

The Zargawi Node in the Terror Matrix

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In mapping out Iraq's links to international terrorism before the United Nations Security Council, Secretary of State Colin Powell highlighted the case of senior al Qaeda commander Fedel Nazzel Khalayleh, better known as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

In fact, Zarqawi exemplifies not only the Iraq role in the web of international terror but serves as a case in point of the terror matrix itself. Zarqawi's activities on behalf of al Qaeda span the globe, from Afghanistan to Great Britain, with equally diverse links to other terrorist groups, from Ansar al-Islam in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon to al-Tawhid in Germany and Beyyat el-Imam in Turkey. At least 116 terrorist operatives from Zarqawi's global network have already been arrested, including members in France, Italy, Spain, Britain, Germany, Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

WHO IS ZARQAWI?

A Palestinian-Jordanian and veteran of the Afghan war against the Soviets, Zarqawi first appeared as a terror suspect when Jordan indicted him in absentia for his role in the al Qaeda millennial bombing plot targeting the Radison SAS hotel in Amman as well as other American, Israeli, and Christian religious sites in Jordan. In 2000 he returned to Afghanistan, where he oversaw a terrorist training camp and specialized in chemical and biological weapons. European officials maintain Zarqawi is the al Qaeda coordinator for attacks there, where chemical attacks were recently thwarted in Britain, France, and Italy. In fact, Secretary Powell informed that Abuwatia (ph), a detainee who graduated from Zarqawi's terrorist camp in Afghanistan, admitted to dispatching at least nine North African extremists to travel to Europe to conduct poison and explosive attacks.

Zarqawi heads Jund al-Shams, an Islamic extremist group and al Qaeda affiliate which operated primarily in Syria and Jordan, but is now believed to have moved to the Ansar al-Islam enclave in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq where he helped establish a new poison and explosive training camp. Powell noted that Zarqawi's lieutenants operate the Ansar al-Islam camp in coordination with a senior Iraqi agent "in the most senior levels of the radical organization."

TERROR TO GO

Zarqawi's own movements are themselves telling. After being wounded in the leg in Afghanistan, Zarqawi escaped to

Iran. While there, he dispatched two Palestinians and a Jordanian who entered Turkey illegally from Iran on their way to conduct bombing attacks in Israel. The three, members of Beyyiat el-Imam (a group linked to al Qaeda) who fought for the Taliban and received terrorist training in Afghanistan, were intercepted and arrested by Turkish police on February 15, 2002.

From Iran Zarqawi traveled to Iraq in May 2002, where his wounded leg was amputated and the limb fitted with a prosthetic device. He spent two months recovering in Baghdad, at which time "nearly two dozen extremists converged on Baghdad and established a base of operations there." Powell informed that "these Al Qaida affiliates, based in Baghdad, now coordinate the movement of people, money and supplies into and throughout Iraq for his network, and they've now been operating freely in the capital for more than eight months."

While Iraq maintained it was unaware of the whereabouts of Zarqawi or other terrorists, Powell informed the Security Council that the United States passed information to Iraqi authorities on Zarqawi's location in the Iraqi capitol via a third party.

From Baghdad Zarqawi traveled to Syria, and from there to Lebanon where he met with leaders from Hezbollah and other extremists at a terror training camp in South Lebanon. In fact, Zarqawi has been definitively linked both to Hezbollah as well as a terrorist cell apprehended in Germany that had been operating under the name Tawhid. German prosecutors announced that the group, tied to the recently arrested Abu Qatada in Britain but controlled by Zarqawi, was planning to attack U.S. or Israeli interests in Germany. Eight men were arrested, and raids yielded hundreds of forged passports from Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Denmark, and other countries.

While in Syria Zarqawi planned and facilitated the October assassination of Lawrence Foley, a U.S. official with the Agency for International Development. In December a Libyan and a Jordanian were arrested for the attack. Jordan's prime minister announced that the pair received funding and instructions from Zarqawi, and intended to conduct attacks against "foreign embassies, Jordanian officials, some diplomatic personnel, especially Americans and Israelis." Powell revealed that after the murder, one of the assassin's associates "left Jordan to go to Iraq to obtain weapons and explosives for further operations."

Zarqawi is now believed to have returned to the Ansar al-Islam camp in northern Iraq run by his Jund al-Shams lieutenants. Terrorists trained at the camp have plotted chemical attacks with various toxins in Britain, France, Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, and Chechnya.

THE TERROR MATRIX

The Zarqawi network highlights the matrix of relationships that define today's international terrorist threat. Indeed, international terrorism is a web linking many disparate groups. Senior U.S. and European officials have noted that although Hezbollah and al Qaeda do not appear to share operational support, they have engaged in logistical cooperation on an ad hoc and tactical basis, as well as cooperative training.

Support networks play a particularly crucial role in the matrix of relationships among terrorists. For example, over the past year, evidence has shown that the al-Taqwa banking network -- which was shut down shortly after the September 11 attacks in light of its ties to al Qaeda -- was a preferred conduit for transferring funds to Hamas and a host of North African terrorist groups, in addition to being established with seed money from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Moreover, state sponsors of terrorism continue to play a central role, as evidenced by the hospitality showed Zarqawi by Iran, Iraq, and Syria. For example, Syria has provided a great deal of assistance against al Qaeda, but is nevertheless believed to be supplying rockets directly to Hezbollah. Damascus should be told in no uncertain terms to direct its counterterrorism cooperation against all terrorists. Tehran continues to support Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups as well, and has given senior al Qaeda officials sanctuary in villages along its eastern

border with Afghanistan and Pakistan. And the Iraqi embassy in Pakistan, Powell announced, served as Saddam's liaison to al Qaeda from 1999 through 2001.

To ignore these links is to forfeit hope of any real progress toward constricting the operating environment in which terrorists plan, fund and execute terrorist attacks. To be effective, the war on terror must have a strategic focus on the entirety of the terror matrix. Tactically, this must translate into taking action against both operational and logistical networks, as well as targeting the full range of groups making up the terror web -- from Jund al-Shams, Beyyiat el-Imam and al-Tawhid to al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas -- and the states that continue to support them. ❖

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