

ZARQAWI



THE NEW FACE OF AL-QAEDA

Jean-Charles Brisard
In collaboration with **Damien Martinez**

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THE NEW FACE OF AL-QAEDA

JEAN-CHARLES BRISARD

WITH DAMIEN MARTINEZ



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To the victims of terrorism and their families



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The author wishes to thank all those without whom this book would not have seen the light of day and expresses his gratitude to the many witnesses who, for personal or professional reasons, prefer to remain anonymous.

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Preface

IF CIRCUMSTANCES ARE WHAT CREATE NOTORIETY FOR TERRORISTS, Iraq is for Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi what Afghanistan was for Osama Bin Laden: violence and more.

Afghanistan and Iraq are two jihadist countries with worldwide stakes. In the former, Bin Laden got himself accepted on the basis of his strategic intelligence; in the latter, Zarqawi predominates by main force. Bin Laden worked out a pragmatic position; Zarqawi advocates chaos as a form of politics. Bin Laden thinks of himself as bringing people together; Zarqawi is exclusionary.

When it comes to violence, Zarqawi brings terrorism back to its original meaning: terror. Always one war behind, he never succeeded in his undertaking until he found in the Iraqi conflict an outlet for his frustrations and complexes and a way to undo his failures. Draped in his personal religious convictions, he has declared war against the world and everyone in it. "I am global," he states, so as not to have to admit that all he can do is depict worst-case scenarios in order to justify his existence, this man who was never more than the shadow of his religious or military masters, starting with Osama Bin Laden, and who was always constrained, be it in the jails of his country or in acts of local terrorism.

The insignificance of his battles explains why, in his lifetime, the most hunted man in the world was just one more name on the endless list of candidates for jihad, and why no one, from Jordan to the United States, noticed the genesis of a criminal. He was let out of prison in the belief that confinement would drive him mad, but what actually happened was that a murderer, already fascinated by death, was uncaged. This blindness went on for a long time: as of the beginning of November 2004 he was still not the subject of a “red notice,” that is, a worldwide arrest warrant issued by Interpol.

Behind the mask of the bloody executioner who terrifies the planet vicariously on the Internet, Zarqawi is a terrorist with an atypical, chaotic career, profiting from the rout of Al-Qaeda to create a personal role for himself and build “his” organization, supplanting the Bin Laden networks in many countries.

Zarqawi became a professional terrorist, a cold-blooded killer, by learning a lot from others. First there was Al-Qaeda, which gave him scope for his ambitions and made him one of its leaders before letting him go off on his own. He took advantage of the weakness of several governments, or their ambiguous position toward terrorism and Islamic radicalism, to establish himself, protect himself, and, today, to extend his influence.

He is neither the tool of Saddam Hussein, as the Americans have claimed, nor the henchman of Osama Bin Laden, but an extremist exceptionally favored by circumstances. Zarqawi does not intend to make a career; what he is trying to do is take revenge on life. He follows no logic other than that of a violence that almost makes the Taliban seem like a band of jokesters in turbans. Zarqawi gives lessons to hell, to use André Malraux’s expression, and others take him as a model. Iraq could be his tomb, but he himself sees it as a stepping stone. It is time to become aware of him.

This is how and why I set myself the task of understanding the personality and acts of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi.

IT ALL BEGAN IN OCTOBER 2002. FOUR MONTHS EARLIER LAWYERS for the families of victims of the attacks of September 11—ten thousand such relatives—had put me in charge of an international investigation aimed at bringing to light and justice the people physically or morally supporting Al-Qaeda. My team had been relentlessly tracking the financial and logistical underpinnings of the terrorist group. From the mountains of Afghanistan to the desert of Yemen, by way of Chechnya and Bosnia-Herzegovina, more than fifteen investigators had been providing daily reports on Islamic terrorism, sometimes to the great displeasure of the official intelligence services.

One morning an investigator of ours in Afghanistan, a man who, several weeks earlier, had asked for automatic pistols, machine guns, and a dozen bodyguards for his protection, handed over to me a box stamped SECRET-AFG and containing a batch of unpublished documents he recovered from the administrative quarters of a training camp that had been deserted after the American offensive. What I found there, all jumbled together, were individual military tags, a handbook for the manufacture of chemical and bacteriological substances, an anti-Western pamphlet, and a practical guide to Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan for new recruits.

This last document, thirty pages in length, was a real treasure trove. It listed useful telephone numbers, detailed the methods of communication and code names to be used, and named people to be contacted, whether religious and military leaders or those responsible for lodgings. In addition to the already identified members of the organization, I noticed a name that had never attracted our attention: Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi. He might have been an insignificant figure had he not had a place on this list, between the military chief of Al-Qaeda and the person in charge of Bin Laden's terrorist training camps.

After several days of research, it turned out that the man called Zarqawi, whose real name was Ahmad Fadil Nazzal Al-Khalayleh, was being sought in Jordan and appeared on a list of Al-Qaeda members who had fled to Iran.

In January 2003, one of my colleagues, whose task is to look into the new leaders of Al-Qaeda, was assigned the AMAZ file and began to seek information about Zarqawi, his intermediaries, and his men. Since that time, over ten thousand pages of documents have been gathered, emanating from the judicial, police, and intelligence services of more than ten countries ascertaining the doings of the “Zarqawi network.” Over one hundred witnesses have been questioned, including not only magistrates and members of the police and intelligence services, but also relatives and close associates of Zarqawi, in order to define the nature of this man’s career and the reality of his network. Over ten trips to the Middle East, especially to Jordan, were required to gather the elements of the investigation presented in this book. Most are unpublished, and some have had to be expurgated so as not to harm ongoing governmental investigations into the man who has become the world’s most wanted fugitive.

PART I

Genesis of a Terrorist

Ambition for which one has no talent is a crime.

—RENÉ DE CHATEAUBRIAND

CHAPTER 1

Zarqa and the Zarqawi Tribe

THE IMAGE WENT AROUND THE WORLD. ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1970, two airplanes, one from Swissair and the other from TWA, were hijacked and forced to land at the so-called “Revolutionary” airport, a disused military facility at Zarqa, in Jordan. Three days later, a British plane was diverted to this same airport. Once the passengers were let go, two Palestinian terrorists, Wadi Haddad and Layla Khalid, blew up the cabins. This first dramatic gesture on the part of the PFLP¹ triggered the onset of Black September, the fierce repression undertaken by King Hussein against the Palestinian fedayeen who had taken refuge in Jordan.

Unprecedented and spectacular, this act of piracy came as a shock to international opinion. The filmed images of the dynamited planes, the first of their kind, lent this view of terror unexpected impact. From now on, the most skillful terrorists would make use of the media to disseminate their message of death. The messages evolved over time, ending, thirty years later, in images of barbarous cruelty broadcast over the new digital channels.

In Zarqa, in 1970, the airplanes were empty. In Baghdad, in 2004,

a man born in Zarqa slit the throats of other men, and the sequence shots were as unbearable as they were interminable.

Despite its efforts in the struggle against terrorism, the Kingdom of Jordan was unable to anticipate the growing Islamist danger in the 1990s. A nation at the crossroads, at the heart of a region in crisis, Jordan was confronted head-on by the repeated attacks of various extremist movements. On the periphery of the capital, Amman, cities like Maan or Zarqa became refuges for the harshest of Islamist causes. Terrorist groups formed and disbanded there, and alliances were sealed. Activists were arrested, tried, sentenced, and often released, alongside the spread of Salafist ideology, which advocated the return to the roots of Islam and took as its ultimate goal the establishment of an Islamic state in Jordan.

At Maan and Zarqa, the two largest cities in the kingdom after Amman, poverty makes the people receptive to the siren song of extremism. Palestinian refugees have been crowding into Zarqa since the 1950s and leading a precarious existence there. Although it is the major city in an area economically important by Jordanian standards, its rate of unemployment, too, is one of the highest in the kingdom,² and the rate of criminality there breaks all records, to the point where Zarqa is often described as the Jordanian Chicago. Public facilities are left in a state of neglect, in contrast to Amman, where brand-new buildings come up every month.

The dusty hills of Zarqa extend as far as the eye can see around Amman. The city shelters Jordan's largest community of Palestinians: in Camp Schneller (also called Camp Hattin) and Camp Mushairifeh refugees have lived in exile since 1948, the year of the creation of Israel. These camps are in fact incorporated as population centers. In the eastern part of Jordan, resentment has been piling up for almost fifty years against both Jordan and Israel. Palestinian identity is a strong social bond, but it is also a force favorable to the politicization of Islam. Since 1948 the Hashemite Kingdom has been trying to sustain a fragile equilibrium between Bedouin tribes and Palestin-

ian refugees. But despite the integration programs put in place by the state, the Palestinians of Jordan stand apart from regional and national political structures, even if, on paper, they possess all the rights of Jordanian citizenship, including the Hashemite passport.

The discontentment of the population of Zarqa had been growing since the early 1990s. In tandem with political developments in certain neighboring countries like Syria and Saudi Arabia, and with the worsening of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the large Palestinian population centers in Jordan became radicalized. Fanaticism gradually spread through Jordanian society. Honor crimes punishing women began to multiply, sermons by extremist imams filled the mosques, and terrorist movements recruited an ever-growing number of candidates to carry out suicide attacks in Israel. The Afghan mujahidin called for the coming of an Islamic state, a caliphate; the Muslim Brotherhood took over the universities and the centers of national power; politico-religious leaders organized protest marches against the policies of Israel. Hamas infiltrated the Palestinian enclaves in Jordan.

Several facts bear witness to this increase in fanaticism, especially in Zarqa. Shortly before the attacks of September 11, 2001, a 22-year-old Jordanian Palestinian called Saeed Hotari, described by those close to him as a calm, poised young man, left for Israel to earn a living. On June 1, 2001, he blew himself up in front of the Dolphinarium Discotheque in Tel Aviv, killing twenty-one young Israelis. Saeed Hotari had grown up in Zarqa, like so many other members of Hamas, the organization claiming responsibility for this bloody attack.³

The other Palestinian terrorist groups did not want to be outdone, beginning with Al-Qaeda. Thus a young Jordanian Palestinian hailing from Zarqa, Mohammed Salameh, is serving a life sentence in the United States for his part in the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. Having entered the U.S. on a tourist visa on February 17, 1988, on the very day of the attack he tried to get reimbursed for the deposit on the van used in the crime. The American courts had

established that he belonged to the inner circle of the organization led by Omar Abdel Rahman, which had planned the attack.⁴ Salameh's family in Zarqa had saved up so that he could obtain his visa.

The destinies of these hundreds of Palestinian activists are often similar, whether they join the ranks of Hamas or the Brigades of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs. And the city of Zarqa had already paid a high price to Islamist terrorism before the appearance on the international media scene of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, literally, Abu Musab from Zarqa. But Zarqawi's own militarism has nothing in common with the political activism of the young Palestinians. Zarqawi is a professional killer who does violence with his own hands. Atypical and elusive, the man escapes all the scenarios of the antiterrorist services, including those of Jordan.

And yet at the beginning of the 1990s the formidable General Intelligence Department (GID) of Jordan had undertaken systematic, methodical surveillance of radical movements operating in that country, with particular attention to the one led by Zarqawi. At that time Jordan was going through one of the most serious political crises of its modern history. Shaken by a deep Islamist current inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Kingdom of Jordan had reacted firmly, taking measures against the various terrorist groups inciting the suburbs of Amman. But this repressive logic did not subdue Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, who, after being arrested, was freed thanks to a general amnesty applying to political prisoners. Thus one of the most emblematic terrorists since Osama Bin Laden left a Jordanian prison on March 29, 1999, never to return.

In contrast to other Arab countries such as Algeria and Tunisia, Jordan had legalized several Islamist political parties from 1989 on. The most important of these, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), is a direct offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. The IAF has political responsibilities at the highest level, including several ministerial portfolios.⁵ On a number of occasions this party has attempted to bend the political direction of the kingdom in the direction of fun-

damentalism. Intervening in the reform of school texts and controlling several municipalities, the IAF established itself in the course of the 1990s as a partner necessary to the Jordanian monarchy. Yet it is merely the legal front for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Weakened in the elections of November 1993, the IAF came back in force after the peace treaty signed in October 1994 between Jordan and Israel and denounced as a betrayal by the Islamists. It then increased its influence in the large Palestinian cities of Jordan, especially in its stronghold, Zarqa. The mayor of the city, Yasser Omari, is a high official in the IAF.⁶

The IAF was sharply critical of the peace treaty and the decisive role played by the United States in getting it signed. IAF militants delivered a fundamentalist message in the suburbs of Amman. At the same time other activist groups, such as the Hizb Al-Tahrir Al-Islami (Islamic Freedom Party) and the Jaysh Mohammed (Mohammed's Army), encouraged their militants to commit acts of violence against Jews and Westerners. Several of Zarqawi's companions in arms in his first terrorist group, Bayt Al-Imam, had belonged at one time or another to these organizations, though they were illegal in Jordan. Most of them were veterans of Afghanistan. Terrorists of this new kind in Jordan liked to be called *imam* without, however, being able to justify this title. On the whole they had received only vague religious instruction.

Thus the Jordanian political context in the 1990s was like a nutrient broth in which Islamist organizations and radical currents proliferated, especially those of the Salafist persuasion. For, soon after the war in Afghanistan against the Soviets, Salafism became fashionable in Zarqa. In this city alone, the three candidates from the IAF won 85 percent of the votes in the elections of 1993, following a clearly anti-Israeli campaign. The Jordanian Islamist current made common cause with the Palestinians in the occupied territories,⁷ while, throughout the decade, the city of Zarqa sank deeper and deeper into a social and economic crisis.⁸

Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi (alias Ahmad Fadil Al-Khalailah, Ahmad Fadil Nazal Al-Khalayleh. Abu Ahmad, Abu Muhammad, Abu Muhannad, Al-Muhajer, Muhannad, Sakr Abu Suwayd, and Garib) was born in Zarqa, under his real name of Ahmad Fadil Nazzal Al-Khalayleh, on October 20, 1966.

He belongs to the clan of the Khalayleh, whose name he bears. This family of Bedouin origin settled in Jordan over two centuries ago and occupies one of the highest positions in the political arena of Zarqa. And so let us note from the outset that Zarqawi does not come from a Jordanian Palestinian family, as was claimed by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in a speech at the United Nations on February 5, 2003. All the available documentation and testimony on Zarqawi are quite clear on this point.⁹ Moreover, in 2004 Jordan decided to revoke his nationality, as Saudi Arabia had done with Osama Bin Laden in 1994.

Comprising several thousand people, the Khalayleh clan inhabits a very large part of the city of Zarqa and also forms various population centers on the outskirts of Amman. As if to distance themselves from the actions of their *enfant terrible*, the representatives of the clan sent a message to King Abdallah II on May 29, 2004, in which they condemned these acts of his and renewed their vow of allegiance to the king and the kingdom.¹⁰

The Khalayleh clan belongs to the Bedouin tribe of the Bani Hassan, with over 200,000 members one of the most numerous Jordanian tribes.¹¹ Sharing power with the Bani Hamida and the Hedwan, it also extends over other countries of the Near and Middle East, including Iraq.

Though it is established in a number of areas distributed over several countries, the Bani Hassan clan has a unity and political capability of its own, to the point where, on July 16, 2002, the representative of the tribe firmly condemned the “diabolical policy of the United States” against Iraq. Other representatives of the Bani Hassan have proclaimed themselves “strongly determined to protect

Iraq and Arab rights everywhere” and “to continue the sacrifice until ... American–Zionist plans [fail] in the region.”¹² The community is constituted along self-sufficient lines so as to defend its own interests. Thus there is a charitable organization in Zarqa called Bani Hassan Islamic Society, devoted to aiding the most needy members of the clan. The Bani Hassan are a crucial link in the sociopolitical system of Jordan.

CHAPTER 2

“The Green Man”

ABU MUSAB AL-ZARQAWI GREW UP IN THE MA'SOUM DISTRICT with his seven sisters and one of his brothers, Mohammed,¹³ in modest surroundings steeped in conservative Islam. Ma'soum is a dormitory suburb in which traditional Bedouin culture exists alongside modernity. The skyscrapers of the capital are a few minutes away by car. The district is the cradle of the Bani Hassan tribe. At the very center of Zarqa, extending across the hills above the city, it is poor but not destitute. The arid landscape is overwhelmed by the sun's burning heat.

Ahmad Fadil was born in Ma'soum on October 20, 1966. The family's large, middle-class house with two stories overlooks the dilapidated town cemetery, with its long-neglected graves. Like many members of the Khalayleh clan, Zarqawi's father, Fadil Nazzal Mohammed Al-Khalayleh, born in 1926 and a veteran of the 1948 war, for which he had volunteered, was employed by the municipality of Zarqa as a *mokhtar*, that is, a conciliator to whom people turned in order to resolve their quarrels.¹⁴ The patriarch died two years after his retirement in 1994,¹⁵ and the family profited from the goodwill of

the municipality, which decided to award the clan a pension. Nevertheless, the large Ma'soum villa was sold in favor of a more modest house in the Al-Ramzi district of Zarqa.

Thus the man who was still called Ahmad Fadil Nazzal Al-Khalayleh grew up opposite the municipal graveyard. His young manhood was spent in constant sight of this moonscape strewn with graves, a likely influence on his personality and, if we are to believe several people who knew him in his youth, one that aroused in him a real fascination with death.¹⁶ With its dusty alleys and barely paved roads, Ma'soum stood in sharp contrast to nearby Amman and its business centers. On Friday, the day of prayer, almost all the women were veiled, and most of them wore robes down to their ankles.

Young Ahmad Fadil was an average student. His teacher describes him as a pupil with "a few" intellectual inclinations.¹⁷ Between the ages of 6 and 11 he rarely achieved a grade as high as B at the King Talal Ben Abdallah Elementary School.¹⁸ He was then admitted to Al-Zarqa High School.

Equivalent to our junior high school, this was the largest scholastic establishment for boys in the Zarqa region, Ahmad Fadil sat in the fourth row on the left, next to the window. According to his teacher at the time, he was a dreamy boy who took no interest in his courses. The school backed onto the city's main Palestinian quarter along the highway leading to Amman and was maintained by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which established the primary public services for the city's Palestinian refugees.

Zarqawi pursued his studies up to ninth grade. In his final school year, 1982, his scholastic average was a mediocre 51.6 out of 100 in general studies. He distinguished himself only in sports and art.¹⁹ The school then decided to expel him and orient him toward vocational education, but Zarqawi refused, preferring to end his studies without giving any explanation to those around him. At loose ends, he spent most of his time in the Ma'soum cemetery.²⁰

His mother, Um Sayel, who was born in Zarqa in 1940 and whose

real name was Dallah Ibrahim Mohammed Al-Khalayleh, was deeply religious. Up to the time of her death from leukemia on February 29, 2004, she regretted that her son hadn't gotten a diploma. As if to exonerate him, Um Sayel also declared that the youngest of her three boys, presented by the Western media as a fine strategist, hadn't attained a high level of instruction, yet she recalled that he had genuine intellectual abilities. Shortly before her death, she was still uncertain about why he had left school: "We tried to persuade him to continue his studies, but he refused. Even if he didn't have to pay anything, he said he wouldn't continue and wouldn't go to college."²¹

Zarqawi preferred the school of the streets. His pals remember him as just one of the boys playing soccer in the back streets of Ma'soum.²² Busy painting the town red with the other youngsters in the neighborhood, Ahmad Fadil did not attend religious services. Witnesses agree in describing him as a rowdy and violent teenager, rebellious, undisciplined, and quick to pick a fight. As his cousin, Muhammad Al-Zawahra, puts it, he wasn't so much physically strong as he was ill-tempered.²³

Soon after dropping out of school, Zarqawi began his working life as an employee in a paper factory, in charge of the chemicals involved in making paper, but he was let go two months later for leaving his machines unmonitored. He then got a job in the maintenance service of the municipality of Zarqa. Like his father before him, he was favored with a flimsy position granted by city hall because he was one of the Khalayleh clan,²⁴ many of whose members are in the army as well as the police and other local institutions. In this way the kingdom maintains social equilibrium among the various tribes.²⁵

National and local Jordanian institutions, however, were to be among Zarqawi's first targets when he headed the terrorist organization Bayt Al-Imam.

Like so many young Jordanians of his generation at the end of the 1980s, as a civil servant Zarqawi was overcome by idleness and

fear of the future. The grand economic reforms and the beginnings of privatization plunged young people into financial and social uncertainty.²⁶ According to the testimony of his friends at the time, the position Zarqawi occupied did not correspond to his deep aspirations. He is described as an idealistic young man, irascible and hard to control. He received two warnings for inciting quarrels and, in 1983, was finally fired after six months on the job.²⁷

One of his neighbors, Ibrahim Izzat, sees him as "a man of a modest social class, isolated and hardly socialized."²⁸ Zarqawi was looking for a way to break free of the dead-end situation in which he felt he was stuck, a way to give meaning to his life and shape his destiny. In 1984 came the time of his obligatory military conscription, and the 18-year-old served for two years. Back in Zarqa in 1986, he was again at loose ends and led a dissolute life. The undisciplined civil servant had become the neighborhood lout, feared by the other young people. Those who knew him in those years say that he drank like a fish and covered his body with tattoos, two practices condemned by Islam. They called him "the green man" on account of his many tattoos, especially on his forearms and shoulders. He even sported an anchor on his left hand, a symbol of his attachment to the sea, and three blue dots at the base of one of his thumbs.²⁹ He clearly had the need to distinguish himself from the narrow world of Zarqa in which he had grown up unwillingly. In 1998 he would try to erase these marks with acid.³⁰

In the space of a few months Zarqawi won the reputation of a cantankerous hoodlum. On several occasions he opposed the local police, to the great displeasure of his father, a leading figure in the city, although he was the latter's favorite son. His father and one of his uncles had to pick him up at the police station repeatedly. In 1987 he wounded a young man of the district with a knife. In police custody for four days before being sentenced to two months in prison, he was eventually let go upon payment of a heavy fine.³¹ He was arrested several times for shoplifting and drug dealing, and was even

questioned in connection with an attempted rape. In this period of his life, Zarqawi was not at all religious. On the contrary, everything in his attitude contradicted the basic tenets of the Koran. In full crisis, this adolescent was seeking his path in the alleyways of Zarqa.

CHAPTER 3

The Great Departure

A FEW HUNDRED YARDS AWAY FROM THE SCHOOL ZARQAWI LEFT prematurely is the Al-Falah Mosque, located within the precinct of Zarqa's main camp for Palestinian refugees. Enjoying full autonomy in the camp, the mosque brought together the most radical of the Palestinian youth. Zarqawi made new friends, people who promoted a highly politicized Islam. He adopted their principles with the same fervor that he had until just recently brought to fighting and drinking. Now, however, he spent months frequenting this Palestinian enclave in Zarqa. Although he was a Jordanian born and bred, he rapidly gained the trust of the young Palestinian refugees, establishing himself as a respected leader.

To bring her son back to the right path, his mother enrolled him in religious instruction at the Al-Husayn Ben Ali Mosque in the center of Amman. This is where he spent most of his time at the end of the 1980s. In those years this place of worship, with its Salafist leanings, was considered a necessary stage in preparation for the "holy war" in Afghanistan against the Soviets. The Salafist sheikh Jarrah Al-Qaddah, who was the preacher there, recalls having met Zarqawi

before he became a practicing Muslim. He recalls how Zarqawi, eager to have a turn at the adventure in Afghanistan, quickly submitted to the most basic religious requirements, forgoing alcohol and regularly attending the inflammatory sermons of the imams.³² The prospect of fighting in Afghanistan offered Zarqawi the best way out, the possibility of finally choosing his destiny.

In 1989, after some months of preparation, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi greatly displeased his relatives by joining other young men leaving Jordan for Afghanistan by way of Peshawar in Pakistan. At this time Zarqawi was not yet a convert to extremism; he contented himself with conscientiously assimilating the precepts of Salafist ideology. This decision to leave brought about a violent conflict with his father, who was convinced that his best interests lay in undertaking a "real career" in Jordan. Zarqawi would bear the scars of this conflict for a long time.³³

Zarqawi and his comrades soon settled in Hayatabad, a town on the outskirts of Peshawar that had become the rear base of the Afghan and Arab mujahidin. Hayatabad lies at the foot of the Khyber Pass, an eminently strategic site leading to Jalalabad and the Afghan battlefields. Throughout the 1990s the town was the hideout of Al-Qaeda, and when Zarqawi arrived in Hayatabad Osama Bin Laden was already there, in District 4, setting up the first networks of his organization, which had been constituted a few months earlier, in September 1988.

A garrison town, Hayatabad brought together the legions of Arab jihadists who had come to strengthen the Afghan ranks. The most visible Islamist combatants, like Abdallah Azzam, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi, were lodged in the town's "guest houses." These were actually safe houses, sheltering preachers and fighters under the same roof.

The intellectual leaders of the jihad were in charge of organizing the fighters and taking in hand the young people who flocked in from all over the world. The first stage was the Service Bureau

(*Makhtab Al-Khedamat*) and the team of Abdallah Azzam. They were then directed to camps located in the zones controlled by the various Afghan warlords, namely Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, and Burhanudin Rabbani. In the face of this rigorous supervision, some of the trainees occasionally remained in Peshawar, giving up the idea of fighting against their Arab brothers on the other side of the border.³⁴

In the spring of 1989, after several days in transit, along with other young fighters Zarqawi was sent to Khost, in eastern Afghanistan. When he arrived the war against the Soviets had just come to an end. He just managed to be present at the fall of Khost so as to be able to enter as a liberator. The city, however, would remain in play as a major strategic site; two years later, in 1991, rival factions to the pro-Communist regime of Najibullah were still clashing in violent battles, and Zarqawi would take part in capturing the city a second time.³⁵

Ever since 1988, the Soviet Army had been withdrawing all of its troops from Afghanistan, and in February 1989 it had in fact abandoned the Afghan mountains. But Zarqawi arrived too late to fire against the Russians. After several years of petty delinquency in Zarqa, the young Jordanian missed his initial rendezvous with destiny, the first war in Afghanistan. Yet he would participate in the battles of Islamist factions against the pro-Communists until 1993, at which time Afghanistan was plunged into full-scale tribal war for the capture of Kabul.

A few weeks after setting foot on Afghan soil, Zarqawi decided to prolong the adventure. He increased the number of trips he made back and forth among the Afghan war zones and Hayatabad. On each side of the Khyber mountain, the "Arabs" were then reveling in the status of victor, occupying a position of strength in both countries. It was in this context that Zarqawi made several decisive acquaintanceships, especially the one with Mohammed Taher Al-Barqawi, alias Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi, whom he met at the time of his arrival in Peshawar in 1989.³⁶ From 1992 on, Maqdisi was to become a spiri-

tual father for Zarqawi. In a letter to Zarqawi dated 2004 and written in the Jordanian prison of Kafkafa where he was incarcerated, Maqdisi speaks at length of their friendship and their meeting in Peshawar at the home of Abu Walid Al-Ansari, another theoretician of the jihad.³⁷

Maqdisi was 38 when he left Kuwait for Pakistan.³⁸ Unlike Zarqawi, he already had solid Islamist references. Born in 1959 in the town of Borqa, near Nablus on the West Bank of the Jordan, Issam Mohammed Taher Al-Barqawi emigrated to Kuwait at the age of three with his family and lived there until the mid-1980s. He then went to Iraq to pursue Islamic studies. Considered a Salafist hostile to the Baathist and secular regime of Saddam Hussein, he was arrested and deported to Saudi Arabia. Maqdisi then settled in Mecca, where from 1984 on he accomplished various missions on behalf of the World Islamic League, which operates in Afghanistan. In 1988 Maqdisi formed close ties with another radical organization located in Kuwait, the *Jam'iyyat ihya' al turath*, also known as the Society of the Revival of the Islamic Heritage (SRIH).³⁹ On a number of occasions beginning in the early 1990s, this Kuwaiti "charitable" organization has been associated with Islamic terrorism. Today it is banned in Russia, and Great Britain suspects it of supporting terrorism.⁴⁰ Moreover, the SRIH was denounced as a terrorist organization by the United States Treasury Department on September 1, 2002,⁴¹ and its assets have been frozen by the Egyptian government.

Maqdisi is one of the most influential ideologues of Salafist thought in the Middle East, a source of inspiration for many candidates for martyrdom. Thus some eighteen articles and publications by Maqdisi were found in Hamburg among the personal effects of Mohammed Atta, the operational coordinator of the attacks of September 11.

Maqdisi was to remain in Peshawar for three years. On the basis of his solid religious knowledge, he was invited to Pakistan by the group *Badafit Al-Mujahdin* (or *Badafat Al-Mujahidin*) as a professor

of religion. Two months later he left this group to join the fundamentalist center Jami Al-Rahman, also in Peshawar. During this time Zarqawi followed the religions teachings of Maqdisi, and the two men quickly became fast friends,⁴² Zarqawi being extremely eager to study with this first-rank ideologue.

Throughout the 1990s Maqdisi proved to be both a theoretician and a formidable practitioner of radical Islamism. Indeed, he was the founder of various Sunni terrorist organizations, and he was implicated in a number of attacks or attempted attacks. His name appeared, for example, in the confessions of one of the four Saudis arrested in 1996 following the Al-Khobar attack, mounted against American interests in Saudi Arabia in November 1995, in which five Americans were killed. In 1996, before his execution, the Saudi terrorist Abd Al-Aziz Fahd Nasir Al-Mi'thim declared;

In Riyadh I met young men whose names I already gave during the inquest. They had taken part in the Afghan jihad. In Afghanistan they met people of different nationalities and were influenced.... Together with these young men, we were accustomed to receiving propaganda documents from Mas'ari, Osama Bin Laden, and also Abu Mohammed Isam Al-Maqdisi. We also read and exchanged books declaring that the Arab leaders were "unbelievers," such as the book entitled *Clear Evidence of the Infidel Nature of the Saudi State* and the book *The Faith of Ibrahim*, written by Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi. Once I read the book *The Faith of Ibrahim* I was eager to visit Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi, and I in fact met him several times in Jordan and was convinced by his ideas.⁴³

At the end of the 1980s several currents of radical Islamist doctrine were flourishing. One of the most famous jihadist theoreticians of this time was Abdallah Yussuf Azzam (alias Abdallah Azzam). Born in 1941 in the province of Jenin, in Palestine, Azzam was a highly gifted student. After pursuing Koranic studies in Syria, he was

awarded the prestigious diploma of *sharia* at Al-Azhar University in 1971. (*Sharia* is the law code based on the Koran.) After teaching Islamic jurisprudence at King Abdel Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in 1979, he joined the Afghan jihad at the beginning of the 1980s. He established his base in Peshawar, where he met Osama Bin Laden and soon became his mentor.

But Abdallah Azzam was not the only ideologue of Islamist terrorism at the end of the 1980s. Other radical theologians took part in forming Al-Qaeda, Maqdisi among them. The Saudi inquest into the Al-Khobar attacks revealed the active role played by Maqdisi in preparing the operation.

In May 1997 a professor at the University of Yarmuk, Dr. Osama Yassin Abu Shamah, was arrested by the Jordanian secret service in the Suwaylih district of suburban Amman. Abu Shamah had close ties with Maqdisi, and the authorities proved that he helped to finance the Al-Khobar operation. He was thus working for the Bayt Al-Imam group.

According to the Jordanian police, in 1997 some of Maqdisi's terrorist activities were personally financed from Afghanistan by Osama Bin Laden.⁴⁴ The two men, said to be close, often met in Afghanistan at that time and especially in Pakistan, the rear base of the Arab forces. One of Osama Bin Laden's top associates in Afghanistan, the Algerian mujahid Abdallah Anas, now in exile in London, recalls sharing a meal in Islamabad with Bin Laden, Abdallah Azzam, and Maqdisi.⁴⁵

In short, Maqdisi was at the heart of Al-Qaeda. That he was so right from the beginning is confirmed by Jamal Al-Fadl, a repentant terrorist who had a leading position with Osama Bin Laden and whose testimony had provided top-level information on Maqdisi's role in Al-Qaeda.

Al-Fadl, a regular witness for the U.S. Department of Justice in Al-Qaeda cases, said in connection with the Ennaam Arnaout case that he met Maqdisi in the context of Al-Qaeda activities. Maqdisi

had just published *Irrefutable Proofs for Undertaking Jihad*. Close to certain Arab fighters in Pakistan and Afghanistan, he maintained a solid friendship with another terrorist called Azmiri.⁴⁶ Azmiri would later be accused of participating in the so-called Bojinka plot to crash several airplanes simultaneously over the United States. Foiled in 1994, this plot anticipated the attacks of September 11. In addition, Azmiri would later meet in Manila with the originator of the September 11 attacks, Khaled Sheikh Mohammed. He is also said to have taken part in an aborted attempt to assassinate President Bill Clinton during a trip to Africa in 1998.

Maqdisi's second close friend in Pakistan, Mohammed Shobana (or Shabana) put out the Islamist magazine *Al-Bunyan Al-Marsus* (*The Impenetrable Edifice*), in which Abid Sheikh Mohammed, brother of the September 11 mastermind, also took part. This publication, run by the friends of Sheikh Abdallah Azzam, was said to be close to the mujahidin and the central organization of Al-Qaeda. Thus as early as its July 1989 issue the magazine published an editorial announcing the real aims of Al-Qaeda; the obligation of every Muslim, it said, is to fulfill the goals of jihad until America is reached and liberated. This was one of the first declarations calling for jihad against the United States. And it was the man at the head of *Al-Bunyan Al-Marsus*, Mohammed Shobana, who, on Maqdisi's recommendation, recruited the young Zarqawi several weeks after the latter's arrival in Pakistan—Zarqawi who wrote Arabic so badly.

Zarqawi's other decisive meeting in Pakistan was with Saleh Al-Hami, a fighter in the Arab legions who would later become his brother-in-law. Sporting a long black beard and an artificial leg, Al-Hami had been a combatant from the outset. Likewise a Jordanian, he had studied journalism at the University of Irbid in that country. Until 1992, when he left Pakistan to return to Jordan, he worked as a correspondent for the magazine *Al-Jihad*, founded by Abdallah Azzam, the mentor of Osama Bin Laden.

While convalescing in a hospital in Peshawar after stepping on a

landmine in the mountains of Khost, in Afghanistan, Saleh Al-Hami met Zarqawi. Present where the accident took place, Zarqawi had taken part in evacuating Al-Hami across the Khyber Pass to Peshawar. Admiring the courage of the wounded man, he visited him regularly in the hospital. Al-Hami recalls that Zarqawi, who had seen him covered with blood when he was hit, came to see him when he recovered, introducing himself by saying that he worked as a correspondent for *Al-Bunyan Al-Marsus* and wanted instruction in the techniques of reporting and publishing. Al-Hami was happy to comply, and this was the beginning of their relationship.⁴⁷

Zarqawi was then 23 years old. The journal that employed him was based in Peshawar itself, and he made regular round trips between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

At this time Zarqawi was a thin young man with a dark gaze, five feet nine inches tall, who traveled all over Afghanistan to gather direct testimony from the Arab combatants, victors in a war he missed by several months. The journal for which he was writing was the ideological spearhead of Al-Qaeda. A makeshift reporter with no journalistic experience or cultural credentials, he tried to construct an identity for himself alongside the fighters he admired so much. People who knew him at this time speak of a young man searching for orientation points of identity and terribly eager to learn. In the evenings, at the fireside, he would take refuge in the Koran and then spend his nights in prayer.

As the months went by, Zarqawi became increasingly close to Saleh Al-Hami. As a token of friendship, he offered his new companion the hand in marriage of one of his sisters back in Jordan. Al-Hami agreed, and in 1991 the young woman came to Peshawar for the wedding. (It is a tradition among the Khalayleh to give their daughters in marriage to fighters for Islam, and two of Zarqawi's other sisters became the wives of diehard jihadists. As we have seen, Alia, born in 1968, married Khaled Al-Aruri, one of Zarqawi's closest lieutenants in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, and Mariam married

Haytham Mustafa Obeidat, alias Abu Hassan, a veteran of the Afghan jihad.) This marriage sealed the friendship between the two men.⁴⁸ Upon his return to Jordan, Al-Hami and his wife settled close to the house of the Zarqawi family in the Al-Ramzi district of Zarqa.

Zarqawi and Al-Hami liked one another and shared the same vision of a triumphant Islam. Al-Hami still considers Osama Bin Laden a model today: "He is a great man, an example for all of us. He is the new caliph. It is as though the Prophet Mohammed had returned to earth from the seventh century to arrive among us."⁴⁹

Al-Hami recalls that Zarqawi told him about a dream while they were spending a night in a cave: he had had the vision of a sword splitting the sky, the word "jihad" engraved on its blade.⁵⁰

The two men spent several months together in Afghanistan before Al-Hami returned to Jordan; according to him, his wife thanked God because she was married to an impaired man, for "God honors the handicapped and the mujahidin." Later, when her brother was declared an international terrorist, she would be stopped for six hours on the border between Jordan and Saudi Arabia on a pilgrimage to Mecca, on the grounds that she was the sister of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi. The zeal of the Saudi police on that occasion angered Al-Hami, who still recalls the fine moments spent with his brother-in-law in Afghanistan: "It was a marvelous thing, a terrific life, the best thing I've ever experienced in my life.... I felt I was being reborn when I went there. That was really living."⁵¹

This first trip to Afghanistan was truly an initiation for Zarqawi. He found a country in ruins and came face to face with others, especially the many Arab or Afghan warlords, to whom he owed respect and deference. The big shot of Zarqa was learning about life. But the Afghanistan of the late 1980s, coveted by rival factions, Arab legions, and Afghan fighters, was a country where a lot was at stake. The young Zarqawi did not possess the cultural wherewithal to make a name for himself in this complex environment, and he was also financially strapped. So he set about forming ties with those

veterans who were likely to support him during his stay in Afghanistan, following the example of Maqdisi, who opened the doors of the Islamist organizations to him.

The war against the Soviet regime was now completely over. With outside help, the jihad had won. But another struggle, an internal one among rival factions, was soon raging. Each clan defended its own plan for government according to its tribal, ethnic, regional, ideological, and religious specificities. The confrontations came to a head during the fight over control of Kabul. In May 1992 Ahmad Shah Massud, a moderate Tajik Islamist, entered the capital with several thousand men and became minister of defense. Tensions remained very lively, and one year later there was still open conflict. Despite a peace treaty among the rival factions, fighting continued south of Kabul. On May 7, 1993, Ahmad Shah Massud resigned, and a new government formed around the radical leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, mentor of the Taliban—and protector of Al-Qaeda.

Although Zarqawi had just missed the war against the Soviets, he took part in the second wave of fighting in this civil war. He quickly chose to join the camp of the Pashtun Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who represented the majority ethnic group. Thus, shortly after beginning his first journalistic experience with the extremist *Al-Bunyan Al-Marsus*, he put down his pen and took up arms alongside Jalludin Haqqani, the Afghan warlord who, since 1995, had won renown for training Taliban cadres in the madrasa (Koranic school) Dar Al-Uloom Islamiya in the town of Sharsadda. In a speech delivered on the Al-Jazira network Osama Bin Laden would later lament the fact that the U.S. strike forces in Afghanistan had killed Haqqani, the “hero... who rejected the American occupation in Afghanistan.”⁵²

Zarqawi attended a number of military training camps in Afghanistan, in particular Sada (Echo), where he learned how to handle weapons like the Kalashnikov or RPG (rocket-propelled grenade launcher).⁵³ Sada was led by an Iraqi jihadist called Abu Burhan Al-Iraqi, a close collaborator of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, the head of

Hizbul-Ittihad El-Islami (Islamic Union Party), which controlled the combat zone around Kabul in 1993.⁵⁴ Sayyaf's troops were known to be among the harshest of the Afghan factions, practicing rapes and beheadings. He was largely responsible for establishing Al-Qaeda facilities, opening several military training camps in the service of the "Arabs."

Zarqawi made the trip to the Sada camp in the company of one of his Zarqa comrades, Mohammed Wasfi Omar Abu Khalil.⁵⁵ Abu Khalil would later be arrested, tried, and sentenced in connection with the dismantling of the first terrorist group led by Zarqawi, Bayt Al-Imam. Zarqawi and Abu Khalil were to be prison mates in Suwaqah, in Jordan.

Besides Zarqawi, other top-ranking terrorists visited Sada at this time, in particular Khalid Sheikh Mohammed,⁵⁶ who, as time went by, had become a close associate of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf before winning the full confidence of Osama Bin Laden and masterminding the operation of September 11.

For many years Sada, located on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, was an obligatory stage in the training of terrorists coming from all over the world to swell the ranks of Al-Qaeda. Another emblematic figure who spent many weeks in this camp was Ramzi Yusef, who devised the first attack on the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993.⁵⁷ Extradited from Pakistan to the United States, Ramzi Yusef was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1998.

At this time, then, Zarqawi was coming as close as possible to the nerve center of Al-Qaeda. He was not in the inmost circle, however, for, although Sada was a cornerstone of the Al-Qaeda military apparatus with regard to the training of the "Arabs" in Afghanistan, it merely provided the ordinary share of fighters. There was a second, so-called long-term, camp under the control of a military council, where the most promising mujahidin were trained, and Zarqawi was not a part of it. It was at this time that he formed friendships with a number of other Jordanian combatants, including a certain Salem

Saad Salem Ben Suweid, whom he recruited some ten years later in the murder of the American diplomat Laurence Foley in Amman.⁵⁸

Up to the time he left Afghanistan in the course of the year 1993, Zarqawi read and heard on tape the inflammatory sermons of the jihad theorist Abdallah Azzam, who had been killed by a car bomb in September 1989. According to his brother-in-law Saleh Al-Hami, as reported in *Al-Jazira*, he found himself in perfect agreement with the thoughts of this Palestinian, the spiritual father of contemporary Salafism and the mentor of Osama Bin Laden. Impressed by Azzam's implacable rhetoric, he spent hours on end steeped in the Salafist message, to which he later referred when he claimed credit for the attacks in Iraq: rejection of modernity, return to the roots of Islam, proclamation of the caliphate.

He had come a long way from the streets of Zarqa. In Afghanistan, he filled himself with the spirit of jihad, no matter what the cause: for the liberation of Afghanistan, for Islam, for the liberation of Iraq, or on any other grounds. Zarqawi discovered in himself the personality of a fighter.

In the early 1990s the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan was already porous, and the Arab legions were setting up their quarters in Karachi and Peshawar. Zarqawi made several stops between Hayatabad and Peshawar, where he visited the Zayd Ben-Harithah Mosque. The imam recalls a young man saturated with religion who spent many hours praying with his Arab brothers, especially during the month of Ramadan. Before setting out on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1992, Zarqawi even asked the imam to pray that God would "forget him a little."⁵⁹

It is on the basis of his experience in Afghanistan that he decided to return to Jordan.

CHAPTER 4

The Return to Jordan

UPON HIS RETURN, EARLY IN 1993, ZARQAWI FOUND THAT JORDAN had changed a great deal. The kingdom had become freer both politically and economically. It had embarked on a peace treaty with Israel and was stabilizing its position in the region. In September 1991 the first Jordanian veterans of Afghanistan began to come back to their country and felt it to be their duty to work for the renewal of the Islamic cause.

In the space of a few months the enemy had changed identity. The men who had left full of enthusiasm for fighting the Soviet occupation returned with a fierce hatred of the United States and the Israeli government. It was a very different time. The most highly motivated mujahidin were already orienting themselves toward new lands of jihad, including Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁶⁰ Many Jordanians were inclined to wage holy war between Sarajevo and Tuzla. Zarqawi did not go along with them but returned home to Zarqa. After missing the war against the Russians, he missed a second opportunity to take part in jihad, this time with the Arab forces of Bosnia.

A goodly number of these young veterans were under surveillance

by the forces of order in their own countries. In Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan, the security agencies often had precise knowledge of the identity of the mujahidin. Even before leaving for Afghanistan most of the fighters had been the objects of special attention on the part of the intelligence services. Ordinary criminals or fanatic Islamists, it was not by chance that they were setting out for Afghanistan. And so the states in the region grew anxious at the return of the "Afghans," especially Egypt and Algeria, where Islamist groups of veterans were rapidly forming again. The anxiety reached its peak when the ISF (Islamic Salvation Front) threatened to win the elections in Algeria in 1991 after a democratic vote.

But if the early 1990s mark the advent of religious fanaticism on the Algerian political scene, they were also marked by increased activism on the part of radical and violent groups struggling against the government and the Coptic Christians in Egypt. Egyptian Islamists returning from the jihad in Afghanistan soon had to seek refuge in the Islamic state of Sudan or in Saudi Arabia. The Islamist wave shook up all the Arab countries in the great Mediterranean arc.

Starting in 1991 the kingdom of Jordan paid ongoing attention to "its" mujahidin, whose commitments ran counter to the political direction taken by the government both on the domestic level, since the Islamist parties were severely restricted by the king's cabinet, and on the international level, given the diplomatic rapprochement between Jordan and Israel.

The heads of the Jordanian intelligence service began to be worried by the activism of the "Afghans" at the beginning of 1991.⁶¹ Information was pouring in to indicate that hundreds of returned veterans had started recruiting young Islamists and training them in the desert. On the political scene, the "Afghans" spoke up, denouncing Jordan's involvement in the American talks that were likely to lead to a peace treaty in the Middle East. They advocated the destruction of Israel in concert with the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al Ikhwaan Al-Muslimoon), a political party that had been banned in all

other Arabic countries. From 1991 on, the most highly organized “Afghans” came together in the Army of Mohammed (Jaysh Mohammed), a Sunni terrorist group that soon held sway in the Hashemite Kingdom. Other veterans joined the ranks of Islamic Jihad and Hamas in the territories occupied by Israel.

The judicial authorities in Jordan set out to understand these new threats so as to be better able to combat them. Large-scale attacks were foiled by the government, and five organizations were dissolved. The twenty-two terrorists comprising the cell of Khadir Abu Hawshar were arrested; they had been planning to strike tourist sites at the moment of transition to the year 2000. Militants of the Army of Mohammed, whose aim was to destroy the Jordanian government, were arrested at the end of 1991 in the vicinity of Amman.

The organization called Al-Hashayibakah (the Jordanian Afghans) planned terrorist attacks in Jordan between 1991 and 1993. On December 21, 1994, its members received harsh sentences from the State Security Court of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Among them was the Saudi businessman Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, the brother-in-law of Osama Bin Laden. From 1986 to 1994 he had headed the charity IIRO (International Islamic Relief Organization) in the Philippines. Suspected of having ties to Islamist terrorism, which he denies,⁶² he was sentenced to death in absentia. He fled to Jeddah, in Saudi Arabia, where he has since opened a seafood restaurant.

Another armed group, Harakat Al-Islah Wal-Tahaddi (Movement for Reform and Change), created in Jordan in 1997, saw its activists convicted of terrorism by a military tribunal on July 22, 2001. On the list of those convicted was the religious leader Abu Qatada (whose real name is Omar Mahmud Uthman Abu Umar),⁶³ an associate of Osama Bin Laden and Maqdisi. Sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment by the Jordanian courts, and sought by the Egyptian and Algerian police, Abu Qatada was leading a life of quiet retirement in London when he was arrested by the British police and placed under temporary detention in October 2002. From 1995 to

2001 he had taken part in the establishment of the Al-Qaeda network in Europe as well as in several operations by terrorist cells there, including the one by Al-Qaeda in Spain.

Finally, another group of jihadists, Al-Buq'ah, was dissolved in 1998 by the Jordanian police.⁶⁴ The aim of these different movements was to overthrow Arab governments, in particular that of Jordan, replacing them with a fundamentalist caliphate. This resolutely simplistic project united the most radical of the Islamists.

On November 10, 1992, two independent, dissident Islamist leaders, Layth Shubaylat and Yaqub Qarrash, were sentenced by a military tribunal to twenty years in prison for illegal possession of firearms and an attempt to overthrow the government. On November 23, 1992, King Hussein announced that he would do everything in his power to protect the state. Many Jordanian statesmen at that time were worried about the radicalism of these young veterans back from the Afghan jihad. Ahmed Oweidi Abbadi, a Bedouin member of the Jordanian Parliament and a former officer, issued a solemn warning to the kingdom in November 1992 on the occasion of a speech before the Parliament. These people, he said, claim that their weapons are to be used in the fight against Israel, but their intention is ultimately to overthrow the monarchy.⁶⁵

Illegal armed groups proliferated, increasing the number of violent actions against the kingdom. Several sectors were aimed at, including tourism, so as to dry up the leading source of foreign currency. A French national, a diplomat by profession named Gilbert Heines, was stricken by this wave of violence.⁶⁶ When Heines and his wife visited the tourist area of Mujeb, about sixty miles from Amman, in February 1995, they were hit by bullets fired from the mountain. Gilbert Heines was wounded. The gunmen, Salem Khakhit Abdallah, 31, and Ahmad Khaled Kassen, 23, were immediately arrested and sentenced to life in prison and ten years in prison, respectively. According to their statements, they were trying to contest the peace treaty signed in October 1994 between Jordan and Israel.

ABU MUSAB AL-ZARQAWI RETURNED HOME TO ZARQA AND, LIKE the other "Afghans," was put under surveillance. In his case, however, he had been well known to the local police as an ordinary delinquent before his departure.

He went back to his house, number 13 on Street 6 of the Al-Ramzi quarter, a large two-story house surrounded by a high wall, where he was rejoined by his wife Intisar, whom he had married in 1988 and who is called Um Mohammed (Mohammed's mother), as well as his oldest son and his daughter Aminah, born in 1991. His mother, some of his sisters, and his brother Mohammed were also living in the family home.

Zarqawi returned deeply marked by Afghanistan. The young neighborhood tough had been replaced by a hardened man. An authoritarian, he quickly imposed a drastic religious rigor on those around him. The women of the family had to conform to the religious practices that he himself had adopted during his years in Afghanistan. From that time on, the members of the Zarqawi family could be recognized in the street, since they alone wore traditional Afghan clothing, and this remains the case today.⁶⁷ Men who are not part of the family were forbidden to enter the house. Similarly, Um Mohammed reports that, from the time of his return from Afghanistan, Zarqawi made his brothers stay away from television because the programs "corrupt the younger generation."⁶⁸

Beside the Zarqawis other veterans lived in the Al-Ramzi quarter, such as Abu Qudama, whose home was close by, and several future members of the terrorist group Bayt Al-Imam. Like them, the Khalaylehs are very pious, and the only decorations adorning the inside of their house are verses of the Koran and a plaque on which is inscribed "Allah." The Zarqawi family house is certainly smaller and less comfortable than the one in the Ma'soum quarter, but it is in perfect keeping with middle-class standards.

To earn a living, Zarqawi opened a video rental business that

seems to have been unsuccessful. But this veteran had other ambitions. For shortly after his arrival, he found his old companions again and spent a lot of time spreading his ideas among the young Jordanians and Palestinians of Zarqa. Once again he visited the mosques of Al-Falah and Hussein Ben Ali, talking about his Afghan experience and attracting an increasing number of unemployed young men to his views.

One of the Salafist leaders in Amman, Sheikh Jarrah Al-Qaddah, remembers him as an impassioned young man who shouted in Zarqa's crowded streets in order to spread the good word. This behavior must have seemed unusual, to say the least, to the inhabitants of a town in which public sermons were forbidden.

In any event, these excesses soon made it possible for him to gather around himself defenders of the most violent causes. Saleh Al-Hami, who returned from Afghanistan in 1992, recalls that this was the time when tensions began to arise between Zarqawi and the Jordanian regime. Waging jihad, he says, had become like oxygen for these men, and it was difficult to forgo it.⁶⁹ After the Afghan war and jihad, Zarqawi was clearly resolved to carry on the struggle in his own country. The Jordanian services knew this and stepped up their vigilance.

The man known to everyone in Zarqa as Ahmad Fadil Nazzal Al-Khalayleh was now called Abu Musab (Musab's father), although his last son, who would bear this name, wasn't yet born. The turbulent adolescent had made quite a change and was now a feared man with overweening ambitions. It is rare that an inhabitant of Zarqa bears the name of his town, but the new name Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi (that is, of Zarqa) reflected the intentions of the man who would do anything to represent his clan and his city. He borrowed his name from one of the prophet Mohammed's warriors, Musab Ben Umayr, considered the patron saint of suicide bombers, who lost both hands at the Battle of Yathrib, an episode Zarqawi has mentioned a number of times.

Only a few months after his return to Zarqa, he tried to find Maqdisi, the Palestinian preacher whose sermons inflamed the “Arabs” of Peshawar. In 2004 Maqdisi wrote a letter in which he speaks of the reunion with Zarqawi: “As soon as he got back from Afghanistan, Zarqawi paid me a visit.... Abu Walid was the one who gave him my address in Jordan.... We then worked together, and I gave religion courses in several Jordanian cities. We thought up tracts.”⁷⁰ From that time on, Issam Mohammed Taher Al-Barqawi, alias Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi, became an ideological crutch and, at the same time, a spiritual father and intellectual reference point for Zarqawi. All other things being equal, he played the same role for Zarqawi as Abdallah Azzam did for Osama Bin Laden.

Maqdisi had finally come to roost in Jordan, in Yajouz on the outskirts of Amman, near the Sohaib Mosque. After Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and then Kuwait once again, he settled for good in Jordan in 1992. His move coincided with the return of the Jordanians who had fought in Afghanistan and with Zarqawi’s return at the beginning of 1993. The two men were glad to meet again and cultivated their friendship amid shared memories of Pakistan.

In this way the simple man from the Amman suburbs became the associate of one of the most conspicuous theoreticians of jihad in the early 1990s, for Maqdisi was already a celebrity in the small world of radical theologians. He had just published *Democracy Is a Religion*. According to this scathing diatribe against the West and its form of government, democracy is a social innovation condemned by the Koran, one that conveys a heretical message. The citizens of democratic states are “infidels” soon to incur destruction. “Democracy is a religion that is not the religion of Allah.... It is a religion of pagans, ... a religion that includes other gods in its belief.... In the democratic religion people are represented by their delegates to Parliament.... They and their associates legislate in accordance with the religion of democracy and the laws of the constitution on which the government is based.”⁷¹

Together with the older radical Saudi preachers Hamud Bin Uqla Al-Shuaibi and Ali Al-Khudeir, Maqdisi advocated a return to the origins of Islam and a firm repudiation of everything that was not Muslim. But this extremist rhetoric was not limited to a few feverish publications. Starting in 1991 Maqdisi was personally involved in the recruitment and training of young Jordanian veterans with terrorism in mind. His participation in various terrorist organizations, including the Army of Mohammed and Al-Islah Wal-Tahaddi, was explicitly confirmed by the Jordanian legal system and would lead to repeated judicial convictions.

Imprisoned for his participation in Bayt Al-Imam, Maqdisi was freed in 1999, only to be arrested and jailed again in December 2002 for masterminding the rebellions that broke out in Maan. In addition, in July 1991 the Jordanians had established his ties to the Army of Mohammed, whose members were being trained in Afghan camps. The six leaders of the group were quickly sentenced to death for their role in attacks on Jordan. Their sentences were commuted, however, following a royal amnesty.

Although Jordan was vigilant, in 1991 it was still unable to grasp the full extent of the threat. The veterans were not really taken seriously by the judicial authorities, who pronounced sentences they then failed to carry out. Yet the intelligence services were still keeping track of the reentry of the veterans into civilian life.

At the time they got together again, both Maqdisi and Zarqawi cherished strong personal ambitions and a common aim, the pursuit of jihad against "infidel regimes." In the course of the year 1993, new enemies and new targets became clear: Israel and the kingdom of Jordan. Like hundreds of veterans, the two men felt deep hatred for the Jordanian government because of what they saw as its guilt in colluding with the enemy.

That same year history speeded up for Maqdisi, Zarqawi, and some three hundred other Jordanian veterans of Afghanistan. Their militant faith had remained strong. Frustrated because they could

not wage “their” war, they constituted a terrorist cell. Toughened by battle and lacking real social bonds in their country of origin, they declared themselves “ready for a confrontation with the [Jordanian] government on the basis of their beliefs.”⁷² They violently disapproved of the peace treaty with Israel that was about to be signed. All of them had received military training, sometimes in camps, like Salah Eddin in Jalalabad, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Some, like Zarqawi at Sada, were trained in the very first camps established by Al-Qaeda. In 1992–1993 the camps of the Saudi Osama Bin Laden, with their abundant facilities and equipment, were considered the most sophisticated and elite in Afghanistan. Costly air-to-ground Stinger missiles, for example, were often available for use during training. What was taught was the relentless imposition of Islamic law, if necessary by force.

This was the context in which Zarqawi introduced Maqdisi to some of his friends in Zarqa, all veterans of Afghanistan. Among them were Sherif (also known as Abu Ashraf), Suleiman Taleb Damra, Khaled Al-Aruri, Nasser Fayez and his brother Nafez, Mohammed Rawashdeh, Amer Sarraj, and Nasri Tahayinah,⁷³ who formed Zarqawi’s inner circle and would soon constitute Bayt Al-Imam (Allegiance to the Imams), his terrorist group. It has been claimed that the Jordanian authorities learned only in 1997, during the interrogation of the activist Osama Yassin Abu Shamah, professor at Yarmuk University and financier of the organization, that Osama Bin Laden provided funding for the formation of this terrorist cell.⁷⁴

In the course of his initial confessions before the Jordanian judiciary on August 31, 1994, Zarqawi described in detail how he and Maqdisi had organized Bayt Al-Imam. Maqdisi provided religious instruction, teaching political views hostile to the Jordanian regime. The message of this Palestinian ideologue, leader of the Salafist sphere of influence in the Middle East, is based on the idea that each individual must lead his life in accordance with the Koran, and that

the Arab governments, particularly that of Jordan, do not honor this precept. This is why the Jordan regime must disappear.

Together with Zarqawi, Maqdisi gave an increasing number of speeches in the homes of group members and in places of worship won over to the cause of jihad, for example the Hamuri Mosque in Awajan, a suburb of Amman, not far from the Zarqawi family home. Here he tested out all his arguments: the decline of Jordanian sovereignty in the face of Israel, American interference in the region, the need for jihad, the struggle against the infidels. As Zarqawi stated before the prosecutor Mahmud Obeidat, his group opposed the United States because that country rejects Islam.

Maqdisi's talent and eloquence and Zarqawi's charisma and the fear he inspired attracted new disciples. The group kept expanding as it recruited in the Jordanian provinces. On one occasion Zarqawi, accompanied by his friend Al-Aruri, traveled to the Karak region on the banks of the Dead Sea near the village of Al-Qasr. There they enrolled Abdul Majid Al-Majali. Mustafa Hassan Musa, Maqdisi's brother-in-law and a veteran of the Army of Mohammed that had been dissolved in 1991, soon brought them his skills in explosives.

Zarqawi has reported that one day, while his group was meeting at Mustafa Hassan Musa's home, the latter touched a spark to a sediment of acetone peroxide, an explosive in the form of a white powder, thereby producing a slight explosion. This was just one way of illustrating his project, which was to send a booby-trapped "Christmas card" to Walid Abu Daher, the editor of the Arabic magazine *Al-Watan Al-Arabi*, whose offices were in Paris. He never managed to bring this off,⁷⁵ though he was convicted of the attempted attack. Walid Abu Daher died in 2004.

As the meetings and theological discussions continued, the members of the group began to grow impatient to proceed to true terrorist action. At the instigation of Zarqawi and Maqdisi, a plan was drawn up for a suicide mission against Israeli targets. But in order to succeed they needed equipment.

Shortly before settling in Jordan in 1992, Maqdisi, as we know, had lived in Kuwait. As it happened, at the time of their retreat Saddam Hussein's troops had left behind quantities of munitions, and Maqdisi had bought a large supply of these on the black market. When he moved to Jordan he slipped five antipersonnel mines, seven hand grenades, and several antitank rockets among his household possessions. He would later confess to Jordanian investigators that his aim was to use this equipment in an attack on Israel.

To carry out operations the right way, Zarqawi suggested that Maqdisi hide the weapons in the large house in the Ma'soum district in which part of his family lived at the time. Maqdisi refused. After trying in vain for two weeks to conceal the equipment around the cemetery, Zarqawi returned most of it to Maqdisi, keeping just a few explosive charges for which he constructed a hiding place, a double wall, in the family home.⁷⁶ He wanted to keep these weapons, he said, "to use them in a suicide mission in the territories occupied by the Zionists."⁷⁷ He had, in fact, persuaded his two faithful colleagues, Suleiman Taleb Damra and Abdel Hadi Daghlas, to carry out a suicide mission on the border between Israel and Jordan. But the latter was arrested by the Jordanian authorities before this first terrorist action planned by Zarqawi could be put into effect.

Some of his accomplices in Bayt Al-Imam describe Zarqawi as ambitious but certainly not a visionary. Thus the Jordanian activist Yussef Rababa recalls a man who, unlike Osama Bin Laden, had no long-term projects. His lawyer at the time, Mohammed Dweik, goes as far as to state that his client never struck him as especially intelligent.⁷⁸ It was Maqdisi who served as the group's mentor, while Zarqawi took charge of military operations.

The arrest of Abdel Hadi Daghlas threw everything back into doubt. For, at this time, Bayt Al-Imam was composed of only a few men, basically Maqdisi, Zarqawi, Khaled Mustafa Khalifa Al-Aruri, Suleiman Taleb Damra, the brothers Nasser and Nafez Fayeze, Mohammed Rawashdeh, Amer Sarraj, Nasri Izzedin Mohammed

Al-Tahayneh, Mohammed Wasfi Omar Abu Khalil, Nabil Abu Harthiyeh, Sharif Abdul Fatah, and Ahmad Yussef. In addition, the hard core of the group were the men around Maqdisi, Zarqawi, Aruri, and Abu Khalil, and differences were beginning to arise among them.

The dissent came primarily from Khaled Al-Aruri, the third in command. Originally from Ramallah in Palestine, he was 27 years old at the time of these events. An employee of the Saudi organization IIRO in 1991, he returned to Zarqa in 1992. He supported Zarqawi but did not subscribe to all his projects, such as the plan to assassinate Ali Berjak, a member of the powerful antiterrorist intelligence service GID, and Yakub Zayadin, honorary president of the Jordanian Communist Party. Nor did Al-Aruri approve of the idea of setting fire to the GID headquarters.⁷⁹

Following several secret meetings of the members of Bayt Al-Imam, Zarqawi undertook to carry out the operations. He provided Aruri and Damra particulars on Berjak and Zayadin, collecting information on these two targets and locating Berjak's personal residence.⁸⁰ Eight years later, on February 28, 2002, two people were killed in the explosion near Berjak's residence of a booby-trapped car belonging to his wife.

IN ANY EVENT KHALED AL-ARURI HAS RETAINED ZARQAWI'S TRUST throughout his career as a terrorist. His name came up in the context of the inquiry into the Casablanca attacks of May 16, 2003: it was he who sent Aziz Hummani, a Moroccan Salafist, the \$70,000 needed to carry out the attacks.

The members of Bayt Al-Imam did not fear prison so much as the tough methods of the GID, whose aim, two years after the return of the first veterans, was to destroy these rebel groups. Tracked by the Jordanian government and weakened by the arrest of Abdel Hadi Daghlas, Bayt Al-Imam was driven into a corner. Zarqawi and

Maqdisi then planned to flee Jordan with false papers. To this end Zarqawi contacted Mahmoud Hassan Hadjawi, who lived near the Huseyn Mosque in Zarqa, to obtain a false passport. It cost him 100 dinars and a photo, and a week later he received the document in the name of Ali Ahmad Abdullah Majali.

As operational leader of the group, Zarqawi was able to use his contacts to the advantage of Maqdisi and Aruri. Maqdisi soon got a false Jordanian passport in the name of Fayez Al-Hafi.⁸¹ He and Zarqawi then hastened their preparations for flight, since, as Zarqawi would later confirm to the prosecutor who interrogated him, they knew they had been under observation by the Jordanian Secret Service for several days.⁸²

Zarqawi was aware that, ever since his return, he had been a priority target of the service on account of his fiendish personality and his relationship with Maqdisi. He received a summons from the headquarters of the service to appear at his Al-Ramzi residence but had already decided not to obey it. His reaction, as he himself described it during his interrogation, reveals a great deal about the kind of man he was: "I would have done anything not to go there and to resist if they decided to bring me in. When I knew I was summoned, I bought a submachine gun and paid 800 dinars for it. I did this with the aim of resisting if the police came to my house.... I had three rounds for this weapon and thirty-five cartridges."⁸³

Despite his firm intention not to be caught, Zarqawi was arrested on March 29, 1994. Five days later Maqdisi, too, was arrested by the police at home in Yajuz. During the search conducted under the direction of Captain Mustafa Awad, Maqdisi asked that his parents be allowed to leave the house so as not to learn that their son had hidden explosives in the family home.⁸⁴ The explosives in question were found in a false ceiling especially constructed for the purpose, as well as in the curtain rods. Maqdisi himself climbed up onto a barrel to point out the cache to the policemen.

The lawyer Fouad Badawi, who was officially appointed to defend

Zarqawi and Maqdisi, refused to do so and was soon replaced by Mohammed Dweik. During their interrogations the terrorists came up against the GID's severity, to the point where Maqdisi had to ask several times not to be hit.⁸⁵

In preparing the case, the military prosecutor Mahmoud Obeidat raised several charges against them, including participation in an illegal organization, unauthorized possession of explosives and weapons, falsification of passports, and impugning the honor of the king. Another military prosecutor, Muhannad Hijazi, who had been on the scene at the Ma'soum house, retained a precise memory of the way Zarqawi addressed him. Zarqawi was shackled at the time and under the surveillance of the security forces when the prosecutor came over to him. Although Hijazi wasn't wearing his badge or official insignia, Zarqawi called him by his name. Surprised, Hijazi asked how he knew his name, and Zarqawi replied that he had seen him at work in a number of court cases and had noted the pertinence of his closing speeches.

Hijazi recalls a hardened boy with a piercing gaze, his body covered with tattoos. In his opinion Zarqawi was more of an ordinary delinquent at this time than an international terrorist; his reputation was that of a hoodlum with vague religious learning. When he was apprehended Zarqawi had tried several times to pass messages to his family members, who were watching from the balcony of the house. He had tried especially hard to let his brother know where the explosives were hidden; he had told the police that the weapons were in a dry stream bed below the family home near the Zarqa cemetery, whereas they were within the precincts of the house itself. Before this Zarqawi had pretended for several hours that he no longer remembered the hiding place.⁸⁶

His brother Omar, too, was eventually arrested in connection with the investigation of the Bayt Al-Imam network and spent prison time in Suwaqah.

Hardened as he was, Zarqawi signed detailed confessions before

the military prosecutor Mahmoud Obeidat on August 31, 1994, declaring himself guilty of having possessed bombs and mines without official permission, and of having forged and used a false passport.⁸⁷ Maqdisi, in turn, signed similar confessions and went as far as to condemn terrorism: "The bombs, mines, and weapons I had at my disposal were not destined for terrorist actions in Jordan but for resistance against the Israeli enemy, and I am against all persons committing terrorist acts against the police, agents of the intelligence services, movie theaters, and stores selling alcohol."⁸⁸ We do not know under what circumstances Maqdisi made this statement. In any event, the actions undertaken by Bayt Al-Imam come under the heading of terrorism as that term is ordinarily understood and were primarily aimed at the Hashemite kingdom.

After this initial arrest Maqdisi continued to support the Salafist cause and Islamist attacks perpetrated around the world, taking special pleasure in the terrorist actions of September 11 in Washington and New York. Although he is once again incarcerated in Jordan, he continues to spread his extremist views on his Web site.

THUS, IN THE COURSE OF THE YEAR 1994, THE BAYT AL-IMAM group was dissolved by the Jordanian police, and its leaders, Maqdisi and Zarqawi, were convicted and imprisoned. This group had been one of the gravest extremist threats hanging over Jordan, and the authorities breathed a sigh of relief. But scarcely three years later, in 1997, new investigations pointed to a reactivation of Bayt Al-Imam centering around four young Jordanians, Mujahid Abd Al-Rahim, Isa Al-Khalayleh, Ali Al-Khalayleh, and Saud Al-Khalayleh. The last three belong to the Zarqawi clan, Saud being Abu Musab's own cousin.⁸⁹

CHAPTER 5

At Suwaqah, the Desert Prison

THE OPERATION AGAINST ZARQAWI AND HIS GROUP WAS A GREAT success for the Jordanian security forces. The thirteen terrorists came before the Court of Military Security, presided over by Colonel Yussef Fawri, in November 1996.

During the trial Maqdisi seemed to revoke his confession, shouting, "*Allahu akbbar* [God is great], history will record the secret of our jihad, the voice of jihad will not weaken." When Colonel Fawri pronounced the sentence of fifteen years in prison for the leaders of the group, Maqdisi recited verses from the Koran. Before leaving the room, he cried, "Your penalties only strengthen our faith in our religion. Victory until jihad!"⁹⁰

Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi received his first oppressive prison sentence in his own country only three years after returning to it. From that day on he cherished a virulent hatred against that power, which he considered to be corrupt and in the pay of the Americans. In 1995, however, these same Americans would express concern about the poor conditions under which the Jordanian prisoners at Suwaqah were detained.⁹¹

At the trial Zarqawi seemed mesmerized by the Salafist views in which he had immersed himself since his return from Afghanistan. He challenged Jordanian power along with all forms of public authority. He did not want a lawyer at his side and refused to listen to the judge, whose verdicts, he said, were contrary to the teachings of God. He tried, quite awkwardly, to be his own defense attorney, asking his judges to repent and get back in touch with the spirit of jihad. He had obviously lost awareness of reality: his was a confused, disturbed personality, saturated with an ideology adroitly distilled by his intellectual mentor, Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi. The court-appointed lawyer for Zarqawi and Maqdisi, Mohammed Dweik, cast a jaundiced eye on the two men: "At the time Ahmed [Zarqawi] had the same ideas as Maqdisi...; he [Zarqawi] could have admitted to being Maqdisi's clone. But Maqdisi is a thousand times more dangerous than Zarqawi. He had charm and charisma and could have convinced anyone."⁹²

After the madrasas in Pakistan, the landmines in Afghanistan, and the suburbs of Amman, Zarqawi found a new battleground: the Jordanian prisons. And it was in prison that his magnetism and strength appeared in a new light. Sentenced on November 27, 1996, to fifteen years of confinement, he was immediately transferred to the high-security prison of Suwaqah, one of the most heavily guarded in Jordan, located in the middle of the desert between Amman and Aqaba.

He had already spent over two years there since his arrest in 1994. On the third tier of the third cellblock, he occupied cell number six opposite the office of the prison director.⁹³ This large collective cell, scattered with steel beds, held various "Islamists" including certain members of Bayt Al-Imam. One of Zarqawi's cellmates recalls seeing him set up his bed as a tent by hanging the blankets down from each side of the mattress; seated on the ground, Zarqawi would try to memorize the verses of the Koran.⁹⁴ Maqdisi reports that, "on the level of the religious sciences [he] wasn't a model student, but he learned the Book of God by heart."⁹⁵

Maqdisi was incarcerated in the same prison at the same time. But now Zarqawi was the one with the influence. In 2004 Maqdisi gave a very mild version of this transfer of authority: “The brothers chose me as emir [chief]. I remained in that role unwillingly for a year before dedicating myself to the religious sciences. I decided to give my position to Zarqawi. Contrary to what certain people have written, [this] was not the result of a quarrel between us but the result of an agreement, so that we could speak with one voice to the heads of the prison.”

Zarqawi became a curiosity for his jailers and cellmates alike. Who was this man, his body covered with greenish tattoos, who spent his time reading the Koran? And why did he say so little? Intriguing and fascinating, he quickly made sure he had a network of relationships both inside and outside the prison. The outside relationships were easy. Maqdisi was able to compose and circulate his writings while in prison, be it at Suwaqah, Al-Salt, Jafar, or Kafkafa. In 2004 he explained that “in each prison it was possible for us to have letters sent out and books brought in The government imprisons us, and God gives us everything we need.”

Though the ways of God are impenetrable, corruption is often widespread in prisons. As for the regular transfers from one prison to another, according to Maqdisi they enabled the inmates “to get close to [our] brothers” and “strengthen ourselves in our convictions.” He adds, moreover, that the Jordanian government “does not suspect that prison makes our fight stronger.”

Sheikh Jarrah Al-Qaddah, who visited Zarqawi in prison, recalls seeing him shortly after he was found guilty. Zarqawi, he says, had the reputation of loving his brothers in arms more than the members of his own family, and he shouted a great deal inside the prison, just as he used to do in the streets of Zarqa when he got back from Afghanistan.

In just a few months’ time he became a respected ringleader in Suwaqah on the basis of his past in Afghanistan, his religious positions, his physical strength, his defiance of the prison authorities, and

his often summary treatment of his fellow inmates. Layth Shubaylat, a more moderate Islamist opponent of the Jordanian regime, was incarcerated at the same time for having been a member of the Army of Mohammed. The two men often crossed paths in the corridors. Although they were both Islamist militants, Zarqawi looked down on this former member of Parliament accustomed to political methods and involved in the democratic system. A faithful pupil of Maqdisi, Zarqawi believed that democracy was in no way compatible with the Koran.

Layth Shubaylat, for his part, recalls a man steeped in religion. On several occasions Zarqawi's sense of commitment led to rather sharp conflicts with the prison staff. For example, the supervisors required all the inmates, with the exception of some political prisoners, to wear uniforms. Zarqawi and his sidekicks refused, the uniform being in their view a symbol of submission to the authority of the regime. According to Shubaylat, the army sent troops into the prison one day in order to make sure the rule was respected. The situation turned into a clash, and Zarqawi's side finally had to give in. Mad with rage, he turned to the soldiers, hurling abuse at them and calling them infidels. According to the same source, right from the beginning of his incarceration Zarqawi established himself as one of the most influential ringleaders.⁹⁶

Layth Shubaylat was freed a few months later by decree of King Hussein and redoubled his attempts to have his Islamist companions released. He later reported his conversation with the king on the occasion of an audience the latter granted him shortly after he was freed:

—Your Highness, let me give them good news.

—About whom are you speaking?

—About the prisoners, the political prisoners, or let me say the Islamists, or let me say the Afghans.... Sir, let me tell you that you and I are responsible for these people.

—How?

—For fifty years you have taught them to stand up to Zionism. Would you expect them to change overnight? For me, as a moderate Islamist, you have failed. You haven't allowed me, or those who think the way I do, to develop one or the other part of our program. And so, Your Highness, you now have to expect that people worse than I am will call you an infidel.

As recounted by Layth Shubaylat the anecdote says nothing about the king's reaction.

While Shubaylat was pleading the Islamist cause before the king, the “democratic” Islamist forces, including the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, were launching into an intensive campaign of lobbying various political forces in the kingdom, and Zarqawi was entrenching his position inside the prison. As one day followed the next, his hatred of the regime and his rage against the “infidels” increased. Yet Zarqawi did not forget his family (especially his mother, Um Sayel, and his wife, Um Mohammed), to whom he regularly sent letters and drawings. Written in the first years of his detention, this correspondence shows how hardened he was becoming in prison. The deprivation of liberty strengthened him in his notion that he was on the right path in his struggle and had to remain steadfast in his beliefs. Nearly two years after his arrest by the Jordanian police Zarqawi showed no regret for his ideological choices or remorse for his first attempted attack.

His fellow prisoners drew closer to him, and Zarqawi noted which of them were the most faithful. The ties that formed during these years became indestructible, all the more so because they were based on a remorseless ideology. A Jordanian journalist, Abdallah Abu Rumman, the future editor in chief of the weekly *Al-Mira'ab*, shared Zarqawi's everyday life during their stay in Suwaqah. He recalls that in September 1996 Zarqawi was still the leader of the group of Islamist prisoners, especially those who came from Bayt Al-Imam.

At that time Zarqawi and his partisans were being held in a cell next to that of the journalist. They had their own social system following strict rules set up by Zarqawi, who attended to all aspects of the group's organization. In this same wing of the prison there were of course other factions, inspired by convictions different from Zarqawi's. According to Abu Rumman, internal wars would often break out between the clans, each accusing the other of apostasy. Prison opened a new battlefield for these warriors of God.

Thus in the early 1990s Suwaqah was a formidable breeding ground in which the most divergent Islamist causes were thrown together. The various movements represented there resembled gangs offering their members protection and survival insurance. Each group occupied its own space, recruiting new members, distributing its own proselytizing tracts, and meeting in specific places at the hour of prayer on Friday.

Several groups, all illegal, shared the central wing of the prison. Among them was the Islamic Liberation Party, whose leader, Ata Abu Al-Rashtah, was also the founder of the Al-Jun and Al-Mujib groups. Offshoots of the Jordanian Islamic Brotherhood, they coexisted with several Islamist mavericks like Layth Shubaylat. And then there were the "Afghans." These men were a group apart, determined to impose the caliphate in Jordan and throughout the Middle East, starting with Suwaqah Prison. Unpredictable and bold, the members of this movement had networks running from one wing to another of the prison and hence were feared by the other inmates. Zarqawi headed the group's hierarchy together with Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi.

Looking on at this fundamentalist organization reconstituted inside the prison, Abdallah Abu Rumman stressed the influence Zarqawi gradually achieved among the "Afghan" prisoners to the detriment of the ideologue Maqdisi.⁹⁷ Even though he had inspired Zarqawi's Islamist vocation, Maqdisi now saw his control and influence diminishing. Unlike the theoretician Maqdisi, Zarqawi was glad to play the

strongman and provoke the guards and administration of the prison. He even tried several times to organize uprisings, maintaining the aggressivity of the group of inmates sharing his conditions of detention. Summoned to the office of the head of security at Suwaqah, he looked him straight in the eye on each occasion.⁹⁸

Zarqawi's outbursts earned him not only close surveillance inside the prison but also the special attention of his jailers. The wing in which the members of Bayt Al-Imam were held soon enjoyed privileges such as exemption from the morning roundups in the prison yard and, eventually, from the need to wear a uniform. According to Abdallah Abu Rumman, the "Afghans" were also freer to move around within the prison, visiting other inmates without fearing reprimands.⁹⁹

FLAUNTING HIS DEFIANCE OF THE GUARDS, ZARQAWI ATTRACTED the admiration, or at least the respect, of his comrades. Unlike the other inmates, he behaved like a rebel. But, by the same token, he found it hard to take criticism.

One of the inmates, Yussef Rababa, incarcerated at the same time for his ties to the illegal organization Ajlun Minds, often wrote for the prison magazine. When he published articles critical of Zarqawi, the latter replied with his fists. According to Rababa, this is all Zarqawi was capable of, being unable to view a situation objectively and use words in support of his actions.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, some reports describe an impassioned man carried away by a vision, the vision of the advent of the caliphate. But the majority of eyewitnesses recall a violent Zarqawi who could not tolerate contradiction and religious differences. According to his comrades, on several occasions he even struck some of his fellow prisoners for having read books other than the Koran.

One of these men, Abu Doma, convicted of throwing a bomb at civilians, has an unpleasant memory of Zarqawi. One day the latter came upon Abu Doma, who was reading *Crime and Punishment*. "Why are you reading this book by a heathen?" he asked. Some time later

Abu Doma received a threatening letter from Zarqawi, reproaching him for having immersed himself in Dostoyevsky's masterpiece. Next, according to Abu Doma, Zarqawi sent him a letter in very bad Arabic, as though it had been written by a young child, ordering him to stop reading "Doseefsky."

Zarqawi came and went freely in the prison, wearing his traditional Afghan garments. He took credit for the great Afghan battles against the Russians, although he had not actually experienced them. In the course of the secret meetings and long afternoon discussions in cell number six, he maintained the myth of the "Arabs" of Afghanistan, forging a legend for himself. Unable to hold his own in the political debates established among the Islamists, he created a different impression by lifting makeshift weights he cobbled together out of pieces of his bed and olive oil cans filled with pebbles. His cellmates clearly recall his muscle-building exercises. To keep himself fit, he ran in the prison yard every day. His physical strength became a way for him to ensure his power; he liked "to have his authority in his hands," Yussef Rababa confirms.¹⁰¹ Zarqawi later demonstrated this in Iraq, during the darkest hours of the execution of hostages.

As the months went by Zarqawi developed the body of a fighter. He became an essential figure in the small world of Suwaqah, taking on a social role by distributing meals to his fellow inmates, participating regularly in housekeeping chores, and on occasion bathing his sick cellmates.¹⁰² In this way he won the forty prisoners around him over to his cause. He then extended his sphere of power by recruiting among the ordinary delinquents and the drug addicts, whom he considered "victims of society."¹⁰³

In the course of 1997 Zarqawi and the political prisoners at Suwaqah were transferred to the prison of Al-Salt and, in early 1998, they were finally incarcerated at the high-security prison at Jafar, one of Jordan's harshest penal institutions, which was reopened for the occasion.¹⁰⁴ There Zarqawi asked to consult the prison doctor. One of his relatives was diabetic, and he wanted to know his own blood sugar

level. The physician on duty, Dr. Basil Abu Sabha, still remembers how great an influence Zarqawi exerted; during that visit the doctor observed that Zarqawi was able to give orders to his fellow inmates solely by blinking his eyes, and that the others did not go to the infirmary unless they had gotten his permission in advance.¹⁰⁵ Abu Sabha also noted that Zarqawi had tried to remove his tattoos, indelible as they were, with hydrochloric acid.

In that same year, 1998, when Al-Qaeda struck the American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, Zarqawi mentioned to his cellmates his firm intention to join in the attack on American targets.

ZARQAWI GAINED HIS INDEPENDENCE IN SUWAQAH PRISON. WHILE he was shaping his body and radicalizing his ideas, his wife, Um Mohammed, his oldest daughter, Aminah, and his mother, already seriously ill, were impatiently awaiting his return to the family home in Al-Ramzi. The people close to him were worried about his situation, but Zarqawi himself was not anxious in prison. Quite the contrary, he felt comfortable there. In the intermittent letters he sent to his family, he explained that he had become reconciled with himself—and with God.

Over the course of the year 1998, Zarqawi dedicated more and more time to praying among his comrades. After each Friday prayer he prolonged the sermon by speaking up against the unbelievers and the injustices committed by the Arab and American regimes. Yussef Rababa, observing developments from the outside, noticed a profound change in the relationship between Zarqawi and Maqdisi at this time; it became increasingly strained as Zarqawi grew envious of the recognition accorded the theologian by those around him. At the end of the year Maqdisi remained alone in Suwaqah after Zarqawi's transfer to Jafar.

Since the time of his arrest in 1994, Zarqawi had most definitely not calmed down. Unlike Osama Bin Laden, who advocated the fight

against the Jews and the Crusaders, Zarqawi swore the destruction of all unbelievers, which assured him quite a large range of potential targets to aim at once he was released.

For Zarqawi, the term “unbeliever” covers a rather heterogeneous set of people, including not only Christians and Jews but also Shiites, Hindus, and, more generally, all those who do not strictly adhere to the tenets of Salafism. By the end of his incarceration in Jordanian prisons he had been won over to the Manichean idea that there are two worlds: the world of Sunni Muslim believers of the Salafist persuasion and the world of the others, the *kafirs* or unbelievers, among whom he counts Muslims themselves when they collaborate with the “implacable” enemies: Israel and the United States. No individual belonging to the second category deserves to live. Shortly before his release from prison Zarqawi confided to Rababa that it was his duty to attack unbelievers wherever they might be and without distinction, whether Europeans or Shiite Muslims.

While Zarqawi was swearing the fulfillment of his dark plans, the Jordanian intelligence services were deeply concerned about this man who was unclassifiable, determined, and hardened by five years of imprisonment. For Zarqawi was unpredictable. He did not fit into any preestablished schema or partisan logic but seemed to obey an instinct of destruction. On this last point the militant Zarqawi is very far from the sophisticated objectives of Al-Qaeda and the ideological directions taken by Osama Bin Laden. The various terrorist operations undertaken by Al-Qaeda at this time conformed to a longstanding political and military strategy worked out and executed by Bin Laden himself. At this stage Zarqawi, like Maqdisi, lacked the means to put his ambitious terrorist program into action.

At first, therefore, Zarqawi would have to content himself with a terrorism of expediency.

PART II

Full-Time Terrorist

He was a sort of hoodlum in the city of Zarqa. He did not have the reputation of being an intelligent or brilliant man. All of a sudden, when he was just a criminal and a drunk, he found himself in the nets of Al-Qaeda.

—KING ABDALLAH OF JORDAN,
SEPTEMBER 27, 2004

CHAPTER 6

A New Departure

AMMAN, JANUARY 1999. KING HUSSEIN WAS DEAD; LONG LIVE King Abdallah, who ascended to the throne of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Abdallah had spent his childhood between Jordan and England, primarily in Surrey, with his English mother, Antoinette Avril, who converted to Islam and took the name Mouna. Schooled at St. Edmond's and then at the military academy Sandhurst, he returned to Jordan only in 1984. Until he was named to the position of brigadier general in the Jordanian army in 1994, Abdallah pursued his studies in the most prestigious Anglo-Saxon universities, including Georgetown in Washington, D. C. It goes without saying that the most Westernized of Arab leaders in the Middle East was quickly denounced by Islamists of every stripe as the pawn of the Americans. As for Abdallah, he wanted to open his country to the outside world and liberalize the Jordanian economy.

In spite of the dissent, the coming to power of the young king worked in favor of regional stability at first. For Abdallah was quick to distance himself from the rigid directions his father had taken when it came to foreign policy. He aligned himself closely with

Washington in the hope of a lasting diplomatic rapprochement with the United States. Though Abdallah refused to let his country become the rear base of the Americans in their project of destabilizing the regime in Iraq, the alliance with the United States took on a special dimension after September 11, 2001, when Jordan headed the list of the Arab nations taking an active part in the antiterrorist struggle waged by Washington. On the regional level Abdallah undertook to pursue Jordan's efforts in the context of the peace treaty of 1994, maintaining peace with Israel. Yet the peace accords remained the subject of strong criticism among the people of Jordan, and even more so in the Islamic world in general.

From the beginning of his reign Abdallah had to work things out with the Islamists, and in particular with the Muslim Brotherhood. A full-fledged institution in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood is one of the top-level political forces in the kingdom. Established in Amman in 1946 as a political party, it defends a fundamentalist vision of Islam. Persecuted in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, and Algeria, the Brotherhood positioned itself under Jordanian protection in the 1970s. This same group, however, had stood by without lifting a finger when the Palestinians of Jordan were crushed in 1970. They followed a policy of docile submission with regard to the king. Given their apparently harmless nature, King Hussein had opened the doors of democratic representation to them in the 1989 election. After an unexpected landslide, the Muslim Brotherhood now dominates the Jordanian Parliament and occupies several ministerial positions.

From 1989 on, then, the Jordanian ruler had to come to terms with the Brotherhood. Its role in Jordanian society had become too important to be ignored or neglected. By 1995 the fraternity employed over one thousand people and controlled entire sectors of society: some thirty schools, eighteen health clinics, and two hospitals.¹ Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood controls some of the Palestinian refugee camps, including the one in Zarqa, one of the largest in the kingdom. It is said to play a role in the writing of textbooks and the

development of educational programs. In book after book it spreads an anti-Semitic and anti-Christian message, in contrast to the king's efforts in the direction of openness.

Like his father, Abdallah undertook a politics of compromise with the Islamists, receiving the heads of Hamas, for example, on March 18, 1999, in the presence of Abdul Majid Zuneibat, the leader of the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamas is the Brotherhood's Palestinian branch). On this occasion Hamas had to repeat the oath of allegiance to Jordan it had made in 1992. As a token of goodwill, the new king granted early release to twelve imprisoned militants of the movement. On August 31, 1999, however, he was forced to close the Jordanian branch of Hamas under American and Israeli pressure.

In the first weeks of his reign Abdallah received a great many requests from Parliament, the Muslim Brotherhood, and various Islamist committees to free political prisoners, that is, fundamentalist Muslims being held in Jordanian penal institutions. This pressure was all the stronger for being supported by public opinion. Faced with this groundswell and the intensive lobbying deployed by Islamist movements, Abdallah was cornered, especially since, traditionally, a royal amnesty is extended forty days after the death of the sovereign. That time was drawing near.

On March 23, 1999, the television news opened with the announcement of a general amnesty for Jordanian prisoners. The king had given in, and, to Washington's great displeasure, the amnesty included the Islamist prisoners. The royal decree was approved by a vote of Parliament on March 18, 1999.² The pardon excluded only individuals imprisoned for drug dealing, slavery, treason, rape, murder, or terrorism. Not a word about the Islamists.

Ultimately three thousand prisoners were freed, Zarqawi among them. The heads of the various Jordanian security services were bitter about this general amnesty. One of them stated confidentially that "many of the freed men are recidivist hoodlums and delinquents who

will remain a burden on Jordanians after their release.”³ This statement was very close to the truth.

The Islamists in power hastened to get their activists out of prison. The amnesty decree went into effect on March 18, 1999, and two days later fifteen members of the Islamist Action Party were freed. Abdul Majid Zuneibat took credit for the king’s decision. On the basis of this success, several Islamist groups in Parliament, for example the Committee on Public Freedoms and Human Rights under Muhammad Al-Azayidah, demanded the immediate release of their people. Al-Azayidah asked for the immediate discharge of the “Afghans” being held in Jordanian prisons, and, on March 29, 1999, Zarqawi and his comrade Khaled Al-Aruri were free men.

SENTENCED TO FIFTEEN YEARS IN PRISON, ZARQAWI DID NOT EXPECT this early release, and it was almost with regret that he left his cell in Jafar. Given his determination to take action against the “unbelievers,” his former associates were waiting to have him rejoin them. A few weeks later Maqdisi left Suwaqah Prison, was kept under surveillance by the GID, and, in 2002, was sent back to prison, where he remains.

Not a single day had gone by in Suwaqah without Zarqawi’s promising the destruction of the infidels. Later on he often told those around him, especially his brother-in-law Saleh Al-Hami, that he hadn’t really been glad to regain his freedom. In accordance with the profile of the psychopath who gradually gets used to incarceration to the point where he needs it for his sense of stability, as time went on in prison Zarqawi had gained an increasingly comfortable position based on his reputation. Outside of the world of prison, he had to start all over again. He confided to his brother-in-law that his detention caused him less distress than living as an ordinary Jordanian, which seemed highly monotonous to him. Hardly out of prison, Zarqawi struck Al-Hami as a man overcome by his lassitude and unem-

ployment, once again eager to leave his own country. "I sensed the spirit of jihad deep within him," Al-Hami later reported.⁴

Set free at seven o'clock in the evening, Zarqawi did not return home to kiss his mother until eight the next morning. He intentionally spent an extra night in prison to share a few more hours with his cellmates.⁵ Later—too late—King Abdallah would admit that his release "was perhaps a mistake," adding, however, that "no one could have suspected at the time what would become of him." On the contrary: there was every reason to believe that Zarqawi was on the point of lapsing into religious violence.

Zarqawi spent only one month with his relatives,⁶ the time he needed to prepare for his departure. He made a show of trying to find a job, but after his two previous career failures he was under no illusions. For a time he toyed with the idea of buying a truck and selling fruits and vegetables, but this plan went nowhere. He attended the mosques of Zarqa once again, trying to mobilize a new set of young men, but his mind was elsewhere. Already planning his revenge, he joined the preparations for the attacks scheduled for the millennium. (As we shall see, these were foiled in October 1999.)

Convinced that Jordan was becoming too dangerous a country for him and his sidekicks,⁷ and that sooner or later he would fall into the hands of the GID, he organized his departure for Pakistan, where he planned to stay on a six-month visa.

Before leaving he withdrew his children from the school system and ordered them to learn the Koran thoroughly. His mother would later say that his decision to leave early was mainly due to the fact that the GID kept on investigating him after he left prison.⁸

In setting out for Pakistan in the summer of 1999 Zarqawi put behind him his family life, his past as a delinquent, and his country. He also distanced himself for awhile from Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi. With the exception of a few isolated terrorist projects aimed at his country of origin, he never went back to Jordan. Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi was entering a life of secrecy and engaging in "global jihad."

Several years later, in a message broadcast in Iraq, he described his departure in these terms: "Although I yearn for the cradle of my childhood and feel a burning desire for my parents, my brothers, and my childhood friends, I am global and have no land that I can call my country. My fatherland is wherever God's word takes me." He added that he "left the land of [his] memory, emigrating to the land of hope where the religion of God was established on earth, and then to the land of Afghanistan in obedience to Allah."⁹

Zarqawi told his lawyer at the time, Mohammed Dweik, that Afghanistan was his only chance. Indeed, in the opinion of Yusef Rababa, his former cellmate in Suwaqah, "Because of his ideological orientations there was no longer a place for him in Jordan."¹⁰ And shortly before he left, Zarqawi said this to Saleh Al-Hami: "Do you remember my dream? Do you remember the sword that fell from the sky, with the inscription 'jihad' engraved on the blade?"

AND SO ZARQAWI LEFT JORDAN A SECOND TIME, HEADING FOR Hayatabad,¹¹ where he had stayed during his first trip to Pakistan between 1989 and 1993. Nostalgic for the grand time of the mujahidin, he was happy to find himself once again in this frontier city, a stopping place familiar to many Arab fighters who had received medical attention there.

Hayatabad is on the outskirts of Peshawar, near the border with Afghanistan. One of Zarqawi's sisters lived there, married to a teacher of religion. His mother says that she accompanied her son to Hayatabad in 1999 and stayed there for a month.¹²

Even more than Peshawar, Hayatabad is a fallback position for Al-Qaeda. The Wafa Organization, one of the Islamic humanitarian groups implicated in Al-Qaeda's functioning, was established in this city. Originally in Jordan, this radical nongovernmental organization (NGO) was characterized as "terrorist" by the United Nations committee on sanctions against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Moreover,

during the German proceedings against Zarqawi's terrorist networks, known as Al-Tawhid, one of Osama Bin Laden's lieutenants, Shadi Abdalla, confirmed that Zarqawi had received major assistance from the Wafa Organization in Pakistan: "In addition to providing false papers and planning clandestine trips, the members of Al-Tawhid take care of providing money for the fighters. For that, the Pakistani Wafa Organization plays an important role with its office in Kabul."¹³

According to the repentant terrorist Jamal Ahmed Al-Fadl, a former top-ranking leader in Al-Qaeda who became an informer for the United States government, Hayatabad is definitely one of the primary nerve centers for Al-Qaeda in Pakistan. At the end of the investigation into the attacks directed against the American embassies in Africa, a criminal trial against Osama Bin Laden and those in charge of the attacks was held in the United States in February 2001. In the course of this trial Al-Fadl gave one of the most precise accounts of Al-Qaeda.

Thus, when asked about what kind of support the terrorist group had in Pakistan, Al-Fadl replied that Al-Qaeda had had guest houses at its disposal in Hayatabad since 1991.¹⁴ And it was in Hayatabad that the Tanzanian Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, the Al-Qaeda member in charge of the attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, was arrested on August 19, 2004. Other important members were also captured in this fiefdom of Osama Bin Laden.

ONCE IN HAYATABAD, ZARQAWI TRIED TO PUT HIS PERSONAL LIFE back together and reconstitute his networks in the shortest possible time. His jihad could wait no longer; the fanatic Islamist was impatient to make up for the time lost in Jordanian prisons. He made more and more contacts, renewing his ties with his former friends from the time of the mujahidin and returning to his former quarters in Hayatabad's most extremist places of worship, the very ones he had stayed at in the early 1990s.

But the situation had changed since then. Peshawar in 1999 had become the rear base of the Taliban. The Afghan mullahs were recruiting on a large scale in the mosques and places of worship. And the Taliban leaders would take refuge there in 2001 after the coalition began bombing Afghanistan.

CHAPTER 7

Entering Al-Qaeda

AT FIRST UM MOHAMMED AND HER CHILDREN MOVED INTO A modest three-room house in the Al-Kasarat district north of Zarqa, but she soon joined Zarqawi in Pakistan.

Hayatabad is also the city that welcomed Osama Bin Laden at the start of the war against the Soviets. According to several reports, in the mid-1980s the Saudi had settled in the Fourth District with his wives and children. From 1987 on, Hayatabad was his rear base.

Zarqawi's return to Pakistan coincided with Al-Qaeda's rise in power. The network had emerged with new strength after the attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998, attacks that left two hundred and twenty-four victims. Osama Bin Laden was now focusing his group's activities on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, specifically between Peshawar and Jalalabad.

It was not by chance that Zarqawi had come there. He knew that if he wanted to plan large-scale operations he had to get closer to Al-Qaeda's decision center and especially to Osama Bin Laden himself. Since his visa permitted him to stay in Pakistan for only six months, his time was running out. And so each evening he would go

to the central mosque in Peshawar to pray and to try, in his own way, to force destiny. But the Pakistani authorities were watchful.

In 1999 the international community was greatly concerned with the aid Pakistan was providing for the Islamists. Pakistan and its central intelligence organization, ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) were accused of playing into the hands of the terrorists, or at least of the Taliban government next door. Moreover, the parts of Pakistan adjacent to Afghanistan were inevitably succumbing to what has been called a kind of Talibanization. This was causing anxiety around the world, exacerbated by the fact that Pakistan was now a nuclear power. The Taliban ideology moved easily across the porous borders of the Afghan mountains as Afghanistan was torn apart by an endless civil war following the peace agreements with the USSR.

The fundamentalist Pashtun regime governing Afghanistan at that time was close to Islamabad. Kabul was under the yoke of fundamentalist leaders whose faces remained unknown, photographs and photocopies being forbidden by the Taliban. The prerogatives of the state were strictly limited to Islamic law, and, with its neighbor's blessings, Afghanistan had become the first caliphate in modern history.

The Taliban regime was supported by a major segment of Pakistani religious leaders like the mullahs of Peshawar, who advocated an updated interpretation of Deobandism, a school of fundamentalist thought that had originated in Deoband, India, as a branch of Sunni Islam promoting the struggle against the British colonizers there. The Pakistani mullahs preached hatred and violence against the infidel Western governments trying to reproduce the colonial pattern in Central Asia.

Saudi money, which had continued to flow in since the end of the war against the Soviets, made it easier to operationalize these precepts. Between 1994 and 1999 almost 100,000 Pakistanis passed through Afghan training camps,¹⁵ and an alliance was soon formed between the Taliban and the opposition party of Pakistani Islamists, Jamiat-Ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI). In July 1999 between six and eight

thousand Pakistani militants joined the ranks of the Taliban. Stonings occurred every week in the streets of Kabul, and all women wore the veil. Thus the Taliban regime was supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, two of Washington's traditional allies.

But Pakistan went too far in providing support. From 1993 to 1999 the government of Benazir Bhutto became increasingly discontent with the political danger posed by its troublesome neighbor. Shortly before she was overthrown by the coup d'état led by General Pervez Musharraf in October 1999, Bhutto undertook a series of purges aimed at Arab militants still present on Pakistani soil. These operations were a response to requests and pressures coming not only from the United States but also from Arabs who hoped to reclaim their "lost soldiers." Going against its traditional policy, Pakistan carried out several raids in Peshawar and above all in Hayatabad, where Zarqawi had recently settled.

In the wrong place at the wrong time, Zarqawi was once more arrested by the police, in this case the Pakistanis. Between May and July 1999 several dozen Arab activists like him were held in the central prison in Peshawar awaiting expulsion to Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, which were for the most part their countries of origin.¹⁶ A number of these extremists would nevertheless manage to escape with the help of ISI, which secretly continued to support the government of the Taliban.

When Zarqawi settled in Pakistan in the spring of 1999, the situation of Jordanian nationals had already become complicated. For several months the Jordanian government, with the help of the American FBI, had been stepping up its pressure on Benazir Bhutto to arrest the American-Palestinian national Khalil Al-Deek.¹⁷ Said to be close to Osama Bin Laden's lieutenant Abu Zubaydah, Al-Deek was the operational head of the terrorist cell that planned the so-called millennium attacks in Jordan, a project aimed at the Radisson Hotel SAS in the heart of Amman.

The attention of the Pakistani security forces was therefore

focused on Jordan, and as a result Zarqawi was first monitored and then arrested. He spent about a week in prison in Peshawar. During this time, if we are to believe her, his mother in Amman was sure he was selling honey in the city markets.¹⁸ He was eventually released and, though he was listed as a terrorist by the security forces of his own country, given an exit permit by the Pakistani authorities. In any event, he left Peshawar for Karachi.

Once in Karachi, Zarqawi had to make a choice: Should he go back to Jordan or rejoin the Taliban in Afghanistan? As far as he was concerned, Jordan was now just a target of destruction, and his heart was inclined toward the Islamic emirate of Afghanistan. All he had dreamed of these past years was finally being realized in this state, ruled by the discipline of the mullahs, where women were entirely covered—in short, where sharia (Islamic law) was applied, and nothing but sharia.

And so, at the end of the summer of 1999, Zarqawi returned to Afghanistan. He first moved into a house near Wazir Allbar Khan Square.¹⁹ Um Mohammed remained in Pakistan with the children for the time being, but she would soon join her husband in Kabul. Shortly before coming to Afghanistan for the second time, however, Zarqawi had met Asra, a young Palestinian who was the daughter of Yasin Abdallah Mohammed Jarad, an instructor at the Herat training camp in eastern Afghanistan, who would later be killed in Iraq.²⁰ Zarqawi fell in love with Asra, who was then 13, took her with him to Kabul, and married her when he was heading the camp at Herat. According to a document from the German security services, Zarqawi also got married a third time, to a girl of 16 whom he met in Iraq, her native country, in 2003.²¹

A memorandum from the United States National Security Council, dated April 29, 1999, claims that at this time Al-Qaeda was using the city of Herat to stockpile nuclear material,²² a detail indicating the crucial role of this city on the Iranian border for the terrorist group.

In the fall of 1999 some young Arab activists who had not fought against the Soviets planned a meeting in Kabul. The word was spread through the circuit of extremist places of worship in Europe and over the Internet: Al-Qaeda was recruiting. A new holy war was in the offing, this time in Afghanistan, against Western interests in the world. Facilities for receiving new recruits, directed by the Jordanian Abu Zubaydah in Pakistan, were moved to Afghanistan in June 1999. At the end of that year Abu Zubaydah, who was now in charge of Al-Qaeda's military operations in Kabul, met with the group of Jordanians under Zarqawi.

On the basis of the charisma he had displayed at Suwaqah and his knowledge of the small world of Jordanian Islamists, Zarqawi had established himself as the leader of the group of Jordanians who came with him to Afghanistan. These included not only his first comrades from the time of Bayt Al-Imam, Khaled Al-Aruri and Abdel Hadi Daghlas, both of whom had left prison in 1999, but also all sorts of future fighters. In the space of a few weeks he had shown surprising skill in reconstituting an operational group and bringing his partisans into Al-Qaeda.

Zarqawi then moved into a "guest house" large enough for his group of about forty Jordanians in the village of Logo, several kilometers west of Kabul, an area traditionally under the control of the extremist leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.²³ He leaned on Al-Qaeda, of course, at first to take advantage of its equipment and logistical support so that he could plan large-scale operations. The man who opened the door of Bin Laden's structure to this group of Jordanians was a Jordanian himself, Abu Zubaydah, Al-Qaeda's head of operations.

By the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2000 Zarqawi had proved himself an important part of the Al-Qaeda apparatus in Afghanistan, and in 2001 he took the oath of allegiance to Bin Laden.²⁴ To avoid any conflict between dissident factions (in particular the Algerian groups), starting in May 2001 the Taliban required all heads of

training camps who wanted to pursue their activities to swear allegiance to their regime.

Having taken this step, Zarqawi had to conform to the ideological line set by Osama Bin Laden. The oath of allegiance was a way for Bin Laden to rein in rebellious spirits, but it was primarily a way to bring the different “Islamist-nationalist” groups together under a single banner. The oath, written by Bin Laden himself, is as follows: “I recall the commitment to God, in order to listen to and obey my superiors, who are accomplishing this task with energy, difficulty, and giving of self, and in order that God may protect us so God’s words are the highest and his religion victorious.”²⁵

Since its creation in 1988 the Al-Qaeda organization has functioned according to a complex system of interpersonal relationships. Each group present in Afghanistan—Jordanians, Egyptians, Algerians, Tunisians, and Kurds—obviously had its own concept of jihad, often linked to plans for action aimed at the destruction of the political regime in its country of origin. By making these different groups swear an oath of allegiance, Bin Laden unified them under a single banner and avoided conflicts of interest. Like the other leaders of foreign groups, Abu Doha for the Algerians or Abu Iyad for the Tunisians, Zarqawi had to line up under the flag of Al-Qaeda. There was no choice.

There were three levels in Al-Qaeda at the time. At the top, of course, were Osama Bin Laden and his right-hand man, the Egyptian Ayman Al-Zawahiri. Around them, in a second circle, a managerial staff took shape, each man assigned to a specific mission (security, intelligence, ideology, planning). The third level of the hierarchy consisted of several hundred operational members, many of whom had come up through the Afghan training camps. They ran autonomous terrorist cells in Arab or Western countries that were nevertheless ideologically aligned with the positions of Al-Qaeda.

According to a confidential document of the Spanish antiterrorist unit UCIE (Unidad Central de Informacion Exterior), at the end

of the summer of 1999 Zarqawi joined the second circle, the circle of Bin Laden's lieutenants. By this time he was no longer an unknown or marginal figure. He was assigned the planning of the group's operations,²⁶ and as such was in charge of several dozen militants.

Shadi Abdalla, Bin Laden's former bodyguard, later told the German intelligence services that Zarqawi's rise within the Al-Qaeda hierarchy owed a great deal to Abu Zubaydah, who was himself very close to Osama Bin Laden. Both men were Jordanians; both were inspired by a visceral hatred of the Hashemite regime. Zarqawi is said to have assisted Zubaydah in the preparation of the so-called millennium attacks against Western interests in Jordan. During this first terrorist operation on the international level he would win the trust of the Al-Qaeda staff and of Bin Laden in particular.

Several witnesses agree that Zarqawi was in Kabul at the beginning of 2000, but the report of Saïd Arif is especially significant. This 37-year-old Algerian, imprisoned in Syria since July 2003 for his alleged membership in Al-Qaeda, took part in several Al-Qaeda staff meetings held in Kabul at the beginning of 2000. In the context of a judicial commission of inquiry with Syria concerning the file on the so-called Chechen Ring, French antiterrorist judges happened to have the opportunity to consult the confessions of Arif, who recalled having lunch with Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Abu Doha in Kabul in 2000.

Abu Doha, whose real name is Rashid Bukhalfa, was born in Constantine, Algeria, on November 24, 1969. He was an old friend of the Salafist leader Abu Qatada, based in London and today in prison. Both were in charge of Algeria House in Jalalabad, the main function of which was to facilitate the entry and reception of Algerian fighters who had come to join Al-Qaeda. At this luncheon, Arif says, he talked with the members of the Zarqawi group while Zarqawi himself was in the company of Abu Doha. Since Zarqawi's house in Kabul was right next to Zawahiri's, it is plausible that such a meeting took place.²⁷

Maqdisi's shadow was still hovering over Zarqawi's career path. Though the two men had gone through a period of tension and conflict when they were incarcerated together in Suwaqah, their fates seem to be irreparably linked. Zarqawi's progress within Al-Qaeda was determined by several factors: not only his strength of character and his charisma, but also his perfect knowledge of the Jordanian networks and his connection to Maqdisi. After the bombing in Afghanistan at the end of 2001, a number of documents were recovered from the "guest houses" belonging to Al-Qaeda. Since its founding in 1988, that group has kept meticulous and up-to-date records on the progress of its activities. The name of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi appears in these documents. He is always presented as "the friend of Al-Maqdisi," and the young recruits arriving in Afghanistan are directed to him.²⁸

A few months after arriving in Afghanistan Zarqawi was a member of the managerial staff of Al-Qaeda. This brought him close to the networks of the Algerian AIG (Armed Islamic Groups) and the Tunisian TIF (Tunisian Islamic Front). Beginning in 2000 the Tunisian activists belonging to Al-Qaeda were led by Seif Allah Ben Hasin, also known as Abu Iyad. Arrested by the German police in 1993, Abu Iyad was found to be in possession of a forged Dutch passport. He told the German authorities that he belonged to the Saudi charitable organization Al-Haramain, most of whose offices abroad had been designated as terrorist fronts by the United States government and the United Nations. In 1999 Abu Iyad, who would later become one of the leaders of the Darunta training camp, which is said to manufacture and experiment with chemical weapons, undertook a major rapprochement with Abu Qatada, who is considered to be the leader of Al-Qaeda in Europe.

Zarqawi's name appears in one of the letters, seized in 2002, that Abu Iyad sent to Abu Qatada. In this correspondence, Abu Iyad kept Abu Qatada informed of the progress of Al-Qaeda activities in Afghanistan. Although he is openly critical of the decisions of a certain

Abu Walid regarding the running of the camps, he praises the results obtained by Zarqawi, whom he calls “an honest, generous person who would be happy to sacrifice his soul and property for you.” He goes on to say that Zarqawi and his group “have decided to protect you against any attack if you decide to come.”²⁹

After spending several months convincing Bin Laden of his trustworthiness, Zarqawi developed his own network with the financial and material support of Al-Qaeda. He eventually left Kabul and settled in Herat, the third largest city in Afghanistan and an important business center bordering Iran and Turkmenistan, directly opposite Kabul on the map.

In moving to Herat Zarqawi distanced himself geographically from the Al-Qaeda staff. This raised doubts at the highest level of the organization; for several months certain dignitaries had suspected him of being “turned” by the Jordanian services during his five years of incarceration.³⁰

Zarqawi was a maverick, as we know, and his autonomy was making the hierarchy anxious.

CHAPTER 8

Origins of the Zarqawi Network

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR 2000, THEN, ZARQAWI MOVED to Herat with his second wife, the young Palestinian. Far from Al-Qaeda headquarters in Kandahar, the Herat training camp was slowly growing larger and receiving an increasing number of Arab recruits from eighteen different countries, including Jordanians and Palestinians. The camp was situated on the Iranian border near the customs house and the offices of the governor of the city, Abdel Manan Khawajazai, with whom Zarqawi had a good relationship.³¹ At the time it was disguised as a religious school³² and contained ten barracks. At the entry to the camp was a banner reading *Tawhid wal Jihad* (Unity and Jihad), which would become the name of Zarqawi's organization in Iraq.

In directing the camp he surrounded himself with people close to him. The faithful lieutenants at the heart of his network were Abdel Hadi Daghlas, Khaled Al-Aruri, Isam Yusif Al-Tamouni (alias Abu Hareth, who died in Afghanistan in 2001), Abu Hamza, and Azmi Abdel Fatah Yussef Al-Jayusi (alias Abu Ata).³³

Zarqawi made frequent round trips between Herat and Kabul on

behalf of Al-Qaeda. Herat was a strategic site for the terrorist group, opening the way to Iraqi Kurdistan via Iran. Thanks to a diplomatic rapprochement between the Iran of the mullahs and the Afghanistan of the Taliban, the border between the two countries, called "Islam Qila," had been reopened in November 1999.³⁴ The agreement on free circulation across the border was signed in Herat and ended a period of sharp political tensions between the two governments, triggered by the assassination of nine Iranian diplomats the year before at Mazar-E-Sharif in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, though the border was open for business dealings and the influx of Afghan refugees, the detente between Kabul and Tehran was only on the surface. The two regimes were full of mutual resentments, and the fearsome Iranian secret service, Savak, was keeping a close eye on the jihadists based on the other side, in Herat. The Iranian consulate in Herat kept a record of the movements of groups linked to Al-Qaeda, Zarqawi's in particular. In addition, the Iranian government was financing an anti-Taliban Shiite militia in the northeastern part of Afghanistan.³⁵ Zarqawi's missions on behalf of Al-Qaeda were thus known to the Iranian authorities.

As a strategic crossroads of trade and commerce, Herat offered Zarqawi a good opportunity to extend his activities. Control of this Afghan city right in the heart of Central Asia makes it possible to oversee several routes for jihad, including the one leading to the Caucasus via Turkmenistan. As early as 1996 the Russian authorities had emphasized that certain Chechen rebels were being trained in the camp at Ziaraj, located in the province of Herat.³⁶ A transit city for the Sunni mujahidin, Herat was also marked by a strong Shiite tradition.

Several months after Zarqawi's arrival it was clear that the camp, situated outside the city, was being run successfully, with recruits being taught the handling of arms, explosives, and chemical weapons. The news quickly reached Bin Laden. Summoned by his chief of staff, Zarqawi went to Kandahar in 2000. He needed money to carry out his activities, especially one close to his heart: he wanted

to mount an attack on Israeli soil at any price. His first attempt, in 1993, as we recall, had ended in bitter failure and led to his incarceration. This time he intended to succeed.

He got \$35,000 from Al-Qaeda to organize the attack and, soon after his trip to Kandahar, sent two of his closest associates on this suicide mission. The Jordanians Firaz Sulaiman Ali Hijir and Ahmed Muhammed Mustafa were arrested at Van, in Turkey, under melodramatic circumstances in February 2002. The two men, accompanied by a Palestinian called Ahmet Mahmoud, refused to comply with a routine check. They took flight and were caught by the Turkish police. Interrogated at the police headquarters in Van, all three confessed their plan, formulated in Kandahar in 1999, to mount an attack in Israel, where they were heading by way of Iran and Turkey. They revealed to the police that they had been convicted by the Jordanian courts in connection with the Bayt Al-Imam affair in 1994.³⁷ The two suicide bombers sent by Zarqawi, who happened to be childhood friends of his from the Ma'soum district of Zarqa, turned out to be failures. Once again a terrorist operation planned by Zarqawi ended up as a fiasco.³⁸

But Zarqawi persisted in his supervisory task. He recruited a goodly number of Jordanians, including some of his former friends from Bayt Al-Imam. In 2000 Zarqawi's Jordanians were a distinctive group on the regional chessboard. Based in Herat, they were mobile and well trained, able to travel to Iraqi Kurdistan by way of Iran. In contrast to the Algerians, who were destroying each other in power struggles in Jalalabad, and the Tunisians of the Darunta camp, the Jordanians were both the scouts and the missionaries of Al-Qaeda on the new front of Iraqi Kurdistan. For all these reasons Zarqawi saw his way clear to gaining his ideological—and also operational— independence very quickly.

In the past he had been careful to keep his distance from Maqdisi. Now he was trying to get free of the political line imposed by Osama Bin Laden himself and especially by Ayman Al-Zawahiri. This wish

for independence was reinforced by the geographical distance of the Herat camp and the recurrent criticism of Bin Laden on the part of many jihadists. The Saudi had the reputation of constructing his own myth to the detriment of the common cause aimed at restoring the caliphate, and two “foreign factions” in Afghanistan, one of which was Zarqawi’s, were said to be hostile to him.³⁹ But in 2000 Bin Laden’s financial and political support was still indispensable to Zarqawi, and he would have to be patient for another few months before breaking free. For it was only when he fled Afghanistan for Iran and then Syria that his expenses would be paid by his networks in Europe and the Middle East.

In Europe Zarqawi was already relying on two important support cells that were forming in Germany and Italy. In the Middle East he was receiving support from people in Syria and Jordan, one of whom was Bilal Mansur Al-Hiyari, a Jordanian national who would be accused by his country’s security court of having participated in financing Zarqawi’s group in Iraq.⁴⁰

For the moment the Herat camp was a training camp quite like the others. But Zarqawi was beginning to surround himself with the faithful. Some of the Jordanians who joined him came from the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon and belonged to the terrorist organization *Asbat Al-Ansar* (League of Partisans).⁴¹ Formed in the Ein Al-Hilweh refugee camp, *Asbat Al-Ansar* was headed in the early 1990s by Ahmad Abdul Karim as-Saadi (alias Abu Muhjin). Several attacks on Western interests in Lebanon in the course of that decade bore the mark of this group, whose Salafist ideology was close to the precepts imposed by Al-Qaeda on its members. It was also Zarqawi’s ideology.

Beside these Jordanians most of the people close to Zarqawi were Iraqis and Palestinians. These men were much too young to have known the years of jihad against the Soviets.

Like Bin Laden, Zarqawi required the new recruits to take an oath of allegiance. His strong personality ensured a unified, homogeneous,

and trustworthy group. Thus it was not long after the establishment of the Herat camp that a number of Zarqawi's associates were implicated in attacks or attempted attacks in Jordan, Iraq, and Israel.

Five Jordanians, in particular, were among those who joined Zarqawi in 1999. Some of them came from Chechen combat zones, others directly from Jordan to strengthen the ranks of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The father of one of them, Nidal Arabiyat, has testified to the conditions under which his son joined Zarqawi.

Nidal Arabiyat had completed his primary education before enlisting in the Jordanian Army for two years. After an auto accident he sought refuge in religion and began to read widely on the subject of jihad. He soon built a wall of silence around himself, remaining alone for days on end, until he announced to his father that he was going on a pilgrimage to Mecca. His father thought at the time that he would never return. After fighting alongside Zarqawi and Bin Laden in Afghanistan, Nidal Arabiyat returned to Iraq by way of Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan. This lieutenant of Zarqawi's, a specialist in laying car bombs, was eventually killed in the course of an American operation in the northern part of Baghdad in February 2004.⁴²

One of the most determined Jordanians, Muammar Al-Jaghbir (also known as Moammar Ahmed Yussef Al-Jaghbir) came from Al-Salt, a city west of Amman controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood. One of Zarqawi's companions at arms, he would eventually be arrested in Iraq and sent back to the Jordanian authorities in May 2004. He was accused of taking part in the assassination of the American diplomat Laurence Foley in Amman in October 2002. Like Zarqawi, Al-Jaghbir was sentenced to death by the Jordan courts; like Zarqawi before him, he benefited from an amnesty in 2000 under pressure from the Islamist deputies of Balqa.

Another of Zarqawi's partners was arrested in Baghdad at the same time. Ali Mustafa Yussef Siam, one of the terrorists who took part in the Foley assassination, also joined Zarqawi in planning the assassination of Ali Berjak, head of counterterrorist operations in the

GID, the state intelligence department.⁴³ He too had been freed in the royal amnesty.

Then there was Azmi Al-Jayusi, who on April 26, 2004 would try to set off a chemical explosion in central Amman that, according to the authorities, would have killed 80,000 people. In his confessions, broadcast in their entirety on Jordanian television, Al-Jayusi explained how it all began: "At Herat I started training for Abu Musab. The training included handling high-level explosives and learning about poisons. I then took an oath of allegiance to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi and agreed to work for him without asking questions."⁴⁴

Another Jordanian from Al-Salt, the city that would provide Zarqawi with twenty of his fifty associates, was Ra'id Khuraysat (alias Abu Abdel Rahman Al-Shami), who quickly became one of Zarqawi's right-hand men. On Zarqawi's order Al-Shami and three other young recruits from Al-Salt, Mahmoud Muhammad Al-Nusur, Mutasim Musa Abdallah Muhammad Al-Darikah, and Ibrahim Khuraysat, soon left the camp at Herat to extend the group's range of action to Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁵ This mission, coordinated by Zarqawi and, from above, by Osama Bin Laden himself, was intended to reorganize the "Islamist resistance" in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The purpose of this small community of jihadists established in Iraqi Kurdistan was to repeat the experience of the Taliban in this area and prepare a possible fallback position for the Al-Qaeda terrorists. On September 1, 2001, Al-Shami and his three associates took part in the creation of the Islamist group Jund Al-Islam; several weeks later they fought against Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Jund Al-Islam, soon to be renamed Ansar Al-Islam,⁴⁶ would ensure the retreat of Zarqawi and his partisans after the American bombing in Afghanistan.

Zarqawi's interest in Iraqi Kurdistan is not surprising, for he was acting on behalf of Al-Qaeda, which was planning a progressive re-deployment of its members to Kurdistan in anticipation of the turmoil to follow September 11. As early as 2000, Bin Laden knew that

the attacks of September 11 would be devastating, and that the American reaction would be proportionately severe. A prudent man, Bin Laden therefore instructed Zarqawi and his partisans to infiltrate the region of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Parastin, the primary Kurdish intelligence agency under the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK) of Massud Barzani, had long taken an interest in Ansar Al-Islam. One of the officials of the agency, Dana Ahmad Majid, stresses the fact that the terrorist organization was inseparable from Al-Qaeda: "Before September 11, Al-Qaeda planned to secure a new base for itself to which it could retreat after the attacks . . . , because they [Al-Qaeda] knew very well that they would be attacked in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks and would have to find another territory They thought the Kurdish government was weak enough that they [Al-Qaeda] would be able to take control."⁴⁷

In 2000 Zarqawi increased the number of his trips between Kabul and Herat, gradually imposing his authority over the Islamic resistance in Iraqi Kurdistan. He controlled the road that passes through Mashhad, in Iran, and leads to the Kurdish mountains. He also took charge of the Sargat training camp in Iraqi Kurdistan, identified several times as a place where chemical weapons and biological toxins were manufactured. Tests performed by the United States Army after the bombing of Iraqi Kurdistan would reveal the presence of very powerful neurotoxic agents like botulin and ricin in the Sargat camp.⁴⁸

To ensure his control of the Islamist factions in Iraqi Kurdistan, Zarqawi called on his companions from early days, the men who had been part of Bayt Al-Imam and were released along with him in 1999, especially his former neighbors from Zarqa, Khaled Al-Aruri (alias Abu Ashraf) and Abdel Hadi Ahmad Mahmoud Daghlas (alias Abu Ubaydah). These two men were living in Iran at the time, on the border with Iraqi Kurdistan. They would soon become the coordinators of Ansar Al-Islam's operations, taking orders from Zarqawi, their chief. The group of about fifteen men, mostly Jordanians, under their

direction had been set up in Iran by Zarqawi himself. Their task now was to help Ansar Al-Islam mount attacks in Jordan and fight against the Democratic Party of Kurdistan. At the same time Ansar Al-Islam profited from the ability of the organization's founder, Mullah Krekar, to mobilize funding.

FOR THE JORDANIAN SERVICES IN CHARGE OF COUNTERTERRORISM this was a bitter picture. It was clear in retrospect that the royal amnesty of 1999 had had grave consequences. Only one year after releasing Zarqawi, Maqdisi, Aruri, Daghlas, Al-Jaghbir, Firaz Sulaiman Ali Hijir, Ahmed Muhammed Mustafa, and the others, the GID saw a revival of the threat of Islamist terrorism, a threat that was all the more direct because the group was planning to kill officers of the GID itself,⁴⁹ most importantly Ali Berjak, the head of the counterterrorism unit.

Between the amnesty freeing the members of Bayt Al-Imam in March 1999 and the reconstitution of Zarqawi's organization, only one year had gone by. In the meantime Zarqawi was strengthening his support in Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq. From now on the Jordanian services would have to confront an extremely serious threat, countering a campaign of attacks directly aimed at Jordan. In short, the Jordanians of the Muslim Brotherhood, who had lobbied intensively at the beginning of 1999 for the freeing of the Islamists, had truly achieved their ends. The terrorists, more hardened now, were free—and in a position of strength.

In accord with Al-Qaeda, the Ansar Al-Islam organization would eventually be placed under the control of a triumvirate: Zarqawi in Afghanistan; Al-Shami in Iraqi Kurdistan; and Mullah Krekar, who had taken refuge in Norway in 2002. The operational members of the organization were based in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, but the network was in Iran and consisted almost entirely of Zarqawi's associates.⁵⁰

Even while he set up his network in Iraqi Kurdistan in coordination with Al-Qaeda, Zarqawi continued to direct the Herat training camp on an autonomous basis. This wish for independence would become stronger in the course of 2001, as the proximity to Iran and his enduring relationship with Ansar Al-Islam inspired him to extend his own networks in Europe, especially in Germany and Great Britain. These terrorist cells, which the European judicial authorities would later call Tawhid (Unity), were in fact only an extension of the Ansar Al-Islam networks. The Tawhid organization was to have a twofold function under Zarqawi: mounting attacks on European soil and ensuring support at the time of his flight from Afghanistan after "Operation Enduring Freedom."

CHAPTER 9

A Regional Terrorist

FROM NOW ON ZARQAWI WOULD REPRESENT A SERIOUS THREAT, as became evident in several attacks and attempted attacks organized in the Middle East between 1999 and 2004. After arriving in Pakistan in 1999, he organized a series of terrorist operations whose primary target was the kingdom of Jordan, still a source of bitterness for him. Thus, before occupying center stage as an international terrorist, Zarqawi made himself a reputation on the regional level.

One of the first attacks he organized after leaving prison was aimed at tourist sites in Jordan. Although the name of Ahmad Fadi Nazzal Al-Khalayleh does not appear on the list of guilty parties sent by the government of Jordan to the Committee on Counterterrorism of the United Nations on January 29, 2002, Zarqawi's participation was later confirmed by the Jordanian courts. Moreover, on February 11, 2002, Zarqawi was sentenced in absentia to fifteen years in prison for his role in this planned attack, which was known as the millennium plot.

The millennium plot had been planned in its entirety by Jordanians working for Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Fresh out of Jordanian

prisons, Zarqawi did not have enough power at the time to coordinate an operation; this task fell to the head of military operations in Al-Qaeda, the Jordanian Zayn Al-Abidin, also known as Abu Zubaydah. In 1999 Abu Zubaydah received a visit from two Jordanians determined to conduct jihad in their own country: Ahmad Al-Riyati and Ra'id Hijazi. Abu Zubaydah agreed to help, taking the two men and training them in the Al-Qaeda camps to handle explosives. In November 1999, when Zarqawi left Pakistan prematurely for Afghanistan, he met the two young Jordanians in Kabul on the advice of Abu Zubaydah. Zarqawi had the full confidence of Abu Zubaydah, who was himself one of the chief lieutenants of Osama Bin Laden.⁵¹

From that time on, Zarqawi, together with his faithful comrade in arms Khaled Al-Aruri, took part in the plans for attacks at the time of the millennium. Among the targets were the Radisson Hotel SAS in the heart of Amman, the place where Jesus was baptized on the banks of the Jordan River, and the King Hussein Bridge connecting Jordan to Israel.⁵²

These were ambitious aims, perhaps too large in scope for the abilities of this group of Jordanians inexperienced in matters of terrorism. Despite the financial support of Al-Qaeda and Zarqawi's technical assistance, the Jordanian police would soon discover the plot and sentence the guilty parties, including Zarqawi. Abu Zubaydah was eventually captured by the American special forces on April 12, 2002, and sentenced to death by the Jordanian court. In the course of his interrogation he confirmed Zarqawi's involvement in the attempted millennium plot.

During his trial, the Jordanian court established the identities of various terrorists implicated in the operation. The military prosecutor in charge of the case, Colonel Fawas Al-Buqor, indicted the military leader of the Kurdish terrorist network Ansar Al-Islam, Najmuddin Faraj Ahmad, better known as Mullah Krekar. Mullah Krekar had provided aid to several members of the cell accused of implementing the attacks, chief among whom was the Jordanian

Ahmad Mahmud Saleh Al-Riyati. Since there is no extradition agreement between Jordan and Norway, where Mullah Krekar was living in exile, the leader of Ansar Al-Islam is still a free man.

Some of the twenty-seven terrorists found guilty of the plot were arrested in Syria and Jordan. When he pronounced the verdict, Judge Tayel Raqad announced that Hijazi, one of the leading terrorists of the group, had been sentenced to death. Hijazi, who was present in the courtroom, exclaimed, "God is great" then turned and addressed the judge as follows: "Where is God's will? Why are you sentencing me to death? You are running the country against the citizens of Jordan. [Ariel] Sharon does not sentence his people to death. You are fighting your own fellow citizens for a few dinars."⁵³

Zarqawi, for his part, was sentenced for the second time to fifteen years in prison, this time in absentia. The millennium plot reveals the state of mind of the militant extremists of Al-Qaeda, resolved to fight a regime they considered corrupt and collaborationist.

Despite this setback Zarqawi pursued his bloody plans, more determined than ever to strike at the Israeli government. He once again decided to attempt a suicide mission. As we have seen, ever since he arrived in Afghanistan and joined Al-Qaeda, he had been planning an operation similar to the one that had failed in 1994, and with the same partners, his neighbors from the Ma'soum district of Zarqa, Firaz Sulaiman, Ali Hijir, and Ahmed Muhammed Mustafa. The same causes produce the same effects: the two men were arrested in Turkey.

These two aborted attempts did not discourage Zarqawi, who, from Syria, coordinated an action targeting Jordan in 2002. The plan was to strike at American interests in that country, and, more specifically, to assassinate the American diplomat Laurence Foley in Amman. The operation called for support and a complex organization of which Zarqawi became the manager.

To implement this operation, he gathered around him several of his own associates and members of the Al-Qaeda network: Salem Saad Salem Ben Suweid (alias Abu Abdallah); Yasser Fatih Ibrahim

Freihat (alias Abu Firas and Abu Maaz), a Jordanian living in Rasifa; Mohammed Amin Ahmad Said Abu Said, a Libyan national also living in Rasifa; Neaman Saleh Hussein El-Harach, a Kuwaiti national living in Amman; Shaker Yussuf El Abassi (alias Abu Yussuf), a Palestinian living in Syria; Mohammad Ahmad Tyura (alias Abu Ouns), born in Syria and living in that country; Mohammed Issa Mohammed Daamas (alias Abu Oman), living in Rasifa; Muammar Ahmad Yussef Al-Jaghbir (alias Abu Mohammed), a Jordanian who would later be killed in Iraq; Ahmad Hussein Assoun (alias Abu Hassan); and Mahmoud Abdelrahman Zaher (alias Abu Abdelrahman), who, like Abu Hassan, was a Syrian national in flight from the law.

This planned attack against the diplomat was partly based on the special relationship between Suweid and Zarqawi. A veteran of Afghanistan, Suweid had met Zarqawi in the Sada training camp in 1989. He also met Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, and Abdallah Azzam, likewise in Afghanistan. Zarqawi's jihadist companion in the early 1990s, Suweid volunteered to join him in carrying out a terrorist operation on Jordanian soil. Zarqawi had support from Al-Qaeda as well as weapons and financial resources.

In radical Islamist circles Suweid already had the reputation of being a professional. The subject of an arrest warrant in Libya for his participation in a group of Islamist activists, he had fled with his wife to Syria, then to Jordan, in 1992. He would remain in Jordan for five years, during which he regularly met with Zarqawi in the Bilal Mosque in Ujan. The two men were solid friends until Zarqawi's incarceration in Suwaqah. In August 1997 Suweid left Jordan and returned to Syria, settling in Damascus, though he made regular trips to and from Jordan with the aid of false Tunisian passports.

Suweid was gradually consolidating his own group of activists, bringing in Yasser Fatih Ibrahim Freihat, his future accomplice in the Foley assassination. Suweid and Freihat had met in Jordan at the end of 1997. But Suweid was especially close to the Syrian Mohammed Ahmad Tyura, who helped him obtain a forged passport in the name

of Ali Lafi so that he could leave Syria. In April 2002 Suweid had asked Freihat to learn how to handle explosives and manufacture chemical weapons. Freihat then contacted Tyura in order to get this training. The next day, Tyura took Freihat to one of the “military barracks”⁵⁴ of Damascus, a camp where Freihat spent a week. Under the supervision of three soldiers, he was trained in the use of submachine guns and pistols and in the manufacture of bombs with ammonium nitrate.

Other members of Zaraqawi’s group, including Daamas and Harach, also trained in Syrian military barracks in 2002. Along with Freihat, they learned how to use M16 assault guns, offensive grenades, and Kalashnikov rifles.

After his training, Freihat returned to Suweid in Jordan. On Zaraqawi’s advice the two men rented an unassuming house in Rasifa, on the outskirts of Amman. In June 2002 they were joined there by the Syrian Tyura. Their house also served as a hiding place for the five Kalashnikovs and other weapons needed for the operation. From neighboring Syria Zaraqawi provided funds for the dormant cell in Rasifa, sending sums of \$1,000 and later \$5,000.

Zaraqawi wanted to oversee the operation personally and soon ordered his two faithful lieutenants, Daamas and Al-Jaghbir, to bring Suweid back to Syria. When they met in June 2002, Zaraqawi gave Suweid a seven-millimeter pistol, a silencer, and seven rounds. This was the pistol used to kill Foley.

Later, at the trial, the defendants stated that in the summer of 2002 “Zaraqawi was living in Syria,” although U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell placed him in the Olympic Hospital in Baghdad, where Zaraqawi claimed to be receiving medical treatment between May and July of that year.⁵⁵

To verify that all was in order, Zaraqawi entered Jordan secretly from Syria in September 2002 and spent several days in Tarfa with Suweid and Daamas. The operation was taking shape. Zaraqawi gave Suweid \$13,000, asking him to enlist additional recruits in order to

ensure the success of the assassination. He promised to send Suweid arms and explosives from Iraq⁵⁶ and to deliver missiles with a view toward a second operation.

One month later, in October 2002, Zarqawi did indeed send Suweid important sums from Iraq: \$10,000 and then \$30,000. The money was intended to finance a series of terrorist operations on Jordanian soil, including the Foley assassination, and came to the terrorists through the Rafidain Bank. Ultimately over half of the funding for the operation would be sent by this bank, which was held by the Iraqi government at the time.⁵⁷

At Zarqawi's request the group simultaneously prepared an attack against the United States. To this end Zarqawi kept watch on the military airport at Marqa, from which American planes would take off to bomb Afghanistan. He even made provision for transporting missiles that could shoot a plane down during takeoff. The operation proved too complex and was eventually abandoned.

On October 28, 2002, Laurence Foley, a 60-year-old American diplomat attached to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was killed in his garage by eight bullets fired point blank by Suweid. This action was the first of its kind directed against a foreign diplomat working in Jordan.

From the very beginning of the inquest, the Jordanian Minister of Information, Mohammed Adwan, noted the lead to the terrorists: "Whatever its motives, this is an attack on the country and its national security." The GID was quick to find not only the gunman, Suweid, but also Freihat, who was waiting for him in his car, and to identify the commander, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi.

During his initial interrogation at the GID, Suweid stated that he had killed Foley "because he was an easy target for us."⁵⁸ On orders from Zarqawi, Suweid and Freihat had first carefully followed their intended victim, studying all his movements in Amman. In short, the terrorists had carried out a painstaking analysis of the terrain on the model of the "Homo" operations conducted by classical intelligence

services. Once the target had been “neutralized,” Suweid called Al-Jaghbir, Zarqawi’s lieutenant in Iraq, to confirm the success of the operation.

The means employed by Zarqawi and his team to implement the assassination seemed almost disproportionate, and the Jordanian antiterrorism investigators were struck by their professionalism. Until then Zarqawi had taken part only in attempted attacks, but after the Foley killing the threat he represented was taken very seriously. On April 6, 2004, after his trial in absentia as the ninth defendant, “Ahmad Fadil Nazzal Al-Khalayleh,” as he was referred to, was sentenced to death by hanging.⁵⁹

The Foley incident marked a turning point in Zarqawi’s career. He had proved capable of coordinating an operation from abroad and profoundly destabilizing his country of origin, Jordan. But his campaign of terror was only beginning.

The operation had revealed Syria’s role, previously unrecognized, in supporting Zarqawi’s networks. According to the Jordanian indictments, Zarqawi had been in Syria between May and September of 2002, availing himself of access to the “military barracks” in order to train his recruits; he possessed a Syrian passport and had been able to travel more or less freely from Syria to Jordan and Iraq. In addition, the Jordanian inquest revealed that the Foley operation had been planned almost entirely from Damascus by Zarqawi and his closest collaborators.

Although these accusations are much more serious than those leveled at any time against the regime of Saddam Hussein, up to now they have not been mentioned. Zarqawi’s presence in Syria is also attested to by at least one Western intelligence service, which has established on the basis of telephone taps that he was in the Damascus area during this time.

But this is not all. When Zarqawi returned to Iraq in September 2002, he let Suweid know that he could be reached in Baghdad should the need arise. Foley’s murderer stated that he was to come to

the Al-Ghouta restaurant, a short walk from the Hotel Palestine in Baghdad, and mention the name "Al-Khalayleh" so that the owners of the restaurant could put him in contact with Zarqawi.⁶⁰ This up-scale establishment in the Iraqi capital is owned by Syrians.

As chance would have it, the actor Sean Penn, writing in his travel journal after his return from Baghdad,⁶¹ used these Syrian owners of the Al-Ghouta restaurant and the presence of Iranian tourists to illustrate "the irony of the Iraqi situation" at a time when the neighboring states were placing all their hopes on the fall of the regime.⁶² This is one more piece of reality that seems to have escaped the Americans, unless they knowingly evaded it.

AT DINNERTIME ON APRIL 26, 2004, WHEN THE WAR IN IRAQ WAS raging, the Jordanian national television channel began the evening news with a "special program." To their horror, the Jordanians learned that they had had a close brush with death.

The threat had a name: Azmi Al-Jayusi. The terrorist who was speaking in front of the camera was a man with a round face, an ordinary-looking but articulate Jordanian. On the occasion of this televised forced confession, he described in detail how he had planned a chemical attack in Amman that, if successful, could have killed 80,000 people and wounded 160,000. The scenario was similar to that of the attack on Foley two years earlier, in that Al-Jayusi said he had received his orders, false passports, and money from Zarqawi. This time, however, the means and ends were different, the targets being none other than the building in which the prime minister had his offices, the headquarters of the GID, and the American embassy in Amman.

To carry out these attacks the terrorist group had manufactured twenty tons of chemical explosives, packing them in containers that were carefully placed on trucks. The overall operation was directed from Iraq by Zarqawi, who had provided the necessary funding and personnel.