

Iraq: A convenient letter from an Al Qaeda terrorist

By James Conachy
17 February 2004

A letter has been discovered in Iraq, allegedly authored by Jordanian-born Islamic fundamentalist Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, appealing to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda for assistance in destabilising Iraq and US efforts to create a new government.

US accusations that al-Zarqawi provides a link between Iraq and Al Qaeda are not new. A significant portion of Colin Powell's presentation to the UN on February 5, 2003, outlining the US justifications for a pre-emptive invasion of Iraq, was devoted to detailing the terrorist activities that Zarqawi was carrying out in northeastern Iraq with the encouragement and backing of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Within days of Powell's accusations in the UN, everything he had claimed about Zarqawi had been publicly questioned or rejected as false by non-US intelligence agencies and anti-terrorism experts. The WSWWS documented this in detail at the time. (See: "Powell's Al Qaeda-Baghdad link falls apart")

Since the US seized control of Iraq, no evidence has been produced corroborating Powell's assertions about Zarqawi, or indicating that he has been carrying out anti-occupation activities since. There is no proof he is even in the country. One Iraqi Sunni cleric, Hareth al-Darri, bluntly responded to the publication of the letter declaring: "Zarqawi is an imaginary character."

Nevertheless, US intelligence has gone public with the claim that the elusive Zarqawi is the author of an undated, unsigned, 17-page document written in Arabic, which one official told the *Washington Post* is so "rhetorical" and "flowery" that parts of it had been "difficult to accurately translate". The letter was made available exclusively to the *New York Times* on February 8, and the paper published a front-page story the following day. English extracts have since been posted on the website of Washington's Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad.

The document states that there are only a small number of foreign Islamic militants in Iraq and that they have little support among the Iraqi people. It declares that Iraq's Shiites "have supported the Americans, helped them and stand with them against the *mujahidin*". Within a matter of months, the author claims, the US will be able to rule Iraq relying on "a bastard government" and local Iraqi police and security forces.

The letter is defeatist and demoralised about the prospects for resistance. It refers to the Iraqi Sunni population as "sleepy" and the Americans as having "succeeded in splitting the regular Sunni from the *mujahidin*". It despairingly declares: "There is no doubt that our field of movement is shrinking and the grip around the throat of the *mujahidin* has begun to tighten. With the spread of the [Iraqi] army and police, our future is becoming frightening."

The author is so convinced that a US-installed regime will be viewed as legitimate by the Iraqi population that he believes the Islamic militants will have "no pretexts" for fighting against it and will have "no choice but to pack our bags and move to another land". To prevent the formation of a new government, the letter outlines a plan to destabilise Iraq. It appeals for assistance in unleashing a wave of suicide bombings to plunge the country into a "sectarian war" between Shiites and Sunnis, which will create the best prospects for Al Qaeda to win support.

The letter may have been written by Zarqawi or another individual associated with Al Qaeda or radical Islamic fundamentalism. In some aspects, it dovetails with the reactionary Wahhabist views of bin Laden—particularly its scepticism that ordinary people will fight against oppression, advocacy of terror to force the masses into struggle, religiously-motivated hatred of Shiite Muslims and contempt for human life.

It is just as possible, however, that the document was concocted by US intelligence agencies or pro-American Iraqi factions for propaganda purposes. The portrait of Iraq given in the letter—that the attacks on the occupation are the work of foreign terrorists with little support among the population—is virtually identical to that of the Bush administration. The CPA in Baghdad has wasted no time presenting it to the American and Iraqi people as evidence the US is bringing the situation under control.

It is not even clear where the document was found. The initial *New York Times* article reported that the letter was found on a CD seized in a raid on a "known Qaeda safehouse in Baghdad" in mid-January. In a separate article, the newspaper's rightwing columnist William Safire claimed it had been found by pro-US Kurdish militiamen on a captured courier in

northern Iraq. Asked which version was correct, military spokesman Brigadier General Paul Kimmitt dismissively told a press conference in Baghdad: “[H]ow we found it is not as important as the fact that we have it.”

So dubious is the document that even the US media, which had no qualms about disseminating the lies of the Bush administration about “weapons of mass destruction”, has been reluctant to accept the claim that it was authored by Zarqawi. Dexter Filkins and Douglas Jehl, the *New York Times* journalists who broke the story, noted that “other interpretations may be possible... including that it was written by some other insurgent, but one who exaggerated his involvement”.

Christopher Dickey of *Newsweek* bluntly commented on February 13: “Given the Bush administration’s record peddling bad intelligence and worse innuendo, you’ve got to wonder if this letter is a total fake. How do we know the text is genuine? How was it obtained? By whom? And when? And how do we know it’s from Zarqawi? We don’t. We’re expected to take the administration’s word for it.”

Whether the letter is genuine or not, the decision to make it available to the press can only be described as fortuitous for the White House.

The past three weeks have seen the Bush administration in disarray over the admission by David Kay, head of the US inspection team, that there is no evidence Iraq possessed “weapons of mass destruction”—the main justification for the illegal war. The most recent ABC News-*Washington Post* poll found 54 percent of respondents now believe the White House intentionally exaggerated the threat from Iraq. Fifty percent no longer believe the war was worth fighting. Some 42 percent do not believe the president is trustworthy or honest.

In this context, the Zarqawi letter has been seized upon by defenders of the administration to try to resuscitate one of the other lies promoted to justify the US war on Iraq—that Hussein’s regime was linked to Al Qaeda and centrally involved in the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001.

The *New York Times*’ William Safire, for example, an ardent advocate of the war on Iraq, declared in his February 11 column: “Of the liberation’s three *casus belli*, one was to stop mass murder, bloodier than in Kosovo; we are finding horrific mass graves in Iraq. Another was informed suspicion that a clear link existed between world terror and Saddam; this terrorist plea for Qaeda reinforcements to kill Iraqi democracy is the smoking gun proving that.”

Contrary to Safire’s assertions, there was no more “informed suspicion” within US intelligence of a link between world terror and Iraq than there was that Iraq had WMD’s—Safire’s third *casus belli*. The exact opposite was in fact the case. Advice was repeatedly given to the Bush administration by the CIA and other agencies that there was no evidence Hussein’s secular Baathist regime had any relations with the

fundamentalists of Al Qaeda.

Safire’s attempt to present the letter as a “smoking gun” is no evidence at all. The alleged ravings of Zarqawi do not provide the slightest credence to claims that Al Qaeda was in Iraq prior to the invasion or that the Baathist regime was working with bin Laden. At the very most, it indicates that Zarqawi and possibly Al Qaeda may now be operating in the country. If they are, then that is the direct responsibility of the Bush administration. Iraq has been plunged into chaos and transformed into a battlefield for both Iraqi and other Arab militants wanting to fight against the US. Safire’s aim is to use the very quagmire the White House has created to justify the US invasion and continued occupation of Iraq.

Joining him have been prominent administration figures. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice told *NewsHour* on February 10: “We have every reason to believe that these are principally foreign terrorists, that these are people associated with Al Qaeda.... The people who are trying to stop that [the establishment of an Iraqi government] are clearly worried that when Iraq becomes prosperous and democratic and stable, that their grand designs to try and harm civilization, to try and roll back the clock to a day when freedom could not exist in this part of the world, they’re clearly worried that their designs are going to be very much harmed by an Iraq that is stable.”

In Baghdad, CPA official Daniel Senor told a press conference on February 11: “Terrorism is not limited to attacks in Iraq... There is a worldwide terror war going on right now and it’s hit everywhere from New York City to Casablanca to Riyadh to Istanbul to Bali.” The next day he declared: “What we have said all along is that Iraq has become the central front in the war on terrorism.”

The American people have been lied to continuously about Washington’s motives for its invasion of Iraq. The war on terrorism was simply the pretext for the Bush administration’s decision to invade the country in pursuit of longstanding economic and strategic ambitions in Iraq and the wider region. The alleged letter of Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi is another attempt to refurbish the old lies with a new set of falsifications.

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