

Mujahideen Blood Rituals: The Religious and Forensic Symbolism of Al Qaeda Beheading

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Beheadings, suicide bombings, and ritual mutilation are not just strategies of war but time-honored warrior traditions that are theologically sanctioned. To relegate these acts to mere terrorist tactics is not only strategically unwise but diminishes the true nature of the threat. Similarly, to designate enemies as religious fanatics, Islamic extremists, insurgents, or radical militants who have corrupted the peaceful religion of Islam is a politically correct fallacy that is undermining every aspect of the war on terrorism and resulting in the death of American soldiers. In this paper, apparently inexplicable violent acts committed during the Iraq war will be presented as the sacred blood rituals of Mujahideen warriors. It will be established that ritual beheadings have been prevalent throughout Islamic history and are theologically prescribed and communally sanctioned. As I have argued throughout my research into new religions and ritualistic crimes, it is my contention that the most reliable method of understanding ritual violence is found in the symbolism, aesthetics, and blood rituals of the participating community. Consequently, in this paper I present a detailed symbolic analysis of numerous ritual beheadings that reveal “beheading signatures” specific to the al-Qaeda network. Finally, I will argue that continuing to analyze the violence from a Western perspective, sugarcoating by the media of violent aspects of the Islamic religion, and failing to recognize that we are in the midst of a century-old Holy war will only serve to perpetuate a never-ending cycle of reciprocal violence.

Mujahideen

Mujahideen (Arabic: **مجاهدين**, also transliterated as mujāhidīn, mujahedeen, mujahedin, mujahidin, mujaheddin, etc.) is a plural form of mujahid (**مجاهد**), which literally means “struggler”, someone who engages in jihad, or “struggle,” but is often translated as “holy warrior.” The root of mujahedeen is J-H-D (**ج-ه-د**), meaning “effort”; this is the same root as jihad, which means “struggle” as in holy war. In the late twentieth century, the term “mujahideen” became popular in the media to describe various armed fighters who subscribe to Islamist ideologies.⁽¹⁾ Several groups on the U.S. Department of State list of foreign terrorist organizations and other terrorist groups

(<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/37191.htm> and <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2003/31759.htm>) have the name Mujahideen in their title such as: Harakat ul-Mujahidin (HUM), Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK) , Al-Badhr Mujahedin (al-Badhr), Hizbul-Mujahedin (HM), Jamiat ul-Mujahedin (JUM), and Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM). Today, the term Mujahideen is more commonly used to refer in general terms to guerrillas fighting the Coalition Forces in Iraq. Even in Arabic, the term has taken on meanings that are specifically religious, specifically military, or both. Mujahideen is essentially a military force of Muslim guerilla warriors engaged in holy war, frequently referred to as Soldiers of God. Insights into the contemporary and religious nature of Mujahideen from an Islamist perspective can be found on an active internet site titled Jihad Unspun (<http://www.jihadunspun.com/home.php>). The publisher, Khadija Abdul Qahaar, is openly promoting Iraqi resistance and a global jihad. An article in Jihad Unspun by Zafir Jamaal titled "Soldiers of God, Fighting In The Name of Allah" describes the Mujahideen warrior:

In theatre against US & coalition forces in the mountainous caves, rural towns and cities in Afghanistan are mostly Mujahideen - Holy Warriors or Soldiers of God who fight in the name of Allâh in His war against unbelievers. Mujahideen number in the hundreds of thousands worldwide and to understand them, one must first understand the Islamic principle of Jihad. . . . To participate in Jihad is an honor and a duty that is welcomed by the true Muslim. The Qur'ân, the law of Allâh handed down to Mohammed, his final Prophet, states that a man killed in a Jihad becomes a Shaheed or a martyr and a special place in Paradise is assured. The Mujahideen's willingness to die in battle stems from the promise by Allâh that Shaheeds go immediately to Paradise. No matter how many sins they have committed in this life, to die as a Soldier of God ensures complete forgiveness. Shaheeds are buried as they fall, in the clothes that they died in, bodies bloodied and unwashed, and without coffins. They go to Allâh exactly as they died for their faith. There is no greater glory for the Muslim warrior.

Courage, physical courage, is central to the Mujahideen character. He demonstrates a special facet of bravery - the ability to suffer pain stoically, without fuss, and silently. To be without courage is abhorrent; such a person is despised. . . . The combination of courage, and their fervent commitment to Allah, the cause for which they fight, make the Mujahideen formidable warriors to defeat. As devout Muslims they know and follow the teachings of the Qur'ân literally. Once religious leaders declare a Jihad, it is the obligation of all Muslim men to fight, to defend their faith, their honor, to protect their independence, and to guard their land and families. . . . It is not only the man who dies in a Jihad that is venerated. There is reward also for those who fight and live. Such a person is called a Ghazi, and Islam promises him rich rewards in Paradise. According to the Prophet (peace be upon him) the Mujahid who spends one night on guard duty has performed equally with the ordinary man who prays for a thousand nights.

The battle cry of the Mujahideen is 'Allâh o Akbar' or God is Great. They shout this as they attack, as they fire their weapons, when they see a target hit, even on training when no enemy is in sight. It is a cry that has been heard down the centuries.

Add to the Mujahid's hardy physique, his ability to endure privations, his great resilience, and you have the makings of a first-class guerrilla soldier. From the military point of view the Mujahid starts with substantial advantages. Physically he is better able to withstand the extremes of the terrain and climate than his often much softer enemy. He is fighting for his faith, his freedom, and for his family, which gives him an enormous moral ascendancy but most importantly, he is fighting for Allâh, his God. (2)

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Significantly the concept of mujahideen is a unifying ideal, a lifelong fraternity of soldiers, who when called upon by a charismatic religious leader such as Usama bin Laden or Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi will not only fight to the death but commit suicide for their ideals. In almost every statement made by various terrorist groups, they proudly identify themselves as mujahideen. They are viewed as more than just ideal soldiers; their actions are not only respected by family, community, and country but more significantly, deemed sacred. Their religious devotion is what makes them such dangerous and committed enemies. For this reason it is extremely important strategically and tactically that we begin to understand the beliefs and rituals of these Mujahideen warriors.

Religious Symbolism

Because it is difficult to fully comprehend suicide bombings, beheadings, and ritual mutilations from a Western perspective, they are generally reduced to acts of barbarism and psychological warfare. In any type of ritualistic crime every aspect of the act has symbolic meaning to the perpetrator, particularly when the violence is perpetrated in the cause of a religious ideology. Ritualizing violence is what makes it sacred, hence justifiable. With the exception of suicide bombings, the most obvious and prevalent examples of religiously sanctioned Islamist murders are beheadings. The symbolism of contemporary beheading is both political and religious; the political aspects are to instill fear, the religious aspects morally sanction murder. Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's group Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (QJBR) (Organization of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers) filmed the beheadings of Americans Nicolas Berg, Kim Sun-il, Jack Hensley, Eugene Armstrong, Kenneth Bigley and numerous other victims. Zarqawi is Iraq's most-wanted man and his group has repeatedly posted such videos showing what it calls "the implementation of God's ruling against Iraqi 'apostates' or foreign hostages." Other groups that have videotaped beheadings include Abu 'Abd Allah al-Hasan bin Mahmud's group Army of Ansar al-Sunna (Defenders of the Tradition), Abdulaziz al-Muqrin's group the al-Qaeda Organization in the Arab Peninsula, Harkat ul-Mujahedeena, the Taliban, and The Salafist Brigades of Abu

Bakr al-Siddiq.

Videos of beheadings are easily accessible free of charge on the internet and can be viewed at sites such as Orgrish.com, which not inappropriately before the war on terrorism was predominantly a violent pornographic site. The political aspects include the sophisticated use of film to arouse panic and the clever use of technology to disseminate the footage. Arabic satellite stations such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Manar and Islamist web sites such as Muntadiyat al-Mahid display the murders for the entire world to see. In his book *Islam in the Digital Age*, Gary Bunt focuses on religious uses that Muslims make of the internet in what he refers to as "online fatwas" and "e-jihad." In an article titled "Terrorist Beheadings: Cultural and Strategic Implications," Ronald H. Jones describes how these multimedia techniques are used,

Since 9/11, jihadists have been very successful in leveraging the Internet to amplify or broadcast their message. The beheading videos are a small part of a larger, sophisticated media campaign which has grown and evolved in a complex way. Early videos included "last will and testament" films of suicide bombers, recording their motivations and enshrining them as martyrs. The videos were played after the attack to claim credit and recruit more martyrs. One beheading video included footage of the surveillance and actual kidnapping of the victim, followed by his confinement, questioning, and murder, and thus served as a "how to" or documentary film. In addition to videos, jihadists are producing and distributing computer art productions, songs, and prayers designed to motivate anti-U.S. mujahideen. Posters or montages of photos glorify al-Qaeda operations and encourage anti-U.S. violence. The images are usually embedded in bulletin boards or stored in digital archives, allowing them to be copied and spread quickly across the Internet. The songs, called *anashid*, vary widely in content and origin but typically consist of chanting combined with military sound effects. They encourage suicide operations by calling to mind Islamic conquests of the past or the prestige of Islamic culture. Short audio clips are embedded in threads in jihadist bulletin boards, while high-quality ones form the audio background of multimedia productions like recruitment and beheading videos.⁽³⁾

The religious messages and commemoration of Islamic conquests perpetuated in e-jihad, particularly the ideal of the holy warrior wielding his sword, has inspired a new generation of mujahideen to ritual violence.

Although the terrorizing impact of sawing off someone's head with a knife, than holding the decapitated head for the cameras is obviously a powerful form of psychological warfare, these ritual beheadings hold a much more significant meaning to Mujahideen and have a long precedent in Islamic theology. The beheading ritual is full of symbolism that places the militants closer to Islam's roots when the sole way of fighting was the sword. These rituals authenticate the ideal that they are in the same war that the prophet and the first Muslims were fighting. In addition the videos have recruitment appeal to young Muslims who see

evidence that the insurgency is strong and pure.(4)

Terrorist groups justify the decapitation of prisoners with Qur'anic scripture. Sura (chapter) 47 contains the ayah (verse): "When you encounter the unbelievers on the battlefield, strike off their heads until you have crushed them completely; then bind the prisoners tightly." The Qur'anic Arabic terms are generally straightforward: *kafaru* means "those who blaspheme/are irreligious," although *Darb ar-riqab* is less clear. *Darb* can mean "striking or hitting" while *ar-riqab* translates to "necks, slaves, persons." With little variation, scholars have translated the verse as, "When you meet the unbelievers, smite their necks." For centuries, leading Islamic scholars have interpreted this verse literally. The famous Iranian historian and Qur'an commentator Muhammad b. Jarir at-Tabari (d. 923 C.E.) wrote that "striking at the necks" is simply God's sanction of ferocious opposition to non-Muslims. Mahmud b. Umar az-Zamakhshari (d. 1143 C.E.), in a major commentary studied for centuries by Sunni religious scholars, suggested that any prescription to "strike at the necks" commands to avoid striking elsewhere so as to confirm death and not simply wound.(5)

Another, albeit less-frequently, cited Qur'anic passage also sanctions beheadings of non-Muslims. Sura 8:12 reads: "I will cast dread into the hearts of the unbelievers. Strike off their heads, then, and strike off all of their fingertips." In the original text, the relevant phrase is *adrabu fawq al-'anaq*, "strike over their necks." This verse is, then, a corollary to Sura 47:3. Yusuf 'Ali is one of the few modern commentators who address this passage, interpreting it as utilitarian: the neck is among the only areas not protected by armor, and mutilating an opponent's hands prevents him from again wielding his sword or spear. The point of this opening phrase—to "cast dread" or, as some translations have it, "instill terror"—has now been adopted by Islamist terrorists to justify decapitation of hostages.(6)

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Timothy Furnish in an article titled "Beheading in the name of Islam" clarifies the religious significance of beheadings.

Islam is the only major world religion today that is cited by both state and non-state actors to legitimize beheadings. And two major aspects of decapitation in an Islamic context should be noted: first, the practice has both Qur'anic and historical sanction. It is not the product of a fabricated tradition. Second, in contradiction to the assertions of apologists, both Muslim and non-Muslim, these beheadings are not simply a brutal method of drawing attention to the Islamist political agenda and weakening opponents' will to fight. Zarqawi and other Islamists who practice decapitation believe that God has ordained them to obliterate their enemies in this manner. Islam is, for this determined minority of Muslims, anything but a "religion of peace." It is, rather, a religion of the sword with the blade forever at the throat of the unbeliever(7)

There are numerous examples throughout this article that link beheadings and other acts of ritual mutilation to Islamic theology. The most obvious example is the group chanting "Allahu akbar," the traditional mujahideen battle cry, as they are slowly decapitating a hostage. This cry that has been heard down the centuries clearly demonstrates the religious nature of these violent rituals.

Al-Qaeda Network Beheadings

Al-Qaeda (Arabic: القاعدة, al-Qā'idah; "the foundation" or "the base"), is a radical Sunni Muslim organization led by Usama bin Laden. In addition to its own members, al-Qaeda's network includes groups operating in as many as 65 countries throughout the world. The principal stated aims of al-Qaeda are to overthrow nearly all Muslim governments, which are viewed as corrupt, to drive Western influence from those countries, and eventually to abolish state boundaries and establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate throughout the world. Al-Qaeda's ideology, often referred to as *jihadism*, seeks to rid Muslim countries of what it sees as the profane influence of the West and replace their governments with fundamentalist Islamic regimes. In 1998 bin Laden organized an alliance of terrorist organizations called the "International Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders," and declared war in an edict that called for attacks on all Americans. It is significant to note that this was not just a political declaration but a religious decree (*fatwa*), a call to arms quoting the Quran as justification for violence, specifically proclaiming that it is the duty of Muslims around the world to wage holy war on the United States, American citizens, Christians and Jews. (A transcript of bin Laden's *fatwa* may be found at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>.)

In the 1980's Usama bin Laden recruited thousands of Muslims from mosques around the Middle East to fight the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. They were referred to as the Afghan Mujahideen. Many of these holy warriors had returned to their respective countries and had later been recruited again by Usama bin Laden for a war against their former ally, the United States. They already were initiated into the mujahideen tradition, had received specialist training, and had established links with each other during the war; it just took someone like bin Laden to bring them back together and reignite their fervor against a new enemy.⁽⁸⁾ Mujahideen fighting the coalition forces in Iraq have revived a long tradition of blood rituals, particularly Quranic verses that beckon holy warriors to smite the necks of unbelievers. The modern version of this mujahideen blood ritual is choreographed and videotaped. These videotaped beheadings are not just a form of psychological warfare but a method of validating the ideal that they are in the same war that the prophet and the first Muslims were fighting.

Most readers are familiar with the beheadings of Daniel Pearl and Nick Berg but may be surprised to discover that there have been dozens of beheadings since. More than 200 foreigners have been kidnapped in Iraq. Mujahideen from several terrorist groups have

demanded the release of Iraqi prisoners, the withdrawal of troops, and ransoms for the hostages' release. Some have been released, but about one-third of them have been killed. Others are believed to be still held hostage in Iraq.

When the Iraq war began the primary victims were Iraqi citizens abducted by Iraqi criminals and ransomed for financial reasons. In April 2004, as U.S. forces simultaneously attacked insurgents in Falluja and Najaf, two groups, the Islamic Army in Iraq and groups linked to al-Zarqawi, began kidnapping foreigners in order to prevent those countries from sending troops or assisting with Iraq's reconstruction. These two groups were the main producers of the videos of executions or victims pleading for their lives. After the interim Iraqi government took over on June 28, 2004, there was an increase of kidnapping attacks on foreigners, which seemed to have the desired effect of causing several companies to remove workers and several countries to withdraw troops and to cease helping with the country's reconstruction. Then in Fall 2004, the focus of the attacks shifted away from foreigners to include the Iraqis themselves, such as police officers, national guardsmen, election commission members, political candidates, and prominent government officials. Partisan targets included Shiite and Kurdish citizens and Christian churches. Violence was directed at the Iraqis to lessen support for the interim government, disrupt elections, and continue the chaotic conditions that favored the militants. The militants labeled these Iraqis as traitors, more accurately as apostates.[\(9\)](#)

Of the numerous hostages killed it is difficult to determine the exact number who have been beheaded. Although this article contains a list of over 50 individual beheadings it does not include decapitated bodies found in mass graves or headless bodies frequently found by soldiers. There have been several news reports of decapitated bodies found in Iraq. For example, on September 15, 2004, United States soldiers discovered three heads and decapitated bodies thought to be of Iraqi civilians on a roadside north of Baghdad. On October 5, 2004, five decapitated bodies of Iraqis were found dumped separately in Mosul and Kirkuk. On November 3, 2004, three beheaded bodies were found under a suspension bridge in Central Baghdad. On November 18, 2004, four beheaded bodies were found in Mosul. On December 12 2004, four decapitated bodies in civilian clothes were found in Haswa. On October 3 2005, south of Baghdad in Latifiya, Iraqi troops found 15 headless bodies in a building inside an abandoned former army base; the bodies included ten men, three women, and two children. The following charts are examples of Al Qaeda network beheadings from the years 2000-2005. It is important to note that the charts do not include the previously mentioned unidentified bodies, hostages kidnapped and later released, or hostages executed by gunfire or other methods. Because of the enormous scope of research and difficulty in ascertaining information on the subject of contemporary Islamist beheadings, there are numerous other instances that have not been included in this article. The following charts are also not representative of the hundreds of people killed by suicide bombings and other Mujahideen tactics.

Al Qaeda Network Beheadings 2000-2005

Tanzim Qa'idat Al-Jihad in Bilad al-Rafidayn

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
Nick Berg	American	Jewish	May 11, 2004	Iraq
Kim Sun-il	South Korean	Christian	June 22, 2004	Iraq
Georgi Lazov	Bulgarian	Christian	July 13, 2004	Iraq
Ivailo Kepov	Bulgarian	*Christian	July 14, 2004	Iraq
Mohammed Mutawalli	Egyptian	Muslim	August 8, 2004	Iraq
Durmus Kumdereli	Turkish	*Muslim	September 13, 2004	Iraq
Jack Hensley	American	Christian	September 20, 2004	Iraq
Eugene Armstrong	American	Christian	September 21, 2004	Iraq
Kenneth Bigley	Britain	Christian	October 7, 2004	Iraq
Unidentified Truck Driver	Turkish	*Muslim	October 14, 2004	Iraq
**11 Iraqi Police & National Guardsmen	Iraqi	Muslim	October 17, 2004	Iraq
Shosei Koda	Japanese	Christian	October 31, 2004	Iraq
Ali Hussein Jassem Mohammad al-Zubaidi	Iraqi	Shiite Muslim	January 21, 2005	Iraq
Ahmad Alwan Hussein al-Mahmadawi	Iraqi	Shiite Muslim	January 21, 2005	Iraq

Jassim Mohammed Hussein Mahdi	Iraqi	Muslim	April 5, 2005	Iraq
Badr Brigades Member	Iraqi	Shiite Muslim	October 22, 2005	Iraq

Islamic Army in Iraq

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
Raja Azad Khan	Pakistani	Muslim	July 28, 2004	Iraq
Sajad Naeem	Pakistani	Muslim	July 28, 2004	Iraq
Zoran Naskovski	Macedonian	*Christian	October 18, 2004	Iraq
Dalibor Lazarevski	Macedonian	*Christian	October 18, 2004	Iraq
**Dragan Markovic	Macedonian	*Christian	October 18, 2004	Iraq

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Army of Ansar al-Sunna

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
***Unidentified Man (CIA)	Western	unidentified	August 11, 2004	Iraq
Khaled Abdul Messih	American	*Muslim	August 25, 2004	Iraq
Nepalese worker (1 of 12)	Nepalese	*Hindu	August 31, 2004	Iraq
Iraqi Kurd	Iraqi Kurd	Muslim	September 19, 2004	Iraq
Iraqi Kurd	Iraqi Kurd	Muslim	September 19, 2004	Iraq

Iraqi Kurd	Iraqi Kurd	Muslim	September 19, 2004	Iraq
Barea Nafea Dawou Ibrahim	Iraqi	Muslim	October 2, 2004	Iraq
Maher Kemal	Turkish	*Muslim	October 11, 2004	Iraq
Luqman Hussein	Iraqi	*Muslim	October 11, 2004	Iraq
Al-Sayed Alaa al-Malki	Iraqi	Shiite Muslim	October 12, 2004	Iraq
Ramazan Elbu	Turkish	*Muslim	October 14, 2004	Iraq
Seif Adnan Kanaan	Iraqi	Muslim	October 22, 2004	Iraq
Iraqi Soldier (1of 11)	Iraqi	Muslim	October 28, 2004	Iraq
Major Hussein Shanun	Iraqi	Muslim	November 3, 2004	Iraq
Unidentified Iraqi	Iraqi	Muslim	September 12, 2005	Iraq
Unidentified Iraqi	Iraqi	Muslim	September 12, 2005	Iraq

Ansar al-Islam (aka Jund al-Islam)

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
25 PUK prisoners	Iraqi Kurds	Muslim	September 23, 2001	Iraq

Harkat ul-Mujahedeena

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
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Daniel Pearl	American	Jewish	January 29, 2002	Iraq
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The Salafist Brigades of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
Fadhel Ibrahim	Iraqi	Muslim	October 13, 2004	Iraq
Firas Imeil	Iraqi	Muslim	October 13, 2004	Iraq

Taliban

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
Malim Abdul Habib	Afghan	*Muslim	January 3, 2006	Afghanistan
Unidentified Afghan man	Afghan	*Muslim	December 9, 2005	Afghanistan

Al Qaeda Organization in the Arab Peninsula

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
Paul Marshall Johnson, Jr.	American	*Christian	June 18, 2004	Saudi Arabia

*****al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya**

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
Hossam Armanious	American	Coptic Christian	January 14, 2005	United States
Amal Armanious	American	Coptic Christian	January 14, 2005	United States

Sylvia Armanious	American	Coptic Christian	January 14, 2005	United States
Monica Armanious	American	Coptic Christian	January 14, 2005	United States

******Fedayeen Saddam**

Name of Victim	Nationality	Religion	Date of Beheading	Place of Beheading
250 women	Iraqi	Muslim	June 2000-May 2001	Iraq
prisoners	Iraqi	Muslim	1995-2003	Iraq

*Presumed religion - unable to verify

** Presumed beheaded - unable to verify at this time

***Presumed group - unable to verify at this time

****there is a debate as to whether the Fedayeen Saddam is part of the Al Qaeda network

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Beheading Videos (warning: these videos depict graphic violence!)

Date	Name of Victim	Video of Beheading
10-22-05	Badr Brigades Member	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/al_qaeda_in_iraq_beheads_badr_brigades_member_Oct_22_2005.html
09-12-05	2 Unidentified Iraqi's	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/two_beheaded_in_iraq_by_ansar_al_sunnay_army_Oct_05_2005.html
04-05-05	Jassim Mohammed Hussein Mahdi	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/zargawis_group_al_qaeda_in_iraq_beheads_iraqi_national_guard_on_video_Apr_04_2005.html
01-21-05	Ali Hussein Jassem Mohammad al-Zubaidi	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/2nd_iraqi_worker_beheaded_on_the_streets_of_iraq_Jan_21_2005.html
01-21-05	Ahmad Alwan Hussein al-Mahmadawi	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/iraqi_worker_beheaded_on_the_streets_Jan_21_2005.html
12-09-05	Unidentified Afghan Man	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/video_shows_beheading_by_taliban_in_afghanistan_Dec_24_2005.html
11-03-04	Major Hussein Shanun	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=135500

10-31-04	Shosei Koda	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=133500
10-28-04	12 Iraqi Soldiers	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=129500
10-22-04	Seif Adnan Kanaan	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=127500
10-14-04	Ramazan Elbu	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=124500
10-14-04	Unidentified Turkish Truck Driver	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/turkish_truck_driver_beheading_video_execution_performed_by_qaqa_brigade_tawhid_and_jihad_group_Oct_14_2004.html
10-13-04	Firas Imeil	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=120500
10-13-04	Fadhel Ibrahim	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=120500
10-12-04	Al-Sayed Alaa al-Malki	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=117500
10-11-04	Luqman Hussein	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=116500
10-11-04	Maher Kemal	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=116500
10-07-04	Kenneth Bigley	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/ken_bigley_video_kenneth_bigley_beheading_video_Oct_10_2004.html
10-02-04	Barea Nafea Dawoud Ibrahim	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/iraqi_national_barea_nafea_dawoud_ibrahim_beheaded_by_ansar_alsunna_Oct_03_2004.html
09-21-04	Eugene Armstrong	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/american_hostage_eugene_armstrong_beheading_video_killed_by_zarqawi_militant_group_Sep_21_2004.html
09-20-04	Jack Hensley	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/american_hostage_jack_hensley_beheading_video_Sep_22_2004.html
09-13-04	Durmus Kundereli	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=93500
08-31-04	12 Nepalese Workers	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/nepalese_hostages_execution_video_and_beheading_images_Aug_31_2004.html
08-25-04	Khaled Abdul Messih	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/khaled_abdul_messih_beheading_video_Aug_25_2004.html
08-11-04	Unidentified Western Man (alleged CIA Agent)	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/cia_agent_beheading_video_Aug_11_2004.html
08-08-04	Mohammed Mutawalli	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=87500
07-13-04	Georgi Lazov	http://www.ogrish.com/archives/bulgarian_beheading_video_in_iraq_possibly_georgi_lazov_Aug_09_2004.html
06-22-04	Kim Sun-il	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=75500
06-18-04	Paul Marshall Johnson, Jr.	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=71500
05-11-04	Nick Berg	http://www.thememoryhole.org/war/decapitation_video.htm
01-29-02	Daniel Pearl	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=54800
1995-2003	Fedayeen beheading / Torture	http://www.benadorassociates.com/article/6086
1995-2003	Iraqis tortured by Fedayeen	http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=83500

Forensic and Symbolic Analysis of Beheading

Beheadings in the Al Qaeda network videos meet all the criteria to be designated ritualistic crimes, more specifically ritual murder in the category of holy war. Ritualistic crime is defined as any act of violence characterized by a series of repeated physical, sexual, and/or psychological actions/assaults combined with a systematic use of symbols, ceremonies, and/or machinations. The need to repeat such acts can be cultural, sexual, economic, psychological, and/or spiritual.⁽¹⁰⁾ Some reporters have claimed that the beheadings are a form of human sacrifice, hence the terrorists committing these crimes are not true Muslims but have returned to pagan pre-Islamic practices that are prohibited in the Quran (editorial in *USA Today*, "Nothing Islamic about human sacrifice," http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2004-11-16-peters-edit_x.htm). The practice of human sacrifice is a form of idolatry that is prohibited in all the monotheistic religions, specifically in reference to the worship of other gods; however, referring to these beheadings as human sacrifice is inaccurate. There are subtle and important distinctions between ritual murder and sacrifice. In its simplest terms, human sacrifice is ritually murdering someone as an offering to a god; ritual murder is ritually killing someone for other reasons. The mujahideen are not beheading victims as offerings to Allah; they are ritually murdering the enemies and apostates of Allah to preserve Islam as theologically proscribed in the Quran. The Mujahideen are not creating a cult of human sacrifice; they are returning to a pure form of Islam, as they consistently claim. These subtle but important distinctions are what prompted me to propose a ritualistic homicide typology in my book *Investigating Religious Terrorism and Ritualistic Crimes*.

The Ritual Homicide typology proposes five categories of ritual homicide based on religious concepts; sacrifice, ritual murder, millennial murder, holy war, and iconoclasm. Each category posits common forensic findings, victimology, crime scene indicators, method of operation, motives of perpetrators, and the symbolic significance of various ritual homicides. All categories consist of premeditated crimes and are not mutually exclusive. Interestingly Mujahideen beheadings constitute the perfect combination of ritualistic crime and religious terrorism, and according to the typology would be classified as ritual homicide in the category of Holy War.

In the ritual homicide typology, Holy War is described as

a sacred (holy) category of group or group sanctioned ritual conduct. Holy War is always committed by a true believer, a religious soldier who commits acts of terrorism because of his or her fervent devotion to a system of beliefs based on orthodox religious conventions. There are several types of victims targeted in Holy War, predominantly the victim represents the antithesis of the offenders' beliefs, therefore victimology depends on this doctrine. If multiple victims are

involved there will be similarities of race, religion, political beliefs, social status, or economic status. Victimology also includes the victims who come into conflict with the group's objectives; this includes the informant, ex-member or any member who poses a threat to either the leaders control or the groups integrity. A paramilitary method of operation will be employed and could include the wearing of uniforms, the use of training compounds, and the highly organized use of military tactics. There will often be multiple crime scenes: confrontation site, death scene and body disposal burial site. The calling card / signature of the group may be left at the scene. The forensics will often reveal the calling card or signature aspect of the group and can include bombings, firearms, and weapons of mass destruction or blunt force trauma from personal weapons. The purpose of this type of ritual homicide is to overthrow the existing religious / political order to achieve political and religious goals.[\(11\)](#)

Al-Qaeda network beheadings meet all of these criteria. The following is an analysis of some of the major crime scene indicators in the beheading videos.

Ritual / Signature

There are distinct commonalities in all the beheading videos that are obviously indicative of repetitive ritualistic behavior, referred to as the signature aspect of the crime. The most prevalent recurrent pattern includes some or all of the following: reading of offenses (transgressions), confession, judgment, last words, execution, praising of the deity, written or verbal statement of demands. Dependant upon the group, symbolic patterns include; the space is decorated with banners that identify the name and emblem of the group, the participants are dressed alike in military type uniforms consisting of black clothing, including ski masks or head scarves covering their faces, weapons are displayed, the victim (hostage) typically has his hands tied behind his back, his feet bound, and is placed on the floor in front of the group. American and some other victims are dressed in the orange jumpsuits of the type worn by detainees in U.S. prisons, including the detention center at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. The ritual pattern begins with a statement from the executioner reciting the reason for the death sentence, which usually alludes to current political events, is teeming with religious language justifying the violence and praise for Allah, and often contains future threats. The victim then has the opportunity for last words; sometimes he confesses to being a spy or whatever the group has coerced him into confessing, or pleads with the audience to acquiesce to the kidnapers' demands and secure his release. At this point the head is cut off with a small knife by the leader, sometimes while other participants hold the victim down; the head is then held in the air by the hair and placed on the victim's back to shouts of Allahu Akbar, the battle cry of the mujahideen. Mutilated bodies are later found in various outdoor public areas, sometimes together with the head and occasionally in a separate location from the head.

The function of ritual is very diverse; but one of the more common purposes of ritual, particularly in warrior traditions, is initiation. The male initiation rite is a rite of passage to transform boys into strong, fierce warriors. Analysis of the dates of the beheadings shows that they escalate and cluster at certain times. The obvious interpretation of the dates of executions is that the beheadings are a response to specific attacks by U.S. forces and to political events such as the interim Iraqi government taking over. However, another interpretation of the quantity and timing of the beheadings is that they constitute initiation into the al-Qaeda organization. Initiation and endurance rituals in warrior cultures are often violent and always involve blood. Killing an enemy warrior is a very common method of initiation. Cutting someone's head off or even witnessing the violence without recoiling requires a certain form of discipline, and would constitute a method of pledging allegiance to a fraternal organization. Another aspect of the ritual is that when everyone participates, it creates a bond sealed in blood that makes the unit that much more united. The video and subsequent media attention bonds the individual terrorist groups to the larger al-Qaeda network, and a rivalry begins over who can behead the most enemies as a method of acquiring status within the organization. Interestingly, al-Zarqawi formally merged with Usama Bin Ladin's al-Qaeda in October 2004, soon after several highly publicized beheadings. On the day that Al-Zarqawi announced his alliance, an Islamist website posted a message in which al-Zarqawi took credit for decapitating 11 Iraqi Police and National Guardsmen. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was successfully initiated and earned his status in the Al-Qaeda network with the heads of hostages and a high body count from suicide bombings.

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Victimology

For the Mujahideen warrior victimology is obvious: because the victim represents the antithesis of the offender's beliefs, victimology corresponds directly with Islamist doctrine. It became evident from a review of statements made by the perpetrators in the videos, on terrorist web sites, and by former hostages that the nationality and religion of the victim is one of the most significant factors in influencing the degree and method of violence. Nationality and religion determined whether the hostages would be released, negotiated for, executed by gunshot, beheaded, or beheaded on video. Hostages from countries that are part of the Coalition Forces are executed as Crusader enemies of Islam; Americans are deemed valuable hostages that will attract the most attention and are typically beheaded and videotaped. Many of the hostages that have been released were from countries that were either not part of the coalition forces, whose government paid the terrorist ransom, or who eventually withdrew their troops from Iraq. The religion of the victim is also a crucial factor in the selection of who is beheaded. The justification for killing Jewish and Christian hostages is obvious, given their status as the original enemies of Islam; this is what Usama bin Laden is referring to when he called upon the Mujahideen to fight the "Crusader-Zionist alliance" in his *fatwa* titled "Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders." Muslim victims are

persons viewed as collaborating with the Americans; the justification is that they are apostates and blasphemers. Apostates (*Murtad*) are Muslims who abandon their religious faith, which is one of the most serious transgressions under Islamic law. Blasphemy (*Kufr*) is defined as a denial of any of the essential principles of Islam. For Islamists a Muslim convicted of blasphemy or who is deemed an apostate is sentenced to death.

The beheading videos and terrorist statements make consistent references to Muslims who support the coalition forces in any manner, particularly those who belong to the new Iraqi Police or National Guard. A typical example is a statement posted on the web site of the Al Qaeda-linked Army of Ansar al-Sunna on November 3, 2004, showing the beheading of what they called "a senior Iraqi army officer" in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. "Your mujahedeen brothers in Mosul managed to capture a senior officer in the Iraqi army, the apostate Major Hussein Shanun." The statement was posted along with the video and photos showing the victim after he was decapitated with his head placed on his back. "At the behest of his American masters (Shanun) took part, along with his soldiers, in several operations against the mujahedeen in Mosul." The statement said the "despicable officer confessed to his actions" and warned that anyone who "dares back the crusader occupation forces" would meet the same fate.[\(12\)](#)

The beheading videos and terrorist statements have also made specific references to the religion of the victims. Al-Zarqawi's group posted a message on its Web site that suggested the killing of South Korean national Kim Sun-il was linked to Kim's religion. "We have killed an infidel who tried to propagate Christianity in Iraq," the message read. "This infidel studied theology and was preparing to become a missionary in the Islamic world." In the message, the terrorist group also accused Kim's employer, Cana General Trading Co., of Christian affiliations, attacking its policy of donating 10 percent of its profits to missionary work.[\(13\)](#) The victim's religion is also referenced in the title of the videotape of the murder of American Daniel Pearl. The title reads "The Slaughter of the Spy-Journalist, the Jew Daniel Pearl." Judaism, Christianity, and Western democracy historically and ideologically have constituted a serious threat to fundamental Islamic beliefs, hence the significance of the nationality and religion of the beheading victims. Formally declaring the victims as infidels, apostates, and pagan enemies of Islam during the beheading ceremony is theologically required to justify the ritual murder.

Weapon

In most of the videos, the captives are decapitated with an 8-10 inch serrated knife. The person is held down while the knife is used in a slicing fashion, cutting the front of the victim's neck first, followed by a combination of circular and sawing motions. A ceremonial knife is the weapon of choice for ritual murder; it is symbolically significant for the leader to draw blood from the victim. Across cultures, the role of the sacrificer is an honored and privileged position and maintains status within the group. In this case the sacrificer is an

enforcer, a holy warrior implementing Allah's law. The terrorists are ritually required to cut the necks of their enemies as proscribed in the Quran, thus transforming the execution into a holy rite.

The use of the knife is also symbolic of the sword which is a prominent symbol of warrior cultures in general and of Islam in particular. "The sword was originally the primary symbol of an Arab fighter until the introduction of the rifle. Khalid ibn Walid, the great general of the Muslim armies in the Prophet Muhammad's era, was called the Sword of God (Sayfullah) just as tribes often referred to themselves as the "sword" of their leader." (14) The sword is also a prominent symbol in the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad is quoted as saying, "The sword is the key of heaven and hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of Allah, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months of fasting or prayer: whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven, and at the day of judgment his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubim." (15) The Prophet Muhammad also had a collection of swords each with their own name and history. (Chart of the Prophet Muhammad's Swords: http://www.usna.edu/Users/humss/bwheeler/swords/index_of_swords.html) In addition, "To commemorate their warrior heritage, the Omani and Saudi flags feature two curved swords." (16) Swords appear in some of the emblems of Islamic terrorist groups including Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC).

Most significantly, Quranic verses of war that sanction fighting against persecution are called the "Sword verses." The Sword Verses command Muslims to slay pagans, hostile Jews, Christians, and Arab polytheists who fought against Muhammad. The Sword verses are frequently used by religious terrorists to legitimate unconditional warfare against unbelievers, which is referred to as Jihad-e-asghar or Jihad of the sword. The symbolism of reciting offenses that declare the victim to be an infidel or apostate followed by group participation in the ritual cutting off of the head with a knife is the contemporary manifestation of Jihad of the Sword.

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Body Disposition / Mutilation

The most obvious signature of the al-Qaeda network beheadings is found in the mutilation and disposition of the body. This article does not include decapitations that occurred postmortem—for example, in July 2005 Taliban gunmen ambushed an Afghani border patrol, killing ten soldiers and afterward beheading their bodies. That is also indicative of a ritual signature but a different type. The focus of this paper is the ritual act of beheading, hence in all case studies the direct cause of death is from injuries resulting from decapitation. There are distinct commonalities in all of the Al-Qaeda beheading rituals with mutilations specific to certain groups. I have identified three distinct group signatures. Tanzim Qa'idat Al-Jihad

in Bilad al-Rafidayn, Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and Fedayeen Saddam. There are many other Islamist groups in Iraq and other countries who perform beheadings, as evidenced in the above charts; however, the length of this article and the scope of investigations into these crimes does not allow for an in-depth description of each group. Hopefully, the forensic and religious observations in this paper will inspire much needed further research into this subject.

What I have identified and refer to as the classic al-Qaeda forensic beheading signature is found in Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group and entails the following: binding the victim, a ritual performance with perpetrators in uniforms, recitation by both victim and perpetrators, execution with group participation where members hold the victim down while his neck is slowly sawed off with a relatively small knife, holding the severed head up by the hair. Body positioning involves staging; after the head is severed from the body the torso is placed on its stomach and the head is placed in the center of the back. This is also evident in other Iraqi insurgent groups, particularly groups that have splintered off from al-Zarqawi's or who share members. The al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya beheading signature entails: binding the victim, slitting the throat with a knife, and mutilation involving the removal of Coptic cross tattoos from victims. The Fedayeen Saddam beheading signature is much more traditional and consists of group participation in a public ritual performance, perpetrators in uniforms, recitation of offenses by the perpetrator, execution by a designated individual who is skilled with a sword; the victim is bound, placed on his knees, and propped over some kind of support where the neck is exposed, the head is hacked off with one cut of the sword, the severed head is held by the hair and publicly displayed. Body positioning involves staging with the head being placed on the victim's back. Female victims were beheaded in a similar manner; however, their heads were hung outside their homes for several days. The following are more detailed descriptions of the three groups' activities, citing specific cases of torture, mutilation, and ritual murder.

Tanzim Qa'idat Al-Jihad in Bilad al-Rafidayn Beheading Signature

The classic Al-Qaeda beheading signature is most evident in Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group Tanzim Qa'idat Al-Jihad in Bilad al-Rafidayn (Organization of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers) also known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (Arabic: تنظيم القاعدة في بلاد الرافدين, Al-Qaa'eda fi Bilaad'ir-Raafidee, al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia) and the al-Zarqawi Network. "Before September, 2004 the group was called Jama'at at-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Arabic: جماعة التوحيد والجهاد تنظيم القاعدة, Monotheism and Holy War Movement) more commonly referred to as Unity and Jihad group. The group's name, which is usually abbreviated as JTJ, purposefully contrasts the strict monotheism of Islam with what it sees as the polytheism of the Christian Trinity. The name change is significant as it uses the archaic name of Iraq used in the Islamic Caliphate era."⁽¹⁷⁾ The group adopted its current name after an important formal merger with Usama bin Laden's al-Qaeda. Al-Zarqawi announced the merger in October 2004, and in December, bin Laden endorsed al-Zarqawi as his official emissary in Iraq. In a

statement posted to an Islamic forum website on October 17, 2004, the militant group said: "We deliver to the nation the news that both Jama'at Al-Tawhid wa Al-Jihad's Amir [al-Zarqawi] and soldiers have pledged allegiance to the sheikh of the mujahideen, Usama bin Laden, and that they will follow his orders in jihad for the sake of God so there will be no more tumult or oppression, and justice and faith in God will prevail." The statement called on the "youth of this nation" to join al-Zarqawi's followers under the banner of Al-Qaeda. Jama'at Al-Tawhid wa Al-Jihad later released a statement claiming it has officially joined the Al-Qaeda terrorist network, and Al-Arabiya television broadcast a statement by the group identifying itself as Tanzim Qa'idat Al-Jihad in Bilad al-Rafidayn (Organization of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers). Iraq is commonly known as the land of the two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates." (18)

The Jordanian Palestinian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaylah, a.k.a. Abu Ahmad, Abu Azraq) established cells in Iraq soon after the commencement of Operation Iraqi Freedom, formalizing his group in April 2004 to bring together jihadists and other insurgents in Iraq fighting against US and Coalition forces. Al-Zarqawi and his group helped finance, recruit, transport, and train Sunni Islamic extremists for the Iraqi resistance. The immediate goal of Tanzim Qa'idat Al-Jihad in Bilad al-Rafidayn is to expel the Coalition through a campaign of bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, and intimidation, and establish an Islamic state in Iraq. Their long-term goal is to proliferate jihad from Iraq into "Greater Syria," that is, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan.(19)

Al-Zarqawi's group claimed credit for a number of attacks targeting Coalition and Iraqi forces, as well as civilians. Activities that are relevant to this paper include kidnapping, beheadings, and targeted assassinations to intimidate Iraqis and third-country nationals working in Iraq as civilian contractors. Tanzim Qa'idat Al-Jihad in Bilad al-Rafidayn is responsible for numerous beheadings and releasing videotapes of the violence. In April, an American civilian, Nick Berg, was kidnapped and later beheaded. One month later, a video of his beheading was posted on an al-Qaeda-associated website. Analysts believe that al-Zarqawi himself killed the American as well as a Korean hostage, Kim Sun-il, kidnapped in June. Al-Zarqawi took direct credit for the September kidnapping and murder of two American civilians, Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong, and later their British engineer co-worker, Kenneth Bigley, and the October murder of Japanese citizen Shoshei Koda.(20) There have been numerous subsequent beheadings by al-Zarqawi's group and other Islamist insurgent groups in Iraq.

The Nick Berg beheading video was the first highly publicized ritual murder and had the desired shocking effect on the American public. At present most people are either unaware of the large number of beheadings that followed Berg's, or as with other forms of violence, have simply become desensitized to them. The Nick Berg video begins with a written title,

and than Berg is seen sitting in a chair wearing an orange jumpsuit. He identifies himself, "My name is Nick Berg, my father's name is Michael, my mother's name is Susan. I have a brother and sister, David and Sarah. I live in West Chester, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia." The next scene depicts Berg with hands bound behind his back and feet bound sitting on the floor in front of five men wearing ski masks and head scarves. A lengthy statement is read aloud from white sheets of paper by the man in the center (al-Zarqawi), standing directly behind Berg. After the statement is read al-Zarqawi removes a knife appearing to have an eight to ten inch blade from under his garments in his chest area with his right hand and swiftly places his left hand on top of Berg's head, grabbing his hair. Nick Berg is pushed onto his left side by al-Zarqawi, assisted by the unidentified individual wearing a white hood/mask combination. Pushed onto his left side, Berg has his legs bent at the knees and raised toward his chest with his arms still tied behind his back. At this point, the video goes out of focus; as it comes back into focus, al-Zarqawi uses the knife to cut the throat of Nick Berg, beginning at the area near his left carotid artery. Almost immediately, blood is seen pouring onto the floor from the wound caused by the incision. The sound of Nick Berg screaming in pain and agony goes on for a few seconds. Al-Zarqawi is shown using the knife in a slicing fashion, cutting the front of the neck first, followed by a combination of circular and sawing motions with the knife around his neck while still holding Berg by the hair. While al-Zarqawi sawed off Berg's head, the other men shouted: Allahu Akbar! The tape appears to stop at an edit point or video stoppage where the individual wearing the white hood and previously standing on the right side of al-Zarqawi is now using the knife in a saw-like manner, holding the knife in his right hand while holding Nick Berg's hair with his left hand. The individual wearing the white hood ultimately detaches the head from his body and holds the head outward in his left hand, still holding the knife in his right. Following this series of frames, the video appears to jump frames (possibly due to uploading the video to a computer), at which time Nick Berg's head is shown completely detached and the primary object on the screen.[\(21\)](#) The last image in the video, depending on which version you obtain, depicts Nick Berg's head placed on the middle of his back.

In addition to the obvious political symbolism of the masked men in recognizable terrorist uniforms, the primary motive for this ritual murder is revealed in the declaration read in the video. News reports summarized and Westernized significant aspects of the wording and the religious language was literally lost in the translation. A transcript of the statement read by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi on the video includes the following language; "Praise to Allah who honored Islam with His support, humiliated the infidels with His power, controlled everything with His Command, and tricked the infidels. Prayers and peace be upon the one that raised the banner of Islam with his sword. . . . Has the time not come for you to lift the sword, which the master of the Messengers was sent with? . . . The Prophet, the master of the merciful has ordered to cut off the heads of some of the prisoners of Badr in patience. He is our example and a good role model."[\(22\)](#) This was not simply a political speech or terrorist threat, it was a religious decree. It is written in the same language as Usama bin

Laden's *fatwa*, using expressions that religiously justify the violence and align the participants with the original mujahideen. The result of the suppression of the sacred language in the media is a secularization of the most dangerous aspect of the war on terrorism, the religious imperative to kill us. An excellent example of the difference between the press reports and the actual language can be viewed at TrackingTerrorism.com news (<http://www.trackingterrorism.com/news/print.asp?artid=458>).

One of the most significant aspects in the Nicolas Berg video, besides the actual violence, is that al-Zarqawi himself wielded the knife; this not only sent a message to the American public but also sent a message to Jihadists around the world. In warrior cultures the leader of the group would never ask his men to do anything he was not prepared to do himself, particularly a violent and dangerous act. Any soldier who aspired to the title of a great fighter and leader always led his men into battle. Performing the execution himself was a method of gaining respect and admiration while simultaneously pledging his allegiance to al-Qaeda. It was of such importance that the audience be aware of the fact that al-Zarqawi personally performed the execution that it was not only stated in the title of the video "Sheikh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi slaughters an American infidel with his own hands" but emphasized again at the end of the read statement, which was signed Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, Prince of Al Tawhid group and jihad, Iraq, 22 Rabi I 1425 (May 11, 2004). There was initially some question of whether al-Zarqawi actually participated in the execution, but the video was immediately authenticated by the intelligence community after they conducted a technical analysis of the tape. Culturally there was no doubt that al-Zarqawi's participation was symbolically required; it would have been dishonorable to take credit for another warrior's kill. Through this televised ritual murder, al-Zarqawi firmly established his leadership and broadcast a rallying call that established beheading as the latest tactic of war. Unfortunately, his strategy was very successful, as evidenced by the dozens of beheadings that followed. That is why the forensic signature in al-Zarqawi's beheadings appears in so many subsequent groups; they are emulating their leader. It is also the reason for designating his group's pattern of ritual murder as the classic al Qaeda beheading signature. Although Daniel Pearl had been beheaded two years earlier, it was not publicized, hence had no strategic value. Nick Berg's beheading and its subsequent publicity was a successful method of aligning the entire jihadist movement with the Prophet Muhammad and the original mujahideen.

The symbolism and staging were more prominent in subsequent beheading videos after the Mujahideen had had time to perfect their rituals. The next video by al-Zarqawi's group depicted the beheading of South Korean Kim Sun-il; in this ritual the group has now hung a banner with their name in the background. Kim Sun-il is blindfolded; unlike Berg, Kim Sun-il is fluent in Arabic and understands the true nature of the situation, so he pleads for mercy and repeatedly begs for his life. Another terrorist participant reads the religious justification for the execution which is basically that Kim Sun-il is a Christian missionary. In the video Al-Zarqawi, who now wears his ritual knife prominently on his belt, proudly wields it before it

is used to cut off Kim Sun-ill's head. After he is decapitated in the same manner as Berg, Kim's head is held by his hair, blood dripping onto his now severed and mutilated body. One of the terrorists chants "Allah Akbar" as the men holding Kim's head return the chanting "Allah Akbar," swinging Kim's decapitated head before them. They shout "Allah Akbar" another fourteen times. The video ends with music softly playing an Islamic prayer.

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The next highly publicized beheadings by al-Zarqawi's group were Americans Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong, and Briton Kenneth Bigley. By this time the Al-Qaeda in Iraq signature is now firmly established; a ritual performance with perpetrators in uniforms, recitation by both victim and perpetrators, execution with group participation where members hold the victim down while his neck is slowly sawed off, holding the severed head up by the hair, praising Allah, and placing the severed head on the center of the back. Subsequent beheadings have elements that occasionally differ, for example, victims may not wear the orange jumpsuit, some are blindfolded while others are not, and the beheading of Japanese hostage Shosei Koda in Iraq occurred while he was lying on top of a U.S. flag.

The religious justification is evident in every beheading. The very fact that these executions are ritualized and that the executioners praise Allah throughout is what distinguishes them from common acts of barbarism. There would be no honor in simply cutting off someone's head for the sake of terrorizing your enemies; the ritual characteristics have to be present to be theologically and communally sanctioned. To situate this in the realm of the sacred as opposed to a mob killing it is ritually required that each person participate in the religious ritual, hence, the communal chanting of Allah Akbar while the victim is being beheaded. Finally, all of the participants in the beheading ritual have to be authentic true believers, who will kill and die for their religion; this is the very reason they identify themselves as soldiers of God. These beheadings are nothing less than the sacred blood rituals of the Mujahideen.

al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya Beheading Signature

On January 14, 2005 in Jersey City, New Jersey, police discovered the bodies of Hossam Armanious, his wife Amal Garas, and their daughters, fifteen year old Sylvia and eight year old Monica, murdered in their home in a crime that has been dubbed "Jihad in Jersey City." "The family was bound, gagged and tortured, before their throats were slit in accord with the instructions for executing nonbelievers, as detailed in the Quran: (47:4) "Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers, smite at their necks; At length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly [on them].""(23) The victims were Coptic Christians, an Egyptian sect of Christianity despised by fundamentalist Muslims for their refusal to convert to Islam. The Coptic Church, whose presence in Egypt goes back nearly 2,000 years, has experienced persecution off and on over the centuries, intensifying in the last ten years. The

Coptic Church is an independent church that broke away from the Byzantine Orthodox in the 6th century. Coptic Christianity was the majority religion in Egypt until at least the 9th century, when it was overtaken by Islam brought by Arab conquerors. Today Coptic Christians are Egypt's largest religious minority, constituting at least ten percent of the population. Exposed to continuous and subtle pressures, their numbers are dwindling due to severe religious discrimination. There is a web site that keeps track of their struggle titled Copts.com, Home of the persecuted Copts in Egypt, on which the Armanious family is listed under the section on Coptic Martyrs (<http://www.copts.net/links.asp>).

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Arabic: الجماعة الإسلامية) (Arabic for "the Islamic Group"; also transliterated Gamaat Islamiya, Jamaat al Islamiya, al-Jamā'ah al-Islāmiyah, etc.) is Egypt's largest terrorist group dedicated to the overthrow of the Egyptian government and replacing it with an Islamic state. It is also one of the original members of the al-Qaeda network and has been responsible for targeting and murdering Coptic Christians in Egypt. The group conducted a number of attacks on Egyptian security forces, government officials in Egypt, Coptic Christians, and other perceived Egyptian "opponents of Islam" in an insurgency that has killed 1,200 people since the early 1990s. To escape Islamic persecution many Coptic Christians emigrated to the United States where several hundred thousand now live, mostly in New Jersey, New York, and California. Jersey City has a population of both Copts and Muslims, and a significant connection to al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Prior to this incident, Jersey City had already gained "the nickname 'Terror City' because of its history of Islamic extremist activity. Jersey City gained this reputation after the first bombing of the World Trade Center, on February 26, 1993, which was carried out by a local terrorist cell. The van used in the attack was rented in Jersey City, the bomb was built in several Jersey City apartments, and the perpetrators frequented the Jersey City mosque presided over by Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman." (24) Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the spiritual leader of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, is currently serving a life sentence for seditious conspiracy for planning to blow up New York landmarks. It was suggested that one motive for the Armanious killings was that a relative of the victims had helped prosecutors in their case against lawyer Lynne Stewart, currently on trial in Manhattan for allegedly smuggling *fatwas* written by her imprisoned client, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, to his followers in al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Some of the *fatwas* resulted in attacks in Egypt.

However, the motive that was cited in most media reports was the fact that Armanious was active in Internet chat rooms and was well known for expressing his Coptic beliefs and engaging in heated debates with Muslims on the Web site PalTalk.com. Pal Talk is an internet chat service that attracts up to three million users a month; some Arabic-speaking users of Pal Talk have reported that contentious debates between Christians and Muslims are common in certain chat rooms. Armanious had a reputation for being one of the most outspoken Egyptian Christians. "According to several reports, Armanious boldly proclaimed his faith on Internet chat rooms and invited Muslims to believe in Christ, and had been doing so for about five years. His intrepid declarations drew numerous threats via the

website. When one Muslim told him to “shut up,” Armanious allegedly replied, “I can say whatever I want. I live in America.”(25) Shortly before the murders one of the internet messages read, “You’d better stop this bullshit or we are going to track you down like a chicken and kill you,”(26) a Middle Eastern reference to slitting the throat. In an important *New York Sun* article, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross uncovered that the Armanious family was just one of a number of Christians systematically tracked by a radical Islamic website because they debate Muslims on PalTalk.com. “The password-protected Arabic Web site, at the address www.barsomyat.com, features pictures and information about Christians who have been particularly active in debating Muslims on Pal Talk. . . . Barsomyat.com features not only photographs of the targeted Christians, but also attempts to track down their addresses. . . . One user posted a photograph of Hossam Armanious and wrote, “This is a picture of the filthy dog, curser of Muhammad, and a photo of his filthy wife, curser of Muhammad. They got what they deserved for their actions in America.”(27) Fittingly, the Islamic website’s banner displays a lamb with its throat being slit and a crucifix crossed out by a violent red “X.” The main heading, in Arabic, says “Christians: Revealing the Truth Behind Our Belief.” The significance of this crime in reference to this article is that detailed reports of the mutilations suggest a beheading signature specific to al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya. The wounds are based on the same Quranic scriptures as other al-Qaeda beheadings and refer to the Islamic legal imperative to kill those who are deemed blasphemers. The considerable amount of time the perpetrators spent in the house, the extent of mutilation and torture, multiple stab wounds in all of the bodies, the cutting of all of their throats, and the symbolism of the injuries is distinctly indicative of ritual murder. The family was bound and silenced with duct tape that may or may not have been found inside the house. “Each of the parents had their throats slit, with three ‘drilled’ or ‘twisted’ holes about the size of a thumb below the slit. The daughters had two similar holes inflicted below the slits in their throats.”(28)Sylvia, who would have turned 16 the next day, was especially brutalized. The girl’s throat was not only slit, but she was stabbed repeatedly in the chest and wrist where she had a tattoo of a Coptic cross. Cross tattoos on other family members were not defaced but Monica’s wrists were cut. Sylvia, a young, outspoken devout Christian, may have been subjected to the worst torture for not representing the values of an appropriately modest Muslim young woman practicing Hijab (dressing modestly).

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Although the authorities tried to relegate this crime to a savage isolated incident, the forensic evidence is characteristic of ritual murders of Coptic Christians in Egypt perpetrated by al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya. After viewing the bodies at the funeral home, relatives said that “the way the four family members were bound and gagged and the way their throats were slit with holes carved is similar to executions that are shown on al-Jazeera. The American public is not aware of this because the details of the executions are not often described in news accounts.”(29) Another report read, “Family members are loath to blame Muslim extremists for the murders,” but point out “the details of the killings are

similar to murders perpetrated by extremists in Egypt, where Coptic Christians have been bound, gagged and had their throats slit.”(30)

Throughout the investigation, authorities claimed that they thought the primary motive for the murders was robbery. The Coptic community continuously argued that due to political pressure the religious aspect was not thoroughly pursued. Although there was some evidence of robbery, there were many inconsistencies, such as large amounts of jewelry that remained untouched. Nevertheless, on March 4, 2004, two former convicts were charged with binding, gagging and cutting the throats of the Armanious family, one of whom had previously rented an upstairs apartment from the family. Hudson County Prosecutor Edward De Fazio emphasized that the motive for the murders was robbery and provided an incredibly detailed account of the crime. In December 2005, both men were formerly arraigned on murder charges; prosecutors have decided to request the death penalty, and as of this writing no date has been set for the trial. The case is being described as a botched robbery gone wrong. Another way of interpreting the crime is to consider that the primary motive was ritual murder as proscribed by Quranic law and that the murders were staged to look like a robbery. It is not known if this was investigated as a contract killing. It is certainly plausible that authorities would not want the general public to know that an entire family was beheaded in their home by Islamic terrorists in an American city for fear of widespread panic. Yet this does not negate the fact that Coptic Christians have been previously mutilated in this manner in Egypt by the Islamist terrorist group Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Regardless of the motive of this particular case, it is significant to note that the community of Coptic Christians that fled Egypt to avoid violent persecution immediately recognized the characteristics of Islamist ritual murder.

Fedayeen Saddam Beheading Signature

Fedayeen (from Arabic *fidā'ī*, plural *fidā'iyīn* فِدَائِيّين, “one who is ready to sacrifice his life for the cause”) describes several distinct, primarily Arab groups at different times in history. *Fedayeen* originally referred to an Islamic group active from the 8th to the 14th century known as the *Hashshashin* or Assassins.(31) They were a religious sect of Ismaili Muslims from the Nizari sub-sect with a militant basis, thought to be active as a mystic secret society.(32) In modern times Fedayeen are more commonly associated with Armed Palestinian militias that were based in Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, consisting of refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. In the 1960s the armed wing of the Palestine Liberation Organization was known as the Fedayeen and continued to lead violent raids into Israeli territory. In Iran the Fedayeen refers to a Marxist-Islamist radical guerrilla group operating between 1971 and 1983, based in Tehran, that carried out a number of political assassinations in the struggle that culminated in the Iranian Revolution of 1979.(33) The Fedayeen that are relevant to this article are a paramilitary militia founded by Saddam Husein's son Uday that was directed against perceived domestic agitators and opponents of the Al-Baath regime and that fought against the Coalition Forces in Iraq after Saddam's

overthrow in 2003. Referred to as Fedayeen Saddam (also known as Saddam's Men of Sacrifice, Saddam's Martyrs, Fidayi Saddam, Fedayeen Saddam Militia, and Iraqi Fedayeen), the name was chosen to imply a connection to their Palestinian predecessors.

Fedayeen Saddam's ideology is primarily paramilitary rather than religious; however, their violence, although secular, has ritual characteristics and is evocative of Islamist symbolism. The most obvious allusion to ritual violence is that Fedayeen Saddam loosely translates as Saddam's "Men of Sacrifice," alluding to the original religious sect. The Fedayeen Saddam included a special unit known as the death squadron, whose masked members committed torture and executions. There were numerous news reports attempting to link Saddam's Fedayeen to al-Qaeda, which would have significant repercussions on the debate over the justification for the Iraq War. Prior to the war in Iraq, the Fedayeen's ideology was primarily a form of secular nationalism or more accurately a forced "cult of Saddam"; however, in their shared objective to purge the country of Americans, their goals coincided with the Mujahideen. "The ideology of many of the fighters is described as 'post-Saddam' and is a simple combination of Islamism and nationalism, covering a wide spectrum of Muslims' viewpoints that converge on the common goal of ending U.S. military rule inside the country. The U.S. occupation is an assault on both Islam and the entire Arab World, and is therefore viewed as something that must be resisted. . . . A number of the former Saddam Fedayeen were reportedly to have converted quickly to the Islamic agenda, becoming members of active Islamic resistance groups." (34)

Several videotapes found in Iraq demonstrated the brutality of the former Iraqi regime and the torture administered by the Fedayeen Saddam. In 2004 the Defense Department made available an edited version of several different torture videos discovered after the regime's collapse. The tape contained graphic depictions of Fedayeen Saddam members and Republican Guard troops breaking arms and wrists with heavy sticks, throwing people off a high building, chopping off fingers, cutting out tongues, ritualized mutilations, amputations, lashings, and a beheading. (For a complete report on the violence perpetrated under Saddam's reign, view the U.S. Department of State Report *Iraq: A Population Silenced*, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, December 2002, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/15996.htm>)

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An article published in *The National Review Online* by Nick Schulz entitled "Seeing, and Believing: The torture tapes the media are ignoring" provides graphic descriptions of the ritual violence perpetrated by the Fedayeen Saddam:

The clip opens amid Saddam Fedayeen chanting loudly: "With blood and spirit we will redeem you Saddam." The Fedayeen stand barking and clapping in a courtyard. A blindfolded prisoner, forced to his knees and held in position has his arm outstretched

before him along a low concrete wall. A masked member of the Fedayeen raises high a three-foot-long blade and ferociously slams down on the man's hand, slicing through his fingertips. The victim is wailing, howling, screaming in agony. The swordsman-torturer, not sufficiently satisfied with his first effort, raises the sword again and drives down once more on the man's immobile hand. This time he severs the fingers closer to the knuckles . . . The camera then turns to the assembled Fedayeen as they continue rhythmically chanting. . . .

"In the name of Allah the merciful," intones the beret-topped loyalist to Saddam's [supposed] "secular" regime in the next segment. He introduces to the viewer and the assembled butcher squad to another prisoner. The loyalist-narrator reads from the Koran, Sura 2:179: "And there is a saving of life for you in the Law of Equality in punishment. O men of understanding, that you may become the pious." "The Fedayeen, Saddin Ezzedin al-Arousi," he goes on, "was charged with a special mission in which he betrayed his duty in the mission. The head of the Fedayeen has ordered the following: He is expelled from Fedayeen work and his arms are to be broken in front of his unit. Tarik Juman will personally undertake the breaking of his arms. Thank you." The camera jumps to al-Arousi sitting with one arm tied behind him as his right arm is extended out to his side. His right elbow rests on a cinderblock and his right fist is supported by another cinderblock. Nothing supports his forearm in between. While a Fedayeen holds the prisoner's elbow in place, Tarik Juman crashes a three-inch-thick pipe down on his old compatriot's forearm, bending the forearm in a 'V' shape and shattering the bones within. This procedure is repeated for his left arm as well.

In another clip a hooded and blindfolded prisoner is led to a room where he is forced to kneel, hands tied behind his back. Another man sits before the prisoner with thick metal tweezers and a scalpel. With his left hand he grabs the tip of the prisoner's tongue with the tweezers and pulls it forward from his head. With the scalpel in his other hand he slices through the prisoner's tongue, cutting it out of his mouth and then dropping it on the floor. This ritual is repeated for more prisoners who are lined up, squatting in a row like parts on an assembly line waiting for processing.

In the final clip we see a blindfolded prisoner being led to his fate as the assembled men around him sing "Happy Birthday, long live the leader, eternal gift to the people." Again with arms tied behind his back he is shoved to the ground, bent over stuffed burlap sacks. A black-clad Fedayeen loosens the prisoner's shirt exposing his back and neck, while another stands two feet from him holding a long silver blade at its curved handle. He raises his arms and strikes, hacking the prisoner's head from his body, tumbling it to the ground. He picks up the severed head by the hair and places it ceremoniously on the dead man's back as the camera pans in closer and closer and you can make out the victim's now lifeless and bloodied face.(35)

The ritualized aspects of the video include the Fedayeen rhythmically chanting their loyalty

to Saddam and clapping throughout the torture, the Fedayeen wearing their characteristic ninja-like black uniforms, and group participation in the violence. The religious aspect is evident in the praising of Allah and the recitation of the Quran during the torture of a supposed Fedayeen traitor. Finally the beheading entails ritualized singing and praising of Saddam while the head is cut off with a sword, held up, and then placed on the prisoner's back. Placing the head on the back of the decapitated body is similar to the body disposition of the classic al-Qaeda signature.

Nevertheless, a forensic signature specific to the Fedayeen Saddam emerged during an alleged anti-prostitution campaign in which more than 200 women were publicly beheaded from approximately June 2000 through May 2001. Many of the victims were actually political opponents rather than prostitutes.

Saddam's Fidayi conducted the beheading operations, which took place in two stages. Accompanied by the leaders of the Ba'th party, the Fidayi made a night raid on the district. The latter was gone through with a fine toothcomb to eliminate any hints of revolt and in order to discover any weapons. The population was summoned for the next day at prayer time. They arrived at the stated hour at the home of the victim, who was dragged out in the clothes she is wearing. She was then stretched out on an iron bench, her head hanging down, in front of her children, her family and the whole population of the district. The executioner and his assistants were dressed in brown bearing the logo 'Saddam's Fidayi' and usually did not come from the district or the region. The Feddayi detailed to carry out the beheading took his sword held out by an assistant and cut's the victim's head off. According to the scenes described, the head was exhibited or the body and the head are thrown into black boxes and taken away.[\(36\)](#)

In another report witnesses stated that after the executions, the victims' families are forced to display the heads at their homes for several days. "Many families have been required to display the victim's head on their outside fences for several days. These barbaric acts were carried out in the total absence of any proper judicial procedures and many of the victims were not engaged in prostitution, but were targeted for political reasons."[\(37\)](#)

Even under Saddam's secular reign the Fedayeen beheadings were ritualized and resonated with the historical symbolism of Islam's holy warriors, particularly the use of the sword to decapitate and the public display of the severed head. Already experienced in ritual violence, it is quite possible that former Fedayeen members passed on their considerable knowledge and skills in the public ceremonies of ritual mutilation and beheading when they joined al-Qaeda-linked Iraqi insurgent groups.

Conclusion: 21st-Century Holy War: A Return to the 7th Century

Typically when investigating a ritual murder you only have remnants of the ritual, generally, the body, symbols, sacred objects, etc., which constitutes the crime scene. With enough evidence, experience, and knowledge you are able to analyze the symbolism and identify a corresponding ritual, religion, group, or person. As disturbing as the beheading and torture videos are, they provide an enormous amount of information and constitute documented records of contemporary ritual murders. More significantly, they prove that ritual murder in the name of religion persists in the 21st century. The contemporary existence of ritual murder and human sacrifice has been the subject of many scholarly debates. The argument against the existence of ritual murder is based on a behavioral science theoretical perspective which claims that perpetrators of these crimes are suffering from some form of psychopathology. The argument that attempts to prove that ritual murder occurs is based on a religious cultural perspective that claims that the perpetrators are making rational choices to engage in a violent ritual that is religiously required of that group. I am the leading proponent of the latter argument, and throughout my career have witnessed a pervasive denial of the existence of premeditated group sanctioned ritual murder. That denial was also prevalent when the first beheading video became public.

There were an abundance of conspiracy theories claiming that Nick Berg was not beheaded by Islamic Fundamentalists, that the beheading was forensically inaccurate, and that it was a hoax perpetrated by the CIA to cushion the blow from the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. There has always been an extreme denial of ritual murder in the United States, particularly when it is in the context of New Religious Movements, Fundamental Extremists, or Contemporary Satanism. Ironically, the public has no problem accepting the fact that secular ritual murders are enacted by individual serial killers, in fact there is a fascination with them. This is because serial killers are viewed as aberrations and it is plausible to regard one individual as a psychopath. It is much more difficult to comprehend ritual murder committed by several offenders who are respected by their communities and whose violence is theologically proscribed by their religious leaders. There has always been a movement to deny the existence of satanic ritual murders by attributing heinous homicides to individual psychopaths and claiming that "satanic panics" were perpetrated by the media. The same denial is taking place by designating these beheadings as a form of psychological warfare. We do not want to acknowledge that in the civilized 21st century people are ritually murdered in the name of God or Satan.

It is difficult to remain in denial when there is actual proof of ritual murders and not just remnants of the crime scene. The American public is all too familiar with images of violent murder. What the public cannot accept is the fact that these beheadings are communally sanctioned and religiously justified. These are not violent crimes committed by psychopaths or a form of group hysteria; beheading, suicide bombing, and ritual mutilation are the sacred blood rituals of the Holy warriors of Islam. This is a highly organized community that

consistently and proudly professes their ideology, values, and goals and persistently identifies themselves as Mujahideen. They do not hide the fact that they are fighting a holy war and that they have a religious imperative to kill Christians, Jews, and unbelievers. All we have to do is listen to what they are telling us.

Zarqawi's group, in an Internet video, November 2, 2004, showed the beheading of Japanese hostage Shosei Koda as he lay on a U.S. flag. The group warned Tokyo to withdraw its forces from Iraq or "drown in the hell of the mujahideen" along with "crusader forces." (38) "Let the whole world know that Al Qaeda Organization of Holy War is firm in its jihad." (39) As if the internet and video statements were not enough to communicate their goals, al-Zarqawi's group al-Qaeda in Iraq described its ideology in a manifesto published online in August 2005. "We vow by the name of God that we are determined to destroy the American empire," it says. The e-book includes numerous sections totaling dozens of pages, covering such topics as how the Quran justifies beheadings and why democracy is wrong. Repeatedly, the book calls on Muslims to launch attacks against foreign forces in Iraq and people who cooperate with them. The document calls on Iraqi troops and police to turn their backs on the new elected government. "You who betrayed Muslims and in humiliation became one of many collaborators, a servant under the command of the cross, we ask you to return to your Islamic instinct or cutting your neck will be your only punishment for your treason against your religion and your people." It adds this warning: "Repent or else." The group says its "doctrine and mission are clear and they can be summarized as our agreement to believe in and fight for the religion of God. We believe that those who follow these beliefs and the provisions of faith are true Muslims and anyone who denounces any of these beliefs and conditions is an infidel even if he still claims to be a Muslim." The document warns there will be no end to the insurgency. "The call for jihad goes on until doomsday, whether there is an imam calling for it or not." (40) The language of this war is religious. There are constant references in the secular media to the Quran, religious holidays such as Ramadan, the Prophet Muhammad, the Holy land, Ulema, Madrassas, Sharia, Fatwas, and Jihads.

The media is fond of using the word "desecration," particularly in reference to Islamic beliefs. Desecration is a sacred concept, and although we are supposedly not fighting a holy war, the word "desecration" has made headlines quite frequently; desecration of the Quran, desecration of enemies' bodies, and desecration of mosques. We are hypersensitive to what Muslims hold sacred even when it jeopardizes our national security and puts soldiers' lives at risk. We are not going to be defeated by terrorism but we will be defeated by political correctness unless we stop sugarcoating the sacred nature of this war. There are many people who recognize the implications of this religious threat; however, not one politician will acknowledge that we are involved in a holy war. It would be political suicide to announce that this is not a war on terrorism but a war on Islam.

The Mujahideen's frequent reference to Crusaders and crosses refers to the Crusades, a

series of wars undertaken by European Christians between the 11th and 14th century to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims who took it by force in the 7th century. Richard D. Connerney foreshadowed the problem in an insightful article written one month after 9/11:

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Unlike Christianity or Judaism, Islam's religious history is inseparable from its conquests. . . . The unfortunate truth of the matter is that Muslim violence against the civilian populations of other religions goes right back to the origin of Islam in the 7th century A.D. . . . And Islam is the only religion that has spawned a wandering group of holy warriors, traveling from conflict to conflict fighting the enemies of Islam wherever they see them—in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan . . . In Islam, it is not the religious message that promotes the faith into the halls of political power as in Judaism and Christianity, it is an original state of political and military strength that promotes the religious message. Looked at this way, jihad is not a secondary concept in the development of Islam—something grafted onto the original religious message—rather it is the very origin of Islam, the sine qua non of the faith. This furthermore explains the inability of Islamic culture to adapt and accept ideas of modernity and secular government. It is no secret that representative democracy does not take well in the Muslim world. Liberal democracy of the American variety requires the embrace of tolerance over truth, the relinquishment of any binding central religious truth or ideology in government. . . . Islam has never existed without the Islamic state, the Caliphate, and it would be hard-pressed to do so now. To accomplish a true secularization of the Muslim world would be to ignore the meaning of the Quran at the core—or at least as it is now interpreted by the most passionate believers.[\(41\)](#)

Jihadists consistently claim that they are traditionalists who restrict themselves to literal and traditional interpretations of their sacred texts. The media have perpetuated an erroneous idea that Islamic terrorists have corrupted the peaceful religion of Islam, when in fact it is moderate Muslims who have altered the religion and actually practice a Westernized, watered-down version of Islam. Acknowledging the documented history of the Islamic religion should not be viewed as an insult to Modern Muslims or deemed slanderous of contemporary Islam. Every major religion has evolved and adapted to new technologies and cultural changes. The danger occurs when revisionist history promotes a fallacy that denies the violent origins of the Islamic faith and undermines the public's perception of the seriousness of the threat. The Mujahideen are nothing if not consistent; they practice what they preach, they have retained Islam's original tenets for centuries and their children are raised as true believers. An example of how deeply the violent ideology is inculcated in traditional Islamic culture is a video that appeared on June 26, 2004, showing four Muslim children staging a mock beheading. A website dedicated to Islamic law featured a video presentation of four children acting out a beheading similar to beheadings in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In a scene that appears to mimic the murder of Nicholas Berg, one young boy kneels in front of three other children, in the same manner as the condemned man; the three

children who are armed with toy weapons stand behind him in the same fashion that the terrorists stood over the men prior to their beheading. The middle child takes the role of Berg's executioner, Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, appearing to read a list of demands. The footage culminates with the mock beheading of the child hostage.⁽⁴²⁾ The video appeared on a site operated by Sheikh Abu Hamza al-Masri, a defender of the 9/11 attacks who is on trial in London charged with 16 crimes, including encouraging the murder of non-Muslims and intent to stir up racial hatred. The video demonstrates that the children had detailed knowledge of the ritual and encourages them to take their place as the next generation of Mujahideen. (Children's beheading video http://inhonor.net/videos/uped/fl_video.php?f_num=74500).

True believers are the most dangerous enemies. You may be able to get a soldier to fight and die for his country in battle, but you would be hard pressed to find one willing to strap on C-4 attached to a vest full of nails and ball bearings and commit suicide as a walking claymore mine. Mujahideen are lining up for this duty. These holy warriors are willingly blowing themselves up because they have faith. As a consequence of our Western view of the world and standard behavioral science analysis of crime, we fail to see the nature of these true believers. Al-Qaeda has already won the most important strategic battle; they know their enemy, but we are in denial of their religious imperative to annihilate us. Our worst opponent is not the Mujahideen, it is our refusal to acknowledge that we are fighting soldiers of God in a centuries-old holy war.

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Notes

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