

JIC Assessment, 30 June 2004

IRAQ SECURITY

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 30 June 2004.

Key Judgements

- I. The recent spike of activity by anti-Government forces is a deliberate attempt to undermine the political process. They will aim to intensify attacks as Iraq moves towards elections in early 2005. Iraqi government, security and economic infrastructure have become the most significant targets.
- II. The level of violence will diminish if the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) is able visibly to establish a credible degree of independence of action, deal with security, improve economic and social conditions, so gaining popular support. But Islamist terrorist attacks will remain a threat.
- III. Al-Zarqawi has claimed responsibility for some of the co-ordinated 24 June attacks, but the extent of his planning and direction is unclear. If he was behind the attacks, the breadth and scale would represent a step change.
- IV. Former Ba'athists are attempting to reorganise both military and political structures. The attitude of the IIG to former Ba'athists will be key in gaining support in Sunni Arab areas and discouraging hardliners from attacking the political process or coalescing with Islamist terrorists. But Allawi's efforts to draw Ba'athists into the political process will need to be carefully judged if he is to avoid alienating the Shia.
- V. The threat from Muqtada al-Sadr continues to decline. He will try to preserve his personal and therefore political freedom. He will attempt to protect his militia by re-branding it.

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This paper is the latest in a series of regular assessments of the overall security situation in Iraq. The work was commissioned by OD Sec and builds on the weekly review co-ordinated by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre and the Defence Intelligence Staff.

Overall Security Situation

1. The Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) assumed sovereign authority on Monday 28 June with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) dissolved. Advancing the handover by 2 days may have avoided the occasion being marked by a surge of violence. Most attacks over recent weeks have continued to take place in the Sunni heartlands of central and northern Iraq. Shia areas in the south and the Kurdish areas in the north remain relatively calm. Baghdad in particular has been a focus for anti-Government forces, although fighting has also flared up elsewhere. A series of attacks on 24 June in Baqubah, Ramadi and Mosul killing over 100 people were probably co-ordinated.

2. The most significant attacks have been against the Iraqi government, security and economic infrastructure. The recent intensity of such attacks is a deliberate attempt to undermine the political process at a critical juncture. There has been a wide range of targets. Any Iraqi either working for the Coalition or the nascent Iraqi administration and security forces is seen as a legitimate target by some anti-Government forces. The assassination of senior politicians such as Deputy Foreign Minister, Kubbah, and the suicide bombing of the army recruitment centre grab media headlines. But there has also been a marked increase in attacks and intimidation at a lower level – one US brigade in Baghdad recently had 7 locally recruited translators murdered over a period of 6 weeks. Economic infrastructure (and contractor support), in particular the oil industry, has been repeatedly attacked. There have been significant attacks on oil pipelines near Basra and Kirkuk in recent weeks. The pipeline near Basra was closed for several days at an estimated cost of \$50 million a day in lost revenue.

3. The numerical majority of attacks continue to be against Multinational Forces (MNF). Most are low-level and use small arms and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). But there has been a sharp increase in the number of vehicle-borne IEDs, particularly in Baghdad since May. Most are remotely detonated and vary in sophistication.

Significant Incidents:

8 Jun	Suicide VBIED attacks in Mosul and Baqubah.
12 Jun	Assassination of Deputy Foreign Minister in Baghdad.
13 Jun	Director general of Cultural Affairs assassinated. Suicide VBIED at CF base in Baghdad kills 12.
14 Jun	Suicide VBIED attack in Baghdad kills 5 including 2 Britons.
17 Jun	Suicide VBIED attack on Army recruitment centre in Baghdad kills 40.
18 Jun	VBIED attack near Balad.
24 Jun	Multiple attacks in Mosul, Ramadi, Fallujah and Baqubah.
26 Jun	VBIEDs in Hillah kill 23 Iraqis.
27 Jun	6 ICDC soldiers killed near Baqubah.

Islamist Terrorists

4. The timing and similarity of targets of the multiple attacks on 24 June suggest a large degree of co-ordination involving some or all of them. Both Ba'athists and al-Zarqawi have claimed responsibility. There has been no intelligence to suggest co-operation between Islamist terrorists and Ba'athists in the attacks, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. Al-Zarqawi was probably behind at least some of the co-ordinated attacks, but the extent of his planning and direction is unclear. [...] Al-Zarqawi was responsible for the Ashura attacks on the Shia simultaneously in Karbala and Baghdad in March. But if he was behind all the 24 June attacks, the breadth and scale would represent a step change, with a combination of suicide bombings and well-organised military-style assaults.

5. [...] But terrorist networks and operational planning have proven robust. There is no shortage of willing martyrs and [...] more suicide bomb attacks may be imminent. [...]

6. [...] Fallujah remains a key nexus for Islamist terrorists, particularly those associated with al-Zarqawi. [...] the Islamist presence in the city may be substantial and the networks have proved to be resilient. [...]

Former Regime Elements

7. [...] former Ba'athists [were thought to be] attempting to reorganise both military and political structures. [...] Other reporting suggests the Ba'ath party is well organised and aims to take part in the national elections. [...] But the degree of co-ordination involved is not clear; rival groups seem to be emerging.

8. [...] the appointments of Allawi and al-Yawer have been greeted positively by some former Ba'athists and military officers, and probably more generally among Sunni Arabs. Allawi's reported decision to scrap the de-Ba'athification committee has been particularly welcomed. The attitude of the IIG to former Ba'athists will be key in gaining support in Sunni Arab areas and undermining attempts by hardline Ba'athists to continue to attack the Coalition and the political process. Allawi is believed to have made contact with the NRC.

Muqtada al-Sadr and Shia Militants

9. The situation in Najaf/Kufah has been relatively calm since the tentative agreement reached between Muqtada al-Sadr and the Shia house in early June. The police are able to patrol around the holy sites, but a Mahdi Army presence continues to control access. Al-Sadr's authority over the Mahdi Army continues to diminish. There are indications that the organisation has fractured in Baghdad and elsewhere. His representatives have called a cease-fire in Sadr City, but some attacks are continuing. [...] Al-Sadr will continue to try to preserve his personal and therefore political freedom. [...]

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

10. The situation in MND(SE) remains relatively stable with sporadic attacks using small arms, heavy weapons, and IEDs around Basra. A British soldier was killed in an IED attack on 28 June. Local cells of

former regime elements remain active and there is the potential threat of further attacks by Islamist terrorists. The Shia population is largely compliant but polling suggests that support for the British presence is waning. The remaining Mahdi Army elements are discredited and factionalised, but continue to pose a threat. Amarah is more volatile with a mixture of violent Shia, tribal and criminal elements. The almost daily attacks have reduced recently after some successful local negotiations, but the situation remains fragile. Hardline Shia are likely to continue to conduct attacks in the future.

Iran and Hizballah

11. [...] The recent seizure by the IRGC of Royal Navy personnel is another example of their aggressive attitude to the Coalition and the limited central control over them exerted by Tehran.

Prospects

12. Violence will continue into and beyond the elections in early 2005. There may be a surge in attacks as anti-Government forces seek to inflict early damage on the credibility of the IIG. They could seek to expose government weakness and reliance on the MNF, or alternatively try to provoke the introduction of extreme security measures. Islamist terrorists, increasingly centred around the al-Zarqawi network, will continue to pursue their destabilising strategy, including fomenting civil war, through suicide attacks, assassinations, hostage taking and a wide range of other attacks. Iraqis – Shia and Kurds – the Iraqi economy, MNF, and the will of the international community (in particular the UN) will remain priority targets. FREs/Sunni Arab insurgents will add to the violence and follow a similar target set.

13. The level of violence will diminish if the IIG are able to establish and present a credible degree of independence of action, gaining more popular and regional support. The government will need to develop security policies and forces capable of dealing with both internal dissent and the malevolent effect of Islamist terrorists. But the pressure on the IIG to demonstrate its authority, and quickly, risks the use of draconian measures – possibly even illegal in the eyes of the international community. Dealing with security will be a priority, but it needs to be supported by improving economic and social conditions to undermine support to anti-Government forces. The prospects for a rapid improvement are not good. Attracting Sunni Arab support – including from former Ba'athists – will be important in isolating and squeezing Islamist terrorists. The handling of the detainees, particularly Saddam Hussein, will be one of a plethora of issues needing finely balanced handling. Failure may lead to increasing coalescence of anti-Government forces. The broad consent of Shia and Kurds will remain fragile.