

## CIG Assessment, 10 April 2006

### KIDNAPPING IN IRAQ: AFTER THE KEMBER CASE

*This paper was discussed by a Current Intelligence Group and approved on 10 April 2006.*

#### Key Judgements

- I. Kidnapping is a multi-million dollar industry in Iraq. Some 50 Western nationals and an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Iraqis have been seized since April 2003, generating well over US\$ 100 million for their captors. A proportion of the money finds its way to insurgents: we do not know how much.
- II. The impact of widespread kidnapping has been far-reaching and corrosive: helping to force Iraqi professional classes out of the country; eroding public confidence in law and order; and contributing to prohibitive security costs for domestic and international investors which constrains reconstruction projects. Popular support for continued commitment to Iraq in some Coalition nations has also been affected.
- III. Those responsible for the kidnap of Norman Kember and his associates are part of a broad network. Some are linked by tribal and family associations; others by criminal or personal contacts. A number have connections to a variety of groups across the insurgent spectrum, including jihadists and Sunni nationalists, but they do not belong to a single identified group. Their motivation is primarily financial.
- IV. Links between kidnap gangs and Iraqi political groupings are unclear. [...]
- V. The Kember rescue was the first successful intelligence-led military action to free Western hostages. The capability of the kidnap group has been degraded; some key figures remain at large. But other groups will continue to kidnap Westerners and other foreign nationals: Americans, British and nationals from other countries supporting the Coalition remain at particularly high risk. The impact on the kidnap of Iraqi nationals will be negligible.

## KIDNAPPING IN IRAQ: AFTER THE KEMBER CASE

*This paper is written at the request of the FCO. Following the successful rescue of Norman Kember, it seeks to place the kidnapping 'business' in Iraq in the context of the wider insurgency and Iraqi politics.*

### Context

1. Kidnapping is a multi-million dollar industry in Iraq. Around 50 Western nationals and an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Iraqis have been seized since April 2003: we judge the majority of Iraqi hostage taking is motivated by personal financial gain. A minor Iraqi businessman can command a ransom of US\$ 5,000-12,000. The average is US\$ 20,000-50,000. At a conservative estimate, the kidnap business has generated well over US\$ 100 million. Westerners can command even larger sums: [...]. A proportion of funding finds its way to insurgents, though we do not know how much. In many cases the motivational difference between criminality and insurgency is blurred. Hostages have become a currency: criminal gangs have sold hostages – both Iraqi and foreign – to politically motivated insurgents.

2. Taking Western hostages is a high-risk business, the potential financial or political reward has to be balanced against exposure to intensified Coalition activity. A variety of groups have been involved, including both Sunni and Shia. But the targeting of Westerners in particular, and foreigners more generally, has primarily been the preserve of jihadist or Sunni Arab nationalist insurgent groups. Jihadists are more likely to seek political impact; one kidnapping led directly to the withdrawal of the small Philippines MNF contingent. Al Zarqawi was behind the high profile kidnap and murder (by beheading) of a number of Western and other foreign hostages in 2004. In 2005 Zarqawi successfully targeted Muslim countries' diplomatic presence: the embassies of Pakistan, Algeria, Egypt and Bahrain all reduced or withdrew staff following the attempted or actual kidnap and murder of staff members (including the acting Egyptian Ambassador). But since late 2004 Zarqawi has not been directly implicated in Western kidnapping. We do not know why, though Ayman al Zawahiri has since criticised al Zarqawi's tactic of beheading. In the same period we have seen an increase in the kidnapping activities of Sunni Arab criminals with nationalist insurgent connections who seem to be more motivated by money [...].

3. The impact of widespread kidnapping has been far-reaching and corrosive: helping to force Iraqi professional classes, crucial for revitalising Iraq's economy, out of the country; eroding public confidence in law and order; and contributing to prohibitive security costs for domestic and international investors, which constrains reconstruction projects. Popular support in some Coalition nations has also been affected.

### An illustration: the Kember case

4. Intelligence and investigation of those responsible for the kidnap of Norman Kember and his associates from the Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT) illustrate the complexity of the kidnapping business and of the insurgency itself. Scores of individuals have been identified as being part of a broad network. Some are linked by tribal and family associations; others by criminal or personal contacts. A number have connections to a variety of groups across the insurgency spectrum, including jihadists (Al Qaida in Iraq and the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC)) and Sunni nationalists (Jaish al Islami, Jaish al Mujahideen, and the "1920's Revolutionary Brigades"). We judge the kidnappers themselves do not belong

to a single group, and cannot be labelled by affiliation or motivation. But detailed investigation suggests members of this network have been involved in the kidnap of at least 18 Westerners<sup>1</sup> since Margaret Hassan in late 2004, in addition to routinely kidnapping Iraqi nationals. Although initial public demands, often through the release of videos, were couched in political terms, we judge their motivation was primarily financial: most of those kidnapped were ransomed, or a ransom was sought.

5. [...]

6. [...] We continue to judge that Americans, British and nationals from other countries supporting the Coalition remain at particularly high risk, but other Westerners will also prove attractive to kidnapping groups as long as ransoms continue to be paid.

[...]

7. [...]

8. [...]

#### **Has disruption been effective?**

9. The operation to release Kember and his associates was the first successful intelligence-led military action to free Western hostages: others escaped, were ransomed, or rescued by chance. [...] The capability of this network has been degraded, but other key figures remain at large. [...] We judge there will be negligible impact on the kidnap of Iraqi nationals. [...]

10. [...]

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<sup>1</sup> These are, in addition to Norman Kember and his three associates: French Malbrunot, Chesnot, Aubenas and Planche, Italians Sgrena, Pari and Toretta, Americans Jill Carroll and Roy Hallum, Britons Margaret Hassan, Australian Douglas Woods and 3 Romanians. German Suzanne Osthoff has also been tentatively linked by intelligence to this network.