

## JIC Assessment, 25 September 2003

### IRAQ SECURITY

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 24 September 2003.*

#### Key Judgements

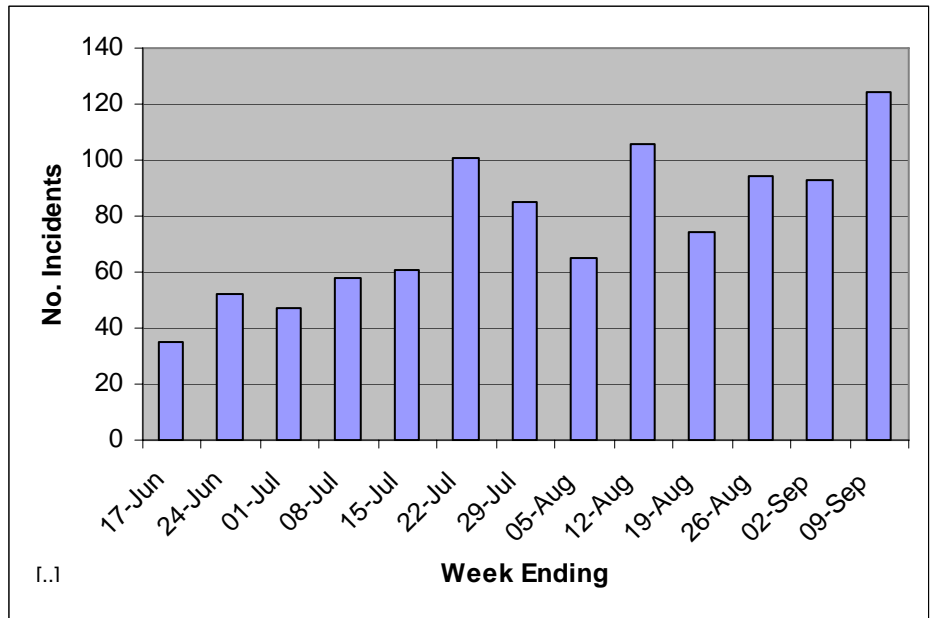
- I. The security environment in central Iraq remains difficult, although attacks against coalition forces in the south are at their lowest level since June.
- II. We have no evidence of any national co-ordination structure among former regime elements. But they are co-operating to at least a limited extent with Iraqi Sunni extremists, foreign fighters, and terrorist groups. Support organisations to assist the infiltration of mujahedin into Iraq are developing.
- III. Ansar al-Islam remains the principal Islamist terrorist group and may be developing a strategy to lead and co-ordinate Sunni extremist activity. Despite AI assertions that it is behind most attacks against the coalition, we do not know whether its ambitions are matched by capability.
- IV. Al Qaida is attempting to establish an operational capability in Iraq and may be re-focussing some effort from Afghanistan towards Iraq.
- V. Shia militias are emerging in the south. Their activities may be helping to restrict the operations of former regime elements and other extremists. Shia co-operation with the coalition has improved recently. But the militias are carrying out illegal arrests, interrogations and in some cases murder.

## IRAQ SECURITY

*This paper is the first of a series of three-weekly assessments of the overall security situation in Iraq. The work was commissioned by OD Sec and complements the weekly review now being produced by the Joint Iraq Security and Intelligence Group (JISIG). The paper builds on [the JIC Assessment] of 3 September 2003, Iraq: Threats to Security*

### Overall Security Situation

1. Since the end of August there has been an increase in the number of attacks against Coalition Forces (CF) in Iraq (see table). In the large majority of cases we cannot attribute attacks to specific groups. Most of the attacks are against US forces in the centre and north of the country and casualties continue to be taken at a steady rate. (We have no accurate figures for civilian casualties). The tactics of the armed opposition groups continue to evolve, including the increased use of more sophisticated IEDs and more elaborate attacks. Sabotage of infrastructure and attacks on economic targets have increased. There have now been two attacks on members of the Iraqi Governing Council. Intimidation of Iraqis working or seen to be supporting the coalition, criminal activity, and attacks against the police, have all continued. (The murder of a British civilian bomb disposal expert is another example of an attack against an NGO, but it is still unclear if this represents deliberate targeting to further undermine NGO ability to operate in Iraq). There has been limited violence between Sunni and Shia communities in the aftermath of the al-Hakim murder and any further attacks against the Shia leadership is likely to lead to further inter-communal violence. A summary of some significant incidents over the past three weeks is included in the box.



2. Counter to the overall trend, the number of attacks against CF in Multi-National Division South East (MND-SE) has reduced since mid August and has reached its lowest level since June. Of the total of 1025 incidents in the above table only 22 took place in the UK area. This could reflect a reduction in activity by former regime elements and Sunni extremists, lying low after of the assassination of al-Hakim in the An Najaf bombing. It could also be explained by CF success in disrupting and deterring attacks and making use

#### Significant Incidents

- 3 Sep Bomb attack Baghdad police station
- 4 Sep Murder of British bomb disposal expert
- 9 Sep VBIED in Irbil
- 11 Sep Explosion at ammo depot in Al Kut
- 12 Sep Iraqi police killed in friendly fire incident in Al Fallujah
- 20 Sep Attempted assassination of Governing Council member, al-Hashemi
- 22 Sep VBIED at UN HQ, Baghdad

of better intelligence, some of which is being provided by more co-operative Shia groups.

### The Threat: Former Regime Elements

3. Intelligence on the activities of former regime elements is improving with more information on planned attacks, structures and groups at local and regional levels. A few reports indicate that contacts are developing between these elements and other anti-CF terrorist groupings, including the provision of money and arms, and involving some contacts outside Iraq. However, there is still no evidence to suggest any national co-ordination structure. Most of the attacks by former regime elements continue to be against US forces in the north and central regions. Although former regime elements continue to conduct some attacks in the south, they do not enjoy the same level of support available in the Ba'athist triangle and are facing an increasingly hostile Shia population. This may restrict expansion of their operations. However, there is reporting indicating some elements are moving south to conduct attacks specifically against British forces.

4. We have [...] [reports of] a potential attack using surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) against a British military aircraft at Basra airport; and an attack on a British military base in Al Amarah using a VBIED. Appropriate force protection and risk reduction measures have been put in place.

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

5. There continues to be a significant volume of reporting covering the flow into Iraq of extremists whose affiliation is often unknown. [...] We do not know how many mujahedin are operating in Iraq [...]

6. A number of different extremist groups are facilitating mujahedin infiltration, both within and outside Iraq. Structures are developing. For example, [...]

7. [...].

8. AI is privately claiming to be responsible for the majority (80%) of attacks against CF. These claims cannot be corroborated and are probably exaggerated, but AI appears to have built on its local contacts and presence in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone to position itself as the main organised Islamic terrorist group in Iraq and is likely to be working with other groups. [...] AI is developing a **long-term strategy** and is seeking to expand its operations and capabilities. This includes an aspiration to establish and lead a military council to control all Sunni mujahedin groupings and attempt to win the support of tribal leaders. The strategy also suggests that future targeting should focus on infrastructure and strike as opposed to martyrdom operations.

9. Since our last paper [...] AQ may be trying to establish an operational capability in Iraq and re-focussing some effort from Afghanistan to Iraq. [...]

10. There are some reports that **al Zarqawi**, a senior AQ associate with close links also with AI, is in Iraq. [...]

## An Najaf Bombing

11. There have been reports of various groups claiming responsibility, or being blamed for the An Najaf bombing which resulted in the death of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim. None of these reports is conclusive. [...] There is a weight of intelligence pointing to Islamist terrorists, possibly connected to AI, but this is not conclusive.

## Shia Attitudes

12. Since the An Najaf bomb tensions remain high. Another successful attack on a Shia leader would have a very serious impact on inter-communal relations. Some Shia groups have demanded greater latitude to provide their own security and this has resulted in the emergence of militias supporting Shia parties, some with a capability to gather intelligence, conduct patrolling and mount vehicle check points. These activities, including the provision of intelligence to CF, are probably restricting the ability of former regime elements and extremists to conduct operations, particularly in the south. However the militias are also carrying out illegal arrests, interrogations, and in some cases murder (in MND (SE) there have been at least 16 killings to date). Any coalition attempt to disarm the Shia militia groups could be a flashpoint for trouble.

13. Shia religious and political leaders have been publicly critical of the coalition. But they have not withdrawn their consent to its presence. [...] For example, Grand Ayatollah **al-Sistani** has used his considerable influence to promote stability, preventing planned disorder in Basra during electricity/fuel disturbances and in the aftermath of the al-Hakim murder. During Friday prayers, militant junior cleric **Muqtada al-Sadr** is reported to have called for non-violent opposition to the coalition, but there is little sign that his Mahdi Army has become a more significant threat to the coalition over recent weeks. [...] There has been no new evidence that Shia groups are mounting attacks on coalition forces.

## Regional Issues

14. There has been no significant change in the **Iranian** position on Iraq-related issues since our last assessment. Iran will continue to compete with the coalition for influence in Iraq, but will draw a line between stirring up trouble and authorising attacks on CF. [...]

15. There has been some progress on **border security**. [...]