

## JIC Assessment, 3 September 2003

### IRAQ: THREATS TO SECURITY

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 3 September 2003.*

#### Key Judgements

- I. The security environment will remain poor, and will probably worsen over the next year, unless the coalition, in conjunction with Iraqis, can reverse current trends. There are likely to be more spectacular attacks.
- II. The violent opposition comprises former regime officials, Sunni Iraqi extremists, Sunni 'Mujahedin' and Sunni Islamic terrorist organisations, mainly Ansar al-Islam. But we do not know who is responsible for specific attacks.
- III. Sunni Islamic extremists/terrorists see Iraq as the new focus for Jihad. They are likely to present the main long-term threat to coalition interests in Iraq, as they can draw on external recruits and finance.
- IV. The threat from former regime personnel will persist over the next few months. But because they lack popular support, prospects for a longer-term Ba'athist insurgency are weaker. Saddam's capture or death would further undermine local support.
- V. Shia consent is fragile and eroding. Acquiescence of the Iraqi population requires the restoration and improvement of basic services and law and order, with security provided by the coalition. The credibility of the Iraq Governing Council and the wider CPA-led political process is also vital.
- VI. The guidance of senior Iraqi Shia clerics has been to give the coalition a year in which to make a difference, but the recent attacks are likely to have shortened this timeline substantially. If their acquiescence turns to hostility, this would have the most serious consequences for the security situation, particularly in southern Iraq.
- VII. Iran and Lebanese Hizballah are probably inciting violent anti-coalition protests and other disruptive activity. Their incitement probably falls short of directly ordering attacks on coalition forces. But after the death of Ayatollah al-Hakim, Iran will be reconsidering its approach. The Soleymanpur arrest is likely to lead to greater Iranian trouble-making.

## IRAQ: THREATS TO SECURITY

*At the request of COBR, we assess who is conducting attacks on coalition forces, infrastructure and other targets in Iraq; we evaluate to what degree the violent opposition is organised; and we assess how the threat is likely to develop in the year ahead.*

### Overview of the security situation

1. Violent opposition to the coalition in Iraq involves daily attacks. Most have occurred in Baghdad and Sunni central Iraq. But over recent weeks there has been an increase in attacks on Coalition forces (CF) in UK-administered southern Iraq, and the Basra riots in mid-August and the sectarian violence in Kirkuk more recently show security problems can arise and escalate quickly. Criminal activity, much of it violent, has been endemic. Actual attacks are only the most extreme example of a precarious security environment.

2. The most significant attacks were vehicle bombs in Najaf and in Baghdad, outside the Jordanian embassy and the UN Headquarters. There have been mortar attacks and 17 (to-date unsuccessful) attempts to shoot down aircraft using man-portable surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). The most frequent attacks, however, have been against CF using small arms and, increasingly, small improvised explosive devices (IEDs, see box). Those conducting them have shown growing competence, determination and sophistication and, in total, these have caused the most CF casualties. NGOs have been the target of similar attacks. Infrastructure (e.g. electricity generation and distribution, oil and gas and water pipelines) has been the target of sabotage and of large-scale looting and theft.

#### IED attacks on coalition forces

May	8
June	45
July	75
Aug to 18/8	97
[...]	

3. In most cases, we do not know who carried out specific attacks. The intelligence picture is incomplete. But intelligence indicates several categories of groups are responsible:

- supporters and officials of the former Iraqi regime;
- 'Mujahedin' (mainly foreign fighters, but also Iraqi Sunni extremists);
- Sunni Islamic terrorist organisations, mainly Ansar al-Islam;
- unaffiliated Iraqis, motivated by personal, local or tribal grievances or by payment from one of the groups listed above.

These divisions are not distinct or mutually exclusive. And there are significant geographical differences in the security environment: some areas are more difficult to manage because, even during Saddam's regime, they had a history of weapons ownership, tribal violence and criminal activity. In many areas, coalition control is very limited.

4. Attacks by Iraqi Shia groups have been limited to-date. [...] Separate reporting indicates supporters of militant Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr are acquiring weapons, planning attacks on coalition targets and may have already attacked Iraqi officials.

#### The threat from former regime officials

5. We judge Saddam did not have a systematic plan for an insurgency, although he issued weapons and cash to his supporters before the war and more of both were looted as the regime collapsed (at least tens of millions of US dollars are at the disposal of these groups). A large volume of intelligence, albeit of uncertain quality, indicates that former regime officials are responsible for many attacks on CF, including some of the attacks on UK forces in southern Iraq.

6. Although some intelligence suggests a nascent organisation on a local and regional level in Iraq, we judge that former regime officials are not pursuing a centrally directed national strategy. They are motivated by self-interest, rather than ideology, particularly a desire to protect the privileged position they gained under the previous regime. Over the next few months, we judge that the potential threat from former regime groups will remain high. However, in the longer term the prospects for a distinct 'Ba'athist' insurgency are weaker. Most importantly, intelligence, diplomatic and media reporting all indicate a lack of popular support for a return to a Saddam-like regime. And the capture or death of Saddam himself would undermine further any local support and the ability of his supporters to exert control through fear.

#### The threat from the Mujahedin, Ansar al-Islam and Al Qaida

7. [...] many Mujahedin, willing to accept martyrdom, have come to Iraq since the war, [...] Most are probably not affiliated or connected with specific terrorist groups. [...] It appears that the networks see Iraq as the new focus for Jihad, akin to Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya. We do not know how many Mujahedin there are within Iraq, or how integrated they are, [...].

8. The main organised Islamic terrorist group in Iraq is **Ansar al-Islam (AI)**, which is closely associated with **Al Qaida (AQ)**. The group suffered significant casualties in coalition attacks, but about 450 members escaped, most over the border into Iran. AI has since reorganised, with some assistance from elements of the Iranian regime, and its members are now present in at least northern and central Iraq, with large quantities of weapons, possibly including SAMs, and explosives. Intelligence suggests Islamic extremists and possibly AI are also trying to establish themselves in southern Iraq, though with what success is uncertain. It seems that AI is becoming an important co-ordinator for Islamic volunteers from across the Arab world, possibly reflecting an ambition to become a significant international actor.

9. [...] Mujahedin groups and AI have conducted some of the low-level attacks on CF, but we cannot specify how many or which ones. [...]

10. Bin Laden has called on Muslims to fight the coalition, and encouraged extremists to travel to Iraq. **Al-Zarqawi**, closely associated with AI and AQ, was reported before the war to have been establishing cells that would conduct attacks in the event of a coalition occupation. Terrorists associated with al-Zarqawi probably remain in Iraq.

11. Islamic extremists/terrorists can draw on external recruits and finance. We judge that they are likely to present the main long-term threat to coalition interests in Iraq.

[...]

12. [...]

13. [...]

### Keeping the Shia population's consent

14. We believe that Shia attacks on the coalition have been limited largely because they are aware that they are the likely beneficiaries of Saddam's overthrow and because of the restraining guidance of the senior Shia clerical hierarchy. But Shia consent is fragile and eroding. If the coalition is perceived to be impotent, particularly in the protection of key Shia leaders, the Shia will take law and order into their own hands. Any coalition attempt to disarm Shia militia groups, such as the Badr Corps (SCIRI's armed wing) and militant cleric Muqtadah al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, could be a significant additional cause of friction. The death of moderate Shia leaders presents the risk that the vacuum will be filled by more extreme figures. If the coalition arrests **Muqtada al-Sadr**, Shia opinion could be inflamed. At this stage, while we cannot rule out Shia involvement in al-Hakim's murder, we judge it to be unlikely. However, intra-Shia splits, and inter-ethnic tensions in the north, might cause violence, albeit not directed against the coalition. Hitherto, the general tenor of Shia clerical advice has been to give the coalition a year in which to make a difference. But the recent attacks are likely to have shortened this time-scale substantially. If the acquiescence of senior clerics and others with influence (e.g. tribal leaders) changes to hostility, it would have the most serious consequences for the security situation in southern Iraq.

### Anticipating trends in security threats

15. Violent opposition has already had an impact on Iraq's reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, prompting a draw-down of UN and other international assistance and causing ordinary Iraqis concerns about law and order. Pervasive criminality is a major bane for ordinary Iraqis, and significantly increases the difficulty of managing security. Developments in Iraq's security are particularly dependent on the coalition's actions. But we are certain that the violent opposition will also adapt. It could present a more serious strategic threat by further targeting International organisations, NGOs, Iraq's infrastructure and Iraqis themselves, in order to undermine the coalition's legitimacy. We judge that the security environment will

remain poor, and will probably worsen over the next year, unless the coalition, in conjunction with Iraqis, can reverse current trends. We judge that:

- more 'spectacular' attacks aimed at causing significant casualties are likely;
- further SAM attacks on aircraft are likely, and will probably become more effective;
- IED attacks will also become more effective;
- CF and other coalition interests will be prime targets, but further attacks on 'soft' targets such as the UN, and possibly the emerging Iraqi political hierarchy, are likely. Infrastructure targets (especially oil) will also continue to be targeted;
- there is likely to be an incremental improvement in co-ordination at the local and probably also regional level between different groups mounting attacks. The distinction between former regime and Islamic groups is likely to blur further;
- individual groups are likely to expand the geographical scope of their operations. This is likely to lead to more attacks on UK forces in southern Iraq.

16. Finally, we judge that the overall security context will depend largely on the continuing acceptance of the coalition by the **Iraqi population**. The most immediate factor is the restoration and improvement of basic services and law and order. The credibility of the Iraq Governing Council and the wider CPA-led political process will also be vital. But we judge that a certain number of groups and individuals, particularly the Sunni Mujahedin and international terrorists, will remain implacably opposed to the coalition and to any eventual Iraqi successor regime.