawi's mistakes, not alienating Iraqi tribes and others he needed to build his caliphate. However, it is also implied that he, like Zarqawi, may have overestimated the tolerance Muslims had for extreme violence, as the Islamic State's burning of a Jordanian fighter pilot outraged many, including fellow fundamentalists, in much the way Zarqawi's attacks on a wedding in Amman did.

Abu Muhmmad al-Maqdisi

Abu Muhmmad al-Maqdisi was a fundamentalist scholar of Islam and an early influence on Zarqawi, encouraging his call for jihad, particularly in Jordan in the 1990s. A fellow inmate of the al-Jafr prison in the latter half of the 1990s, Maqdisi was known for his persuasion skills and intellect, and was considered the leader of the inmates who subscribed to radical fundamentalist views. However, even then his influence over the men was considered less than that of Zarqawi's, and more physically imposing force who compensated for a lack of education with combat experience, something Maqdisi lacks. Later, Maqdisi became appalled by his former pupil's methods, particularly attacks on Muslim civilians, denouncing them and Zarqawi's successor organization

ISIS. Perhaps due to that lack of experience on the battlefield, however, his influence never rivaled that of Zarqawi's outside of the prison, and his words failed to rein in their excesses.

Abu Haytham

A brigadier in the Mukhabarat, Jordan's intelligence service, Abu Haytham monitored and worked to thwart Zarqawi's plots against targets in Jordan. A capable, thoughtful leader of the intelligence service, Abu Haytham was able to anticipate that Zarqawi would remain a continued threat to Jordan as early as 1999, but was constrained by his country's dedication to the rule of law and unable to restrain Zarqawi indefinitely for lack of proof. He and the Mukhabarat's effective style of interrogation and intelligence gathering were successful at thwarting many, but not all, plots inside the country, but Abu Haytham was haunted by the carnage at the sites of Zarqawi's successful attacks, and weary of having to continue waging war against ISIS, who continue the legacy of Zarqawi's ideology.

Nada Bakos

A CIA analyst whose work began with tracking the financial crimes of Saddam Hussein, Nada Bakos gradually became tasked with tracking the movements and activities of Zarqawi. A dedicated and capable analyst, Bakos ran into difficulty under the Bush administration, who insisted on establishing a link between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, settling Zarqawi as an intermediary. Bakos, aware that Saddam was actually an enemy of al-Qaeda and Zarqawi, nonetheless had her intelligence consistently manipulated to back administration objectives, and could only watch in horror at the results, particularly the death of Nick Berg. She demonstrated the apolitical functions within the government, but also how political objectives can distort data.

Bashar al-Assad

The president of Syria since 2000, Bashar al-Assad is a study of comparisons and contrasts with Abdullah II. Like the Jordanian king, Assad inherited power in his country from his long-serving father, even though he had prepared for a different career. Unlike Abdullah, however, Assad had also inherited his father's authoritarian governance and was determined to uphold it, ruthlessly suppressing the Arab Spring uprisings that Abdullah accommodated. An Alawite Shia presiding over a secular government that ruled a majority Sunni nation, Assad inflamed regional tensions, receiving help from the Shia Iranian government and blaming popular uprisings on fundamentalist Islam. When he released Islamic fundamentalists from prison early in the uprising this became a self-fulfilling prophecy, as those fighters joined with Iraqis and others to form the core of ISIS.

Robert S. Ford

Career diplomat Robert S. Ford, along with Nada Bakos, represents the frustration of apolitical officials rendered helpless by political objectives and unforeseen circumstances. A multilingual and accomplished employee of the State Department for several decades, Ford was given thankless tasks, such as trying to draft Sunni politicians to run in Iraqi elections at the height of sectarian violence, and serving as U.S. ambassador to Syria just before the Arab Spring ignites. Despite Ford's dedication to his work and to the people he worked with, his career ultimately ended on a sour note, as he left the foreign service after years of watching of the U.S. fail to take action to halt the civil war.

The U.S. government

The government of the United States played an instrumental role in the foundation of ISIS. It began with the Bush administration's determination to oust Saddam Hussein, regardless of the consequences for Iraq and regardless of the shortcomings in its rationale for war. It continued under the administration of Barack Obama, unsure of how to react as the civil war in Syria created the conditions that the ISIS leadership exploited. The U.S. government in this book demonstrates the pitfalls of power, as it created a distance between Washington and those it influenced, and that distance created misunderstandings.

The Mukhabarat

Jordan's intelligence service did not succeed in preventing all of of Zarqawi's attacks on the country, but it largely did. Unlike the U.S. government, which made decisions based on political considerations, largely removed from the realities in the Middle East, the Mukhabarat's successes were continuously attributed to its networking among the general population of Jordan. This, even more so that the individual talents of Abu Haythan and others at interrogation, provided them with the information they needed to prevent attacks, and to catch the perpetrators of the attacks that succeeded.

Al-Qaeda

The organization founded by Osama bin Laden was, at the start of the book, the leading actor in spreading Islamic terror around the world, and a guide that fundamentalists including Zarqawi sought approval from. That said, al-Qaeda maintained a distance from Zarqawi throughout the book, anticipating that his goals and tactics were distinct from theirs, and that he would not reliably follow orders. When his methods attracted attention in Iraq Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's successor, criticized Zarqawi for improperly representing Islam and bringing it shame. He maintained this criticism of ISIS following Zarqawi's death, yet at the time of the book's publication ISIS was by far

the more successful organization, commanding territory larger than many Middle Eastern states as well as the loyalty of disgruntled Muslims across borders.

Zaydan al-Jabiri

The Sunni tribes of Iraq, as exemplified by Zaydan al-Jabiri, demonstrate the difficulties in governing the country after Saddam. Zaydan, a tribal leader, nearly lost his life resisting the rule of Saddam in the 1990s but later came to respect Saddam for his ability to maintain order, as well as to maintain Sunni control over the Shia, whom Zaydan distrusted. Zaydan's off-putting encounters with American troops not long after their arrival foreshadow continued American struggles in keeping the peace; these tribesmen welcomed Zarqawi's men for a time to protect them from Shia domination, but would later be crucial in turning against Zarqawi when the jihadists wore out their welcome through domineering behavior. Later on, disputes between the tribes and Shia-led government in Baghdad provided ISIS with the opportunity to invade and claim territory; Zaydan, who disliked Iran's influence over Baghdad more than he disliked ISIS, approved.

Objects/Places

Iraq

Following the U.S. invasion to remove Saddam, Iraq was a chaotic location where sectarian feuding, long beneath the surface, came to light. This was prompted by the loss of opportunities for many Sunnis after the U.S. dissolved the Baath Party and Saddam's army, but was further prodded by Zarqawi's attacks, aimed at provoking Shia-Sunni conflict. Zarqawi both provoked and was undone by additional societal rifts in Iraq, namely between the cities and tribal outskirts, where residents were particularly distrustful of outsiders, be it Americans or Iranians.

Syria

Much like Iraq, Syria is a country where sectarian rifts had been suppressed by a secular dictatorship, but a chaotic event (a civil war in Syria's case) proved that these divisions remain relevant. Once exposed, they made Syria all but ungovernable, as the minority population, with its control over the government and military, could neither conquer or be conquered by the less powerful majority. These circumstances lead to a thus-far unending conflict, and ultimately opportunities for ISIS to thrive.

Jordan

Less riven by sectarian divisions than Syria and Iraq and less scarred by dictatorship, Jordan appears far more modern and tranquil by comparison. The fundamentalism that devastates other Arab countries can be found there – it is Zarqawi's nation of origin, after all – but Jordan is typified by modernization and tolerance. However, it this modernity means constant vigilance on the part of Jordanian authorities toward the militant minority within its borders, but also toward chaotic events in neighboring countries, which occasionally spill over onto Jordanian soil.

Washington

The capital of the United States is typically seen from the vantage point of the CIA or State Department, where officials and analysts worked to make sense of unfolding events such the insurgency in Iraq and Syrian civil war. The point of view of political figures, in congress and in the White House, is typically not shown, but they consistently demonstrated ability to exert influence over the analysts and functionaries in Washington, usually toward a political end and typically having negative results.

Afghanistan

Only a small part of the book takes place there, but Afghanistan is in many ways the epicenter of the Islamic terrorism this book revolves around. Afghanistan's struggle against the Soviets in the 1980s attracted many Muslims who fought against the Soviet occupation and became radicalized in the process. Zarqawi was one of these, and years later he looked to Afghanistan, the base of operations for Osama bin Laden, for approval and support. The U.S. bombing of Afghanistan in 2001 also contributed to Zarqawi's desire to strike at the U.S. in Iraq, as it seriously injured him and he witnessed its effects on the countryside.

Raqqa

This Syrian city functions as the capital of ISIS, as the first city to come under their control and have its extreme vision of Islamic fundamentalism imposed on them. In the months after ISIS assumed control residents of the city faced punishment for a variety of offenses, including non-sanctioned interactions between unmarried men and women, resulting in beatings, and unspecified punishments resulting in public executions and public display of the victim's corpse. Objects considered incompatible with Sunni beliefs, ranging from tobacco and alcohol to Shia mosques, were destroyed.

Tribal areas of Iraq

The tribe of Zaydan al-Jabiri near Ramadi is a frequent example of the divisions within the country that made it so difficult to govern since the U.S. invasion. A fatal skirmish between tribesmen and the U.S. not long after their arrival turned Zaydan, and most likely others, against the Americans early on, a sentiment Zarqawi was able to exploit. Zaydan's commentary also indicated that anti-Shia and anti-Iranian sentiment was particularly strong here, and since the fall of Saddam tribesmen had been particularly wary of Iranian influence over Baghdad. This was something ISIS was eventually able to exploit.

Iraqi Kurdistan

This region is where Zarqawi set up his initial base of operations in Iraq, taking advantage of its distance from Baghdad and state of lawlessness since Kurdish rebellions against Saddam fell under a U.S. no-fly zone in the early 1990s. Here, away from the control of Saddam and in parts controlled by militants, Zarqawi spendt much of 2002 and early 2003 making preparations. He departed following the invasion in March 2003.

The Internet

One of Zarqawi's primary innovations in the realm of Islamic terrorism was the use of media to further his message. This started with a grainy video capturing his beheading of Nicholas Berg in 2004, but continued through additional posts online, explaining his actions and calling for other Muslims to join his cause. He and his former mentor Maqdisi both took to the Internet to feud with one another and explain differences of opinion. Later, ISIS expanded this tactic to a full-scale social media blitz, upgrading the production value but maintaining the shock value, as it portrayed a wide array of executions via beheading, shooting, and immolation.

Prison

A stint in Jordan's al-Jafr Prison in the 1990s solidified Zarqawi's ability to command men and turn them to fundamentalist terrorism. Later, prisons were a site for those searching for militants, whether it was Assad's efforts to discredit his opponents in Syria, or ISIS looking to expand its armies. U.S.-run and Shia-run prisons in Iraq and their mistreatment of inmates were also a catalyst for Zarqawi's cause during his reign of terror in Iraq.

Themes

Islamic fundamentalism

This book traces violent fundamentalist Islam back to the 1920s and the Ikhwan, who helped establish the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and attacked targets in Iraq and Jordan before they were wiped out. Jordan and Iraq were both created in the twentieth century and had their borders drawn by Westerners, and the Ikhwan are described as committed opponents of Western influence and the Muslims who tolerate it. Like the Ikhwan, the fundamentalists that followed were purists, unable to accept changes to the traditionally Arab and/or Muslim way of life. This is repeated later in Ansar al-Islam, Zarqawi and his associates in Iraq, the al-Nusra Front, and especially ISIS; these groups insist on strict Sharia law in areas they control.

But fundamentalism is also a reaction to grievances, both by exploitative outsiders from the U.S. to the Soviet Union, and by Arab Middle Eastern governments. Like Osama bin Laden, who acquired an animosity for the United States in the early 1990s due to its military presence in the holy lands of Saudi Arabia, Zarqawi and other insurgents would be similarly motivated to arms by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. “Zarqawi’s woman” Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi were also be prompted to join the man from Zarqa’s jihad because of her desire to kill Americans and avenge the deaths of her brothers.

The conviction of these groups that jihadis have an eternal reward waiting for them if they strike at infidels helped in recruiting those who would carry out potentially sacrificial endeavors. Furthermore, it was their willingness to risk – or outright sacrifice it – that attracted followers largely because they were successful in disrupting U.S. plans. Attacks in the first year of the American invasion of Iraq struck at Americans sense of security, at Sunni-Shia unity, and at the hopes for neutral mediation on behalf of the international community – namely by bombing the UN mission. Later, the al-Nusra Front similarly defended its use of suicide bombings in Syria by saying that such tactics were effective for fighting Assad.

However, devout Islam is not so clearly defined, and the extremists faced not only military obstacles but a concerted attack on the religious justifications for their acts. Early in the book the radical cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi is depicted as retreating, at times, from face-to-face confrontations over Islamic law with knowledgeable staff at his Jordanian prison, and a less-than-devout member of the Mukhabarat was nonetheless successful in breaking down a jihadist’s will during interrogations using his own Koranic expertise. Later, the tactics used by Zarqawi/ISIS were challenged, not only by non-radical Muslim leaders urged on by King Abdullah, but even other radicals such as Maqdisi and al-Qaeda. This establishes not only the threat that fundamentalism presents, but also complicates it; fundamentalism has appeal, but not a universal one among Muslims, and ISIS has employed tactics that horrify some fundamentalists.

U.S. mistakes

The book largely attempts to tell its story from the perspective of Middle Easterners, particularly in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan, yet the theme of U.S. actions and their consequences is unavoidable. In attempting to remake the Middle East the U.S. launched its invasion of Iraq in 2003 despite an absence of justification and despite warnings from those knowledgeable of the region. In the section of the book that takes place before the war the author clearly establishes that the Bush administration's rationale for the war was untenable, as intelligence analysts tracking Islamic fundamentalists in the region concluded that there was no link between the Saddam regime and al-Qaeda; all such evidence was dismissed as officials, led by Vice President Dick Cheney, who insisted that ties must exist, and that the CIA must have simply failed to discover it.

King Abdullah, a friendly Arab sovereign, also comes across as prophetic for warning the American administration that its invasion will have unforeseen consequences. Warrick's account of the early days of the U.S. administration over Iraq describes a U.S. military seemingly intent on proving Abdullah correct; with no plan in place except to remove Saddam, the U.S. dissolved the army and barred Baath Party members from participating in government positions, all the while doing nothing as looters ransack the country. As Baath Party membership had been a prerequisite for many important jobs, their actions created voids in public services and an army of deprived Iraqis ripe for recruit in the jihad against the U.S.

Furthermore, the budding insurgency was not acknowledged for months – expressly because President Bush had declared the war over and was about to run for re-election – and by then many American and even more Iraqi lives had been lost. The U.S. responded to the increasing violence by insisting on elections to put Iraqis in charge and pull American servicemen back, ignoring intelligence that Sunnis were unwilling to risk participating in the elections, and that proceeding would further marginalize them when a Shia-dominated government formed. All of this creates an image of a United States very much at odds with its stated goal of "liberating" Iraq; instead, Iraq had been made to suffer for American political objectives.

Later on, the Obama administration faced a spiraling catastrophe in Syria, as well as a mounting ISIS presence, and remained non-committal precisely to avoid repeating the Bush administration's blunders. These acts themselves are treated as mistakes, as they contributed to a humanitarian crisis in Syria and the eventual successes of ISIS. In this way, the author presents a U.S. that must be involved in the Middle East and which had a responsibility to act; given the emphasis on quality intelligence at the CIA (namely from Nada Bakos) and the Mukhabarat, the author appears to be suggesting closer reliance on the experts, and on knowledgeable allies in the region, was required.

The Shia-Sunni divide

The divide between Shia and Sunni Muslims dates back more than a millennium, and much analysis of the Syrian civil war and the Iraqi insurgency has focused on how these conflicts broke down on sectarian lines. In the majority-Shia Iraq no longer ruled by Saddam – himself a Sunni – the Sunnis suddenly found themselves out of many influential positions in society, victims of targeting by Shia police and gangs, and began flocking to Zarqawi. In Syria, the Alawite Shia were far outnumbered by the Sunni population they ruled over, but their control over crucial government and military resources – along with support from their fellow Shia in Iran, as well as from Russia – prevented the rebellion from sweeping them away.

Yet, one of the interesting features of this book is its suggestion that violence between the two strands of Islam was not inevitable in either country, but was largely engineered. Before Saddam fell, Sunni and Shia Iraqis had been relatively well-integrated and fought together during the Iran-Iraq War; early on in the occupation there were figures, including the ill-fated Ayatollah Mohammad Bakir al-Hakim, who preached an explicitly conciliatory message between the two sects. Their divisions had a lot to do with Zarqawi's targeting of Shia believers and worship sites, which not only killed leaders like Hakim, but successfully instigated Shia reprisals and thus pushed Sunnis toward violence.

Likewise, the protests against Assad's government in Syria were originally shows of unity between faiths, including Sunnis, Alawite Shia, and Christians. In this case the sectarian conflict was largely instigated by the Assad regime, whose Alawite security forces subjected Sunni rebels to torture, and who released Sunni extremists and then blamed the rebels for their radical Islamism. Also, as the rebellion dragged on, both sides began seeing propaganda distributed in their neighborhoods claiming that the other sect was plotting attacks on them; it is never revealed conclusively whether the regime is responsible for these messages, but the messages aimed at Shia communities are strikingly similar to those in their Sunni counterparts.

Yet by demonstrating how unity movements in both countries were defeated, the does book suggest that there is a potential for reconciliation. Zarqawi and ISIS have adhered to a hardline anti-Shia perspective, but their ruthless attacks on Shia civilians starkly contrast with Osama bin Laden, who considered himself a unifying figure in Islam, and are condemned by al-Qaeda’s current leader and Zarqawi’s former advisor Maqdisi. Should ISIS be defeated and governments, namely Iraq’s, pursue a more successful policy of integration and/or co-existence, these sectarian conflicts need not be repeated. However, the book also establishes that such divisions are easily exploitable.

Islam and Modernity

One of the ironies of Zarqawi, and of ISIS, is their obvious flair for media despite their extreme discomfort with modernity. It is technology that was invented in the West – namely video recording and the Internet – that allowed Zarqawi to transmit his

fundamentalist messages. He also used it to bolster his own image, in which he appeared brandishing high-powered firearms, dressed in black and sporting New Balance sneakers. He clearly demonstrated the most comfort in areas of the least luxury, be it Afghanistan, Jordanian prison, or the rural areas of Iraq, especially in the midst of insurgency. Zarqawi had found civilian life in Jordan, however, unbearable due to easy access to alcohol and tobacco, as well as Western products and the casual mixing of the sexes.

In Zarqawi's case, this was perhaps an overreaction caused by his pre-conversion life of crime, which included pimping and many an alcohol-fueled brawl. However, it had been clearly embraced by his spiritual successors in the Islamic State, who brutally and ruthlessly imposed their vision onto areas they have conquered, including the Syrian city of Raqqa, where alcohol and tobacco have destroyed and people punished publicly for mingling with a member of the opposite gender they are not married to. They, however, have upped the production values on their propaganda videos considerably; compared to the grainy footage of Zarqawi executing Nicholas Berg, their execution of the Jordanian fighter pilot includes not just clear footage, but special effects and sophisticated editing, helping them reach a modern audience with their unique brand of barbarism.

The enemies of ISIS in the Middle East must also balance modernity and conservatism, however. Abdullah II, however, must simultaneously appeal to groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, his family in the royalty, and a populace that expects representative government. When possible, Abdullah sides with the people, though, hoping to limit the influence of the royals and the wealthy and pave the way for constitutional monarchy; having been advised that he must proceed carefully, he relished the protests of the Arab Spring for giving him good reason to institute desired reforms.

In these instances the author is telling us that the Middle East must contend with both modernity and conservatism; the latter is engrained in the culture and must be dealt with, perhaps on an incremental basis. Modernity is likewise unavoidable; it is too pervasive and holds too much appeal to the public to be dismissed completely. However, those who fail to assuage the concerns of conservative fundamentalists cannot simply count on them to be carried away by modernity's tide; Zarqawi and ISIS prove their staying power, and even their ability to adapt what they need from modern times.

The Value of Intelligence

The intelligence community receives a glowing treatment in this book. Jordan's Mukhabarat are lauded for their deep, wide networks into the crevasses of Jordanian society, which allowed them to head off a pair of Zarqawi's terrorist attacks before they could be carried out, and to swiftly catch the perpetrators of the Laurence Foley assassination in 2002 and the Amman bombings of 2005. Once suspects are in their custody, their interrogators are legendary for their patience, persuasiveness, and adaptability; this was exemplified by an operative, whose secularism is clearly

demonstrated by his breaks for alcohol, who could nonetheless debate Islamic with a suspected militant for hours before breaking him down.

Though they frequently take the blame for the misconception that there were weapons of mass destruction in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the CIA also fare well in this book. Granted, most of the CIA work depicted is that of Nada Bakos – who established a niche tracking Zarqawi long before he made a name for himself as an insurgent leader – the CIA is generally shown finding accurate information on the extremists they tracked. However, their lot is seemingly to be ignored by politicians who needed CIA findings to fit specific political goals. This is seen in tense interrogations from Cheney and his staff in 2002, when the vice president responded to an absence of evidence connecting Saddam to al-Qaeda by essentially demanding that the CIA prove a negative; in the blatant distortions of intelligence in Colin Powell's infamous 2003 UN speech; in how Bakos expertly extracted information from a distraught former underling of Saddam's after the war, only to be told what she had always known Zarqawi and Saddam were not working together.

For the author to consistently present the intelligence community in such a light is unusual; the CIA are regularly faulted not only for mistaken reports of Iraq's WMDs, but failing to anticipate the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, etc. This is not to say that their successes are universal; the Mukhabarat failed to prevent the Amman bombings and let Zarqawi leave Jordan in 1999 to launch his career in international terror. Even in these cases they are consistently humanized: it is implied that Abu Haytham allowed Zarqawi to depart because he knew Jordan is a nation of laws and indefinitely detaining him without evidence was wrong. Years later, Abu Haytham is haunted by the carnage at the Amman bombings, particularly the bodies of two girls the same age as his daughters.

This treatment is significant: the author describes the intelligence officials not as incompetents, nor as James Bond-esque superspies, nor as shadowy men and women of secret, sinister purposes. They are simply competent specialists whose work should not be twisted to fit political objectives.

Styles

Structure

This work is primarily set in chronological order, but with numerous flashbacks. First, while events proceed more or less directly from the late 1990s until the solidification of the Islamic State and its territorial gains, the story employs numerous flashback and background. Zarqawi is introduced in prison in the 1990s in Part I, yet it is the next section, during his interrogation by Abu Haytham, that we learn of the plot that landed him in prison to begin with (through a telling of Abu Haytham's background, as part of the team that arrested Zarqawi in 1994). As new individuals are introduced, the book tells us of their background, often going several years or even decades, and occasionally taking readers back to events the book has already covered, such as the invasion of Iraq, as told from a new character's perspective.

The other caveat is the prologue, which takes place in the very recent past; namely the 2015 immolation of the Jordanian pilot and their demands for the surviving Amman bomber's release. This informs readers of where the story stands as of today, with a ruthless fundamentalist organization threatening unspeakable barbarism and looking to settle the scores of the past. What follows is designed to tell us how the organization came to be and what connections they have to the Amman bombing, an event that predates the name "ISIS" by several years.

But other than that the book proceeds in order, divided into three "books." The first involves Zarqawi's conversion, his radicalization, and his plans to commit terrorist attacks against his home country, against Israel, and then against the United States. The second book details his actions in Iraq, from instigating terrorist attacks and launching the insurgency, but ultimately meeting his demise as the U.S. adapted to his methods. The final describes the events after his death, from temporary stabilization in Iraq, the collapse of Syria into civil war, and reassembling of old Zarqawi allies under the ISIS banner.

Perspective

The perspective of this book is journalistic, as the author tells the story by piecing together interviews, news reports, and the written accounts of central players in the story. While mostly matter-of-fact about events as they took place, it does seek to accurately convey the emotions of the individual actors, from Abu Haytham's traumatic experiences following the 2005 Amman bombings to the exasperation Nada Bakos felt when her intelligence analysis was warped to fit the justification for war. This fits the adage "show, don't tell"; the author's primary goal is to piece together the events as they transpired, but the use of Abu Haytham's memories conveys the horror of Zarqawi's deeds, while the reactions of Bakos and the intelligence community to the Bush

administration's statements prepares the reader the disorder that is to follow once the Iraq invasion commences.

Tone

Though the author mostly avoids opinionated statements and overdramatization of events, he also employs a consistently foreboding tone. Part 1 on Zarqawi's prison stay ends with a note about how easily prisoners - even the most dangerous ones - can be freed based on political decisions. Part 4, describing Zarqawi's actions following his departure from Jordan ends with him going to Iraq and predicting that it will be the site of his upcoming war with the Americans. And Part 16, which tells of his death and precedes the final third of the story – about the rise of ISIS itself – ends with the idea that Zarqawi deeds have infected Iraq, and that something "homegrown" will replace him.

Quotes

The black flags will come from the East, led by mighty men, with long hair and beards, their surnames taken from their hometowns."
-- The Hadith (Prologue paragraph 4)

Importance: This is why ISIS carries a black flag today, as it believes it is the culmination of the prophecy. Zarqawi ('the man from Zarqa") and Baghdadi (even though his hometown is Samarra, not Baghdad) have evidently chosen their names out of belief that they fulfill the prophecy.

By Allah, we will come out. Forcibly, if God wills."
-- Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Book I, Part 1 paragraph 7)

Importance: This reflects not only Zarqawi's determination to leave prison, but his belief in his own sense of destiny.

I knew at this moment that I would be hearing about him. This man was going to end up either famous, or dead."
-- Basel al-Sabha (Book 1, Part 2 paragraph 3)

Importance: Sabha, the physician at the al-Jafr prison, was stunned to see Zarqawi return to the facility to check up on fellow inmates after receiving amnesty. In awe of Zarqawi's commitment to his compatriots and his ability to command their devotion, Sabha was convinced that Zarqawi would do noteworthy things.

It is not just halal. We are commanded to kill the kafir."
-- Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Book I, Part 3 paragraph 3)

Importance: Under interrogation from Abu Haythan, Zarqawi was asked about the Islamic command to not take innocent life. Zarqawi replied that unbelievers (kafir) were not innocent, and that killing them was not only permitted (halal) but demanded.

The way to Palestine is through Amman."
-- Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Book I, Part 4 paragraph 2)

Importance: Though intensely against Israel and hoping to see it destroyed, this quote illustrates that Zarqawi was scheming to strike at his home country throughout his time away from it in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and eventually Iraq.

I did it for al-Qaeda and for Zarqawi."
-- Salem Ben Suweid (Book I, Part 5 paragraph 6)

Importance: Suweid was a Libyan who confessed to the assassination Laurence Foley, U.S. ambassador to Jordan, in 2002. Though little known outside of the Middle East at

this time, this event demonstrates Zarqawi's ability to command and direct successful terrorist attacks by individuals from countries far from him.

But I was certain of one thing: the longer the war lasts, the more terrible the consequences would be."
-- King Abdullah II (Book I, Part 6 paragraph 2)

Importance: Having expressed his opposition to the invasion of Iraq publicly, Abdullah agreed to assist the Americans in their invasion secretly, hoping to maintain good relations help their mission go smoothly. He warned that it would have unforeseen consequences; a prediction that was proven true.

In deciding to use Zarqawi as an excuse for launching a new front in the war against terrorism, the White House had managed to launch the career of one of the century's great terrorists."
-- The author (Book I, Part 7 paragraph 2)

Importance: Zarqawi's presence in Iraq was used by the Bush administration to argue for a connection between Saddam Husseinn and al-Qaeda, even though the two were natural enemies. This quote prepares readers for the terrorist attacks Zarqawi carried out once the invasion of Iraq began.

Brother, Allah was merciful today."
-- Unknown caller (Book II, Part 8 paragraph 2)

Importance: This comment, picked up by a U.S. intelligence wiretape, appears to have been in reference the bombing of the UN mission in Baghdad on August 19, 2003, killing the head of the mission.

Three-thousand dollars? That's what you pay to replace one of your police dogs!
-- Zaydan al-Jabiri (Book II, Part 9 paragraph 3)

Importance: Zaydan's response to the U.S. offer to compensate the families of 17 tribe members killed during a protest. The offer, Zaydan concluded, showed that Americans had no respect for tribal customs and that they could not be trusted.

The only solution is for us to strike the religious, military, and other cadres among the Shi'a with blow after blow until they bend to the Sunnis."
-- Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Book II, Part 10 paragraph 1)

Importance: In his letter asking for Osama bin Laden's support, Zarqawi made clear his plan to instigate a conflict between the Sunnis and Shia. Explaining that he knew this would result in a terrible conflict with the Shia that would engulf all Muslims, Zarqawi added, "This is exactly what we want."

If I die, I become a martyr, and those I kill will go to hell."
-- Azmi al-Jayousi (Book II, Part 11 paragraph 3)

Importance: Jayousi explained why he undertook the failed dirty bomb plot in Amman for Zarqawi.

You will see nothing but corpse after corpse and casket after casket of those slaughtered in this fashion.
-- Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Book II, Part 12 paragraph 1)

Importance: Before killing Nicholas Berg, Zarqawi promised more deaths of this nature and said it was punishment for the abuse of Muslims in Abu Ghraib.

(Jihad's) flames will blaze until they consume the Armies of the Cross in Dabiq."
-- Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Part II, Book 13 paragraph 5)

Importance: Zarqawi said his mission would end with a final battle between Muslims and non-believers in northern Syrian.

We're not going to put candidates in the election, because we're not going to get ourselves killed."
-- Tariq al-Hashimi (Book II, Part 14 paragraph 5)

Importance: Hashimi, the leader of a major Sunni political party, said Sunnis would not participated in a 2005 election because they did not feel safe from insurgent attacks.

That was a screw-up."
-- Stanley McChrysal (Book II, Part 14 paragraph 3)

Importance: McChrystal predicted that Zarqawi's ordering of the 2005 Amman bombings would turn most Muslims against him.

They told me I would be killing Americans. All I wanted was to avenge the deaths of my brothers."
-- Sajida al-Rishawi (Book II, Part 15 paragraph 3)

Importance: Amman suicide bomber Rishawi said that she joined al-Qaeda in Iraq after her brothers were killed by U.S. forces.

I don't think we can wait. I'm going to bomb it."
-- Unnamed deputy (Book II, Part 16 paragraph 1)

Importance: Monitoring the hideout of Zarqawi and hoping to take him alive, Stanley McChrystal's team chose to bomb the facility and kill him rather than risk having him escape.

President Assad is not indispensable, and we have absolutely nothing invested in him remaining in power."
-- Hillary Clinton (Book III, Part 17 paragraph 4)

Importance: Following an attack by a pro-government mob on the U.S. embassy in Syria, Secretary of State Clinton strongly suggested that President Bashar al-Assad should step down.

This is going to take much longer than anyone thinks."
-- King Abdullah II (Book III, Part 18 paragraph 1)

Importance: The king of Jordan predicted that Assad would be able to say in power despite massive defections from his side to the rebels.

The revolution removed many of the obstacles and paved the way for us to enter this blessed land."
-- Abu Mohammad al-Juliani (Book III, Part 19 paragraph 1)

Importance: Juliani, a surrogate of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, said that his group had found success acquiring territory in converts thanks to the Syrian civil war.

You have moved yourself down the menu."
-- King Abdullah II (Book III, Part 20 paragraph 5)

Importance: In a conversation with another unnamed Arab leader who supported the militants in Syria, Abdullah warned that, if successful, those militants would target that leader's country in the future.

People were frightened, which is what they wanted. They wanted people to be terrified of them."
-- Abu Ibrahim (Book III, Part 21 paragraph 2)

Importance: A resident of Raqqa, the new "capital" of ISIS, Abu Ibrahim explained the reaction to the public executions, crucifixions, and decapitations of those said to have committed crimes against Islam.

They sometimes get sick, but they never die.
-- Abu Haythan (Book III, Part 22 paragraph 6)

Importance: After the rise of ISIS, a frustrated Abu Haythan noted how efforts to combat radical Islamic fundamentalism failed to prevent it from returning over and over.

...we are forced to defend Islam and make clear that this is not from Islam."
-- Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (Epilogue paragraph 1)

Importance: Maqdisi, a former teacher of Zarqawi, expressed his outrage over the immolation of a Jordanian fighter pilot by ISIS.

Topics for Discussion

Does the United States have a responsibility to fully support allies in the region who are fighting ISIS?

As readers learn of King Abdullah's requests for assistance from the U.S., they can consider whether Abdullah's track record means that he should be trusted, whether U.S. actions have made it responsible for how ISIS is dealt with, and whether it has a responsibility to act whenever a group such as ISIS threatens to commit war crimes.

What do you think would draw people like the al-Jafr inmates to a person like Zarqwi?

Are these men frustrated by a lack of opportunities, by religious conviction, or simply Zarqawi's charisma? Is it something else, or all three? Determining an answer to this question may say a lot about how such groups recruit people.

Did Abu Haythan have enough reason to detain Zarqawi in Jordan for good?

Consider whether Zarqawi's background meant that he should have been kept in Jordan, even if it meant bending the law. If Jordan did disregard it's own laws to fight terrorism, what would that mean for the country?

Should the CIA have pushed back against attempts by the Bush administration to push for war?

The Bush administration was determined to go to war, and seemed determined to manipulate the evidence if it had to. CIA operative such as Nada Bakos are expected to remain apolitical, but when evidence is being distorted, is staying silent the same as staying neutral?

Without Zarqawi do you think it would have been possible for Shia and Sunni to coexist in Iraq?

Shiites and Sunnis have a rivalry going back centuries, but the two were able to coexist under Saddam Hussein in Iraq, though this may have been by force. Zaydan's remarks indicate that there was distrust for the Shia, but Shia clerics such as Mohammed Bakir al-Hakim were targeted by Zarqawi specifically because they had a message of coexistence.

What do you think made the image of Zarqawi killing Berg appealing to many Muslims?

It was an act that horrified the West, but the book describes the event as one that boosted Zarqawi's image and even earned him the title "sheikh of slaughterers." Can Muslims sense of victimization by the invasion of Iraq torture of detainees explain this?

Would capturing Zarqawi alive have been useful?

Answer this question based on previous experiences Jordanian authorities had in interrogating Zarqawi. He may have had valuable information; the question is whether anyone could have gotten it out of him.

After Iraq, should the U.S. consider intervening in situations like Syria?

Barack Obama was elected partly as an answer to the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq. As a result, it was clear that they did not want to get involved in the Syrian civil war, yet it appears evident that their decision not to get involved may have prevented a unified, secular uprising against Assad to be co-opted to Islamists.

Could better decision-making in the future prevent the rise of groups like ISIS?

The book establishes that a number of key events have contributed to the success of ISIS in recent years, namely mistakes by the U.S. and Assad. However, it also establishes that the region has a history of fundamentalism in the twentieth century. Abu Haythan despairs at the end of the book of ever being rid of fundamentalism, but could it realistically be stamped out?

Are the condemnations of Muslim clerics necessary for defeating ISIS?

Abdullah and other Muslims have been attempting to attract opposition to Zarqawi and his ideas since the middle of the last decade. However, ISIS continues to survive, and despite the condemnation of other groups including Zarqawi's former associates. So how useful are such statements?