

CIG Assessment, 19 April 2005

AL-ZARQAWI THREATENS UK FORCES IN IRAQ

This paper was discussed by a Current Intelligence Group and approved on 19 April 2005.

Key Judgements

- I. We cannot verify the authenticity of al-Zarqawi's statement threatening intensive military attacks against British forces in the south of Iraq. But it must be taken seriously.
- II. Al-Zarqawi has proven capability to direct limited operations against UK military and civilian targets in the south: mounting a sustained campaign of attacks would be much more difficult.
- III. Non-military UK interests in Iraq may also be under threat and all UK nationals are at increased risk. Al-Zarqawi's most capable networks operate in the Sunni Arab heartlands in central and northern Iraq, extending into the Kurdish areas. He could choose to target British interests in these areas. We also cannot rule out attacks against UK interests outside Iraq by his network, although we have no intelligence of possible targets or timings.
- IV. The threat from al-Zarqawi is diverse. In the past he has used suicide bombers and kidnapping to particular effect to gain publicity.
- V. There is no specified linkage in the statement to the UK election. But al-Zarqawi does follow the UK domestic political scene and may have chosen to issue the threat at a politically sensitive time in the UK, in order to gain maximum publicity and attempt to damage the government.

AL-ZARQAWI THREATENS UK FORCES IN IRAQ

This assessment was commissioned by the JIC Chairman in response to the specific threat posed by al-Zarqawi's organisation to British interests in Iraq.

Al-Zarqawi's statement

1. On 18 April a statement (see Annex) claiming to be from al-Zarqawi's "Al Qaida in Iraq" group appeared on several websites, a number of which had previously been used by al-Zarqawi for similar purposes. We cannot verify the authenticity of the statement, but have no reason to doubt it. The statement threatens intensive military attacks against British forces and their allies in the south of Iraq, and also attacks against Iraqi "agents and spies" and "collaborators" co-operating with the British. Although not specified, we judge that non-military UK interests in Iraq may also be under threat and all UK nationals are at increased risk. The threat must be taken seriously: some previous such threats by al-Zarqawi, for example in the run up to the Iraqi elections, have been followed by attacks.

2. Al-Zarqawi has previously threatened UK interests, but usually in tandem with the US. There is no linkage in the statement to the UK election campaign, and we have seen no other threat reporting specific to the election. But al-Zarqawi is skilled at exploiting the media. He does follow the UK domestic political scene and we judge that he may have chosen to issue the threat at a politically sensitive time in the UK, in order to gain maximum publicity and attempt to damage the government. Islamist terrorists have a recent track record of linking attacks to elections. [...]

The threat posed by al-Zarqawi in Iraq

3. Al-Zarqawi's most capable networks operate in the Sunni Arab heartlands in central and northern Iraq, extending into the Kurdish areas. He could choose to target British interests in these areas, including Baghdad, or the UK consulate in Kirkuk. Al-Zarqawi claimed a suicide bomb attack against the Black Watch battlegroup deployed to North Babil in November last year. But the text of the message mentions specifically attacks against British forces in southern Iraq.

4. Al-Zarqawi has the proven capability to direct limited operations in the south against UK military and civilian targets. He was probably behind:

- a suicide bomb attack on Italian forces in Nasiriyah in November 2003;
- multiple suicide vehicle bomb attacks on the Iraqi security forces on 21 April in Basra and further attacks using suicide boats on the Basra oil terminal on 24 April 2004;
- the vehicle bomb attack on the UK logistics base at Shaibah outside Basra in January 2005.

We do not know the strength of al-Zarqawi's network in the south. But the comparatively small number of attacks thus far, together with the difficulty of operating in a predominantly Shia area, suggests that jihadists do not have an established presence. Facilitation networks are using the south to infiltrate jihadists into central and northern Iraq. This structure could be used to support attacks. Jihadists could be brought in from

the north or possibly from [...] for specific operations. Mounting a sustained campaign of attacks would be much more difficult.

5. [...] We have no specific intelligence on likely targets: the threat is diverse. In the past al-Zarqawi-linked attacks have involved the use of suicide bombers against bases, large military convoys, senior officers and officials. Small arms, mortars, RPGs, improvised explosive devices or surface to air missiles have also been used. Complex attacks, increasingly seen in the Sunni areas, are possible. Al-Zarqawi was behind a number of kidnappings, including the murder of Kenneth Bigley. There could be further attempts: a drawn out hostage crisis playing in the media prior to the UK election would be an attractive option for al-Zarqawi.

The threat beyond Iraq

6. The statement is specific to Iraq. But since the merger of al-Zarqawi's network with Al Qaida late last year, [...] We do not know how far advanced any plans might be, and we have no intelligence of possible targets or timings, in the UK or elsewhere. But we cannot rule out attacks against UK interests outside Iraq by al-Zarqawi's network.

ANNEX

TEXT OF AL-ZARQAWI MESSAGE

In the name of God, the Merciful, and the Compassionate. Praise be to God, and prayers and peace be upon God's messenger, and upon all his family, companions, and followers.

The Higher Command of the al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers decided to direct heavy military attacks against the British forces in Southern Iraq, turning both north and south of Iraq into hell and a graveyard for every Crusader who considers attacking the lands of the Islamic nation. We warn every agent and every spy who offers protection or acts as human shield to the British forces in Iraq.

Agents and spies cooperating with the British forces must declare their repentance to God, may He be exalted, and join their free honorable mujahidin brothers, because the free honorable mujahidin will not have mercy on any agent or spy who cooperates with the British forces when they begin to direct their painful military strikes against the British forces.

We are awaiting the repentance of the agents and the spies who are collaborating with the British forces before our elements begin to carry out their intense attacks against the British forces. We want to show the generosity of Islam in forgiving every agent and spy who cooperates with the British forces, but decides to repent to God and join his mujahidin brothers.

The British forces and their collaborators should know that the triangle of death is coming and that future attacks will not be the attack and retreat type as was the case in the past, and that death is coming to them.

The British Government which suffers from the greatest security phobia in the world should know that the more it intensifies its security precautions, increases its human shields of spies and agents, the more the resolve and determination of the mujahidin will become to attack its interests.

The Zionist United States is receiving painful punishment from the heroes of al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers everyday, in retaliation for the massacres this Zionist country has carried out against Muslims in their countries.

Britain should receive the same dose of painful punishment which the US is receiving, so that Islamic justice through revenge against every criminal who carried out massacres against the Muslims anywhere in the world is realized. Britain and its allies will not leave Iraq without punishment.

Criminals should pay the price for the actions they have committed against Muslims, before they depart from the Iraqi swamp, to become an example and a lesson to any country in the world that considers the invasion of Muslim countries; and to make of them a lesson and an example for any country that considers to take cover under the protection of the US, when it kills Muslims.

God the Almighty said, If ye will aid (the cause of) Allah, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly [Koranic verse]. God is All-Knowing.

Al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers