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JIC Assessment, 26 November 2003

IRAQ SECURITY

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on Wednesday 26 November 2003.

Key Judgements

- I. Although incidents in the MND SE area have remained roughly level over the last two weeks, the security situation in Sunni areas of Iraq has continued to deteriorate. Anti Coalition elements are proving to be both creative and flexible. There has been an increasing number of more effective attacks against Coalition objectives.
- II. Improvised Explosive Devices remain the preferred means of attack, but aircraft and helicopters are prestige targets, whose evident vulnerability makes them increasingly attractive. MANPADS have been responsible for only one loss, but these systems are readily available to anti-Coalition elements and their use will continue.
- III. There is a significant gap in our intelligence concerning command, control and coordination of anti-Coalition groups in Iraq.
- IV. Although the Shia community remains largely supportive of the Coalition, Muqtada Al-Sadr remains a threat. His arrest would probably provoke short-lived, localised disturbances, but would have the tacit support of the senior Shia clergy.
- V. The increasing number of attacks on members of the Iraqi interim government and others who cooperate with the Coalition may deter other Iraqis from greater involvement, making progress towards Iraqification harder to achieve.

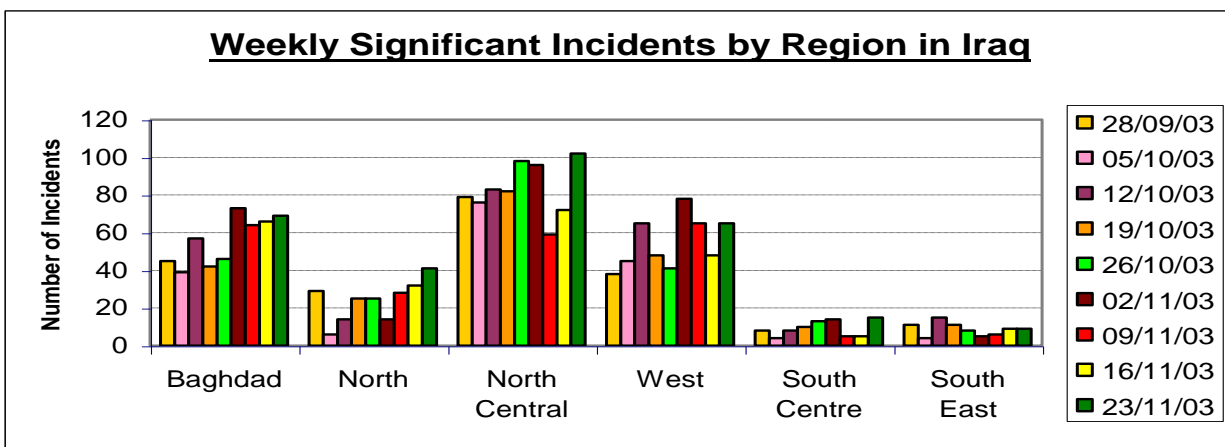
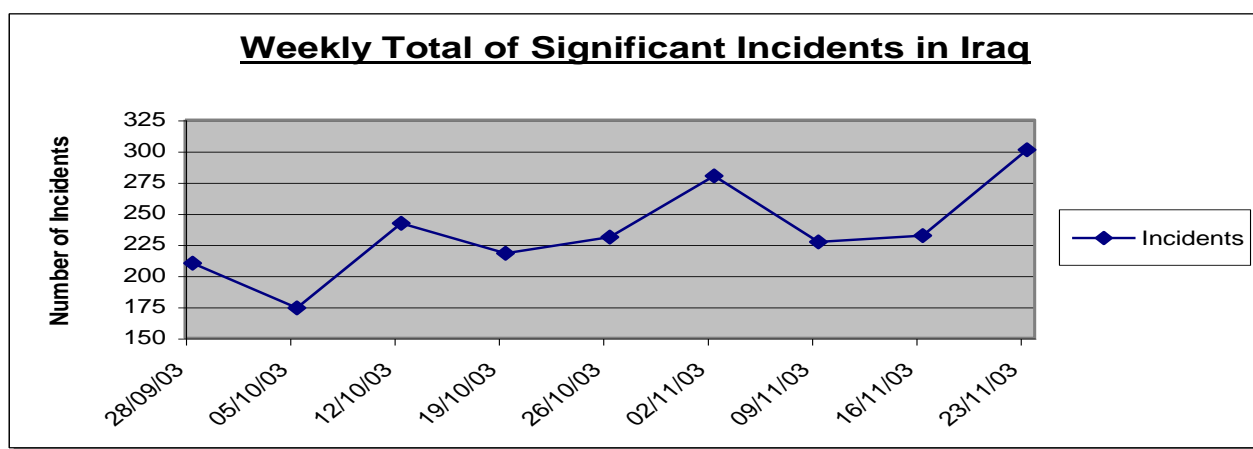
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This paper is the fourth in a series of three-weekly assessments of the overall security situation in Iraq. The work was commissioned by OD Sec and complements the weekly review produced by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC). The paper will also inform the work of the London Iraq Security Committee (LISC). The statistical database used in this paper is immature and figures should therefore be treated with caution.

Overall Security Situation

1. The number of Coalition casualties has risen sharply over the last 3 weeks, largely due to the An Nasiriya bomb on 12 November (18 Italian servicemen dead) and the loss of three US Blackhawk helicopters (24 dead). The rate of significant incidents rose from 30 to 36 attacks per day across the country as a whole, but remained level in the MND SE area. The main focus of activity remains the Sunni heartland to the north and west of Baghdad, although reports continue to show that anti-Coalition groups are actively preparing for attacks in the south of Iraq. Attacks have also occurred in the Kurdish north, but on a more limited scale.



2. Anti-Coalition groups are becoming more effective in their attacks as they become more experienced in using the weaponry at their disposal. They are also proving highly flexible, adapting their

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modus operandi to the security measures in force. Recent use of donkey carts to move weapons inconspicuously is an example of this.

3. Overall, IEDs continue to be the most common means of significant attack. The proportion of suicide bombs has increased. In addition to the An Nasiriya device, three Iraqis were killed in a suicide attack on the PUK headquarters in Kirkuk on 20 November, seven Iraqis in a similar attack on the Iraqi Council offices in Ar Ramadi that same day and 7 Iraqi police plus 8 civilians in two explosions in Baqubah on 22 November.

4. There has been a clear increase in the number of Iraqis targeted over the last two months. The assassination of the Qadisiya Minister for Science and Education in Diwaniya on 17 November illustrates efforts on the part of anti-Coalition elements to deter civilians from cooperating with the Coalition. Judges, academics and schools have also been targeted in the past; the threat is particularly high in Sunni dominated areas. In the last eight weeks there have been 29 attempted assassinations: of the ten killed, seven were regional or city leaders. There have been numerous reports that attacks are planned against the Iraqi Governing Council. The assassination of prominent Iraqis may well deter other Iraqis from participation in the transitional government process.

5. Recent attacks, particularly suicide bombs, have resulted in a considerable number of Iraqi civilian deaths. The nature of recent attacks indicates that anti-Coalition groups are currently indifferent to the level of civilian casualties they cause.

6. There is mixed reporting about the Iraqi police. They successfully intercepted three ambulances containing explosives on 10 November and have been engaged in more aggressive operations in the North and Western areas. [...] a more visible police presence in Baghdad has led to a reduction in criminal activity. However, some police personnel are known to be concerned at the level of corruption and an apparent resurgence of Ba'athist ideology within the ranks and there are isolated reports that some officers feel they are being targeted as a result of their cooperation with the Coalition. At present there appears to be no shortage of recruits.

Recent Serious Incidents

7. Three helicopters have been lost over the last reporting period, although the cause of the 16 November incident in Mosul in which 17 US servicemen died has yet to be established. This emphasises the vulnerability of prestige targets, such as helicopters and low-flying aircraft, to all forms of enemy fire. There have been six probable instances of the use of Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS) since the end of October; one resulted in the loss of the Chinook on 2 November, one damaged a DHL

Significant Incidents

7 Nov	Blackhawk shot down
11 Nov	Attack on Baghdad compound
12 Nov	Nasiriya IED kills 18 Italians
16 Nov	2 Blackhawks crash
20 Nov	Suicide bomb at PUK HQ
20 Nov	Suicide bomb on Iraqi Council in Ar Ramadi
22 Nov	DHL plane hit by MANPAD
22 Nov	2 Suicide bombs in Baqubah

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cargo plane on 22 November and the others were unsuccessful. The weapon used against the DHL aircraft was a SA-14, which is much easier to use than the SA-7. Other attacks employed Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) or small arms.

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

8. Analysis by MND SE suggests that as few as four bombmakers may be responsible for the majority of recent IEDs in their area, at least one of whom may be based in Fallujah. The same bombmaking technology has been used in Basrah and Baghdad.

9. The MND SE assessment of the Vehicle Borne IED (VBIED) in Nasiriya, which killed 18 Italian troops, is that it was conducted by elements from outside their area and not one of the bombmakers referred to above. We previously judged in [the JIC Assessment] of 5 November that FRE groups were attempting to operate in the south; this supports our assessment that this target was selected in an effort to destabilise the relatively peaceful southern sector by anti-Coalition elements from outside the MND SE Area of Responsibility. It does not, therefore, necessarily indicate a loss of local Shia support (there are some indications that this support may actually be increasing in MND SE). The bomb itself was constructed in a manner which maximised its blast effect through a combination of fuel and explosives.

The Threat: Former Regime Elements (FREs)

10. There is a clear intelligence gap on the activities of FREs. The high level of communications security demonstrated by the previous regime may account for the absence [...].

11. We are unable to attribute responsibility for the majority of attacks. Although various anti-Coalition elements have claimed responsibility, we have seen insufficient intelligence to confirm them. Of those arrested while in the process of mounting attacks, however, the majority have been FREs. The transfer of bomb-making technology across the country indicates a degree of coordination and there are growing signs of cooperation between groups at the local level, but we are unable to determine whether any form of centralised control exists or, if so, its extent.

The Threat: Ansar Al Islam (AI), Al Qaida (AQ) and Other Mujahidin

12. AI aspires to a greater role in coordinating Sunni extremist operations and claims internally to be succeeding. [...]

13. We previously judged in [JIC Assessment of 19 November 2003] that we have no evidence that AQ are directly responsible for attacks within Iraq, although they may be providing external assistance to others, such as AI. This judgement still stands.

14. Several reports suggest an imminent threat of VBIEDs emanating from Ar Ramadi and connected with Mujahidin leader Abu Hammam. Hammam was injured during a recent Coalition raid in which 6 of his

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colleagues were killed and appears bent on revenge. A more recent Coalition operation resulted in the death of three of his group and the arrest of seven others, but it is not yet known if this has removed the VBIED threat associated with them.

Disaffected Iraqis

15. Disaffected Iraqis - those without jobs, those who have been disadvantaged by the change in regime, or those who simply find the conditions of life worse than before the war – also present a threat to stability. In the last week there have been 59 Iraqi casualties as a result of Coalition action. While, as civilian casualties rise, it is likely that more Iraqis will feel alienated and may therefore be motivated to mount attacks on the Coalition, awareness that anti-Coalition elements have been killed or captured may bolster support.

Logistics

16. [...] funds are readily available to anti-Coalition groups, although at the tactical level problems have been encountered in disbursing them.

17. [...]

Shia Attitudes

18. Supporters of Muqtada al Sadr have been relatively quiet compared with previous levels of activity; [...] this may be due to Sadr's fear that he faces imminent arrest. Although Sadr's supporters have dwindled, he commands sufficient influence to be a threat, particularly in Najaf, Karbala and Baghdad. Previously he has instructed his followers to take over mosques in those areas and attempts to recover them, both by followers of Grand Ayatolla Sistani and by Coalition forces, have led to violent confrontations. The widespread belief in the Shia community that he was responsible for the murder of prominent cleric Al Khoi in April and his continued liberty undermines confidence in the Coalition's ability to enforce the law. [...] A warrant exists for the arrest, but we are unsure precisely when it will be served. Sadr is likely to have planned his supporters' response to any move against him and it is probable that there will be protests in the immediate aftermath; given his lack of broad popularity in the Shia community as a whole, these may be violent, but are likely to be short-lived.

[...]

19. [...]

20. [...]

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