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Jp001

NICK CANNON

IRAQ SECURITY

1. In advance of today's PM-President video conference you may wish to be aware of the following points which are reflected in a JIC paper to be discussed tomorrow:

- The decrease in the number of attacks against Coalition forces has continued. However, the security situation in central and parts of northern Iraq remains difficult, for example:
 - The co-ordinated suicide bomb attacks in Karbala on 27 Dec killed 18, including Thai and Bulgarian soldiers.
 - The restaurant bomb attack in Baghdad on New Year's Eve killed 8 and wounded scores more.

It is too soon to judge if the downward trend in attacks will continue.

- Most attacks in Iraq continue to be conducted by former regime elements. There are some encouraging reports of the effect Saddam's capture has had on former regime elements, but it is too early to judge whether the arrest has had a direct impact on their activity.
- Indications that Ansar al-Islam, senior Al Qaida associate al Zarqawi, and possibly Al Qaida are co-ordinating activity and consolidating their presence represent a worrying development. Islamist extremist groups continue to plan and conduct attacks, including suicide bombings, and collectively pose a serious threat to Coalition interests.
- The principal infiltration routes for mujahedin remain through Syria, Iran and Saudi.

2.


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