

The Zarqawi Attack on Jordan: A Single Point Does Not Make a Trend

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It is too early to generalize about Zarqawi's influence outside Iraq. Rather than see Iraq as spilling over into other countries, or as some kind of magnet for terrorism, it is wise to consider Zarqawi's history, and the fact his attack on Jordan may be more a logical extension of his past focus on that country.

Zaraqawe is a Jordanian who served a seven-year sentence for efforts to overthrow the Jordanian government, and began to attack targets in Jordan long before he went to Iraq. In late 1999, he organized attacks on the Radisson SAS hotel in Amman and Jewish and Christian religious targets. In October 2002, his followers killed Laurence Folly, as US diplomat assigned to the US Embassy in Amman. He was under a death sentence in Jordan before the Coalition invaded Iraq.

It is not clear exactly when Zarqawi and other insurgents began to consider attacking targets outside Iraq. Zarqawi seems to have played a role in the bombing of the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad in August 2003. There are some indications that Zarqawi's group began planning and attempting such attacks in late 2003.

Jordan also reported that a Zarqawi agent named Azmi al-Jayousi led a cell that attempted to carry out a massive explosive and chemical attack on the US Embassy, the headquarters of the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate, office of the prime minister and other targets in Amman in mid-April 2004. Jordanian officials said they had halted an attack using three trucks loaded with 20 tons of explosives and chemicals.

The three trucks were halted in Irbid, and Jordanian sources claimed they could have killed 80,000 people and wounded 160,000 others within two square kilometer area. The cell was one of two cells in place, and its members had a variety of forged Jordanian, Syrian and other Arab passports.

Zarqawi acknowledged the attempt in an audiotape circulated on April 30, 2004, but denied any effort to use chemical weapons. The tape made available on the Islamist website said his goal was "totally destroy the building of the Jordanian intelligence services" with "raw materials which are sold on the market...The Jordanian security services have lied in claiming to have foiled a plan to kill innocent Muslims."

He accused Jordan of "creating an outcry and presenting the Jordanian people as a victim targeted at the hands of terrorism ... in order to hide the sordid face of the Jordanian intelligence services..."evil Jordanian services" of "fabricating (the

affair) of the chemical bomb." If we had such a bomb -- and we ask God that we have such a bomb soon -- we would not hesitate for a moment to strike Israeli towns, such as Eilat, Tel Aviv and others... We have scores to settle with this (Jordanian) government which will turn children's hair white."

Some sources say Jordan halted further attack attempts after that time, including a rocket attack on a US warship in Aqaba earlier in 2005. One senior Jordanian source claimed that Jordan had foiled two attacks in 2003, eight in 2004, and 10 in 2005.

Zarqawi was the first major insurgent leader to openly threaten to expand the fighting to foreign countries, however, although his open statements only began to get serious publicity in the summer of 2005. Jordanian intelligence reported that it had intercepted signals that Zarqawi had ordered some of his fighters to leave Iraq to carry out attacks in other Arab and Islamic countries in October 2005.

On November 9, 2005, Zarqawi's operation in Iraq carried out three suicide bombings of US managed hotels in Amman, including the Radisson, Grand Hyatt, and Days Inn. The attackers specifically targeting Jordanians -- including a large wedding party - and killing 56 people from some six different countries and wounding 96. Only a few Americans were killed or hurt, but the casualties also included four Palestinian officials, one of whom was Lt. General Bashir Nafe, the head of West Bank security.

It is still unclear how much of the attack was assembled outside Jordan, Zarqawi may have drawn on his previous connections in Jordan and existing cells. There are also some 400,000 Iraqis were reported to be living in Jordan, and some do provide support for Islamist and FRE operations in Iraq. They might be willing to carry out operations in Jordan.

There do seem to be clear links to some aspects of the attack and Zarqawi operations in Jordan. One of the bombers -- Ali Hussein Ali Shmari and his wife - seem to have been part of Zarqawi's operation in Fallujah. At least 10 other suspects were arrested. It was not clear how many actually infiltrated into Jordan, although Jordanian sources believed the explosives and some infiltrators had come in from across either the Syrian or Jordanian border.

In any case, until there is much better evidence of a major new trend, it seems best to be cautious about how much the war will actually widen, and who will widen it.

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