27 May 2004

Flashpoints

Baghdad (Sadr City, Green Zone), Najaf, Fallujah, Nasiriyah, Amarah, Kufah, Kirkuk, Karbala, Basrah, Baqubah, Mukaradeeb (near al-Qaim) and Ramadi

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 been subject to 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 offer of negotiation touted by Moqtada al-Sadr is welcome and may lead to a peaceful settlement avoiding further bloodshed around Iraq's holy sites. It is likely that the US will accept negotiation perhaps along the lines of the recent Fallujah settlement. The Coalition will be keen to avoid bloody violence in the run up to the 30 June handover. Of concern is that Sadr has made offers in the past and failed to deliver. Some of his demands (particularly the dropping of charges linking him to the murder of a rival cleric in 2003 and confinement of CF to barracks around Najaf) are unlikely to be accepted.

Sadr is likely calculating that he might be able to extricate himself out of the standoff and promote himself as a champion of Shi'a Islam in the face off of US aggression. Renewed CF operations against his support base (including the capturing of senior aides) has likely forced his hand and convinced him a peaceful solution with the opportunity of legitimate political salvation is preferable to a humbling detention.

It is reasonable to assume there are hardliners within his Mehdi Army who will not be willing to fade away from their positions of authority. The future of the Mehdi Army is uncertain in Sadr's latest offer and it is likely to form a considerable obstacle during negotiations.

Summary

The security situation has been comparatively calm in Iraq in the past 48 hours. Unfortunately, moments of quiet in Iraq have traditionally been followed by an increase in incidents. Personnel are therefore advised to remain and alert across Iraq.

Prospects for a negotiated settlement between supporters of Moqtada al-Sadr and Coalition Forces have been raised. It would now appear that al-Sadr is willing to negotiate although exact details have not been confirmed.

Attacks on Iraq's vital oil infrastructure have continued and the announcement that the Russian

company, Interenergoservice, will withdraw from Iraq following the latest attack on its employees is of concern. It is feared the withdrawal will further deepen the power crisis in Iraq. Russian engineers have a greater understanding of antiquated Soviet-era power production facilities in Iraq.

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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)

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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