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AMERICA'S MOST COMMITTED MUSLIM ALLY

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On December 30, 2009, a young captain and military intelligence expert was murdered in Khost, Afghanistan, by an al Qaeda suicide bomber. He died along with seven comrades from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in a covert operation gone terribly wrong. After his death was announced, the officer was described as a hero throughout his country, and the head of state was among the mourners at his funeral. His name was Sharif Ali bin Zaid, and he was a Jordanian and a Muslim. In considering his case, such bravery and commitment can hardly come as a surprise. Even before 9/11, the United States and Jordan were cooperating in the struggle against al Qaeda, and a senior Jordanian intelligence official is thanked by name in former CIA Director George Tenet's memoirs for such cooperation.

Somehow in the rage over the New York Mosque and Cultural Center, many of America's Muslim allies have been forgotten. Jordan is an especially important case. This country is both a victim of terrorism and one of America's most committed allies in the struggle against al Qaeda. As with the United States, al Qaeda has struck Jordanian targets without mercy. One of the first al Qaeda targets in post-Saddam Iraq was the Jordanian Embassy, which was attacked with a car bomb on August 7, 2003, with 18 dead and over 50 wounded. A few small-scale al Qaeda attacks within Jordan followed this strike, although most such efforts were foiled by Jordanian security forces. Then on November 9, 2005, al Qaeda terrorists bombed three large Western hotels in Amman, murdering 57 innocent people, although failing to kill any Americans and murdering only two Israelis (purportedly their two primary targets). In a gloating post-attack message, al Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi took credit for the attacks and in a later audiotape announced that he planned to behead Jordanian leader King Abdullah.

The hotel strikes were Jordan's 9/11, and Amman is reported to have struck back hard at the terrorists through its General Intelligence Directorate (GID). These types of activities seldom come to light, but Jordanian King Abdullah has admitted that the GID had "a role" in supporting the successful U.S. effort to find Zarqawi, who subsequently died in an U.S. air strike in Iraq. Jordan has also provided extensive counterterrorism training to friendly troops throughout the region at the state-of-the-art King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center, which was constructed with U.S. funds. Moreover,

in addition to waging physical war against al Qaeda terrorists, Jordan has also waged an ideological war. In November 2004, Jordanian political and religious leaders ostentatiously issued the Amman Message, (ammanmessage.com), a strong denunciation of Islamic extremism and especially terrorism in the name of Islam. Since that time, the Amman Message has become a foreign policy fundamental for Jordan and is continuously quoted by the top leadership. The website for the Message displays an impressive list of senior clerics in Jordan and throughout the Islamic World who have announced their support for its opposition to terrorism and its calls for tolerance.

As Americans sort out their feelings about the Cordova Center in New York, one might remember both the fallen Jordanian officer in Khost and the victims of the Amman hotel bombings. These people died at the hands of a murderous, hate-intoxicated enemy just like the innocent victims who were killed in the Twin Towers and at the Pentagon. To fail to acknowledge this bond is negligent at best. More importantly, to treat all Muslims as potential al Qaeda sympathizers is especially unfair since it erases the distinction between al Qaeda terrorists and key allies who fight beside us against them.

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