

JIC Assessment, 16 June 2004

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: THE THREAT FROM ABU MUSAB AL-ZARQAWI

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on Wednesday 16 June 2004.

Key Judgements

- I. Al-Zarqawi is now second only to Bin Laden as an inspirational figure in the Islamist extremist world. His networks have proved resilient and if he is killed or captured other leaders will emerge.
- II. Islamist terrorists have been responsible for a number of major suicide attacks in Iraq, and al-Zarqawi has been behind many of them.
- III. Other significant but less well publicised Islamist terrorist groups are conducting similar attacks against similar targets. But his actions and words have given al-Zarqawi an unrivalled prominence as the key jihadist leader in Iraq.
- IV. It is not clear whether al-Zarqawi is a member of Al Qaida. He has close links with the leadership, but maintains his independence.
- V. His strategy in Iraq is to destabilise the country by fomenting civil war, and eventually to establish a Sunni Islamist state – and a safe haven from which Islamist terrorists can pursue the jihad. In pursuing this strategy he will seek to intensify attacks in the lead up to the handover of power and beyond, targeting Americans, British, Kurds, Shia and other Iraqis seen as supporting the Coalition and the new Iraqi government.