

Terrorist al-Zarqawi vows to assassinate Iraqi leader

By Todd Pitman
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The suspected mastermind of beheadings and bombings threatened to assassinate Iraq's prime minister, and U.S. officials claimed Wednesday that an airstrike against a hideout of the al-Qaida-linked militant killed up to 20 of his followers.

Militants focused their anger on Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and his government — the latest sign that the campaign of insurgent violence against the U.S. occupation is unlikely to end with the June 30 handover of power.

Allawi brushed off the threats. The threat against his life came in an audiotape purportedly made by Jordanian-born militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, found Wednesday on an Islamic Web site. The message also denounced Allawi's government as a tool of the "infidel foreigner."

Another group warned Allawi against imposing martial law in parts of Iraq, or else they would "strike with God's might."

Al-Zarqawi's group claimed responsibility for the beheading of American hostage Nicholas Berg last month and Kim Sun-il, a South Korean whose decapitated body was found Tuesday.

Hours after Kim's body was found, the U.S. military launched its second attack against al-Zarqawi in three days, with an airstrike on Fallujah late Tuesday.

A coalition military official said 20 foreign fighters and terrorists were believed to have been killed in the strike against a house used by al-Zarqawi's group.

Fallujah residents said the strike hit a parking lot, killing three people and wounding nine, according to hospital officials.

The al-Zarqawi recording warned Allawi that he had already survived "traps that we made for you" but vowed that the group would continue planning his assassination "until we make you drink from the same glass as Izzadine Saleem," the Governing Council president killed by a car bomb last month.

There was no way to authenticate the recording, but the voice sounded like al-Zarqawi, whose Tawhid and Jihad movement has been blamed for many of the bombings and assassinations that have killed hundreds of people, most of them Iraqis, in recent months.

The CIA was reviewing the tape.

In an interview with the Italian newspaper Il Giornale, Allawi dismissed al-Zarqawi as a criminal who would be caught and punished.

"Abu Musab al-Zarqawi doesn't threaten just me, but the entire country," Allawi told the newspaper, which released a copy of the interview Wednesday night.

"He has killed hundreds of Iraqis, has sown disorder and fear," Allawi was quoted as saying. "But he is just a criminal who must be captured and tried. We are used to threats and we know how

to deal with them and how to win."

In an interview Wednesday with Associated Press Television News, U.S. Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said many of the major attacks in Iraq are carried out by al-Zarqawi's forces, while former regime supporters are responsible for smaller assaults.

"He is a very, very crafty leader of a large network that is conducting terrorist operations inside this country," Kimmitt said. "The people of Iraq must understand they have a responsibility. They bear a responsibility to making sure we take Zarqawi and his network off of the street."

Al-Zarqawi's group killed Kim, a 33-year-old South Korean, after the Seoul government rejected its demands to withdraw troops from Iraq. His body was dumped on a road between Baghdad and Fallujah, a hotbed of Islamic extremism.

Iraq's interim president, Ghazi al-Yawer, said Kim's killing violated Iraqi and Islamic tradition and "completely tarnishes Iraq."

"How could we rebuild our country if we can't guarantee the safety of people who come to help build our country," al-Yawer said on the U.S.-funded TV station Al-Iraqiya.

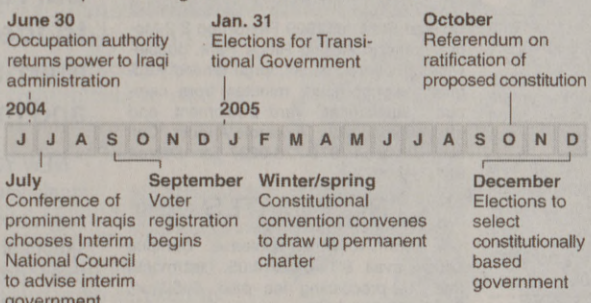
Allawi told reporters Sunday that his government was considering martial rule in certain areas to restore order.

A group of masked militants claiming to represent resistance groups in Iraq warned against that step in a video aired Wednesday night on Al-Arabiya television.

They said they would "strike with God's might" if Allawi imposed emergency rule on behalf of the "occupation

Steps to Iraq's transition to democracy

The U.S.-led occupation returns power to Iraq's interim administration, setting Iraqis on a road that Washington and its allies hope will bring democratic rule in 18 months.



SOURCE: United Nations

AP

masters."

U.S. and Iraqi officials are bracing for stepped up violence ahead of the June 30 transfer of sovereignty, which marks the formal end of the U.S.-led occupation.

Nevertheless, U.S. and Iraqi officials say the handover schedule is on track. On Thursday, a ceremony is planned to mark the official transfer of the final 11 ministries to Iraqi control — including the defense, interior, justice and electricity ministries. Iraqis have already taken over the running of the other 15 ministries.

The military said insurgents staged at least six attacks on American convoys throughout Iraq on Wednesday, wounding one U.S. soldier and a civilian contractor.

Late Wednesday, insurgents hurled a hand grenade at the newly refurbished Iraqi Transportation Ministry, then engaged in a 10-minute gunbattle with security guards, injuring at least one, residents said.

Elsewhere, a roadside bomb in Baghdad killed a policeman, a woman and her child, Iraqi police said.

Another roadside bomb in the northern city of Mosul killed one Iraqi soldier and wounded four others. In Ramadi, an insurgent stronghold 60 miles west of Baghdad, gunmen killed two policemen and wounded a third in a drive-by shooting, witnesses said.

Justice Department rewriting advice on prisoner abuse scandal interrogations

By Curt Anderson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is rewriting its legal advice on how far U.S. interrogators can go to pry information from detainees, working under much different circumstances from the writers of earlier memos that appeared to justify torture.

The first memos were written not long after the Sept. 11 attacks, while the new advice is being crafted against the backdrop of prisoner abuse in Iraq.

Justice Department lawyers will spend several weeks reviewing and revising several key 2002 documents, especially a 50-page memo to the White House on Aug. 1, 2002, that critics have characterized as setting the legal tone for the mistreatment of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison.

"The reason the original memo was so damaging was that it was consistent with a pattern of conduct from Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay to Iraq," Jonathan Turley, a constitutional law professor at George Washington University, said Wednesday.

A day after releasing hundreds of pages of legal memos on the terror war, Bush administration officials reiterated that even though President Bush signed a declaration in 2002 saying he had the authority to ignore international rules for treatment of captives, no orders were given to torture or mistreat prisoners.

The unusual decision to release the memos and disclose that some were being revised came amid intense political pressure from Democrats and other critics stemming from the Iraq and Afghan abuses. Yet no Bush administration officials flatly said the memos were wrong.

Current and former Justice Department officials rejected criticism that the Aug. 1 memo, signed by then-Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee, laid a legal foundation for torture. They said that the memo's sections

along such lines never became administration policy and that no detainees had been mistreated at Guantanamo Bay.

They also said that no Justice Department memo on interrogations addressed the war in Iraq, which the administration determined was governed by the Geneva Conventions and that treaty's rules for treatment of prisoners of war.

One of the most controversial sections of the Bybee memo that appears targeted for change or removal is entitled "The President's Commander-in-Chief Power." Over the next nine pages, Bybee lays out arguments that a key U.S. anti-torture law would be unconstitutional "if it impermissibly encroached on the president's constitutional power to conduct a military campaign."

"One of the core functions of the commander in chief is that of capturing, detaining, and interrogating members of the enemy," the Bybee memo said.

Critics say that reasoning goes too far. Some say it would give the president absolute authority in the waging of war.

"The administration has shown a stunning disregard for the law, resorting time and again to saying 'we are at war,'" said Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass. "We are not under martial law in this country. The laws and the Constitution are not suspended because we are at war."

Democrats on Capitol Hill are pushing to secure release of more Bush administration documents, with some in the House calling for a special committee to investigate abuses at Abu Ghraib.

"We can't get to the bottom of this unless there is a clear picture of what happened at the top," said Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, senior Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

It is clear that, in a presidential election year, photos of U.S. personnel abusing prisoners in Iraq made the conclusions of the post-Sept. 11 memos untenable for the Bush administration, legal experts say.

General suggests U.S. military dominance of skies may decrease

By John J. Lumpkin
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The success of the Indian air force against American fighter planes in a recent exercise suggests other countries may soon be able to threaten U.S. military dominance of the skies, a top Air Force general said Wednesday.

"We may not be as far ahead of the rest of the world as we thought we were," said Gen. Hal M. Hornburg, the chief of Air Combat Command, which oversees U.S. fighter and bomber wings.

The U.S.-India joint exercise, "Cope India," took place in February near Gwalior in central India. It pitted some F-15C Eagle fighters from the 3rd Wing at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska, in mock combat against Indian MiG, Sukhoi and Mirage fighters.

The F-15Cs are the Air Force's primary air superiority aircraft. The Indian fighters, of Russian and French design, are the type of planes U.S. fighters would most likely face in any overseas conflict.

declined to provide details, other than to suggest the Indian air force scored several unexpected successes against the American planes.

For the last 15 years, the U.S. military has enjoyed almost total command of the air during conflicts. A few fighters and fighter-bombers have gone down, usually victims of surface-to-air missile fire, but in general, American planes have been able to target enemy ground forces at will.

In the most recent invasion of Iraq, Saddam Hussein's air force stayed grounded.

New tactics, better Russian fighters like the Su-30, and a new generation of surface-to-air missiles mean that U.S. dominance could be ending, said Loren Thompson, who follows military issues for the Lexington Institute, a Washington think tank.

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— Gen. Hal M. Hornburg
chief of Air Combat Command

Hornburg, speaking to reporters, called the results of the exercise "a wake-up call" in some respects, but he

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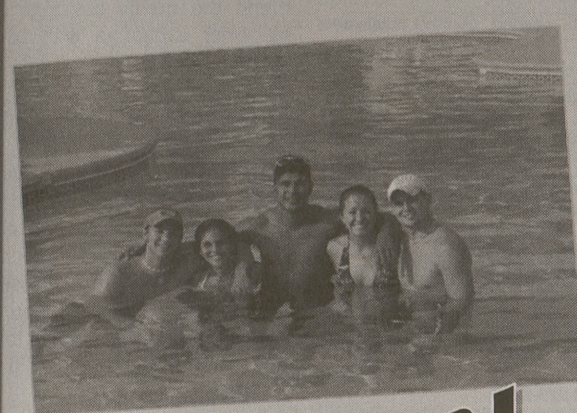
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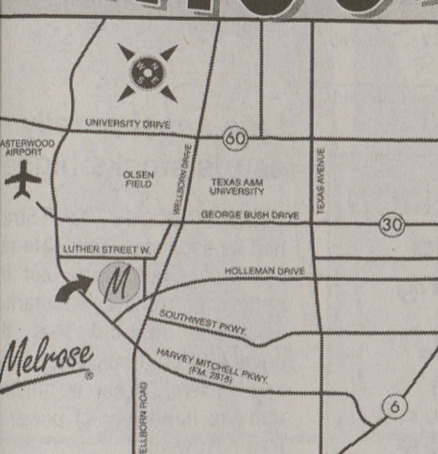
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