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Flashpoints

Baghdad (particularly Sadr City), Basrah, Fallujah, Ramadi, Karbala, Latifiya

The following highways and routes should be considered extremely hostile

- **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.**
- **The route to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) is extremely dangerous. Restrictions are sporadically applied to this route.**
- **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 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

Credible intelligence warned on 25 September that a vehicle borne attack (VBIED) attack against the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad's al-Mansour district could be imminent. Of course, the Jordanian Embassy has previously been the target of large scale terrorist attack in August last year.

The 15th day of the Islamic month of Sha'ban (29/30 September depending on Lunar Calendar) will mark the celebration for Shi'a Muslims of the birth of the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Muntazer al-Mehdi. For 'Twelver' Shi'a's (the majority of Shi'a Muslims) the Imam was occulted, suspended between heaven and earth and will return as a redeemer, signalling that the day of judgement is near. The celebration, held in Karbala will attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. Given previous attacks by a groups linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in the holy city of Karbala most notably during the Ashura commemorations in March this year, authorities have erected checkpoints in an attempt to prevent terrorists from entering the city, this could prove an impossible task. It is highly probable that attacks will take place in the city over the celebratory period, particularly as al-Zarqawi linked activity has been rife in recent weeks and because an attack on such an event fits with the radical Islamist's goals in Iraq, one of which is to induce civil war in Iraq by targeting the Shi'a and Kurdish populations.

It is believed that the situation in Iraq is set to deteriorate as the US Presidential election in November approaches and indeed, as the electoral process in Iraq develops and the first of next years nationwide Iraqi elections approaches. US Secretary of State Colin Powell has already indicated his fears of a forthcoming deterioration in the security environment, however, evidence would suggest that it is already underway. Attacks on westerners in particular in the form of kidnapping and large

scale attacks on facilities being used by them are likely to increase considerably.

Australian Prime Minister, John Howard has pledged to maintain his country's military presence in Iraq for as long as is necessary. His comments were made on 26 September. Indeed, Howard's comments may well encourage further attacks against Australian personnel operating in Iraq. Given that after the Australian Prime Minister's encouragement to the French government not to negotiate with terrorists following the seizure of two French Journalists, there has been a claim (not yet proven) that two Australian Nationals had been kidnapped.

An aide of the radical cleric, Moqtada al-Sadr stated on 27 September that al-Sadr will play no part in the forthcoming elections if US forces remain in Iraq. The statement, which further announced that no candidate will be put forward by the supporters of al-Sadr, contradicts and supersedes a previous statement made in August this year. In the earlier statement, it was announced that candidates would be put forward, campaigning for the withdrawal of US forces. It is likely that such an announcement was made amid the cleric's growing fear that not all those who have taken up arms in the name of al-Sadr and his Mehdi are loyal to him and indeed, will not take kindly to the cleric adopting a position within mainstream Iraqi politics. Confrontation in this respect could well be forthcoming.

With reference to the majority Shi'a population, the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI), al -Hakim has commented upon his movement's desire to maintain close ties with and benefit from a close relationship with the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran. Worryingly, during the same interview, al- Hakim warned third party counties not to intervene in the relationship. Furthermore, commenting upon concerns over the forthcoming elections, al-Hakim detailed a recent meeting with the Grand Ayatollah, al-Sistini and the Ayatollah's criticsism of the electoral process.

These comments by the leading Shi'a figures in Iraq coming in such close gives rise to fears that even if the elections do go ahead that further problems could arise in the Shi'a camps that could lead to wider scale violence and problems nationwide.

The British Foreign Office has warned that there is a specific threat of kidnap against personnel in the al-Mansour area of Baghdad between 2100 and 0000 hours local time. Intelligence suggests that a dark grey Mercedes and a BMW may be used by insurgents, both have tinted windows and are thought to be very like those used by the insurgents who seized the two US and one British citizen last week. The Foreign Office has reiterated that while there are specific times detailed above the attacks may not fall within the time frame given.

Summary

Reports on 27 September suggested that Brigadier General Talib Abid Ghayib al-Lahibi, a senior commander in the Iraqi National Guard was arrested on 23 September, accused of being involved with known insurgents in the province of Diyala which has been particularly restive in recent months. This situation is akin to that in neighbouring Saudi Arabia where there are known connections and family ties between members of the security forces and insurgent groups, most notably al-Qaeda are evident. In a society where family connections, honour and face are so highly prized, it is difficult for an individual to deny the request of a family member to, for example to provide information on those they are working for in Iraq/Saudi Arabia.

Throughout Iraq violence and attacks have continued. Attacks have involved the use of an array of weaponry including; rockets, mortars, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), Small Arms Fire (SAF) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The use of suicide bombers has also persisted and looks set to increase in the coming months, particularly ahead of the November US elections. The energy industry has been a favoured target in recent days.

Kidnapping remains a major threat to all personnel operating in Iraq.

Kidnapping – an update

Following the personal appeal of Al-Zarqawi's remaining hostage, the British citizen, Kenneth Bigley, Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian President has added his voice to the plea for his release. Arafat's support for the release of Mr. Bigley follows a similar call the previous day by the Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern. An Islamic group based in London, the Islamic Observation Centre, has claimed to have made contact with the Tawhid and Jihad group in an attempt to help release the British hostage. The group's leader Yasser al-Sirri was quoted over the weekend as stating that the 'British hostage is still alive'. Nonetheless, al-Sirri is wanted by the US for sponsoring terrorism in Afghanistan. A delegation from the British Islamic Council also arrived in Baghdad in recent days to add their support to the calls for the release of Mr. Bigley.

On 28 September, an Egyptian national and two Iraqis employed by Orascom, an Egyptian based telecoms firm, were released after spending some six days in captivity. Reports suggest that the remaining five Egyptian employees of the company are to be released shortly. Speculation that a ransom was paid in order to secure their release has not been confirmed or denied, however, the Egyptian government has denied that it has any direct dealings with the group holding the men.

An attempted kidnapping of six Turkish nationals employed by a subcontractor of Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) north of Baghdad on 28 September was thwarted by the Iraqi National Guard. The incident took place near Dujail where numerous previous attacks and seizures of this nature have taken place.

Unconfirmed reports on 28 September suggest that US intelligence has intercepted, by way of electronic devices, what could be the voice of one of the two female Italian hostages. Italy remains optimistic despite the claim of the Islamic Jihad organisation that it has executed the two Italian hostages that it is holding. The group announced the executions on an Islamist website after the Italian government failed to meet the group's demands: withdrawing its MNF contingent from Iraq. Given current events in Iraq and the fact that the group itself threatened to kill the two NGO workers without further warning if its demands were not met, it is possible that the claim could be true. Further threats were made against Italy, both against its interests in Iraq and on its sovereign territory. Italian intelligence sources are believed to have made some indirect contact with the group holding the women in recent days giving hope that the women were still alive. It should be remembered that there has been some ambiguity as to which group is actually holding the women or, indeed, if the two groups that have claimed the abduction are one and the same.

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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