



16 September 2004

#### **AKE Bespoke Intelligence Reports**

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#### **Flashpoints**

**Baghdad, Kirkuk, Baqubah, Basrah**

**The following highways and routes should be considered extremely hostile:**

- The route to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) is extremely dangerous. Restrictions are sporadically applied to this route.
- The Baghdad to Amman Highway remains particularly dangerous and should be avoided if at all possible. 'The Group of Death' has issued a video warning in which it threatens to cut off Highway 10, the major supply route between Amman and Baghdad.
- In the south of the country, carjacking and banditry are rife on the following routes: Safwan to Basrah, Nasiriyah to Basrah and Hamza to Diwaniyah.
- The roads from Baghdad to Fallujah have reopened although they remain extremely dangerous. A number of checkpoints have also been erected on the routes and are being manned by both Multinational Forces (MNF) and the Iraqi police.
- The route from Syria to Mosul in the north of Iraq has also proven dangerous in the past few weeks

While these routes have been highlighted, it should be noted that transit throughout Iraq is **dangerous** and no route can be guaranteed as being safe.

#### **Projections**

It should be reiterated that given the mounting evidence of a growing al-Qaeda presence in Iraq it is safe to assume that further co-ordinated and large-scale attacks can be anticipated.

On 15 September, a videotape was broadcast on al-Arabiya television by a group claiming to be the Islamic Jihad Brigade threatening to attack universities in Iraq should they not ban female students from studying alongside their male counterparts. Such a threat is in line with the practice of Islamic Jihad and therefore threats against universities could well be forthcoming.

Lebanese nationals were the focus of a threat on 16 September by a group calling itself the 1920 Revolution Brigades which threatened to decapitate any Lebanese national assisting the US army in Iraq. This group released a warning in 2003 against foreign countries sending their forces to Iraq. They are also believed to have connections with other groups operating in the country (possibly al-Qaeda). Interestingly however the 1920 Revolution from which they take their title was a largely Shi'a uprising against the British that took place in that year. The reason for the uprising at that time was the failure of Britain (which claimed to be the liberator not the occupier) to create the new 'nation state' the people of Mesopotamia were promised upon their arrival. It should also be noted that the gel that held the revolution (uprising) together in 1920 was tribal rather than religious.

## Summary

Once again, Musab al-Zarqawi has claimed responsibility for attacks in central Iraq. Indeed, a statement was posted claiming that incidents of violence and attacks in Baqouba, Ramadi and Baghdad were the work of his supporters.

Violent incidents and attacks have occurred nationwide, although the majority have focussed on the central area of the country. Mortar and rocket attacks have taken place in the capital and suicide vehicle attacks have again been apparent. The usual array of weaponry has been in use and in addition to those already mentioned, Small Arms Fire (SAF), Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) have all been used by insurgents. Of course, **kidnapping remains a significant risk to all personnel operating in Iraq.**

## Kidnapping – an update

Reports on 16 September detail the kidnap of two US nationals and one British citizen in Baghdad. At the time of writing, little information is available although it is known that they were snatched at daybreak from their house in the capital's al-Mansoor district. The modus operandi of the attack is very similar to that of the seizure of the two Italian women and two Iraqis detailed below. It is believed that the three men were specifically targeted and if, as the Italians are thought to be, held by an al-Qaeda-affiliated group their fate may already be sealed.

Sheikh Mohammad Naji, an Australian Muslim cleric suffered a four-day kidnap ordeal according to reports on 16 September. The cleric was released on 12 September after being seized at gunpoint. It appears that the cleric was snatched for financial purposes, although his captors did threaten to kill him. Family members have denied that a ransom was paid to secure his release and have stated that he was freed because he was a Muslim cleric.

A Jordanian national has been seized by insurgents in Iraq according to reports on the al-Jazeera network on 14 September. Images of the hostage were broadcast on the network from a tape provided by the insurgent group the Brigades of al-Tawhid Lions. In accordance with previous demands of groups in Iraq, it has given the employer of the hostage 48 hours to cease its operations in Iraq. The tape was released only one day after a warning was issued specifically to Jordanian truck drivers that they would be killed should they work in Iraq.

A Turkish hostage, again believed to be a truck driver, looks set to be released following the release of another tape on 14 September which threatened to behead any further Turkish nationals working alongside the MNF, particularly the US in Iraq.

On the night of 14 September, the four policemen held by supporters of Moqtada al-Sadr were released in Basrah after being snatched by a group called the Joint Operations Against Spies and Agents which claims to have links to the radical cleric. The group had threatened to kill the men.

The fate of the two Australians and several Asians believed to have been kidnapped by an offshoot of the Black Banners, the Islamic Secret Army remains unclear. Australian governmental sources claim to have accounted for all their personnel currently operating in Iraq and a security company with which the hostages were linked claims that their personnel have likewise been accounted for. Furthermore, there has been an evident lack of footage of the men released by the group. Nonetheless, it cannot simply be assumed that the claim is a hoax. As detailed in AKE's Iraq Security Briefing of 14 September, the Black Banners group was responsible for the kidnap of three Indians, three Kenyans and an Egyptian who were held by the group for a period of 42 days and were released following the payment of a \$500,000 ransom by the employer of the hostages, Kuwait Gulf Link.

Mystery also surrounds the fate of the two Italian women and two Iraqi aid workers seized from central Baghdad last week. In this case also, there has been a clear lack of communication from the group. However, this was expected as the group(s) originally stated no further information would be released until their demands were met and the women would be executed without further warning.

The group that has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, the al-Zawahiri Loyalists, has accused the Italian women of being spies and has stated that they will be used to “burn the hearts” of the Italian people and their prime minister, Berlusconi. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the presumed namesake of the group, is believed to be number two to Osama bin-Laden in the al-Qaeda network.

The two French hostages remain in the custody of the Islamic Army in Iraq, despite hope on a number of occasions in recent days that they would be released. The group has demanded a ransom of \$5 million. The demand was posted on an Islamist website and further stated that the group’s demands are required to be met to ensure the release of the two men.

#### **Areas of continued concern**

- **It is feared that mosques are potential hot spots for demonstrations, and possibly suicide and other explosive attacks in the coming days and weeks**
- **Hotels remain at risk of attack, particularly those providing residence to Western personnel, including those in the ‘Green Zone’, despite increased security**
- **All facilities relating to the energy industry in Iraq remain at risk of attack, including offices and vehicles**
- **Police stations, local government and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) facilities continue to be the target of demonstrations and suicide attacks**
- **The homes and offices of those involved in the political development of Iraq, those of personnel involved in the former regime (i.e. low level Ba’athists) and those of tribal leaders are believed to be under an increased risk of attack or assassination**











#### **The following other buildings and facilities are consistently at risk:**

- **Any building, element of infrastructure or machinery involved with the reconstruction effort (particularly the energy industry)**
- **Coalition facilities of all nationalities (inhabited by contractors, NGO workers, diplomatic and military personnel)**
- **Civic buildings, particularly police stations, diplomatic offices and those of NGOs and media organizations**
- **Any convoy/vehicle carrying personnel from the media/NGOs or indeed contractors and diplomatic staff is at risk of attack at all times**

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## AKE risk ratings

	1-9	Generally stable and secure
	10-19	Instability
	20-29	Hostile
	30-39	Highly unstable
	40-49	Widespread militancy
	50-59	Low intensity conflict
	60-69	Advanced guerrilla war/civil war
	70-79	Limited conventional war
	80-89	Regional war
	90-100	Total war (sub-nuclear)

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