

Iraq: Plot to bomb US, European countries revealed

Iraqi authorities obtain confessions from captured insurgents who claim Al Qaida is planning to attack the United States and Europe

- AP
- Published: 19:49 December 15, 2010

Baghdad: Iraqi authorities have obtained confessions from captured insurgents who claim Al Qaida is planning suicide attacks in the United States and Europe during the Christmas season, two senior officials said on Wednesday.

Iraqi Interior Minister Jawad Al Bolani told *The Associated Press* that the botched bombing in central Stockholm last weekend was among the alleged plots the insurgents revealed.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, in a telephone interview from New York, called the claims "a critical threat."

Both Al Bolani and Zebari said Iraq has informed Interpol of the alleged plots, and alerted authorities in the US and European countries of the possible danger.

Neither official specified which country or countries in Europe are alleged targets.

There was no way to verify the insurgents' claims.

Al Bolani said several insurgents claimed to be part of a cell that took its orders directly from Al Qaida's central leadership. He said at least one of the captured suspects was a foreign fighter from Tunisia.

The confessions were the result of recent operations by Iraqi security forces that have netted at least 73 suspected operatives in the last two weeks, Al Bolani said.

Links between Al Qaida's central leadership, which is believed to be hiding in Pakistan, and the terror organisation's front group in Iraq are tenuous as the local branch in recent years has been run by local insurgents.

But Al Bolani said the claims - if true - show that Al Qaida remains a presence in Iraq.

"Several members of this terrorist group have direct links with the central leaders of the Al Qaida organization," Al Bolani said. "Those captured represent the main structure of the Al Qaida organisation in Iraq."

Zebari, who is in New York for a meeting of the US Security Council, said he informed "the countries concerned." He mentioned the US, but would not specify which countries in Europe.

Al Bolani said the suspects claimed that last Saturday's suicide bombing in Stockholm - carried out by an Iraqi-born Swede on Saturday - was among the plots. He said the suspects made the claim after the bombing happened.

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