

# What al-Qaida Really Wants

The Future of Terrorism

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**If there is anyone who might possibly have inkling as to what al-Qaida are up to, it is the Jordanian journalist Fouad Hussein. He has not only spent time in prison with al-Zarqawi, but has also managed make contact with many of the network's leaders. Based on correspondence with these sources, he has now brought out a book detailing the organization's master plan.**



There must be something particularly trustworthy about the Jordanian journalist Fouad Hussein. After all, he has managed to get some of the most sought after terrorists to open up to him. Maybe it helped that they spent time together in prison many years ago -- when Hussein was a political prisoner he successfully negotiated for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to be released from solitary confinement. Or is it because of the honest and direct way in which he puts his ideas onto paper? Whatever the reason, the result is that a film, which Hussein made about al-Zarqawi, has even been shown on al-Qaida affiliated Web sites. "That showed me that they at least felt understood," the journalist says.

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Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is blamed for some of the worst terrorist attacks and hostage killings in Iraq.

Even for an Arab journalist it is no easy matter getting in touch with al-Qaida's inner circle. Nevertheless, Hussein, who is based in Amman, Jordan, has succeeded in turning his correspondence with the terrorists into a remarkable book: "al-Zarqawi - al-Qaida's Second Generation."

If you meet Hussein, as you might when he is relaxing in Amman's Café Vienna, you see he is calm and laid-back, without any of the glamour of a secret service spy. But what this small, slim man has to report is nothing less than the world's most dangerous terrorist network's plan of action: al-Qaida's strategy for the next two decades. It is both frightening and absurd, a lunatic plan conceived by fanatics who live in their own world, but who continually manage to break into the real world with their brutal acts of violence.

One of Hussein's most sensational sources for the book, according to what he told SPIEGEL Online, was Seif al-Adl. The Egyptian terrorist, who is suspected of taking part in the attacks on the American Embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi in 1998, has a ransom of US\$5 million on his head from the FBI. Secret services suspect that al-Adl is now in Iran.

To prove that he really has had contact to al-Adl, Hussein includes in the first two pages of the book a copy of a handwritten letter the wanted man sent to the author. In the original document, which is 15 pages long, al-Adl describes the disagreements between al-Zarqawi and Osama bin Laden during the Afghanistan war. "Statements from Seif al-Adl have also crept into the chapter on al-Qaida's strategy," explains Fouad Hussein.



AFP

Have you seen this man? If so, you could earn yourself 5 million dollars. Seif al-Adl is not only wanted by the FBI but is also one of Hussein's main sources in the book.

### **An Islamic Caliphate in Seven Easy Steps**

In the introduction, the Jordanian journalist writes, "I interviewed a whole range of al-Qaida members with different ideologies to get an idea of how the war between the terrorists and Washington would develop in the future." What he then describes between pages 202 and 213 is a scenario, proof both of the terrorists' blindness as well as their brutal single-mindedness. In seven phases the terror network hopes to establish an Islamic caliphate, which the West will then be too weak to fight.

- **The First Phase** Known as "the awakening" -- this has already been carried out and was supposed to have lasted from 2000 to 2003, or more precisely from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington to the fall of Baghdad in 2003. The aim of the attacks of 9/11 was to provoke the US into declaring war on the Islamic world and thereby "awakening" Muslims. "The first phase was judged by the strategists and masterminds behind al-Qaida as very successful," writes Hussein. "The battle field was opened up and the Americans and their allies became a closer and easier target." The terrorist network is also reported as being satisfied that its message can now be heard "everywhere."
- **The Second Phase** "Opening Eyes" is, according to Hussein's definition, the period we are now in and should last until 2006. Hussein says the terrorists hope to make the western conspiracy aware of the "Islamic community." Hussein believes this is a phase in which al-Qaida wants an organization to develop into a movement. The network is banking on recruiting young men during this period. Iraq should become the center for all global operations, with an "army" set up there and bases established in other Arabic states.
- **The Third Phase** This is described as "Arising and Standing Up" and should last from 2007 to 2010. "There will be a focus on Syria," prophesies Hussein, based on what his sources told him. The fighting cadres are supposedly already prepared and some are in Iraq. Attacks on Turkey and -- even more explosive -- in Israel are predicted. Al-Qaida's masterminds hope that attacks on Israel will help the terrorist group become a recognized organization. The author also believes that countries neighboring Iraq, such as Jordan, are also in danger.
- **The Fourth Phase** Between 2010 and 2013, Hussein writes that al-Qaida will aim to bring about the collapse of the hated Arabic governments. The estimate is that "the creeping loss of the regimes' power will lead to a steady growth in strength within al-Qaida." At the same time attacks will be carried out against oil suppliers and the US economy will be targeted using cyber terrorism.

- **The Fifth Phase** This will be the point at which an Islamic state, or caliphate, can be declared. The plan is that by this time, between 2013 and 2016, Western influence in the Islamic world will be so reduced and Israel weakened so much, that resistance will not be feared. Al-Qaida hopes that by then the Islamic state will be able to bring about a new world order.
- **The Sixth Phase** Hussein believes that from 2016 onwards there will be a period of "total confrontation." As soon as the caliphate has been declared the "Islamic army" it will instigate the "fight between the believers and the non-believers" which has so often been predicted by Osama bin Laden.
- **The Seventh Phase** This final stage is described as "definitive victory." Hussein writes that in the terrorists' eyes, because the rest of the world will be so beaten down by the "one-and-a-half million Muslims," the caliphate will undoubtedly succeed. This phase should be completed by 2020, although the war shouldn't last longer than two years.

### A Serious Plan?

But just how serious is this scenario? "Al-Qaida makes no compromises," says the book's author Fouad Hussein. He obviously believes that this seven-point plan could well become the guiding principle for a whole range of al-Qaida fighters. Hussein is far from an hysterical alarmist -- in fact he is seen as a serious journalist and his Zarqawi book is better than most of the reports in Arabic on the subject. Only last year, the journalist made a film, which was received with great interest and was shown on the German-French TV channel arte. In it he provided deep insights into al-Qaida's Internet propaganda machine.

Nevertheless, there is no way the scenario he depicts can be seen as a plan which al-Qaida can follow step by step. The terrorist network just doesn't work like that anymore. The significance of the central leadership has diminished and its direct commands have lost a great deal of importance. The supposed master plan for the years 2000 to 2020 reads in parts more like a group of ideas cobbled together in retrospect, than something planned and presented in advance. And not to mention the terrorist agenda is simply unworkable: the idea that al-Qaida could set up a caliphate in the entire Islamic world is absurd. The 20-year plan is based mainly on religious ideas. It hardly has anything to do with reality -- especially phases four to seven.

But that doesn't mean that we should simply discount everything that Hussein has uncovered. A few of the steps in the agenda are plausible. The idea that Syria will become a focus for the Mujahedin is regarded by experts as highly likely. "Close ranks, concentrate on getting more recruits, set up cells," was the call to the "Mujahedin in Syria" which appeared on one Web site at the beginning of August. From the point of view of the jihadists, Israel and Turkey are also fairly logical targets for an escalation of the confrontation. "Al-Qaida views every fight as a victory, because for so long Muslims didn't have any weapons at all," says Hussein. He may not be far off. As for Jordan, al-Qaida leaders such as al-Zarqawi, have already made attacks on the country. They have also stated on numerous occasions that Jerusalem is the real target.

Equally, the idea that in the future al-Qaida could increasingly become a movement that attracts young frustrated men, is hardly a theory plucked out of thin air. The terror network puts a lot of effort into its propaganda -- assumedly in order to expand its support base.

### **Attacks on the West: a Means to an End**

What is interesting is that major attacks against the West are not even mentioned by Fouad Hussein. Terrorism here cannot be ignored -- but it seems these attacks simply supplement the larger aim of setting up an Islamic caliphate. Attacks such as those in New York, Madrid and London would in this case not be ends in themselves, but rather means to achieve a larger purpose -- steps in a process of increasing insecurity in the West.

Nowadays, it is harder than ever to truly understand al-Qaida: the organization has degenerated into branches and loosely connected cells, related groups are taken in, and people who hardly had anything to do with al-Qaida before, now carry out attacks in its name. It is hard to imagine orders, which come right from the top because Osama bin Laden spends all his time struggling to survive. At the same time, the division between foot soldiers in the organization and sympathizers is becoming increasingly blurred. It is all too easy to fall prey to disinformation -- al-Qaida also excels in this area. Even Hussein's scenario should be judged skeptically.

His book should therefore be read for what it really is: an attempt to second-guess how al-Qaida terrorists think, what they really want and how they propose to get there.

URL: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,369448,00.html>