



Allawi on Iraq and al Qaeda

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I would like to draw your attention to a May 23, 2005 Agence France-Presse (AFP) article, "Al-Qaeda Number Two Visited Saddam's Iraq: Former PM." AFP reported on a recent interview that former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi gave to the Saudi newspaper Al-Hayat. According to Allawi, bin Ladin's top lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri, visited Baghdad in September 1999, and al-Zarqawi entered Iraq "probably around the same time," "began to set up cells," and also "forged links with Ansar al-Islam." AFP further reported:

Allawi, a former Baathist dissident who lived in exile at the time, said he had "confirmation" of Zawahiri's visit to Iraq and that the fugitive Egyptian Islamist had entered "under an assumed name" during the ninth Islamic popular congress held in Baghdad in September 1999. "Islamists

who led terrorist networks in the world" met on the sidelines of the congress, he said. Allawi said Saddam's regime maintained contacts with militant groups via "one Faruk Hijazi, who was eventually named ambassador to Turkey and then to a (North African) country." He said Hijazi was "arrested after the fall of Saddam's regime (in April 2003) while trying to infiltrate into Iraqi territory."

Allawi's comments, if accurate, build upon the work of the September 11 Commission Report, which stated:

In March 1998, after Bin Ladin's public fatwa against the United States, two al Qaeda members reportedly went to Iraq to meet with Iraqi intelligence. In July, an Iraqi delegation traveled to Afghanistan to meet first with the Taliban and then with Bin

Ladin. Sources reported that one, or perhaps both, of these meetings was apparently arranged through Bin Ladin's Egyptian deputy, Zawahiri, who had ties of his own to the Iraqis.

Similar meetings between Iraqi officials and Bin Ladin or his aides may have occurred in 1999 during a period of some reported strains with the Taliban (p. 66).

While the report also stated that "to date we have seen no evidence that

these or the earlier contacts ever developed into a collaborative operational relationship," commission chairman Thomas Kean was quick to note that "there was no question in our minds that there was a relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda." Alawi's remarks, should they hold up to scrutiny, would suggest a more substantial relationship between Iraq and terror groups than is usually portrayed in the major media.

(Additional information on Iraq's ties to al Qaeda may be found in our report, "Iraq: Setting the Record Straight," at www.newamericancentury.org/iraq-042005.pdf)

