

JIC Assessment, 11 November 2004

IRAQ SECURITY – CURRENT CONCERNS

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 10 November 2004.

Key Judgements

- I. Insurgent violence will continue at a high level in Iraq over the next few months, however effective the operations in Fallujah. A quick success in Fallujah will boost the political credibility of Allawi's government. But there is also a real risk that the advancing electoral timetable could prompt a further increase in violence. Mosul may become a particularly serious challenge: the city is slipping further out of Government control.
- II. There is no overall coordination of the insurgents, but there is evidence of local cooperation between groups. The Syria-based Ba'athist New Regional Command may be becoming more influential.
- III. US and Iraqi forces are making good progress on the ground in Fallujah. A large number of insurgents have left the city, although the risk of significant attacks remains. Insurgents outside Fallujah will continue responding to the offensive with an increased effort, including in the UK area of responsibility in North Babil.
- IV. [...] Such relatively low risk operations will continue: groups will try to kidnap MNF soldiers to gain maximum impact. Criminals will also continue to kidnap people – including Iraqis – in order to raise income.
- V. There are still too few capable Iraqi forces to cope with the widespread security problems. Attacks and intimidation by insurgent groups against the Iraqi security forces are undermining their effectiveness, in some cases. All Iraqi official institutions, including the security forces, employ individuals who give information to insurgents, either willingly or under threat.

IRAQ SECURITY – CURRENT CONCERNS

This paper was commissioned by OD Sec and provides a round-up for senior readers on current themes relating to the security situation in Iraq. Other recent JIC papers have covered the specific situation in Fallujah and North Babil as well as the prospects for the election.

Overview

1. The number of attacks against Multi-National Forces (MNF) and Iraqi security forces has continued to increase over the past month, in line with the trend since the end of the war (see graph at annex). Most incidents are still low level, directed at elements of the MNF. But larger-scale or higher profile attacks also continue. The number of direct attacks against infrastructure has decreased, but attacks against Iraqi officials, as well as regular kidnappings, are creating an environment of intimidation that is having an impact on reconstruction efforts. The violence will continue at a high level over the next few months, however effective or quick are operations in Fallujah. There remains a real risk that violence could increase further, fuelled by the advancing electoral timetable. We do not anticipate any major changes to tactics used by the insurgents, although the election process will provide them with a large new set of targets across Iraq.
2. We continue to judge that there is no overall coordination of the insurgency, although many of the groups are linked, share expertise, and may be sharing information on targets and operations at a local level. Some intelligence suggests that the Syria-based Ba'athist New Regional Command is becoming more influential.
3. Although the violence is widespread, some areas of Iraq are more stable than others. The South continues to experience less violence than other areas and there have been no major attacks against MNF or Iraqi forces in MND(SE) over the past month, although regular IED attacks continue to cause casualties. Shia militants, including al-Sadr's militia, have been less active recently. The Kurdish North has also been relatively quiet. UK companies that have established contracts in Iraq continue to operate in some areas outside Baghdad, although companies without contracts are not seeking opportunities in Iraq.

Fallujah

4. Although intelligence indicated that insurgents were preparing for the assault on their stronghold, there has been only moderate resistance so far. There is no evidence of effective central co-ordination among the insurgents in the city. A large number of insurgents – including Zarqawi-linked terrorists – appear to have left the city, although one of Zarqawi's senior lieutenants (Umar Hadid [...]) may have been killed. But significant attacks against MNF troops are still possible.
5. We judge that, at least in the short term, insurgents outside Fallujah will continue responding to the offensive with an increased effort. Violence in some Sunni areas has already increased markedly. We do not believe that Shia violence will significantly increase, although intelligence shows that some Sadr supporters are considering attacks in response to events in Fallujah. The assault has already caused some

political fall-out: the Iraqi Islamic Party (the main Sunni Islamist party in the Government) has withdrawn from the Government, and the Muslim Ulema Council (made up of prominent Sunni clerics) has called for a boycott of the elections. But we do not know how significant either of these moves will be in the longer term. They could be off-set by a boost to the credibility of Allawi's government from a successful operation – especially if it is concluded quickly.

Mosul – the next challenge

6. The area that has witnessed the most significant increase in violence over the past month is Mosul. During October there were 24 car bombs in the city (accounting for 25% of all car bombings that month). The security situation has been declining since the reduction of US forces in the area in February and the city is now to a large extent outside Government control, and getting worse. The police force in Mosul has not tackled the insurgency and in some cases has contributed to it. Nor has the Iraqi National Guard been able to operate effectively. Insurgents were already well established in Mosul. Reporting indicates that more have arrived recently after leaving Fallujah, and we judge that the flow of fighters into Mosul will increase with any MNF action in Fallujah. The security situation will present a serious challenge to elections in Mosul if it remains as it is. If it worsens, other towns in the region, such as Kirkuk, may be affected by a spill over of the violence.

UK Deployment to North Babil

7. UK forces deployed to North Babil on 27 October. There is a far greater concentration of insurgents in the area than in southern Iraq. MNF operations in early October disrupted some of the insurgent groups there, but we judge that their presence was not weakened significantly. Extremist web sites have urged extremists to attack the British troops, and several attacks have already been directed at UK forces. Al Zarqawi's group has claimed responsibility. Such attacks will continue, and may increase as the assault on Fallujah proceeds. [...]

Kidnappings

8. [...] Over 230 foreigners – and many more Iraqis – have been kidnapped since March last year. Islamist terrorists have been responsible for the majority of the high profile incidents. The regular videos of beheadings ensure maximum impact, for attacks that involve relatively little risk for the terrorists. The high profile attacks are forcing many organisations to stop working in Iraq (Medicins sans Frontiers is the latest to withdraw) disrupting aid and reconstruction efforts. We judge that the massive publicity given to foreign captives will encourage further such incidents. Groups will try to kidnap MNF soldiers to gain maximum impact, and may also try to kidnap officials involved in the forthcoming elections. Criminal gangs have also been responsible for the kidnapping for ransom of a large number of ordinary Iraqis as well as some foreigners.

Iraqi security forces – infiltrated and vulnerable

9. Insurgent groups have attacked the new Iraqi security forces since their creation. The most recent, and one of the most serious, attacks occurred on 23 October when a convoy of Iraqi National Guard (ING) forces was ambushed and 49 unarmed recruits were shot. Most recently, the past few days have seen a surge of attacks against the Iraqi police, causing substantial casualties.

10. We judge that all the Iraqi official institutions, including the security forces (Army, Police, National Guard, Intelligence Service) employ individuals who give information to the insurgents, whether willingly or under threat. We estimate that nearly a third of current police officers will in time have to be dismissed due to their unsuitability, many of whom are believed to cooperate with insurgents. In Basra the police chief has been sacked, in Mosul the chief is 'on notice' from the Ministry of the Interior [...]. Some attacks, such as the murders of high profile officials, suggest insider knowledge. But insurgents are also able to intimidate or attack the security forces simply because they live in and are known among the local community.

11. The Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) has suffered several recent assassinations and kidnappings. [...] Shia militants – possibly with Iranian assistance – have been responsible for many of the attacks on the INIS. [...] and one INIS officer claims that the vast majority of his colleagues who had previously been assigned to Iran-related work in the Saddam era intelligence service have received threats.

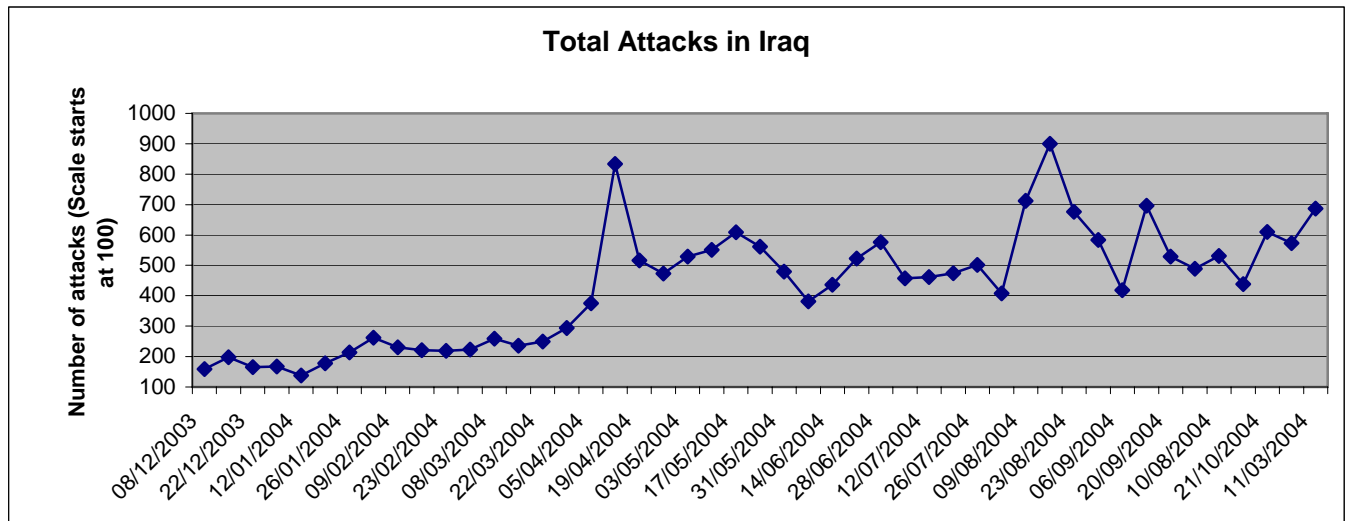
12. This intimidation of the Iraqi security forces is undermining their effectiveness – although the impact is not uniform. [...] 200 Iraqi soldiers were absent when their unit was due to deploy to Fallujah. Nonetheless, there are some areas (e.g. Kut, Karbala and Hilla) where the police in particular are improving their capability. Some Iraqi National Guard and Army personnel have over the past three months operated effectively, but only in small units. Iraqi forces involved in the assault on Fallujah have performed relatively well – although reports from theatre still show a high level of absenteeism (8 out of 38 officers in one unit). But there are still too few capable units to address the widespread security problems.

Al Zarqawi and Al Qaida

13. On 17 October Zarqawi and his group announced that they had "pledged allegiance" to Bin Laden, stating that Al Qaida understood and was satisfied with their strategy in Iraq. After the announcement, Zarqawi changed the name of his group to 'Base of Jihad (i.e. Al Qaida) in The Land of the Two Rivers'. (Assessments Staff issued update [...] on this subject on 19 October.) This new relationship with Al Qaida has had no immediate impact on the security situation in Iraq and is unlikely to alter it in the short term. Intelligence continues to show, however, that [...] and there are early indications of other Al Qaida operatives [...] sending trainers to Iraq. But we judge that Zarqawi will continue to operate largely autonomously of the senior Al Qaida leadership.

ANNEX: ATTACKS IN IRAQ

The graph below shows the total number of recorded attacks by insurgents across Iraq. The data is recorded by Multi-National Forces at a local level and compiled in the Significant Activity Database (SIGACTS) run by US forces. The figures are not precise, but the method of recording these statistics has remained consistent for the past year, and we judge that the overall trend they demonstrate to be accurate.



The large majority of recorded attacks (around 80%) are against MNF units and result in few casualties. Attacks against the Iraqi security forces tend to be more lethal than those against MNF. Nearly 80% of recorded attacks occur in four provinces where 42% of the population lives (Al Anbar, Salah ad Din, Ninawa and Baghdad).