

# Al-Zarqawi's Death- Impact on Terrorism in Iraq and Europe

July 2006

## The Bottom Line

Those who believe that al-Zarqawi's death signifies the death knell of the insurgency will be woefully disappointed. Although al-Zarqawi's group is potent, one must be cautious not to overstate its significance. AQ Iraq has limitations; the organisation (which includes a cadre of foreign fighters) has remained a very small part of the overall insurgency in the country. True, it has at times proved to be one of the most potent elements of the insurgency, responsible for several high profile and large-scale terrorist atrocities; however, the vast bulk of militant activity in Iraq is carried out by nationalist Sunni groups and Shi'ite militias.

## Lull in Violence?

It is likely that those militants who fall under al-Zarqawi's extremist banner will be eager to impress their continued potency on the authorities. They will want to convey a sense of continuity. The organisation has achieved this in the past; never has the removal of a significant local or regional AQ Iraq leader preceded a local or regional lull in violence. This has simply failed to materialise as lieutenants have filled the gaps. As such, the death of al-Zarqawi indicates the first big test for AQ Iraq.

## Are there likely to be reprisal attacks in Europe?

The threat of Islamic extremist terrorism in Europe remains very high, and it is almost certain there will be further attacks. Although it is possible that future attacks may be justified by the perpetrators as revenge for the death of al-Zarqawi, extremists will be planning attacks regardless of this recent development and had al-Zarqawi not been killed an alternative justification would undoubtedly be provided.

## The Iraq angle:

### Impact of activities locally:

The impact will be mixed. It will be a near-term blow to AQ Iraq and his death will certainly set the Iraqi organisation off balance. It remains to be seen whether AQ Iraq possesses a leadership figure strong enough to preserve unity in the organisation.

Those who believe that this signifies the death knell of the insurgency will be woefully disappointed. Although al-Zarqawi's group is potent, one must be cautious not to overstate its significance. AQ Iraq has limitations; the organisation (which includes a cadre of foreign fighters) has remained a very small part of the overall insurgency in the country. True, it has at times proved to be one of the most potent elements of the insurgency, responsible for several high profile and large-scale terrorist atrocities; however, the vast bulk of militant activity in Iraq is carried out by nationalist Sunni groups and Shi'ite militias.

### Will effectiveness in Iraq be damaged?

If Osama bin Laden was to be killed it is unlikely that his removal would have much impact on AQ operational planning and execution. This is because global AQ operates rather like a franchise system, dislocated from the overall leadership by individual cells and cell leaders. In a sense bin Laden is a symbolic, Che Guevara like figure who has little direct operational responsibility. Al-Zarqawi, however, is a very interesting figure in that he appears to straddle two very impor-

tant roles; that of spiritual/ideological leader and of 'hands on' operational leader. As a planner and a coordinator of terrorist attacks it is likely that he will be missed.



### Increased violence in Iraq?

In the near term it is likely that those militants who fall under al-Zarqawi's extremist banner will be eager to impress their continued potency on the authorities. They will want to convey a sense of continuity. The organisation has achieved this in the past; never has the removal of a significant local or regional AQ Iraq leader preceded a local or regional lull in violence. This has simply failed to materialise as lieutenants have filled the gaps. As such, the death of al-Zarqawi indicates the first big test for AQ Iraq.

### Retribution?

There will be calls for revenge; however, AQ is not a group which has ever tended to hold anything back. They rarely miss an opportunity to attack a target in the most destructive

JANUSIAN: THINKING



and effective way possible. It is feasible, however, that already planned attacks will be brought forward to provide a speedy response to al-Zarqawi's death. It is also possible that his death might encourage more near-term martyrdom operations. In Iraq, this might include a military style assault on a significant target, however, this is only likely to materialise with adequate leadership.

### Evolution of AQ Iraq

Al-Zarqawi might have gone but his extremist cause still remains, and if various groups wish to reorganise and pursue the fight they will continue to pose a potent threat. If AQ Iraq remains unified it is likely that we will see it evolve as it has done over the last year. As foreign leaders of AQ Iraq cells have been killed, or otherwise removed from the battle space, the gap has tended to be filled by Iraqis. Therefore, we might well see a more pronounced 'Iraqification' of AQ Iraq in the absence of such a prominent foreign operational and ideological figurehead. It is unlikely that al-Zarqawi's death will precipitate the disappearance of foreign fighters from Iraq because Iraq is indisputably the foremost arena for modern Jihad. Foreign Islamist extremists have too much in common with Iraqi extremists to be rejected from the country wholesale. It is likely, however, that freedom of movement for foreign fighters might well now prove more restricted.

### Diary Update:

Since this report was written, two weeks ago, we have seen several developments on the AQ Iraq front.

### June 2006

**Friday 9<sup>th</sup>** - Abu Ayyub al-Masri is identified by the US military as the most likely successor to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He is Egyptian born and is thought to have met Zarqawi at the Al-Faruq training camp in Afghanistan between 2001-2002. Al-Masri came to Iraq before Zarqawi did, and was likely based in and around Baghdad. He is believed to have established first AQ cell in Iraq in 2003 in the Baghdad area.

**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>** - The US military reveals that al-Zarqawi was alive after his safe-house was

bombed, though he could barely speak. The spokesman also indicated that US troops, 'went into the process to provide medical care to him,' before he expired. Some reports from the area quote witnesses as saying that al-Zarqawi was beaten to death at the scene by US soldiers. This has been refuted by senior American military officials. **Jordanian link** - According to Jordanian intelligence sources, the success of the Zarqawi operation was partly a result of information obtained following the arrest in Jordan during May of Ziad Khalaf Raja al-Karbouly, an AQ Iraq operative linked to Zarqawi.

**Monday 12<sup>th</sup>** - In a Web statement, AQ Iraq announce that a militant named Abu Hamza al-Muhajer is the group's new leader, 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq's council has agreed on Sheik Abu Hamza al-Muhajer to be the successor for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in the leadership of the organization [... al-Muhajer is] a beloved brother with jihadi experience and a strong footing in knowledge'. Abu Hamza al-Muhajer is believed to be Abu Ayyub al-



Al-Masri photo

Masri; the name al-Muhajer is Arabic for 'immigrant', suggesting that he is not Iraqi. The statement said that he will continue to pursue the gruesome campaign of suicide bombings and beheadings begun by his predecessor.

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup>** - Iraqi National Security Advisor, Muwafaq al-Rubaie announced the seizure of AQ Iraq documents, signalling a determined effort to maintain the momentum of counter-insurgency operations. 'We believe this is the end of al Qaeda in Iraq,' al-Rubaie asserted, claiming multinational forces and Iraqi security forces now have the upper hand on the group. The documents recovered from the scene of al-Zarqawi's death are said to give key information about the group's network and the whereabouts of significant members.

**Friday 16<sup>th</sup>** - 2 US troops are kidnapped following an attack on a military CP in Yusufiyah.

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup>** - The Mujahadin Shura Council, a militant umbrella group comprising at least 5 extremist organisations and led by AQ Iraq, announces that it is behind the abduction of the 2



US soldiers. The message also ridiculed US operations in Iraq: 'Your brothers in the military wing of the Mujahadin Shura Council kidnapped the two American soldiers near Yusufiyah [...] The events reconfirm the weakness of the alleged American intelligence and its going astray in Iraq [...] The American military has launched a campaign of raids using armour and equipment, in the region around the incident, but the army of "the strongest nation in the world" retreated in defeat and disgrace'. The group also said it was holding 4 Russian diplomats hostage in Iraq and claimed to have killed a fifth Russian. They were abducted on 3 June in western Baghdad in an attack which killed a fifth Russian at the scene. They give Moscow 48 hours to pull out from Chechnya and free Muslim prisoners. 'The Russian government sends its diplomats to Iraq to support the crusaders' project, led by America, and to provide international backing and legitimacy to the exhausted Iraqi government [...] God has enabled the lions of monotheism to arrest four Russian diplomats in Iraq and kill the fifth'.

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup>** - The Mujahedeen Shura Council posts an Internet statement stating that al-Zarqawi's AQ Iraq's successor has 'slaughtered' the kidnapped US soldiers: 'we give the good news to the Islamic nation from the battlefield that we have carried God's verdict by slaughtering the two captured crusaders [...] The two crusaders taken hostage have been executed by having their throats cut [...] With God Almighty's blessing, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir carried out the verdict of the Islamic court'.



**US soldiers on patrol after a car-bombing**

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>** - The US military recovers the bodies of the 2 missing soldiers from the vicinity of an electrical plant, only a few miles from where they originally went missing. MNF spotted the soldiers' bodies late on Monday, however the recovery was delayed until an explosives team cleared the area of improvised explosive devices. According to a US military spokesman, around 8,000 Iraqi and US

troops searched for the missing soldiers. 1 US soldier was killed and 12 others were wounded during the operation to find the men. In addition they received 66 tips, 18 of which were considered worthy of follow up, killed 2 insurgents and detained another 78 suspected militants.

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup>** - The Mujahedeen Shura Council posts an Internet statement stating that it has decided to kill 4 kidnapped Russian Embassy workers after a deadline for meeting its demands passed. The Council said that Moscow had failed to meet its demands for a full withdrawal of troops from Chechnya and that a 48-hour deadline had run out.

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup>** - The Mujahedeen Shura Council releases a video showing the murder of two of the four Russian diplomats: 'We present the implementation of Allah's rule against the Russian diplomats to comfort the believers [...] It is also in revenge for our brothers and sisters and what they suffer of torture, killing and displacement by the infidel Russian government'.

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup>** - National security adviser, Muwafaq al-Rubaie announces the arrest of an AQ Iraq affiliated Tunisian, Yousri Fakher Mohammed Ali; aka Abu Qudama. Qudama was arrested after a gun-battle in Udaim which killed 15 other foreign fighters. He was allegedly responsible for bombing the 1,200-year-old Shi'ite Askariya shrine in Samarra on 22 February; the attack which triggered a wave of sectarian killings across the country. Rubaie also stated that; 'Iraqi forces and its intelligence have achieved major penetrations of al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups'. **Note:** the suspected mastermind behind the Askariya shrine attack, an Iraqi named Haitham Sabah Shaker Mohammed al-Badri, remains at large.

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup>** - In a 19-minute audio message posted on an Islamic militant Web site, Osama Bin Laden pays tribute to al-Zarqawi. He defends attacks by al-Zarqawi against Iraqi civilians, saying that he was acting under instructions to kill anyone who backed American forces: 'those who accuse Abu Musab of killing certain sectors of the Iraqi people [...] Abu Musab had clear instructions to focus his fight on the occupiers, particularly the Americans and to leave aside anyone who remains neutral [...] But for those who refused and stood to fight on the side of the crusaders against the Muslims,

**JANUSIAN: THINKING**



then he should kill them whoever they are, regardless of their sect or tribe. For supporting infidels against Muslims is a major sin'.



**Osama Bin Laden paying tribute to al-Zarqawi via video**

The video has several objectives. Firstly, it aims to underline the AQ hierarchy, bin Laden's use of the word 'instructions' was chosen to illustrate al-Zarqawi's position in the militant pecking order and reaffirm bin Laden's over-all command. Secondly, the message highlights bin Laden's support for ongoing AQ operations in Iraq. Thirdly, it is intended to incite George Bush and King Abdullah of Jordan; to the latter he taunts: 'What scares you about Abu Musab after he's dead? You know that his funeral, if allowed to happen, would be a huge funeral showing the extent of sympathy with the Mujahedeen'. This is especially sensitive at a time when the King's government is considering what further action to take against 4 Islamic party figures who attended al-Zarqawi's wake in Jordan and made inflammatory statements in the days after he was killed. Fourthly the aim is once again publicise Osama bin Laden's continuing existence, his power and his authority. This is the 4th bin Laden message seen in 2006.

### The European angle:

#### How extensive were al-Zarqawi's networks in Europe? Was al-Zarqawi involved in coordinating attacks in Europe?

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was believed to have extensive links to jihadist groups and individuals across Europe, although many of these links are indirect and it is not believed that at the time of his death al-Zarqawi was personally involved in the co-ordination of cells to prosecute attacks in Europe. The threat of acts of Islamist extremist terrorism in Europe can be attributed to al-Zarqawi more by association of a common ideology and as an iconic role-model to a wider movement than by direct organisational association.

#### What was the nature of al-Zarqawi's role in terrorism in Europe?

Al-Zarqawi has been directly associated to cells plotting attacks, recruiting and fundraising in Germany and Italy from 2000 to 2002, and indirectly linked to cells in the UK, Bosnia, to the bombings in Istanbul in 2003, to the Madrid Bombings of March 11 2004 and to a cell uncovered in Paris in December 2005, to name a few. However, these links have often been tenuous at best. Very often the links have been established by degrees of association from one extremist group to another and then to al-Zarqawi within the context of the amorphous transnational jihadist community, rather than direct contact and involvement.

It is known that al-Zarqawi's scope was not limited solely to Iraq or his home country of Jordan where he executed several attacks. On one occasion he had stated that he was 'global' and his al-Tawhid cell in Germany was directed by him to target Jewish targets in German cities.

As the tempo of his activity in Iraq gained pace, it is believed that cells in Europe that had links to al-Zarqawi increasingly functioned largely in a support capacity, rather than as operations cells; providing finances, volunteers, false passports and other necessities to sustain his primary concern: jihad in Iraq. This outward flow of support from networks in Europe to al-Zarqawi in Iraq was most likely to have been exchanged by an inward flow to



Europe of propaganda, expertise and encouragement to launch attacks; actual operational support and co-ordination to launch attacks is considered less likely.

### **What impact will al-Zarqawi's death have on terrorist groups and cells in the UK and Europe?**

Al-Zarqawi's death is unlikely to have any significant impact on terrorism in UK and Europe, for the worse or for the better.

Although there is little doubt that al-Zarqawi provided a great deal of inspiration to extremist elements - Mohamed Sidique Khan the ringleader of the 7 July 2005 bombers cited him as a hero for example- the lure of Islamist extremist terrorism is ultimately based upon a belief system, a set of ideas, as sense of injustice, and the lure of violence and martyrdom, rather than any one individual.

Any of the networks currently in place that have been recruiting volunteers for jihad in Iraq, or have been playing some kind of role in planning attacks in Europe will not be disrupted by the death of al-Zarqawi given that any networks established by, or associated with, al-Zarqawi will be cellular in structure and therefore designed to minimise the impact upon the wider network caused by disruption to any one element - be they operational cells, ideologues or commanders in Iraq. Terrorist attacks can only be averted by disrupting the actual cells directly involved in organising and carrying out the attacks. There is a possibility that possible funding for attacks flowing from al-Zarqawi to European cells may be disrupted and therefore have an impact, and that al-Zarqawi's successor may deviate from al-Zarqawi's strategy to greater or lesser effect in Europe. However, given al-Zarqawi's pre-occupations in Iraq, and coalition efforts to maintain the momentum and pressure achieved on AQ Iraq since his death, his successor is unlikely to shift his attention from the situation on the ground in Iraq and increase the focus on attacking distant European targets at this time.

### **Are there likely to be reprisal attacks in Europe?**

The threat of Islamic extremist terrorism in Europe remains very high, and it is almost certain there will be further attacks. Although it is possi-

ble that future attacks may be justified by the perpetrators as revenge for the death of al-Zarqawi, extremists will be planning attacks regardless of this recent development and had al-Zarqawi not been killed an alternative justification would undoubtedly be provided.

It is possible that there may be an increase of effort by groups to launch symbolic and spectacular attacks in Europe as soon as possible, in revenge of al-Zarqawi's killing. However, spectacular attacks take significant planning and preparation and should spontaneous terrorist actions be undertaken by elements sympathetic to al-Zarqawi, they are unlikely to be on the scale of high-casualty spectaculars such as the Madrid bombings if launched immediately. Any effective attacks in the immediate future would have already been in preparation prior to his death and most likely would not be connected to him or his immediate group directly; attacks in the medium to long term in Europe under the orders of al-Zarqawi's successor are a possibility, although the threat is considered higher from other quarters of the Islamist extremist movement.

**This article was written by Luke Roberts and Henry Wilkinson, analysts with Janusian Security Risk Management.**

**They can be contacted via e-mail at: [roberts@janusian.com](mailto:roberts@janusian.com) or [wilkinson@janusian.com](mailto:wilkinson@janusian.com) or by telephone on +44 (0)20 7578 0009**

**JANUSIAN: THINKING**



### Profiling the Suicide Bomber

Today, there are over 15 terrorist groups who have a proven desire to conduct suicide operations around the world: these bombers remain extremely difficult to detect once they embark on a mission. They can be likened to guided missiles with an ability to constantly reappraise the situation and re-orientate accordingly. However, their vulnerability lies in a tendency to panic if confronted by obstructions to the successful completion of their mission. This might result in premature detonation or an abortion of the mission.

Certain attacks will require the use of a suicide bomber to guarantee operational success: the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi was undertaken by a female, Sri Lankan suicide bomber who was able to get close enough to her target to ensure he would be killed. Heightened security measures often call for the use of a suicide bomber to penetrate barriers designed, for example, to prevent car or truck bombs from approaching a particular target—an embassy perhaps. However, where there is no specific person or location being attacked but a more general locality with no security in place, such as busy commuter transport networks, it is clear that the choice to use suicide bombers is not solely driven by military tactical requirements. There is now almost a cult surrounding the suicide bomber, whose victims extend far beyond those who are physically harmed by the attack to include those who remotely suffer a deep psychological impact. The use of home-grown, British suicide bombers on 7 July, where timed devices left to detonate would have had the same effect, was clearly intended to affect the psyches of millions of people and of the British authorities in a way beyond dealing only with the impact of physical damage.



Palestinian suicide bomber identified by Israeli security

Seizing the initiative in countering attacks launched by suicide bombers is clearly not only about identifying and neutralising potential attacker in the last minutes before they detonate. This is an option that occasionally may be available to law enforcement and intelligence agencies, although the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes shows how difficult it is to effectively take advantage of such a situation, but is not one

that individuals can normally rely on.

At a personal level, maintaining a complete avoidance of busy places, commuter trains at rush hour, high profile public gatherings, locations that are obvious targets, may make you feel safer, but is not realistic. Remaining vigilant when in such situations is important and can help you protect yourself, as well as those around you.

In countries where suicide bombing has been widespread, such as Israel, studies have been carried out in which points of recognition by which a potential attacker may be identified in the latter stages of detonating their device have been documented. The Israeli government has issued a set of guidelines allowing the public to spot suicide bombers. The pamphlet, 'Only Together Will We Stop the Terror', advises an awareness of:

- People wearing unseasonable warm clothing—this to conceal the explosive device, possibly a bulky body harness (9kg explosives) or belt (4.5kg explosives)
- Protruding bulges underneath their clothing
- People who are sweating, mumbling or fidgeting
- People trying to avoid security personnel
- Young people trying to fit into crowds they would not normally belong with

However, it is essential to remember that there is no definitive checklist that can be guaranteed. Whilst some common recognition points exist; there is no proven method that can identify the suicide bomber at close quarters. Other, signals to be aware of might include:

- A backpack or bag that appears to be unusually heavy due to the weight of explosives and material packed to maximise the damage potential of the blast
- Any visible electrical wiring protruding from a bag or under clothes
- A person avoiding all direct eye contact
- Where 'ritualistic cleansing' is undertaken all body hair is removed, with the exception of the top of the head. This may result in skin tone differences, rashes and irregular behaviour (e.g. touching a beard that is no longer there)
- A tense and nervous disposition in a person noticeably aware of their surroundings
- Walking carefully not to disturb the device and cause a premature explosion
- Constantly looking for something either under their clothing or in their bag.

In general, counter-terrorism must be carried out at an institutional level rather than an individual one. The last thirty seconds before the detonation of a suicide bomber is too late to implement effective methods of protection. Techniques to push back secure perimeters surrounding assets, such as the detection and interception of terrorist reconnaissance and surveillance missions, offer the opportunity to gain an advantage over potential attackers.

The most effective way of neutralising the threat of suicide bombers remains preventing the radicalisation of those recruited to carry out these operations. This, however, is a complex, long term and strategic endeavour that does not address the threat posed by those already groomed for their missions. In the meantime, vigilance and a determined implementation of security risk management strategies are essential.

**This article was written by Charles Skinner, an Operations Manager with Janusian Security Risk Management. He can be contacted via e-mail at: [skinner@janusian.com](mailto:skinner@janusian.com) or by telephone on +44 (0)20 7578 0009**

JANUSIAN: THINKING



# JANUSIAN: THINKING