

On the official US response to the killing of Zarqawi

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There is something not only politically odious, but psychologically perverse in the lurid and manic response of the US government and media to the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The exultation in the Islamist terrorist's demise, replete with gruesome photos of the corpse plastered across newspapers and displayed on TV screens, takes on an almost ritualistic character. The killing of Saddam Hussein's sons and the capture of the former Iraqi president evoked similar official responses.

President Bush was reportedly "thrilled" when he got the news Wednesday night of the successful hit, although he was evidently coached to contain his euphoria when he went before the cameras Thursday morning to announce the "good news." Much of the media, however, evinced no such restraint.

"Gotcha!" was the front-page headline on Friday's *New York Post* tabloid, atop a full-page photo of the dead man's scarred face lying in a pool of blood. The newspaper's inside headline read: "Evil Zarqawi Blown to Hell."

The *New York Daily News* front page exclaimed "PICTURE PERFECT! Al Qaeda Terror Boss Blown Right to Hell." Below was a US soldier holding a large framed copy of the same photo.

The "respectable" *New York Times* ran a banner headline of the size normally reserved for presidential elections or natural catastrophes, with the same grisly photograph taking up about a fourth of the front page.

This spectacle bespeaks both the mindset of the American ruling elite, and what it seeks to inculcate among the public at large. Terms that come to mind in regard to the outlook of the ruling establishment are "primitive," "backward" and "self-delusionary." It retains an almost childish belief that it can somehow extricate itself from the disaster it has created for itself

in Iraq if only it can kill another 5,000, 10,000 or 100,000 people.

At the same time, it is driven by a need to brutalize and degrade public consciousness. Almost nothing is out of bounds in the pursuit of this goal.

The irony is that a state apparatus and media which believe themselves to be the world's masters in the art of manipulating public opinion are far less effective than they think. The more obnoxious and heavy-handed their propaganda, the less real and lasting is its impact.

Most Americans instinctively sense that there is something artificial and dishonest in the official hoopla over the killing of Zarqawi. They watch the reports on the television news, and move on, checking to see what else is on TV. They glance at the photos and banner headlines on the front page, and turn the page.

Years of lies and the exposure of one atrocity after another, carried out in their name, have had an impact. For the most part, the official celebration of death and carnage passes over their heads.

They do not really believe that Zarqawi was the towering figure described by the government and the media. And in this their instincts are correct. His exploits, in fact, both real and apocryphal, played a negligible role in the growth of Iraqi resistance to the American invasion and military occupation. Any impact he did have was destructive of the resistance, since his deeply reactionary aim was to incite sectarian warfare between the Shiite majority and the Sunni minority.

Zarqawi was far more significant for the function he served as the latest devil incarnate conjured up by the US government and media to somehow justify the war. Unable to provide a coherent rationale for the war, the political establishment, Democratic as well as Republican, is perpetually looking to find—or

manufacture—a new symbol of evil they can use to frighten and disorient the public.

Zarqawi had barely been dead a day when Bush administration and military officials began floating reports about his replacement. It appears at present that the new devil will be Abu al-Masri, reputed to be an Egyptian-born associate of Zarqawi. The US Central Command already has a \$50,000 bounty on al-Masri's head.



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