

JIC Assessment, 10 February 2003

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: WAR WITH IRAQ

**Key Judgements**

- I. The threat from Al Qaida will increase at the onset of any military action against Iraq. They will target Coalition forces and other Western interests in the Middle East. Attacks against Western interests elsewhere are also likely, especially in the US and UK, for maximum impact. The worldwide threat from other Islamist terrorist groups and individuals will increase significantly.
- II. Al Qaida associates 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. While individual attacks are likely to be small-scale they may be numerous. Individual attacks might inflict relatively few casualties, but will cause significant alarm.
- III. Al Qaida associated terrorists in Iraq and in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone in Northern Iraq could conduct attacks against Coalition forces and interests during, or in the aftermath of, war with Iraq. But Al Qaida will not carry out attacks under Iraqi direction.
- IV. Saddam's own capability to conduct terrorist attacks is limited, especially outside the Middle East. But the threat of terrorism conducted or directed by Iraqi Intelligence, including the use of chemical or biological material, cannot be discounted.
- V. In the event of imminent regime collapse, Iraqi chemical and biological material could be transferred to terrorists including Al Qaida, whether or not as deliberate regime policy.
- VI. Al Qaida and associated networks will remain the greatest terrorist threat to the UK. The risk of attacks will increase following any Coalition attack on Iraq.
- VII. Hizballah's terrorist wing will not conduct attacks in support of Saddam. But it may attack US forces in Iraq following a campaign, if it judges that the US intends to act against Hizballah, Syria or Iran. [...] Individual Palestinian terrorists may attack Western interests, without sanction from parent groups.

**Policy implications:** Cross-department consular, evacuation and travel contingency plans for the Gulf must be agreed urgently. These, as well as diplomatic and military protection plans, should take account of the terrorist chemical/biological threat.

## INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: WAR WITH IRAQ

*[The JIC Assessment of 10 October 2002] focussed on Iraqi-directed terrorism in the event of conflict. Commissioned by the MOD and FCO, this assessment considers broader terrorist activity that would be triggered by war with Iraq, and updates [the JIC Assessment of 10 October 2002].*

### Al Qaida and other Islamist terrorists

1. [...] continuing determination by Al Qaida and other Islamist terrorists to attack Western interests around the globe. [...] We have previously judged that Al Qaida and other Islamist terrorists may initiate attacks in response to Coalition military action against Iraq, and that Al Qaida will use an attack on Iraq as further justification for terrorist attacks in the West and Israel.

2. [...] Some reports indicate that Bin Laden has instructed that there should be no terrorist attacks before the start of a conflict. [...] Al Qaida intends to exploit both anti-Western sentiment within the Muslim world, and the preoccupation of the US and UK that would come from action against Iraq. Al Qaida or associated groups may also seek to conduct attacks against Israel, intended to provoke a reaction that would further inflame feeling within the Islamic world.

3. [The JIC believed that Islamist terrorists had manufactured and stockpiled CB material intended for attacks against both UK and US targets in the Gulf.] Instructions for production of similar CB materials have been distributed by Gulf-based terrorists to extremists [...]

4. **We have some doubts about the viability of the proposed attack methods**, but judge [...] **a serious intention to use CB weapons**. Even if successful, individual attacks might inflict relatively few casualties. But attacks could be numerous and cause significant alarm.

5. [...] the use of CB materials is an increasing aspiration of Islamic extremists globally, including in Europe. Such material may be manufactured locally or provided by production facilities such as that operating in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) in Northern Iraq. We have no intelligence that Iraq has provided CB materials to Al Qaida, but we continue to judge that **in the event of imminent regime collapse there would be a risk of transfer of such material, whether or not as deliberate Iraqi regime policy**. We also continue to judge that Al Qaida retains its long-standing interest in acquiring a nuclear device, but have no convincing intelligence that it has done so.

### Al Qaida in Iraq

6. We have no intelligence to suggest that Al Qaida plans to carry out attacks under Iraqi direction. But intelligence shows the presence of Al Qaida associated extremists in Baghdad. [...] We do not know what the current presence is, its purpose, or what relationship it has to Saddam's regime, if any. But we judge it unlikely that the Iraqi regime are unaware of this presence. We do not know whether these terrorists plan to conduct activities in or from Iraq.

7. Intelligence suggests the presence of [...] Al Qaida-linked terrorists in North Eastern Iraq, in the KAZ, with safe haven provided by Ansar al Islam, an Al Qaida-associated extremist group. Some of these

individuals [...] are involved in production and distribution of CB materials. Intelligence shows that extremists continue to arrive in the region. The terrorists in Baghdad and the KAZ may re-locate in the event of imminent Coalition action there, perhaps returning to Iran or Afghanistan. But equally they **could conduct terrorist activities (including possible use of CB materials) or guerrilla actions against Coalition forces in Iraq.**

### **Palestinians**

8. [...] (Both groups also had this intent at the time of the 1991 Gulf War, but did not carry out any attacks.) We continue to judge that these groups lack the capability to do so other than on a small-scale.

9. [...] Relations between the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Iraq have been strengthened recently. We cannot rule out the possibility that in the event of an attack on Iraq, the PFLP will attack UK or US interests in Israel or the Occupied Territories, perhaps using hired guns from disaffected members of other Palestinian extremist groups. (They could also seek to free the PFLP detainees in Jericho, where US and UK nationals are monitoring their detention, particularly in the event of ramping up of Israeli security activity in the Occupied Territories.)

10. It remains unlikely that other major Palestinian groups would attack Western interests in the event of war, whether or not at Saddam's request. But recent indications of breakdown of authority within these groups, and greater factionalization, **increases the likelihood of terrorist acts by individual Palestinian extremists in protest at Coalition action.** [...]

### **Hizballah**

11. Hizballah will publicly oppose war against Iraq; they **do not intend to back this up with terrorist action in support of Saddam Hussein.** [...]

### **Iraq**

12. We have previously judged that Saddam would aspire to conduct terrorist attacks against Coalition interests in the event of military action against him, or possibly if he believed an attack was inevitable. Authoritative reporting suggests that **Iraqi Intelligence (DGI) has little reach or capability outside Iraq,** [...] But terrorist attacks, for example dispersal of CB material in public places, could be mounted by individuals with little or no specialist training. We have no intelligence of Iraqi intentions to conduct CB terrorist attacks using DGI or its agents; but such activity remains a possibility.

13. [...] We have no estimate of the number of non-official cover operatives, many of whom may have been deployed since the 1991 Gulf War.

14. [...]

15. Whatever plans Iraq may have made for terrorist activity in the event of conflict will be dependent on individual operatives' willingness to implement them, which will be in doubt if they perceive regime change to be certain. **But the threat from terrorism conducted or directed by DGI cannot be discounted.**

### **Mujahideen e Khalq**

16. The Iraq-based anti-Iranian terrorist organization Mujahideen e Khalq (MEK) are more likely to be used as a tool of repression against Shias inside Iraq than against the Coalition [...] MEK has a presence beyond the region, but are unlikely to conduct terrorist attacks outside Iran and Iraq.

### **Other extremist groups**

17. Non-Islamist terrorist groups around the world may seek to exploit a conflict with Iraq. Reporting suggests planning by Turkish Marxist groups to mount attacks in the event of conflict against military facilities including the Incirlik airbase, transport routes and individuals in Turkey. Reporting also suggests attack plans by KADEK (a Kurdish Separatist group), but we assess they are unlikely to break their current ceasefire. It is likely that attacks by most non-Islamic groups would be small-scale, sporadic, and directed primarily to soft targets.

### **Prospects**

18. Despite a significant body of intelligence on Iraq's preparations to conduct terrorism against Western interests, [...], we have seen no persuasive evidence that these efforts will be effective. **Al Qaida and associated groups will continue to represent by far the greatest terrorist threat to Western interests, and that threat will be heightened by military action against Iraq.** The broader threat from Islamist terrorists will also increase in the event of war, reflecting intensified anti-US/anti-Western sentiment in the Muslim world, including among Muslim communities in the West. And there is a risk that the transfer of CB material or expertise, during or in the aftermath of conflict, will enhance Al Qaida's capabilities.