

JIC Assessment, 15 October 2003

IRAQ SECURITY

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 15 October 2003.

Key Judgements

- I. The security environment in central Iraq, principally Baghdad and the surrounding Sunni Arab areas, is still difficult. The situation in the UK area in the south remains relatively calm.
- II. Former regime elements (FREs) continue to be responsible for the majority of attacks against coalition forces. They appear to be developing a base of operations in the Sunni Arab areas where they are feeding on broader dissatisfaction. Some FREs are aiming to foment greater unrest in the south. We still have no evidence of a national co-ordination structure among FREs. But there is evidence of some co-operation between FREs and other extremist groups.
- III. Mujahedin support organisations, arranging movement, training and funding, continue to develop inside and outside Iraq.
- IV. Ansar al-Islam [...] may be seeking greater co-operation with Al Qaida.
- V. Shia accommodation with the Coalition in the south remains firm. Violence in Karbala between rival Shia militias is a worrying development and the impending arrest of Muqtada al-Sadr may spark more Shia-led violence in Baghdad and elsewhere.

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This paper is the second in 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 produced by the Joint Iraq Security and Intelligence Group (JISIG). The paper will also inform the work of the London Iraq Security Committee (LISC).

Overall Security Situation

1. The security situation remains difficult in central Iraq. The upward trend in the number of attacks against the Coalition Forces (CF) shows no sign of abatement. In May attacks averaged 5 a day. This increased to 16 a day during the summer months and reached 23 a day in September. So far in October the number of attacks has continued to increase. The vast majority of attacks (some 80%) occur in Baghdad and the surrounding Sunni Arab areas. The level of attacks elsewhere is significantly less, although Mosul in the north may be a developing hotspot. US forces continue to take casualties – 11 killed in the first eight days of this month. Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) are the single most common form of attack, some increasingly sophisticated, and we have also seen more mortars being employed. These stand-off methods of attack are less risky to the perpetrators and could mark an evolution in tactics. We assess that most of these attacks are conducted by former regime elements (FREs) but we cannot attribute attacks to specific groups.

2. The majority of attacks are aimed at the CF. However, intimidation, criminality and attacks against the police continue. It is not possible to quantify the level of this activity – there is no systematic record being made. Sabotage of infrastructure and attacks on economic targets also continue, but these have not prevented some progress with electricity and fuel supplies, both now improving – electricity generation in particular has reached pre-war targets. A suicide bomb attack, probably targeting the Iraq Governing Council (IGC), killed six Iraqis at the Baghdad Hotel. Other softer targets attacked have included a hotel in Baghdad used by the media, the CPA accommodation at the Al Rasheed Hotel, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A Spanish diplomat (an intelligence officer) has been assassinated in Baghdad; the motive for the attack is unknown. The suicide bombing outside the Turkish Embassy may have been a response to the recent discussion on the deployment of Turkish troops to Iraq. The difficult security situation has resulted in the UN deciding to pull out most of its foreign staff (specifically after the second bomb incident at its HQ in Baghdad on 22 September). Some NGOs, including Save the Children, have also decided to withdraw and others, for example Medecins Sans Frontieres, are reviewing their presence. A summary of some of the significant incidents is included in the box.

Significant Incidents

25 Sep	Al-Hashemi (IGC) dies of injuries
27 Sep	Rocket attack at Al Rasheed Hotel
7 Oct	Mortar attack at MFA
8 Oct	Mortar attack at Basra
9 Oct	Suicide bomb at Baghdad Police Station
9 Oct	Murder of Spanish diplomat
12 Oct	Suicide bomb at Baghdad Hotel
14 Oct	Suicide bomb outside Turkish Embassy

3. CF operations continue to disrupt attacks and cause attrition. Intelligence coverage is improving and we are seeing the increasing use of Iraqi security forces. 200 Iraqi police were involved in a raid in Al Fallujah at the end of September. More police are now on the streets of Baghdad and providing a greater degree of reassurance to the local population - although the suicide bomb at the police station was another attempt to de-rail this process. The first battalion (700 men) of the new Iraqi army graduated on 4 October and will shortly deploy to assist with security on the border with Iran. But even these improvements, and better co-ordination between the various elements, will not end all organised violence.

Security Situation in Multinational Division (South East) (MND(SE))

4. The situation in the UK area of responsibility in the south remains relatively calm. In the first week of October, out of 174 attacks against the CF in Iraq, only 4 were against troops in MND (SE). The mortar attack against the British base in Basra on 8 October was a serious incident, but the trend continues to be a relatively low level of attacks. There are a number of reasons why the security situation in the south is different. FREs and Sunni extremist terrorists are finding it difficult to operate in Shia dominated areas, traditionally more hostile to Saddam's regime, and local leaders are co-operating with the Coalition. CF are also able to capitalise on improving intelligence to arrest suspects and disrupt operations.

The Threat: Former Regime Elements (FREs)

5. [...] we are establishing a clearer picture of the operational influence being exerted by individuals from former key security structures, including the DGI (Iraqi Intelligence Service). There have been further reports of links between FREs and other anti-CF terrorists but intelligence is fragmentary and it is difficult to piece together any coherent pattern in the linkages between the various groupings. We judge that there is still no evidence to suggest the existence of any national co-ordination structure (but note that Iraqi regime officials were accustomed to practising good communications security and may still be able to do so). We believe that some FREs are in contact with extremist groups and facilitators outside Iraq and there is some reporting that Palestinians are being recruited to carry out attacks.

6. The large majority of attacks we believe to have been conducted by FREs are conducted in Baghdad and the surrounding **Sunni Arab** areas. The nature and depth of support for these anti-CF attacks in this Sunni Arab heartland is difficult to gauge. And it is difficult to judge whether the increasing level of attacks represents increased support. Recent reporting indicates that Sunni frustration and alienation is growing. This has been most clearly manifested in recent demonstrations, some in support of Saddam, and others, in Baghdad, Basra and An Nasiriyah, by former military personnel complaining about payments. The Ba'ath party may be taking advantage of the fears of the Sunni Arab population and deliberately capitalising on an apparent failure of the CF to impose control. [...] Ba'ath party [...] activity includes appointing local party chiefs and holding party elections. The situation is also generating resistance among

Arab Sunnis, who do not necessarily wish to be involved with former regime elements. There are a number of perceived Sunni Arab concerns: Shia domination of the IGC; CPA de-Ba'athification policy; a lack of money and jobs; aggressive and clumsy CF operations and particularly, indiscriminate detentions. The fear that Saddam is still alive may also be a factor. Collectively, these circumstances may be further breaking down Sunni consent and providing a fertile recruiting ground for anti-CF groups, whether Sunni or FREs. The Coalition is developing a strategy to address some of these Sunni-related issues.

7. In the Shia-dominated south, anti-CF operations are at a much-reduced level since early summer and there is evidence from theatre to suggest that resistance in the south is being reinforced by elements from Baghdad and the north. Of particular concern is reporting indicating the return of a specific bomb maker to Basra. British forces have enjoyed significant success in disrupting those cells operating in the south, though planning and reconnaissance for further attacks is ongoing. We do not know who was responsible for the 8 October mortar attack on the Basra base.

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

8. The flow of extremists into Iraq is continuing. Our understanding of this movement is improving, but we still cannot judge accurately the scale of the flow, or the particular affiliation of individuals. [...] We do not know the numbers of mujahedin in Iraq, but we estimate there may be up to a couple of thousand. [...]

9. [...] Although we have previously assessed that AI probably exaggerates the scale of its anti-CF attacks, we still judge AI to be the main Sunni extremist grouping operating in Iraq – if successful, its attempt to coalesce with other groups would be a worrying development. Several reports indicate that AI continues to plan and conduct attacks against the CF [...]. Risk reduction action has been taken in theatre.

10. There is evidence to suggest that AI is also seeking closer links with **AQ**. [...] Some reporting indicates that AQ operatives are in Iraq and may be co-ordinating with AI and other extremist groups. (But the picture is clouded by use by [...] of "AQ" – like Wahabi - to describe Sunni extremists.) [...] There also continue to be reports that senior AQ associate **al-Zarqawi** is preparing car bomb attacks in Mosul and Baghdad.

Shia Attitudes

11. Increased co-operation with the CF by the Shia in the south, notably since the murder of al-Hakim, has continued and has contributed significantly to the improved security situation. However, some illegal Shia militia activity continues and although there may be no direct linkage, a further five former Ba'athists have been found murdered in the MND (SE) area since our last assessment.

12. Diplomatic reporting indicates Ambassador Bremer is now intent on arresting the militant junior cleric **Muqtada al-Sadr**. This arrest has been discussed for some months, but the decision has now been taken to arrest al-Sadr and a number of his lieutenants for complicity in the murder of a Shia cleric on 12 April. In recent days al-Sadr has declared his intent to form an alternative government and, anticipating the planned arrest, he may be preparing for a confrontation with the CPA. There has been fighting in **Karbala** between al-Sadr's supporters and rival Shia militias, probably allied to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. There is an intelligence report that al-Sadr has asked Nasrallah, the General Secretary of Lebanese Hizballah, to intercede with al-Sistani. The situation is tense. These events may help Bremer gain the necessary support from senior Shia leaders (some of whom have been privately critical of al-Sadr) and tribal sheikhs prior to the arrest. The arrest will be carried out by the Iraqi police. Al-Sadr's popular support has waned in recent months, but the incidents in Karbala may be a warning that his arrest could provoke a violent reaction from some hard core supporters in Baghdad and elsewhere. We have one intelligence report of a possible threat to seize members of the CF as hostages.

Regional Issues

13. There has been no significant change in the Iranian position on Iraq-related issues since our last assessment. [...]

14. At our request, posts in the region, Middle East and elsewhere recently reported on local attitudes to Iraq as the new jihad. In broad terms most responses indicated lukewarm enthusiasm for a new jihad amongst most populations and, more so amongst governments. However, there is obvious hostility and anger towards US policies in the Middle East, and linkage in many minds between the occupation of Iraq and Palestine. There are plenty of angry young potential extremists to be recruited by networks feeding mujahedin into Iraq.