20 July 2004

Flashpoints

Baghdad, Baiji, Mosul, Ramadi, Fallujah, Basrah, Kirkuk, Mahmudiyah

The following highways and routes should be considered extremely hostile:

- **The route from Saudi Arabia to Baghdad has been dangerous in recent days**
- **The route from Syria to Mosul in the north of Iraq has also proven dangerous in the past week**
- **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.**
- **The Baghdad to Amman Highway remains particularly dangerous and should be avoided if at all possible**
- **The route to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) is extremely dangerous. Restrictions have been applied to this route**

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 threat to Japanese personnel (military and civilian) has increased significantly following a warning issued by Jama'at al-Tawhid and Jihad on 20 July. The group, led by suspected al-Qaeda operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, has demanded that Japan withdraw its forces from Iraq. The threat was posted on an Islamist website. The threat should be seen as credible as the militant group has demonstrated an ability to launch sophisticated attacks and has specialised in hostage taking. It is possible that if any attack were to take place it would be in Samawah. However, Japanese nationals are advised to increase their security awareness.

Reports on 19 July suggest that attacks could be planned against Korean personnel operating in Iraq. Korean government intelligence indicates that missionaries are particularly vulnerable. Missionaries have previously been targeted inside Iraq (please see AKE Iraq Security Briefing of 16 March 2003). Those travelling to Iraq with the intention of converting Muslims are at real risk of attack not only from insurgent elements but also by conservative practicing Muslims.

The spate of targeted assassinations is set to continue with the targets chosen increasingly likely to be influential and important Iraqi officials. Following a death threat issued previously by Musab al-Zarqawi, a group with links to the militant leader posted a reward on the life of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi on an Islamist website on 18 July. The sum of $282,000 has been offered by the al-Qaeda linked group.

A newspaper backed by the firebrand cleric Moqtada al-Sadr is to be republished according to reports on 19 July. The sanctioning of the paper's publication came from the transitional government in what is believed to be an attempt to appease and gain the support of the majority Shi'a population of Iraq. It is likely that the paper will remain under the close scrutiny of the authorities in case it attempts to publish any further inflammatory material. The closure of the paper was a key reason behind the outbreak of Sadr-inspired violence earlier this year in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala as well in Sadr City. It is likely that any future interference in the affairs of the publication will have a similar effect.

The group responsible for snatching the Egyptian driver, The National Islamic Resistance – the 1920 Revolution Brigades has issued a statement on Islamic media networks warning all companies providing assistance to or working alongside the Multinational Forces (MF) that they are at risk of attack or having staff kidnapped. It is likely that this group is the same as the Iraqi National Islamic Resistance

(1920 Revolution Brigades). This group released a warning in 2003 to those countries sending their forces to Iraq and are thought to have links with other groups operating in Iraq (possibly al-Qaeda). The group is known to be Anti-Saddam, Anti-Colonialist and broadly Iraqi nationalist in outlook. Interestingly, the 1920 Revolution used in the group's 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 and it should not be forgotten that in Iraq tribes can, on occasion, override sectarian division. Some 2,200 British soldiers died in the uprising of 1920 together with nearly 9,000 Iraqis.

Following the announced withdrawal of the Philippine military and police presence in Iraq, further hostage taking can be anticipated. Although the Philippine force was small its participation in the 'coalition of the willing' was nonetheless significant. Further attacks by militants seeking to push foreign forces out of Iraq will occur in the coming days and weeks. These will most likely target foreign nationals, from states that are perceived to be susceptible to militant pressure or who are going through an electoral process.

Similarly, the Polish pledge to maintain a military presence in Iraq until 2005 and the possibility of Malaysia deploying a team of medics to assist the MF in Iraq may encourage attacks against nationals of both countries.

Summary

Violence has continued across Iraq with vehicle suicide attacks and targeted assassinations resulting in numerous fatalities and casualties. In addition, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) have remained a preferred method of attack for insurgents throughout the country. As noted in AKE's Iraq Security Briefing of 14 July, of interest is the geographical spread of attacks and incidents of violence which have not been limited to the central area of the country but have been increasingly evident in the north and south.

Areas of continued concern

• All facilities relating to the energy industry in Iraq remain at risk of attack, including offices and vehicles. Personnel are also at risk.
• 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 .
• Police stations, local government and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) facilities continue to be the target of demonstrations and suicide attacks.

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)

For more in-depth analysis of the security situation in Iraq as well as other world hot spots see Global Intake, AKE's online strategic information and intelligence tool.

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