



18 May 2004

### **Flashpoints**

**Baghdad (Sadr City, Green Zone), Najaf, Fallujah, Nasiriyah, Amarah, Kufah, Kirkuk, Karbala, Basrah, Baqoubah, Samawah**

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

**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 Coalition Forces (CF) and the Iraqi police. There is however no access to Fallujah from the main Highway.**

**The Baghdad to Amman Highway remains particularly dangerous and should be avoided if at all possible.**

**Routes in the vicinity of Najaf, Kufah, Najaf and Karbala should be avoided as should those around al-Kut.**

**Amarah is likely to witness further attacks and travel on roads to and from the city should only be undertaken with caution.**

**The route from Baqoubah to Mosul has experienced a number of attacks over the past 48 hours and should be considered dangerous.**

**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 fallout from the assassination of Ezzedine Salim has largely set the agenda in Iraq in the past 24 hours. The little known "Arab Resistance Group - al Rashid Brigades" has claimed responsibility for the attack. Senior US military figures in Iraq have already linked the attack to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Zarqawi is the alleged figurehead for the al-Qaeda movement in Iraq.

The funeral for Ezzedine Salim commenced on 18 May within the Green Zone in Baghdad. The funeral will likely draw large crowds who may vent their frustration. Large crowds also make attractive targets for militants seeking to destabilise Iraq further.

Further attacks on Iraqi political figures can be anticipated in the weeks leading up to 30 June.

The month of Rabi'al-Awwal (also known as the month of birth or Shahr al-Mawhid) has begun across the Islamic world. During this period the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad will be marked by all Muslims; Shi'a Muslims will also celebrate the birth of Ali. Heightened religious fervour during this month (particularly on 2, 12, 13, 14 May dependent on lunar calendar) may induce violence by some radical elements of society. Cultural and religious awareness should be practised.

The recent killing of Nick Berg and the immense publicity this has caused, may convince hostile elements to take further hostages. The statement released with the footage of Mr Berg's "execution" should also be taken as a threat of further action of this kind: "You will not receive anything from us but coffins after coffins ... slaughtered in this way."

The discovery of two explosive shells containing chemical agents has raised the worrying concern that there are more explosive devices in Iraq and that assailants will now try and harness their destructive ability.

## Summary

The assassination of Ezzedine Salim has revealed the failure of security forces to guard senior Iraqi political figures and has underlined the debate on the likelihood of the handing over of sovereignty proposed for 30 June. Further attacks on senior Iraqi political and religious figures alongside Coalition Forces and expatriate personnel can be anticipated by those seeking to derail the political process.

A row is developing over how the assailants were able to get so close to the Iraqi Governing Council leader. Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar, the new head of the IGC, has highlighted the poor security surrounding senior Iraqi political figures. He has claimed that security details for Iraqi politicians have not been supplied with equipment such as body armour by the US. However, the US has denied this stating that Salim turned down Coalition protection and instead used relatives as bodyguards. It would seem certain that security would now be stepped up.

Apparently a man of his word, Moqtada al-Sadr has maintained his 13 May pledge to continue the fight against the US and Coalition. Instability sparked by his militia, the Mehdi Army, has been recorded in a number of Iraqi cities including those that were considered comparatively peaceful. There has also been serious and protracted fighting in the usual Sadr areas of influence including Nasiriyah, Karbala, Najaf and of course Sadr city (Baghdad)

Al Sadr's rebellion looks increasingly politically isolated but, conversely, all the more dangerous for it. Senior Shi'a clerics and Iraqi politicians in recent days have called for his militia, the Mehdi Army, to disband and leave the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf.

Personnel should be conscious of the threat posed by those taking advantage of the uprising. In areas of engagement looting has taken place, although it is not always clear that Sadr militiamen have been directly behind the criminal incidents. Personnel should also be aware of the establishment of illegal vehicle checkpoints by those loyal to Sadr.

It was announced on 17 May that an explosive shell containing the deadly chemical agent sarin had exploded, slightly affecting two US soldiers from an explosives' ordnance team. It was also confirmed that it was the second such find within ten days after a 155mm artillery shell containing mustard gas was discovered. Both devices were being used as improvised explosive devices and it is likely that those who planted the devices did not fully comprehend the content of the bombs.











On 17 May two Russian hostages taken captive on 10 May were released in Latifiya, south of Baghdad. Their release was orchestrated by the al-Janabi tribe, highlighting the influence of Iraqi tribes in the successful conclusion to the series of kidnappings in the past weeks. An unnamed Russian diplomat was quoted as saying that the two were released because of the longstanding friendship between Russia and Iraq and the former's refusal to condone the invasion of Iraq last year, thereby suggesting the men were kidnapped by mistake. Russia has urged all its citizens to leave Iraq.

In addition to the above, attacks and violent incidents have persisted with ambushes and hijackings, the usual tactic of planting Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) which are detonated remotely or on contact and thereafter followed up with Small Arms Fire (SAF). Rocket and mortar attacks have also occurred, perpetrated by insurgents, while the CF have used increased force against Moqtada al-Sadr and his militia, the Mehdi Army in the holy cities of Najaf, Karbala and the surrounding area.

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	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
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	90-100	Total war (sub-nuclear)

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