

# Dead al-Zarqawi Used By Pentagon To Prolong Occupation

**Cleric Says al-Zarqawi Died Long Ago**

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Al-Qaida's leader in Iraq Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is dead but Washington continues to use him as a bogeyman to justify a prolonged military occupation, an Iraqi Shia cleric says in an interview.

Sheikh Jawad al-Kalesi, the imam of the al-Kazemiya mosque in Baghdad, told France's Le Monde newspaper on Friday: "I don't think that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi exists as such. He's simply an invention by the occupiers to divide the people."

Al-Kalesi claimed that al-Zarqawi was killed in the Kurdish northern region of Iraq at the beginning of the US-led war on the country as he was meeting with members of the Ansar Al-Islam group affiliated to al-Qaida.

"His family in Jordan even held a ceremony after his death. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is therefore a ploy used by the Americans, an excuse to continue the occupation. It's a pretext so they don't leave Iraq."

Al-Kalesi made the comments to Le Monde as he passed

through Paris after attending an inter-religious gathering in the eastern French city of Lyon organised by the Roman Catholic Sant'Egidio Community.

Fake statement

The cleric dismissed statements attributed to Zarqawi. "If the occupation continues, the situation will only get worse and the Iraqi will increasingly join the resistance"

He said an audio message posted on the Internet on Wednesday and attributed to al-Zarqawi, was meant to push Shia "to find refuge with the Americans rather than join the resistance."

The voice message had declared "all-out war" on Iraqi Shia and claimed responsibility for a series of attacks that killed more than 150 people, most of them Shia waiting to be hired as day labourers in Baghdad.

"If the occupation continues, the situation will only get worse and Iraqis will increasingly join the resistance," al-Kalesi said.

Iraq's main Sunni Arab religious authority, the Association of Muslim Scholars, has condemned the call to arms against Shia, calling it "very dangerous" and saying it "plays into the hands of the occupier who wants to split up the country and spark a sectarian war."

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