

CURRENT TRENDS IN ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY

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The Preacher and the Jihadi

STEVEN BROOKE

SINCE THE INVASION OF IRAQ, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the “field commander” of al-Qaeda in Iraq, has arguably become the face of Islamist terrorism and what is often referred to as the “*salafi-jihadi*” movement. Bloody beheadings, grisly bombings and Zarqawi’s skillful use of the media including the Internet have brought him increasing notoriety. But despite this notoriety, little is known about how this once petty thug and small-time criminal became al-Qaeda’s “emir” in Mesopotamia and one of the leading lights of the global *salafi-jihadi* movement.

For insight into Zarqawi, one needs to understand his teacher, the Palestinian-Jordanian theologian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Maqdisi devoted much of his life to churning out religious and polemical works that condemn democracy, attack Arab regimes for their apostasy and disbelief, and provide ideological guidance to holy warriors operating throughout the greater Middle East. But unfortunately, the ubiquitous reports about Zarqawi rarely mention his mentor.

What our reporting also seldom mentions is the increasingly acrimonious dispute that has recently emerged between Zarqawi and Maqdisi (a dispute analyzed earlier in Volume 2 of *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* by Nibras Kazimi). This is indicative of a critical gap in our understanding of the contemporary *salafi-jihadi* movement, and especially our lack of appreciation for the disparate and often conflicting ideological strains within that movement. Examining Maqdisi’s life and thought will help to fill in these critical gaps and also help to explain what appears to be the growing estrangement of al-Qaeda’s field commander in Iraq from some of his fellow travelers in the *salafi-jihadi* movement.

The Preacher of Tawhid

Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, also known as Isam Tahir al-Barqawi, was born in Nablus in 1959. During his childhood, his family emigrated to Kuwait. Maqdisi wanted to attend the Islamic University in Medina to study

the *sharia*, but his parents sent him instead to study engineering in northern Iraq. Although denied the opportunity to undertake religious studies formally, he embarked on a self-guided study of key Salafist texts, starting with the thirteenth century theologian Ibn Taymiyya and eventually gravitating toward Taymiyya's eighteenth century votary Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.¹

Maqdisi's studies of these and other Salafist thinkers deeply impacted his life and thought. In his 1985 book entitled *Millat Ibrahim*, which is often translated as *The Religion of Abraham*, Maqdisi elaborates on two Islamic principles that have preoccupied him throughout much of his intellectual career.² The first principle concerns *tawhid*, or the belief in the oneness and absolute indivisibility of Allah and the connected religious obligation to worship Him alone. The second and related principle is the obligation to struggle against polytheism in all its manifestations.³ A Muslim, says Maqdisi, must demonstrate enmity and hatred toward all of polytheism's adherents until they renounce their ways and return to the true path of Islam.⁴ For Maqdisi, fulfilling these twin obligations is the paramount duty of each and every Muslim, more important than daily prayer, almsgiving, or any other religious obligation.⁵ In Maqdisi's mind, as with other salafi-jihadists, the combination of these twin religious obligations—belief in *tawhid*, and the Islamic struggle against polytheism—translated into a desire for radical political change and for jihad.

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Maqdisi traveled to the region to join the jihad, and in the early 1990s, he met the young Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Peshawar, Pakistan. The two men discovered they had much in common, but the turmoil in the region at that time soon forced them to part ways.⁶ After the Soviets withdrew, Maqdisi returned briefly to Kuwait, but then, after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, he fled to Saudi Arabia, where he amassed a small following. Ultimately, Maqdisi settled in Jordan in 1992.⁷

In Jordan, Maqdisi was visited by Zarqawi, who sought him out because of their earlier conversations during the Afghan jihad. The men formed a group they called "al-Tawhid" ("The Oneness of God"), and began spreading their religious message and calling for an Islamic revolution in the Arab heartland.⁸ The group also began stockpiling rifles and explosives in houses around the country.⁹ The circle grew and eventually caught the eye of Jordanian security and intelligence services. On March 29, 1994 Zarqawi and Maqdisi, along with a number of their followers, were arrested.¹⁰ The subsequent trial, which became known as the "Bayat al-Imam case," ended in November 1996 with guilty verdicts for ten men, including Zarqawi and Maqdisi.¹¹

The al-Tawhid group matured in prison, although by Maqdisi's own estimate it never included more than thirty men. It was decided Maqdisi would be the "emir" of the group, but after a year, he passed the leadership to Zarqawi to concentrate on his studies and writing. Maqdisi still advised Zarqawi during this time and maintained a close personal relationship with him.¹² Maqdisi later explained that Zarqawi had a "strong personality" that was well-suited "to deal with the prison management" and that he was also a better choice than himself to serve as the group's emir because he was Jordanian.¹³

In 1999, Zarqawi, Maqdisi and a handful of other Islamists were released from prison under a general amnesty. Zarqawi, zealous as ever for jihad, returned to Afghanistan.¹⁴ Maqdisi, however, chose to stay in Jordan to study and to resume his public preaching.¹⁵ Since then, Maqdisi has been unable to stay out of jail. He and his followers have been implicated in numerous plots to overthrow the Jordanian government, and his writings have been used by Islamist radicals to justify terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Since 1999, Maqdisi has had to pursue his religious calling mostly from behind bars.¹⁶

Down with Kufr Government!

Even while locked away in jail, Maqdisi has remained a stalwart advocate of Islamist revolution in the Arab heartland, and a prolific author and polemicist. Democracy has been a frequent target of his slings and arrows, and he vehemently opposed both the Kuwaiti elections in the early 1990s and the Jordanian elections in 1993 and 1997 as un-Islamic. In his book *Democracy: A Religion!*, Maqdisi elaborates on these views, singling out democracy as the preeminent threat to the *tawhid* of Allah in the world today. "Democracy is a religion," he writes, "but it is not Allah's religion." Muslims must therefore struggle against it; they must "destroy those who follow democracy, and we must take their followers as enemies—hate them and wage a great jihad against them."¹⁷

Maqdisi's justification for jihad against all of democracy's followers is deeply influenced by his reading of the thirteenth century theologian Ibn Taymiyya and especially the latter's doctrine on *takfir*. *Takfir*, which is translated loosely to mean "excommunication," is a pronouncement that designates an individual or a group as apostates from Islam or disbelievers. This charge makes it religiously permissible, even obligatory, for other Muslims to wage jihad against them. Historically, the majority of Muslims have traditionally eschewed pronouncing *takfir* on other Muslims on the grounds that such a pronouncement induces strife and discord (*fitna*) within the Muslim Nation (*Umma*,) or because they believe such a pronouncement should be left

to God alone. Shaykh Taymiyya, however, broke from this mainstream when his family had been driven from their home by Mongol invaders led by King Ghazan. Because Ghazan and many in his armies were converts to Islam, Ibn Taymiyya had to develop an innovative way to justify fighting back against his fellow Muslims. He argued that Ghazan, despite being a Muslim, allowed traditional Mongol law, known as *Yasiq*, to coexist with Islamic sharia law. Ghazan had thus forsaken his duties as a Muslim ruler, allowing his armies and subjects to deviate from the true path of Islam. While the Mongols professed Islam outwardly, they were in reality not truly Muslims. On the basis of this argument, Ibn Taymiyya pronounced *takfir* on the Mongols, declaring them to be *kufr*, or disbelievers in Islam, and argued that it was obligatory for Muslims to wage jihad against them to repel the Mongol invasion.¹⁸ As the theologian explained,

Any group of people that rebels against any single prescript of the clear and reliably transmitted prescripts of Islam has to be fought... even if members of this group publicly make a formal confession of the Islamic faith by pronouncing the *shuhada* [the confession of faith: There is no god but the true God and Mohammed is His prophet].¹⁹

As Ibn Taymiyya did against the Mongols, Maqdisi attacks democracy and the current regimes of the Arab heartland as “modern *Yasiq*” governments.²⁰ That is because such regimes have created a constitution and body of legislation to govern them that supplements or replaces the divine law and judgment of Allah. They have thus made their laws and their state into a deity over and above Allah. Furthermore, since democrats and citizens of Arab constitutional monarchies pledge loyalty to these humanly-devised laws, Maqdisi finds them guilty of idolatry, as they worship a false deity or a *taaghut* rather than worshipping Allah alone.²¹ As such, they have been corrupted by polytheism, and have forsaken the *tawhid* of Allah.

Among the followers of this evil doctrine that Maqdisi attacks most harshly are those Muslims who participate in democratic activities, including even those Islamists who aim to establish an Islamic government through democratic debate and winning elections. He excoriates, for example, all those who are “cooperating and assisting and advising and sitting at the discussion tables for the benefit of the country and its security and its economy and... and...[sic]—all for the country whose *taaghut* controls it and rules it!”²²

This particular attack contains a thinly-veiled reference to the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist group that has traditionally sought to work inside that country’s political system and is, according to French scholar Gilles

Kepel, a “staunch defender of the [Jordanian] throne.”²³ Maqdisi’s animosity toward the Jordanian Muslim Brothers is likely the result not simply of the group’s willingness to engage in democratic politics. As a Palestinian, Maqdisi must have felt the Brethren had betrayed his people when they supported King Hussein’s crackdown on the Palestinians during the infamous “Black September” uprisings of 1970. Hussein later rewarded the Muslim Brothers’ loyalty by giving them control of the Ministry of Education. Invoking the Muslim Brotherhood’s chief theologian Said Qutb (for whom Maqdisi has nothing but deep respect), he taunts the modern-day Brotherhood for parroting “many of the words of Said [Qutb]...while at the same time ... [racing] one another to beg the *taaghut* who turn away from the legislation of Allah ... so that they might attain a seat in the councils of *shirk* [polytheism] and transgressions and disobedience.”²⁴

Maqdisi also targets the Islamic religious establishments of modern *Yasiq* governments in the Arab heartland. According to him, the establishment scholars actually practice and profess disbelief in Islam: They forsake the *tawhid* of Allah and bend and twist Islam’s message for the purpose of obtaining rich endowments and teaching positions at colleges and mosques, or for the purpose preserving the governments or false deities (*taaghut*) that they worship.²⁵ To illustrate this point, Maqdisi recalls the House of Saud’s refusal to propagate the writings of Juhayman Utaybi, the Salafist terrorist who briefly took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979. Juhayman’s writings were suppressed by Saudi scholars, Maqdisi explains, because he preached a belief in *tawhid* that would not suffer the false god of the Saudi monarchy.²⁶ Likewise, Maqdisi attacks the Saudi-established Muslim World League on the grounds that it works to distract Muslims from the main false deity or *taaghut* that is the Saudi state.²⁷ Not only have such scholars forsaken the *tawhid* of Allah, they also lead people astray from fulfilling their all-important obligation to struggle against polytheism. For example, in his article “The Caravan Is Moving and the Dogs Are Barking,” Maqdisi attacks Muslim scholars who try to reinterpret jihad as being incompatible with violence or harmful to the Muslim Nation (*Umma*).²⁸

Muslims must rebel against these “Imams of *kufr*” and “the disbelieving rulers” of the *Yasiq* governments, says Maqdisi. Each and every Muslim must fulfill his religious duties and struggle “for the purpose of replacing...every one [of the *kufr*] according to his [own] capability.”²⁹ In two separate polemics—*Clear Evidence on the Infidel Nature of the Saudi State* and *Unveiling the Falsehood in the Provisions of the Constitution*—Maqdisi railed against the constitutional monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Jordan as apostate regimes.

The struggle against these “near enemies” of Islam is even more important than the struggle against such “far enemies” of Islam as Israel and the United States, he says. This is because the threat posed to the *tawhid* of Allah by the near enemy’s “influence and all his evil and his tribulation are greater and far more serious than the farther one.”³⁰ As he explains,

I believe and continuously pronounce that carrying out jihad against the enemies of Allah who substitute [their own laws for] His *sharia* and are overpowering the Umma today, is one of the most important obligations...of the Muslims. In fact, in my opinion, it is more important than and [should be] given preference over the jihad against the Jews who occupy Palestine.³¹

Maqdisi’s revolutionary agenda for the Arab heartland and his ideological guidance for young holy fighters played a deadly role in November 1995, when a terrorist group called the “Islamic Movement for Change” car-bombed the Saudi Arabian National Guard headquarters in Riyadh. The attack killed six, including five Americans, and wounded over sixty others. One of the four men accused of the crime admitted that he and the other bombers had been inspired to undertake this mass murder by Maqdisi’s writings. The terrorist later said that he and his co-conspirators

read and exchanged books that declared the rulers of the Arab countries and the rulers of this country as unbelievers, such as the book called *Clear Evidence on the Infidel Nature of the Saudi State*, and the book called *The Religion of Abraham* written by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. When I read this book, *The Religion of Abraham*, I was eager to pay a visit to Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. And indeed, I visited him on many occasions in Jordan and was affected by his ideas, publications and books that declare that leaders of Arab states and the government and the body of senior *ulama* [theologians] of this country Saudi Arabia are unbelievers.³²

Between Dawa and Jihad

Arguments made by Maqdisi and other *salafi-jihadi* ideologues have clearly inspired much of the jihadi violence that plagues the greater Middle East today, including the insurgency in Iraq being led by Zarqawi and his followers. However, while Maqdisi supports the Iraq Jihad and seeks Islamist revolution in the Arab heartland, his approach to attaining those objectives is much more cautious and methodical than that of Zarqawi and other holy fighters involved with al-Qaeda’s current operations in Iraq and elsewhere.

The differences between these two lies in part in Maqdisi's interpretation of *takfir*. Whereas Zarqawi, the terrorist field commander, has effectively declared general *takfir* on everyone in Iraq who is actively working for democracy or participating in democratic activities as *kufr*, and thus, as legitimate targets for jihad, Maqdisi has always seemed much more cognizant of the gravity of the charge. In *Millat Ibrahim*, Maqdisi explains that his own understanding of *takfir* is based on Ibn Taymiyya's teachings. While Shaykh Taymiyya broke with the mainstream, he also argued that *takfir* was to be used cautiously and only when other methods of struggling against polytheism have failed. Maqdisi is certainly aware of the limited scope of Taymiyya's doctrine, and this accounts for his reluctance to apply *takfir* in general terms. Even while in prison, Maqdisi went out of his way to distance himself from what he perceived to be extreme pronouncements of *takfir* based on unsound understandings of Islam. On several occasions, he has reported that he and many of his followers in the al-Tawid group were in the habit of correcting Jordanian prison administrators who called them "Takfir and Jihad."³³ This was a corruption of the group's real objectives, for as Maqdisi explained, "we do not make general *takfir*."³⁴

Like Ibn Taymiyya, Maqdisi believes that there are in fact gradations of unbelief or different kinds of *kufr*, and not all of these should be confused with true apostasy.³⁵ The pronouncement of *takfir* is only appropriate if an individual or community declares their apostasy outright, or if they undertake actions that hurt the Muslim Nation. As he puts it, "we only perform *takfir* upon the one who has in his work a type of *kufr* or *shirk* [polytheism] such as participating in the *kufr* legislation, or the *taaghuti* rule, or allegiance to the *mushrikun* [polytheists] and *kufr*, or aiding them against the people of *tawhid*."³⁶ By contrast, disbelievers or those who are suspected of disbelief are first to be subjected not to physical punishment, but to rigorous criticism and religious guidance, or *dawa* aimed at forcing them to disavow (*bara'ah*) themselves of their false beliefs. They are not to be judged and punished as apostates unless they persist in their disbelief. Even then, Maqdisi recognizes the possibility that what a person says or does may differ from what he or she actually believes. He therefore emphasizes the need for caution in pronouncing *takfir*. Maqdisi cites an analogy originally used by Ibn Taymiyya to illustrate his point:

Like the two hands, one washes the other, and it is possible that the removal of dirt would, at times, require scrubbing. But its objective is to be praised, because the intent is the preservation of the wellbeing of both hands and their cleanliness. And we do not seek, at any

instance during these occasions, to allow the complete disavowal of them, because the Muslim's right of his brother is the right of allegiance, which is not cut off (completely) except due to apostasy and the leaving of the realm of Islam.³⁷

Maqdisi's limited as opposed to general application of *takfir* is reflected in his views on the Iraq Jihad. While he firmly supports the jihad against the forces of democracy and those Muslims who aid and abet them, he writes that we "do not declare as *kufr* the generality of people who participate in the elections, for not all of them seek legislating lords in their participation in it."³⁸ And whereas Zarqawi and others in the Sunni-Salafi universe advocate an all-out war on Iraq's majority Shia (both because the Shia for them are heretics well as because many Shia participated in Iraq's recent elections), Maqdisi eschews a blanket condemnation of the Shia as apostates.³⁹ While Maqdisi has nothing but enmity and hatred for "the path of the *Rawafid* [the Shia]," he believes that they must not be confused with real apostates or the enemies of Islam. Once again, he cites a *fatwa* from Ibn Taymiyya on the Shia to lend authority to his position, urging Sunni Muslims not "to equate the Shia with Jews and Christians" in the Islamic struggle against "the people of tyranny." Pronouncing general *takfir* on the Shia and permitting "the spilling of all Shia [blood] is wrong," he says. The "mujahidin must not be involved in it."⁴⁰

Maqdisi's reservations about general *takfir* reflect not only theological considerations, but also tactical ones. For example, in his earlier writings, it is clear that Maqdisi does not expect overthrow of modern *Yasiq* regimes to happen overnight. In *Millat Ibrahim*, Maqdisi summarizes his revolutionary strategy as follows: "secrecy in the [military] preparation and planning; openness in the *dawa* and the conveyance [of Islam's message]."⁴¹ Before open confrontation with the regime, Islamists must first engage in a long, arduous period of *dawa*, or preaching and religious guidance.⁴² During this period, Muslims must work both to bring people to the true faith and to make existing governments and laws appear "foolish" and weak by "mentioning their negative [attributes] to the people, while openly declaring disbelief in them and openly showing and declaring enmity toward them."⁴³ While this *dawa* is to be carried out publicly, Maqdisi says an operational military force must also be built up. But it must be meticulously planned, and ideally in secrecy. The revolt must take place on pre-selected terms and conditions, on a set schedule, and only when a critical mass of society has been prepared through *dawa* to successfully overthrow the *kufr* state.⁴⁴

While he seems mostly satisfied by the resurgence in recent years of the salafist ideology generated by Islamist *dawa* efforts, Maqdisi says he fears it

may now be jeopardized by the “hasty actions” of Muslim youth trying to incite fruitless battles with their governments.⁴⁵ Maqdisi rebukes those “unstable” persons who initiate *dawa* in order to provoke the state to armed response and thereby encourage armed revolt prematurely.⁴⁶ In short, he stresses ideological preparation, and a gradual and cautious approach to Islamizing society and the implementation of his goals rather than outright jihad. This emphasis on caution and prudence in waging jihad reflects a tactical decision derived from hard experience. He has stated that remnants of the al-Tawhid prison group were unable to achieve their objectives and eventually crushed not because of effective Jordanian counterterrorist efforts, but rather because of inadequate ideological preparation and planning, resulting in “organizational weakness and fatal security negligence on the part of the young men.”⁴⁷

Maqdisi seems increasingly worried that this same fate will come to the Iraq insurgency and the broader *salafi-jihadi* movement in the Arab heartland if their leaders, including Zarqawi, are not careful. In a July 2005 interview on Al Jazeera television, Maqdisi reiterated his strategy, emphasizing the long-term nature of the Islamist struggle:

My plan is not to blow up a bar or a movie theater. My plan is not to kill an officer who tortured me. My plan is to restore the nation to its glories and establish the Islamic state for all Muslims. This is a big plan. It is not achieved by small acts of vengeance. It calls for raising a Muslim generation, long-term preparation, and participation of the whole nation with its *ulama* and sons.⁴⁸

The Strategist and the Field Commander

In July 2004, Maqdisi issued a jail-cell missive entitled *Support and Advice, Pains and Hopes* that harshly criticizes Zarqawi’s actions in Iraq. In subsequent interviews following his July 2005 release from prison, Maqdisi elaborated on these criticisms and forwarded some of his own views on how the Iraq insurgency and the jihad elsewhere should be fought. Ever since, the *salafi* community has been buzzing about the rift between the two men.

In *Support and Advice; Pains and Hopes*, Maqdisi provides a laundry-list of mistakes that Zarqawi has made and that he considers irresponsible and damaging to the overall Islamist struggle. Maqdisi urges Zarqawi to stop issuing declarations of general *takfir*. He further says that the Islamist insurgency should not be targeting Shias because they, like the Sunnis, are equally victims of the Infidel “occupiers.” He further warns Zarqawi against “expanding the circle of conflict or fighting individuals other than the occupiers and their

allied lackeys.” Zarqawi should not undertake “actions that include involvement in unsuccessful plans in countries beyond the locations of the mujahidin and their resources.” Moreover, the “meaningless threats against countries around the world” that Zarqawi has made only serves to discredit the mujahidin as a serious force.⁴⁹ And because the Iraq insurgency risks overstepping their bounds and alienating the Iraqi people, Maqdisi insists that Iraqis, not Zarqawi or other foreigners, should be at the forefront of resistance.”⁵⁰

Maqdisi sharply criticizes Zarqawi’s choice of tactics, especially the use of suicide-bombing. While he in principle approves of such attacks—reasoning that the Islamic injunction against suicide is not applicable to actions not taken out of fear or in protest of God’s will—he maintains that they should only be used on military targets. Even then, he says suicide attacks are acceptable only if there is no alternative way of inflicting damage on the enemy. “As for carrying out these operations to kill a *kufir* who can be killed by a pistol or gun, then sacrificing the self is not permitted because it is not a necessity and because it can be accomplished by other means.” Maqdisi reminds Zarqawi that “bombs from the deposed regime are readily available.”⁵¹

More pointedly, Maqdisi says the Iraq Jihad under Zarqawi’s leadership has become a “crematory” for Muslim youth. These youth would be better utilized as propagandists and preachers in their own countries rather than by dying in Iraq, he says.⁵² The “Mujahid brother is a precious jewel in this time,” he writes, “and must not be wasted for targets that can be claimed without losses of this type.”⁵³ He also urges Zarqawi not to lose sight of the overall goal of the Islamist struggle—the founding of Islamic state—and of the importance of *dawa* in attaining those objectives. Maqdisi laments wasting the talents of an intelligent mujahid on an ordinary suicide-bombing operation:

Take for an example Abu-Anas al-Shami, our brother who was killed in an incident said to be for the purpose of liberating Iraqi women from Abu-Ghraib prison. Had I been responsible for brother Abu-Anas al-Shami, I would not have sent him on such a mission. Because whoever reaches the stage of maturity and awareness as brother Abu-Anas al-Shami cannot be used in such an operation, regardless of the justifications and necessities. We have very few mature brothers with such a level of knowledge. We must sponsor them. They must be instructors.⁵⁴

Finally, Maqdisi reprimands Zarqawi for the carnage that he has unleashed on Muslims.

Maqdisi has admitted in his earlier writings that when waging a jihad, there is always the risk that a true believing Muslim might be killed accidentally if

he happens to be among the *kufr* targeted by Muslim holy fighters. Should this occur, Maqdisi relies on Allah to correct the injustice by giving the victim a place in paradise.⁵⁵ But the evil of killing a believer is not to be taken lightly; it is acceptable only when sparing the lives of a mass of unbelievers would be an even greater evil. Indeed, he often quotes a religious scholar who asserts that “the mistake in leaving one thousand *kufr* is easier than the mistake of shedding the blood of one Muslim.”⁵⁶ But Maqdisi finds none of this concern for innocent Muslim life in Zarqawi. “Six months ago,” Maqdisi writes, “we read daily in the newspapers and saw on the televisions tens of Iraqi civilians getting killed, including women and children, and barely one or two occupier Americans were wounded or killed.”⁵⁷ Such indiscriminate killing and mass carnage results from Zarqawi’s inability to discern the different levels of unbelief, says Maqdisi.⁵⁸ The Islamist struggle must not be jeopardized by hasty, thoughtless action, he warns. Those who violate this injunction will be held “accountable before God for wasting their youth and assets.”⁵⁹

On July 12, 2005, Zarqawi shot back with a letter of his own.⁶⁰ Though he still speaks well of Maqdisi as a scholar, Zarqawi attacks him for misrepresenting facts and being irresponsible in the timing of his remarks. He also denies ever being Maqdisi’s pupil and claims that today he is receiving advice from “righteous scholars who are far more knowledgeable than Maqdisi.” Above all, Zarqawi stresses his disagreement with Maqdisi on matters relating to jihad, noting that he had left Jordan in 1999 to pursue active jihad while Maqdisi continued to favor a more long-term approach based on education and preaching. “I believed that there is another way to effectively help the religion that is different from his,” states Zarqawi.

Zarqawi addresses many of Maqdisi’s specific charges against him. He defends his reliance on martyrdom operations, saying that his thinking on the subject is informed by one Shaykh Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir. He writes, “Not only did I see that [martyrdom operations] are permitted but I was convinced that they are desirable.” He also claims that his actions against the Shia are justified as well: they initiated hostilities by taking over Sunni homes and mosques and attacking Sunnis on the streets. More significantly, he argues that Maqdisi’s references to Ibn Taymiyya do not apply to the current situation in Iraq, and then names several modern scholars who agree that the Shia must be fought. But Zarqawi is clearly most enraged by Maqdisi’s declaration that the war in Iraq is a waste, a crematorium for Muslim youth who could be better utilized elsewhere:

Can anyone believe that such a fatwa comes from Abu Muhammad [Maqdisi]? What inferno are you talking about? The real inferno

awaits those who shy away from implementing the verdict of Allah and refuse to answer the call to jihad...The real inferno awaits those who do nothing to free Muslim prisoners from Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and other locations. The real inferno awaits those who betray our honored sisters who are being raped day and night by the cross worshippers and the *Rafidhah* [Shia].

Here Zarqawi directly challenges Maqdisi's strategy of preparing for jihad slowly and carefully through *dawa*, planning and organization. Citing several scholars, including Osama bin Laden, he argues that the "jihad in Iraq is obligatory." Zarqawi closes by telling Maqdisi that he must "beware of plots of the enemies of Allah," warning him not to "fall for their trap that is designed to use you to drive a wedge between the Mujahidin."

Indeed, it appears that such a wedge has already emerged between two opposing camps within the *salaf-jihadi* movement. That wedge derives from a major difference between theology and tactics, and strategy. Zarqawi and his followers now look with a mixture of scorn and pity on Maqdisi and others like him, whom they view as complacent, out-of-touch, and unwilling to devote their life to jihad. Maqdisi's faction blames Zarqawi for sending some of Islam's brightest minds on suicide missions in Iraq and weakening the overall Islamist struggle.

A smart counterterrorism policy must seek to understand and make use of these cracks within the *salafi-jihadi* movement, rather than treat the entire movement as a monolith. This is vital for winning the battle against Zarqawi and others who undertake "hasty actions" in the Islamist jihad in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. It is also vital to developing strategies to wage the equally important and quite likely much longer struggle against Islamists like Maqdisi who today are actively engaged in *dawa*, planning for the Islamic jihad of the future.

NOTES

1 "An Encounter Behind the Apostates' Bars in Jordan: an interview with Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," *Nida'ul Islam*, conducted in two parts, in the December 1997-January 1998 (#21) and February- March 1998 (#22) issues. Hereafter referred to as "Encounter."

2 The book's title is taken from the Quranic sura *Al-Baqarah* ("The Cow"), verse 30, which says, "And who forsaketh the religion of Abraham save him who befooled himself? Verily, We chose him in the world, and lo! in the Hereafter he is among the righteous." M.M. Pickthall Trans.

3 Abu Muhammad Asim al-Maqdisi, *Millat Ibrahim (The Religion of Abraham)* (Tibyan Publications, 1985): 38-40. Hereafter referred to as *Millat Ibrahim*.

4 Ibid., 52.

5 Ibid., 44.

6 Fu'ad Husayn, "Part VI: Al Zarqawi...The Second Generation of Al Qa'ida," *Al Quds al Arabi*, June 25, 2005

7 "Encounter."

8 Ibid.

9 "Revival of Islamic Groups," *Al-Hadath*, May 11, 1998.

10 Fu'ad Husayn, "Part I: Al Zarqawi...The Second Generation of Al-Qa'ida," *Al Quds al Arabi*, June 8, 2005.

11 Rana al-Husayni, "Ten Given Jail Terms in Bay't al-Imam Case," *Jordan Times*, November 29, 1996.

12 Fu'ad Husayn, "Part VI: Al Zarqawi...The Second Generation of Al Qa'ida," *Al Quds al Arabi*, June 25, 2005

13 "Interview with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," *Al Jazeera TV*, July 5, 2005. Hereafter referred to as "Al Jazeera Interview."

14 Fu'ad Husayn, "Part VI: Al Zarqawi...The Second Generation of Al Qaeda," *Al Quds al Arabi*, June 25, 2005

15 Ibid.

16 "Al Jazeera Interview"; see also Samir Hamdan and Muhammad al-Da'mah, "Residents of Ma'an Mourn Their Dead; Security Authorities Arrest Shaykh Al-Barqawi," *Al Sharq al Awsat*, December 7, 2002 and Rana Husayni, "Prosecution Presents Closing Argument," *Jordan Times*, July 1, 2005.

17 *Democracy: A Religion!*, 3.

18 For a summary of Ibn Taymiyya's anti- Mongol polemics, see Thomas Raff, *Remarks on an Anti- Mongol Fatwa by Ibn Taymiyya*, (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1973).

19 Quoted in Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 37

20 *Millat Ibrahim*, 126. Maqdisi is obviously quite familiar with the Mongols. This is likely due to his intense study of Ibn Taymiyya.

21 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Democracy: A Religion!*, Trans. Abu Muhammad al-Maleki and Abu Sayf Muwahhid, (At-Tibyan Publications, n.d.), 5, 16. Hereafter referred to as *Democracy: A Religion!* and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Believe in Allah and Disbelieve in Taaghoot*, Trans. Abu Muhammad al-Maleki, available online at <http://stateofislam.com/print.php?id=70> (accessed August 15, 2005).

22 *Millat Ibrahim*, 186.

23 Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 334.

24 *Millat Ibrahim*, 110.

25 Ibid., 42.

26 Ibid., 46f.

27 Ibid., 192- 193.

28 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "The Caravan Is Moving and the Dogs Are Barking," *Mu'askar al Battar*, no. 7 (March 2004).

29 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *This is our Aqidah!*, 27. This is a very important document to understand Maqdisi's ideology, as he wrote it to correct what he sees as false assumptions about his group's ideals and methods. Hereafter referred to as *Aqidah!*.

30 *Millat Ibrahim*, 188- 189. He finds support for his position on attacking the "near enemies" before the "far enemies" in the Quranic verse 9:123, which says "O ye who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you, and know that Allah is with those who keep their duty [unto Him]." M.M. Pickthall Trans.

31 "Encounter."

32 SPA News Agency, Riyadh, April 22, 1996. While Maqdisi denied that he had anything to do with the attacks, he acknowledged in a 1996 interview that he knew the terrorists who had been convicted.

33 Fu'ad Husayn, "Part V: Al Zarqawi...The Second Generation of Al-Qa'ida," *Al Quds al Arabi*, June 21, 2005.

34 *Aqidah!*, 22. See also Marwan Shihadah and Muyassir Al-Shamri, "Interview with Maqdisi," *Al Hayat*, July 10, 2005.

35 *Millat Ibrahim*, 65.

36 *Aqidah!*, 23.

37 *Millat Ibrahim*, 50.

38 *Aqidah!*, 22.

39 Ibid., 11.

40 "Al Jazeera Interview."

41 *Millat Ibrahim*, 83.

42 Ibid., 70-71, 92.

43 Ibid., 63.

44 "Encounter."

45 "Al Jazeera Interview."

46 *Millat Ibrahim*, 83.

47 Fu'ad Husayn, "Part I: Al Zarqawi...The Second Generation of Al-Qa'ida," *Al Quds al Arabi*, June 8, 2005.

48 "Al Jazeera Interview."

49 Abu Muhammad Asim al-Maqdisi *Support and Advice: Pains and Hopes*, July 2004. Hereafter referred to as *Support and Advice: Pains and Hopes*

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 "Al Jazeera Interview."

54 *Support and Advice; Pains and Hopes*.

55 *Millat Ibrahim*, 176.

56 *Aqidah!*, 26- 27; see also *Support and Advice; Pains and Hopes*.

57 *Support and Advice; Pains and Hopes*.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Abu Musab al Zarqawi, "Clarification of Issues Raised by Sheikh Maqdisis During His Interview with Al-Jazeera Television," July 12, 2005. All quotations that follow are from this letter, which is available online at http://www.jihadunspun.com/newsarchive/article_internal.php?article=103565&list=/newsarchive/index.php&