

**JIC Assessment, 7 January 2004**

**IRAQ SECURITY**

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 7 January 2004.*

**Key Judgements**

- I. The downward trend in the number of attacks against Coalition forces has continued. It is too soon to judge if this will last. The security situation in central and parts of northern Iraq remains difficult. Some attacks show increasing sophistication and co-ordination.
- II. There has been no significant change in the security situation in the UK area of responsibility in the south – it remains relatively calm.
- III. 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.
- IV. Indications that Ansar al-Islam, senior Al Qaida associate al Zarqawi, and possibly Al Qaida are co-ordinating their 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.
- V. The principal infiltration routes for mujahedin remain through Syria, Iran and Saudi. Intelligence suggests that Syria continues to take action to prevent the movement of mujahedin across the border with Iraq. However, the picture remains mixed and confirms our judgement that elements within the Syrian regime may be sympathetic to anti-Coalition force activity, but that there is no evidence that any support has been sanctioned by President al-Asad.

## IRAQ SECURITY

*This paper is the sixth in a series of three-weekly assessments of the overall security situation in Iraq. The work was commissioned by OD Sec and builds on the weekly review co-ordinated by the Joint Terrorism and Analysis Centre (JTAC).*

### Overall Security Situation

1. Despite a slight increase in the number of attacks over the past week, the overall downward trend in the number of attacks against the Coalition Forces (CF), noted in our last assessment, has continued. The daily average by the end of December was 24 attacks, comparable with the level for September. In mid-November the number of attacks had peaked at around 50 a day. Most attacks are taking place in Baghdad and the Sunni Arab areas to the north and west – and include a variety of non-military Coalition targets. Some attacks show increasing sophistication and co-ordination. The CF have continued to conduct a number of intelligence-led operations, have made many arrests and succeeded in disrupting anti-Coalition forces planning and attacks. Some operations have been the direct result of exploitation of information following the capture of Saddam Hussein. Despite the recent reduction in attacks, the overall security situation in central, and parts of northern Iraq remains difficult. **It would be premature to judge that the current downward trend in attacks will continue.** But, the imminent roulement of US formations will present opportunities for anti-Coalition forces to exploit inexperience in the operating environment.

### Recent Serious Incidents

2. Vehicle – borne IEDs (VBIEDs) continue to be the most lethal form of attack employed by anti-Coalition forces. They continue to become more sophisticated. [...]

3. Suicide VBIEDs formed part of a series of attacks against CF in **Karbala** on 27 December. Two devices killed two Thai soldiers at a Polish logistics base; a third device killed four Bulgarian soldiers in their base; and a fourth device exploded by a police station near the City Hall, killing five Iraqi policemen. Five Iraqi civilians died in the attacks, many more CF and Iraqis were wounded. Two of the attacks were followed by mortar and small arms fire. The attacks were synchronised and well co-ordinated. Similar such lethal attacks were conducted against the police in Baghdad in October and the Italian contingent in An Nasiriyah in November. It is not yet clear who carried out the attacks in Karbala. (FREs are believed to have been responsible for organising the attack in An Nasiriyah). Anti-Coalition forces have again demonstrated the ability and intent to attack targets outside their own major operating areas. There have been many previous attacks against the police, and non-US CF seem to be becoming another target of choice.

4. **Anti-Coalition forces continue to attack a wide variety of targets.** On Christmas Day seventeen different targets were attacked in the space of three hours in the Baghdad area. Hotels, banks, government buildings and embassies, as well as some CF bases (including the Green Zone), were all attacked using a variety of rockets, IEDs and small arms. None of the attacks resulted in serious casualties. [...] The

attacks were synchronised and well co-ordinated. Other vulnerable targets continue to be attacked. A New Year's Eve suicide VBIED exploded outside a busy Baghdad restaurant, frequented by Westerners, killing eight people and wounding scores, including a female British journalist. A UN official was killed in Baghdad and the UNHCR office in Mosul was also attacked. [...] kidnapped and perhaps murdered, although details are not yet clear. An attempt was made to assassinate the Iraqi Minister of Communications. Muhammad al-Hakim, a senior SCIRI official, was assassinated on 16 December – he was an anti-Ba'athist hard-liner. A list of significant incidents is in the box.

**Significant Incidents:**

16 Dec	Senior SCIRI official assassinated.
17 Dec	UNOHCI staff officer killed.
25 Dec	Widespread attacks across Baghdad.
26 Dec	5 US soldiers killed in separate incidents across Iraq.
27 Dec	Multiple attacks in Karbala kill 18 including 6 CF.
31 Dec	Restaurant explosion in Baghdad kills 8.
2 Jan	OH58 helicopter brought down. .

5. A number of Iraqis were killed (reports vary between 5 and 8) during disturbances in **Kirkuk** on New Year's Eve. The details are not clear, but Kurdish militiamen apparently fired on a crowd of Sunni Arabs and Turcomans approaching the PUK headquarters in the city. The clashes underline the ethnic sensitivities and the potential difficulties which may emerge (not only in northern Iraq, but also in Shia areas) as the political debate on the transfer of power gathers momentum.

**The Situation in Multinational Division (South East) (MND(SE))**

6. There has been no significant change in the security situation in the UK area of responsibility – it remains stable. Anti-Coalition forces continue to plan and conduct attacks. The intent remains for some groups to increase the number of attacks in the South. The CPA compound in An Nasiriyah was mortared on 5 January with no casualties. Shia consent and accommodation with the CF is holding. Local religious leaders share objections raised by al-Sistani to the political process and could undermine Shia consent.

**The Threat: FREs**

7. The interrogation of **Saddam Hussein** continues. [...]

8. Some reporting is emerging of **reactions to Saddam's capture from within the Ba'ath party and FRE groups**. [...] Although these reports are encouraging, it is too early to judge whether Saddam's arrest has had a direct impact on FRE activity – the nature and motivation of groups is different and reactions will vary. FRE groups remain very capable and continue to plan and conduct lethal attacks on the Coalition. We continue to judge that **most attacks against the Coalition are carried out by FREs**. In the long term we judge that their determination and ability to attack the Coalition may wane. [...]

**The Threat: Ansar al-Islam (AI), Al Qaida (AQ) and other Mujahedin**

9. Extremists continue to travel to Iraq, but the numbers remain unclear. The principal routes remain through [...] and [...]. There has been further evidence of funding and volunteers coming from Europe.

10. There is continuing reporting suggesting internal dissent and financial difficulties (including some accusations of corruption) within **AI** and Ansar al-Sunna as it attempts to establish an umbrella group. [...]

11. There is a growing weight of evidence suggesting that a **senior AQ associate, al Zarqawi**, who has a longstanding relationship with AI, is beginning to play a leading role in co-ordinating the activities of some mujahedin groups. Indications that AI, al Zarqawi and possibly **AQ** are co-ordinating activity and consolidating their presence represent a worrying development. [...] We remain unclear as to the capabilities of these various Islamist extremist groups and cannot link them to specific attacks. However, reporting shows that they continue to plan and conduct attacks, including suicide bombings, and could pose an increasing threat to Coalition interests. There is reporting to suggest that Islamist extremists regard the capture of Saddam Hussein as providing an ideological vacuum that can be exploited in Sunni areas.

### **Position of Shia**

12. The assassination of Muhammad al-Hakim on 16 December and the bomb attack on the SCIRI offices in Baghdad on 19 December underline the threat posed to Shia leadership figures and political organisations. The attackers are not known but they were probably FREs. There have been a number of attacks over recent months both on Shia (SCIRI and Badr Corps) and former Ba'athists (according to reporting from theatre a number having been killed in the UK area in the south). They will continue and the number may grow as the political process moves towards transition. The activities of the Shia militias may become an increasing problem if the political process does not match their expectations.

13. **Muqtada al-Sadr** remains marginalised. [...]

[...]

14. [...]