

**JIC Assessment, 12 March 2003**

**INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: WAR WITH IRAQ: UPDATE**

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on Wednesday 12 March 2003.*

**Key Judgements**

- I. The threat from Al Qaida will increase at the onset of military action against Iraq. Attack plans in the time-frame of a potential conflict are probably now going ahead under the control of lower-level operational leaders, but Khalid Sheikh Muhammad's capture may lead to postponement or abandonment of at least some terrorist plans.
- II. The greatest threat to Western interests from Islamist terrorists is in the Middle East. South East Asia and East Africa are the most likely regions for attack outside the Middle East, although Al Qaida retains a strong determination to mount attacks in the US and UK.
- III. Al Qaida and sympathisers may well attempt chemical or biological terrorist attacks in the Gulf, including against UK civilian targets there, in the event of war with Iraq.
- IV. Al Qaida terrorists in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) previously noted testing and producing chemical and biological substances remain active and are likely to attack Coalition forces.
- V. Senior Al Qaida associated terrorists may have established sleeper cells in Iraq, to be activated during a Coalition occupation.
- VI. Iraq continues to prepare for terrorist attacks against Western interests in the Middle East, Europe, South East Asia and elsewhere, although the regime's capability remains limited, especially beyond the Middle East.

## INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: WAR WITH IRAQ: UPDATE

*This assessment updates [the JIC assessment] of 10 February, on terrorist activity that would be triggered by war with Iraq.*

### Al Qaida

1. [The JIC assessment of 10 February 2003] noted that Al Qaida intend to attack Western interests at the start of Coalition action against Iraq. [...] The capture of Khalid Sheikh Muhammad (see box) may produce actionable intelligence. Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, and other senior terrorists with whom KSM has recently been in contact, will now be under significant pressure.

2. Attack plans in the time-frame of a potential conflict with Iraq are now probably going ahead under the control of lower level operational leaders. KSM's arrest might lead some plans to be advanced. But overall, we judge that it is likely to demoralize Al Qaida terrorists at all levels, reduce trust and confidence between operatives, and introduce greater caution in their activities. [...]

### Islamist terrorists

3. We continue to see a substantial body of reporting of plans by Al Qaida and other Islamist terrorists for attacks in the Middle East. Some of these plans have been disrupted by recent arrests in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and much of the planning will not materialize. But we judge that the greatest terrorist threat to UK and other Western interests in the event of war will continue to be in the Middle East. [...]

4. [...] And there will continue to be risks from lone extremists, such as the killing of a UK citizen in Saudi Arabia last month.

5. Arrests of extremists involved in chemical/biological (CB) attack plans in Bahrain may have reduced the threat of an attack there linked to conflict with Iraq. But the full distribution of instructions for making CB devices has yet to be uncovered [...].

6. We have seen continuing but non-specific intelligence indicating attacks elsewhere, and judge that Islamist terrorist capabilities and the local security situation in South East Asia [...]. We continue to receive a high volume of intelligence on plans by Al Qaida and other Islamist terrorists to conduct attacks around the world in the event of war, including in Europe. Most of this is uncorroborated reporting, which represents aspiration or misinformation rather than serious intent, and will not translate into attacks.

#### Khalid Sheikh Muhammad

KSM was the most senior of Al Qaida's three main operational planners – with the strongest reputation. He was widely respected among Islamist terrorists. KSM coordinated the 11 September attacks and was involved in the attack against a synagogue in Tunisia in April last year. [...]

A number of claims made by KSM in his early debriefing corroborate other intelligence. But he is likely to be using counter-interrogation techniques, including giving his debriefers information that he assumes they already have. He has confirmed Al Qaida intentions to conduct attacks against Heathrow [and another target in London].

KSM was also coordinating and encouraging attacks in the Middle East, Pakistan and Africa. In debriefing he has claimed that he had authorised attacks on hotels in Pakistan, [...]. In addition, KSM was playing an important role in coordinating Al Qaida's efforts in Afghanistan - including arranging for the distribution of improvised explosive devices to anti-Western forces.

7. A substantial body of reporting (much of which is also uncorroborated) suggests targeting against UK and US interests. We assess that Al Qaida retains a strong determination to mount attacks in both countries.

#### **Islamist terrorists in Iraq**

8. In [the JIC assessment of 10 February 2003], we assessed that Al Qaida-linked terrorists currently in [Iraq] might conduct attacks against Coalition forces. Reporting since then suggests that senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab al Zarqawi has established sleeper cells in Baghdad, to be activated during a US occupation of the city. These cells apparently intend to attack US targets using car bombs and other weapons. (It is also possible that they have received CB materials from terrorists in the KAZ.) Al Qaida-associated terrorists continued to [...].

9. [...] Whatever the precise relationship between al Zarqawi and his DGI contacts, it is unlikely that he could conduct activities in Iraq without the knowledge (and probably the support) of the regime.

10. [...]

#### **Hizballah**

11. [...]

#### **Palestinians**

12. We continue to judge that major Palestinian groups such as Hamas and PIJ are unlikely to attack Western interests in the event of war, although they may use war as a pretext to increase terrorist attacks against Israel for their own purposes. [...] And maverick members of Palestinian groups may attempt independent attacks.

#### **Iraq**

13. Intelligence continues to show preparations by the Iraqi regime for terrorist attacks against Western targets in the Middle East, Europe, South East Asia and elsewhere. [...]

14. [...]

15. [...]

#### **Mujahideen e Khalq**

16. [...] MEK is more likely to be used as a tool of repression among the Iraqi population and forces than against the Coalition.

#### **Turkish groups**

17. [...]

## Conclusion

18. Despite serious setbacks for Al Qaida, and some disruption of terrorist activity, especially in the Middle East, the threat from Islamist terrorism in the event of war with Iraq remains high, with continuing evidence of attack planning. We can expect Al Qaida to persist with plans for at least one major attack to coincide with an outbreak of hostilities, as well as widespread attempts at low-level attacks by extremist groups and individuals worldwide, especially in the Middle East, Africa and South East Asia. We judge that this threat remains greater than any terrorist threat from Iraq.