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

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#### **Flashpoints**

Baghdad (particularly Sadr City), Najaf, Baqouba, Mosul, Basrah, Kirkuk.

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**

The execution of the three Kurdish hostages detailed below is likely to induce a significant increase in ethnic tension and violence in the north of the country. Given the known connection between the Army of Ansar al-Sunna and the al-Qaeda network, it is very possible that the executions were the latest in a string of events that have been carried out by al-Qaeda-linked groups and those linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who pledged to invoke civil war in Iraq per his February memorandum which was intercepted by security services. The memo specifically detailed the Kurdish population as a target of this aim.

The executions took place only a matter of weeks after Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) representatives issued testing statements. Indeed, as detailed in AKE's Iraq Security Briefing of 9 September, the leader of the KDP, Massud Barzani, has fanned the flames of increasing ethnic tension in the northern city of Kirkuk by commenting that Kurds in northern Iraq are ready to fight for the divided city. He stated that "Kirkuk is the heart of Kurdistan and we are ready to wage a war in order to preserve its identity and to sacrifice ourselves for what Iraqi Kurds have already achieved." His comments are not likely to be taken kindly by the Arab and Turkomen populations of the city with whom the Kurds have clashed on numerous occasions. It is believed that violence is likely to flare in Kirkuk when the nationwide census scheduled to be held in October takes place and its results are made public.

In addition to this there have been numerous developments in recent days that may precipitate an

escalation in violence, not least that execution of the US national detailed below. The decapitation of Eugene Armstrong is likely to invoke an upping in US, MNF and Iraqi police assaults on the increasingly restive city of Fallujah and other al-Qaeda/Zarqawi strongholds. In turn, it is likely that we will witness a cycle of events that will result in high levels of casualties.

The mooring by the Japanese government that it may extend its national contingent's deployment in Iraq by up to another year may encourage attacks against their facilities in Samawah and Japanese personnel both military and civilian throughout the country.

The arrest and detention of several high-profile aides to the radical Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr is likely to induce further tension and possibly violence. The raid in Basrah has also resulted in the necessity for talks between the Mehdi Army, al-Sadr's aides and the British Military, however it is the raid (detailed below) on the office facilities in the holy city of Najaf that may cause most trouble. It should be remembered that the arrest of only one of al-Sadr's aides in the past has resulted in several weeks of clashes. Given the large-scale occupation of the MNF with Sunni insurgents at this time, it may not have escaped al-Sadr and his supporters that any commotion caused could have disastrous results for the transitional government and the MNF alike.

There is also the possibility that the targeted assassination of two high-ranking Sunni clerics and that of one Shi'a cleric could be part of a programme of such attacks planned for the coming days and weeks. Furthermore, such incidents of violence also have the potential to spawn tit-for-tat attacks and increase tension between the Sunni and Shi'a population of the country. This could prove particularly hazardous in areas where there are mixed communities, such as Baqubah.

### Summary

The weekend and early part of this week have been particularly bloody and look set to remain so. Suicide bombing and vehicle-borne suicide attacks have been carried in numerous locations and attacks against Iraqi national guardsmen, the Iraqi police and the MNF have persisted nationwide. The brutal execution of several hostages has been broadcast demonstrating the continued risk to foreign personnel and Iraqi nationals. As usual, attacks involving an array of different weapons and methods have also been carried out, including the favoured Improvised Explosive Device.

Talks between local tribal and religious leaders from Al-Anbar and Sadr City and the Iraqi authorities are taking place in an attempt to gain their assistance in disarming the various insurgent groups. Such talks are likely to prove fruitless given that historically, Iraqi males have almost always been armed, the current security environment is unlikely to convince even the less radical elements of society to part with what is viewed as a security provision and to some extent part of their cultural heritage.

### Kidnapping – an update

One of the two American nationals held alongside a Briton was decapitated on 20 September by the Tawhid and Jihad group led by Musab al-Zarqawi. Eugene Armstrong's execution was videoed by the group. Little hope remained that the hostages would be freed when it was revealed over the weekend which group had snatched the three men. While the families of both the remaining hostages, Briton Kenneth Bigley and US citizen, Jack Hensley have issued pleas for the release of their relatives, hope is fading. The group has demanded the release of female prisoners from two Iraqi jails, Abu Ghraib and Um Qasr, however the US has denied that any Iraqi women other than two high-ranking women from the former regime are imprisoned. Those women have been nicknamed Mrs. Anthrax and Dr. Germ. It is believed that Tawhid and Jihad specifically made demands that it knew could not be met and has little to do with the release of the two aforementioned prisoners.

Over the weekend period the number of those in kidnappers' custody increased considerably with the revelation by a Shi'a group that it was holding some 18 members of the Iraqi national guard captive and would execute them within a 48 hour period (from 19 September). The Shi'a group has demanded the released of an aide to the radical Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

The 18 National Guardsmen have now been released, reportedly on the command of Moqtada al-

Sadr, the radical cleric in whose name they were originally snatched. While the men were threatened with execution, al-Sadr has vehemently opposed execution on a number of occasions and to date, no Shi'a group has been responsible for the execution of hostages. The group holding the men, the Mohammed bin Abdullah Brigades, demanded the release of an aide to Moqtada al-Sadr, Hazem al-Aarajj.

Three Lebanese men and their Iraqi driver were abducted on 17 September according to the Lebanese Foreign Ministry. The men are all believed to have been employed by a travel agency in Baghdad. They were snatched as they travelled on the notorious highway between the Iraqi capital and Fallujah. AKE's Iraq Security Briefing of 16 September warned that Lebanese nationals were at increase risk of kidnap and attack following a threat made against them by the 1920 Revolution Brigades.

Video footage of three hostages being decapitated was released only a few hours after Prime Minister Allawi's vow that elections in Iraq would go ahead as planned. In a clearly political move, the three Iraqi Kurds are believed to have been killed near Mosul where their bodies were found. The men are all thought to have been members of the KDP peshmerga. The executions have been claimed by the Ansar al-Sunna Army. The group has claimed responsibility for numerous other attacks and executions, most notably the execution of 12 Nepalese nationals in August this year. In February this year, the group claimed responsibility for two attacks in Erbil against Kurdish Targets. It is believed to be an offshoot of Ansar al-Islam, and is therefore highly likely to have ties to al-Qaeda. The group has been evident in Iraq since 3 November 2003 although little information regarding it has been forthcoming.

While it has not yet been verified, the group holding the two French journalists has purportedly issued a statement in which they advise the men have been freed but are staying with the group to cover their activities. If verified, this will be the first information provided by the Frenchmen's captors, the Islamic Army in Iraq for some time.

On 18 September, a group calling itself the Salafist Brigades of Abu Bakr al-Seddiq released a tape which was broadcast by al-Jazeera in which it threatened to kill ten hostages if their employer, a Turkish- and US-based company ceases its operations in Iraq within 72 hours. The name of the company has not yet been revealed.

A Jordanian national has been freed by US forces and the Iraqi National Guard in Nazziriya according to reports on al-Arabiya. Sixteen people are reported to have been arrested in connection with the kidnapping. The criminally-motivated group attempted to ransom their victim for \$250,000. Interestingly, the victim stated that "When they captured me they didn't know I was Jordanian, they only wanted to steal the car. But when they searched us they found my Jordanian identification papers and ... took me so they can make some money."

The Australian prime minister, John Howard remains optimistic that the claimed kidnapping of two Australian nationals will turn out to be a hoax. Nonetheless, the body of a blonde man was discovered north of Baghdad on 16 September; although the identity of the body has not yet been revealed, the initial evidence suggests the man is of foreign origin. The body was found in the River Tigris near Yethrib village. Australian authorities are believed to be considering increasing the security surrounding their nationals operating in Iraq.

Mystery continues to surround 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.

### 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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