



20 April 2004

### Flashpoints

**Baghdad, Fallujah, Kufah, Najaf, Karbala, Kut, Basrah, Mosul, Kirkuk.**

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

US forces banned civilian traffic on a number of main routes in Iraq on 18 April stating that any non-CF military vehicle will be fired upon if it travels upon the routes which (according to unconfirmed reports) have been labelled 'free-fire' zones. The routes covered by the ban include parts of the highway to Turkey, Highway 10 to Jordan and Highway 8 to Kuwait. The ban on civilian vehicles will have a major effect on the situation in Iraq making transit to some parts of the country almost impossible (the whole point of the exercise). In this regard, the closure of the routes could antagonise an already inflamed situation.

**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 month of Rabi'al-Awwal has begun across the Islamic world which is also termed the month of birth (Shahr al-Mawhid). During this month the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad will be marked by all Muslims, however, Shi'a Muslims will also celebrate the birth of Ali. The celebrations are not an official Islamic festival but are entrenched culturally. Nonetheless, heightened religious fervour during this month (particularly between the dates of 12, 13, 14 May dependant on lunar calendar) may induce violence by some radical elements of society. Cultural and religious awareness should be practised.

On 19 April Ricardo Maduro, the Honduran President, announced that his country's forces operational in Iraq would be withdrawn within the shortest possible period of time. 370 Honduran soldiers are currently in Iraq where they have been responsible for providing medical support and clearing mines. As anticipated, the Spanish withdrawal has induced a domino effect and set a dangerous precedent, not least by the fact that insurgents and terrorists alike will see the benefit of large-scale attacks against both the Coalition countries and also their contingents in Iraq. The Honduran announcement came only the day before the statement of Thaksin Shinawatra, the Prime Minister of Thailand, on 20 April, that its 451 troops in Iraq would be withdrawn if they were attacked, injured or killed. This announcement is likely only to increase the risk of an attack on the Thai contingent which has been confined to a camp in Karbala.

An aide to the firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr, warned on 19 April that Australian citizens in Iraq were at risk of kidnap and are being targeted in this respect; citizens of the US were also mentioned in the threat. It is believed that both civilians and military personnel are at risk. The aide further added that the citizens of countries not involved with the coalition would not be kidnapped. Despite this announcement, nationals of countries that do not have troops in Iraq or provide financial support to the coalition should not be complacent. There are a plethora of groups operating in Iraq that would use (and have used) kidnap to their own ends not all of which are even Shi'a, let alone followers of Sadr. Sheikh Qays al-Khaz'ali, another aide to the firebrand Shi'a cleric and himself a Mehdi Army spokesman, warned on 18 April that the Bulgarian Coalition contingent faces a double risk in Iraq. The Bulgarian presence on the holy soil of Karbala is only one of the reasons their soldiers are at risk, the second reason is the country's early support of the US vis-à-vis its position on Iraq. However, it is their presence on holy soil that, according to al-Khaz'ali, is the main reason Bulgarian forces are at risk of kidnap, death or injury.

Given the latest bin-Laden tape in which the figurehead of the al-Qaeda global terror network pledged to avenge the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin (detailed in *AKE Iraq Security Briefing*, 15 April 2004) the assassination of Abdel Aziz Rantassi (Yassin's successor) on 16 April is likely to further exacerbate the situation in Iraq and possibly lead to yet further violence. It is possible that this latest tape may provide added momentum to insurgents in Iraq, particularly those in Fallujah, where reports indicate al-Zarqawi may be located. US targets are especially at risk, although there may be little discrimination between foreigners, particularly Westerners.

It should be reiterated that on 14 April, a letter was circulated in Baghdad addressed to families in the city. The letter warned Iraqis not to leave their homes, attend university, school, work or open their businesses between 15 and 23 April because the 'Mujehedeen Companies for God, Victory and Success' would be transferring the resistance from Fallujah to Baghdad in order to free Baghdad from 'the darkness of the occupier'.

### **Summary**

It is clear that the run up to the transfer of power will be a period of heightened tension and increased violence largely strengthened by the growing disillusion of the Iraqi people with the CF and CPA, and further exacerbated by the actions and rhetoric of figures such as Moqtada Sadr who have found it easy to mobilise certain sections of society.

Incidents of violence have persisted throughout Iraq in recent days and several hostages remain captured. The usual array of attacks, weaponry and tactics have been evident in all areas of the country including the increasingly preferred tactic of ambush. In an attempt to limit such attacks (and the planting of improvised explosive devices (IEDs)) many of Iraq's main transport routes have been closed off by Coalition Forces (CF). Mortar and rocket attacks have also occurred as have small arms fire (SAF) attacks, incidents involving the use of rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and IEDs. Clashes between US forces in the vicinity of the Syrian border demonstrate the presence of extra-territorial elements (ETEs) in the country (as indicated in *AKE Iraq Security Briefing*, 11 March 2003).

### **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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	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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