

JIC Assessment, 5 November 2003

IRAQ SECURITY

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 5 November 2003.

Key Judgements

- I. The security situation in central Iraq, including Baghdad, is very difficult. Attacks continue at a high level and are becoming more sophisticated.
- II. A wide set of targets continues to be attacked, aimed at undermining the Coalition's political objectives. We do not know who was responsible for recent multiple attacks in Baghdad. More are likely.
- III. We still cannot attribute attacks to specific groups but believe most involve former regime elements. There is continuing evidence of co-operation with other extremist groups, but we have no evidence of any national co-ordination structure.
- IV. Islamist terrorist groups, such as Ansar al-Islam, are growing stronger and there is no evidence of a slow down of extremists wishing to come to Iraq. Al Qaida has some capability inside Iraq.
- V. The situation in the south remains relatively calm. Shia consent in the south is holding firm. Any action against Muqtada al-Sadr may spark some unrest, but is not likely to undermine wider Shia consent.

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This paper is the third 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 in central Iraq, principally Baghdad and the surrounding Sunni Arab areas, is still very difficult. By far the majority of attacks against Coalition Forces (CF) continue to take place in these areas. US reporting indicates that the Tigris valley from Baghdad to Tikrit is becoming more hostile – local support from Tikrit tribes may be increasing. There has also been a relative increase in attacks in the north with more incidents reported in Mosul and Irbil – where suicide bomb attacks have been disrupted. We still cannot attribute attacks to specific groups. Former regime elements (FREs), Ansar al Islam (AI) and other Al Qaida (AQ) associates, and other mujahedin all have the capability and intent to conduct large scale attacks, but we judge that most attacks continue to involve FREs. It is a complex picture: distinctions between groupings are blurred and individuals and cells cannot always be conveniently labelled. Despite the level of attacks and their increased sophistication and co-ordination, we still see no firm evidence of a national co-ordination structure.

2. The main trends have been as follows:

- Attacks against CF have steadily risen from a daily average of 5 in May to 30 in October.
- Attacks have largely been confined to Sunni Arab areas, the UK area of responsibility in the south has remained relatively calm.
- The CF casualty rate (the vast proportion US) continues to rise.
- Most attacks are against CF, but attacks on other targets are increasing.
- The single most common form of attack is the improvised explosive device (IED) – and these are becoming more sophisticated. Stand off attacks (mortars, rockets and remote control IEDs) are becoming more common. The use of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) may be increasing.
- Vehicle-borne suicide bombs continue to be used.
- The Shia remain passive. Diplomatic reporting suggests that public support in the south continues to grow. Sunni Arab dissatisfaction gives greater cause for concern.

3. Since the last assessment the upward trend in the number of attacks against CF may have levelled off. But anti-coalition forces have enjoyed more success and continue to inflict significant US casualties. A Black Hawk helicopter crashed after being hit by an RPG on 25 October, and on 2 November 16 US soldiers were killed when a Chinook was brought down near Al Fallujah. The recent success with MANPADS will

encourage their use (the threat has been present for some time). A summary of the more significant incidents is in the box.

4. Attacks against infrastructure and economic targets continue. Anecdotal evidence suggests that criminality in Baghdad has reduced considerably. In MND (SE) Op SWEENEY, interdicting smugglers, has resulted in nearly 300 arrests. (We are working with Post to produce more countrywide information on criminality.)

Recent Serious Incidents

5. The **multiple suicide bomb attacks against police stations in Baghdad** last week, probably to mark Ramadan, were a serious development. Although vehicle suicide bombs have been used to devastating effect in recent months, for example in the August attack on the UN, the Baghdad attacks have been the first to have been clearly synchronised and well co-ordinated. [...] Such attacks are likely to continue. There is evidence that anti-coalition forces are recruiting volunteers for suicide operations. The apparent success of the security forces in preventing bombers getting close to targets (as for example, in the attack against the Al Fallujah police station) may encourage the use of truck/tanker bombs, [...]

Significant Incidents

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|--------|---|
| 17 Oct | CF casualties in clashes in Karbala. |
| 25 Oct | Black Hawk shot down. |
| 26 Oct | Rocket attack at Al Rasheed Hotel. |
| 27 Oct | Multiple suicide bombs in Baghdad including against the ICRC. |
| 28 Oct | Suicide bomb in Al Fallujah. |
| 31 Oct | RM killed in SF operation. |
| 02 Nov | 15 US soldiers killed in Chinook attack, Al Fallujah |

6. The targets for the suicide attacks conform to a pattern emerging over the past months. By attacking a wider set of targets, extremists aim to undermine the Coalition's political objectives. Many NGOs have already withdrawn from Iraq and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), like the UN, intends to pull out most international staff. Medecins Sans Frontieres has already decided to do so and others may follow. [...] The nascent Iraqi security forces are facing a relentless campaign of intimidation. The scale of losses (around 40 policemen killed, up to 100 injured, and several senior policemen assassinated since their formation) could seriously damage morale. But over 7000 operate now in Baghdad, and there appears to be no shortage of recruits. Other targets continue to be attacked and threatened: the deputy Mayor of Baghdad was murdered on 28 October; there have been reports of [...] Baghdad University was rocketed; and [...]. **More Iraqi civilians than members of the Coalition are being killed in attacks.**

7. The sophisticated attack on the **Al Rasheed Hotel** in Baghdad (where Wolfowitz, US Deputy Defense Secretary, was staying) on 26 October was the second on this CPA-used facility. Some 20 rockets hit the building. The attack involved a launcher disguised as a generator trailer, a remote control initiating mechanism and a secondary device. Reports suggest the same team was responsible for the earlier attack on the hotel; the military expertise required points to FREs. The Green Zone (Coalition secure zone) in Baghdad has been the target of mortar attacks in recent days. A security review is underway.

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

8. The situation in the UK area of responsibility remains relatively calm, although there was a spate of IED attacks in Basra province in mid-October. One sophisticated remote control device targeted a Czech military convoy, and in another incident a UK mobile patrol escorting civilian staff was attacked, killing an Iraqi engineer, wounding a DFID contractor and 2 military personnel. (This could be the work of the FRE bomb maker, [...], reported in our last assessment to have moved to Basra.)

The Threat: FREs

9. [...] has claimed that co-ordination between FREs and mujahedin is taking place and that the former provide the planning and expertise and the latter the suicide bombers. [...] FRE cells may contain both FREs and other anti-coalition force extremists, some described as foreign fighters and jihadists. We believe that FRE elements continue to be in contact with extremist groups and facilitators outside Iraq.

10. We continue to see FRE groups attempting to reinforce and operate in the south but they face a difficult environment in the Shia-dominated areas – [...]. We know little about the attitude (or level of support) of Sunni Arabs to the activities of FREs.

The Threat: AI, AQ and other Mujahedin

11. Our intelligence on extremist infiltration is improving, but we do not know the numbers involved or whether the flow is increasing. There is no evidence of a slow down of extremists wishing to come to Iraq. [...]

12. Reports indicate that **AI** may have had some success in forming an umbrella organisation – Ansar al Sunna. The intelligence suggests that AI has merged with other extremist groups and claims to be the largest mujahedin organisation in Iraq. [...]

13. In an apparent Bin Laden message broadcast on 16 October, Muslims were encouraged to join an Iraq jihad. AQ has some capability inside Iraq. There has been little substantive evidence of them strengthening ties with mujahedin groups in Iraq or developing their own operating base. [...]

Shia Attitudes

14. The accommodation between the Shia community and the CF in the south is holding firm, and has not been affected by the recent unrest in Karbala. Fighting between supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr and Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani was contained by mediation and forceful CF military response - but only after US forces and Iraqi police suffered casualties in a further attack by al-Sadr supporters on 17 October. The situation is now calm and al-Sadr remains in An Najaf, heavily protected by his militia. [...] Although his recent activities have probably marginalised al-Sadr, any arrest could well spark more trouble (but is unlikely to undermine wider Shia consent). [...]

[...]

15. [...]