



12 August 2004

## Flashpoints

Baghdad (particularly Sadr City), Najaf, Karbala, Baqouba, Mosul, Basrah

The following highways and routes should be considered extremely hostile:

- Roads in the vicinity of Najaf, Karbala and Kufah are likely to become increasingly dangerous over the coming days
- The Baghdad to Amman Highway remains particularly dangerous and should be avoided if at all possible. Indeed, '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 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

Violence as a result of the continuing clashes between Moqtada al-Sadr's supporters and the Multinational Forces (MNF) and Iraqi security forces is unlikely to abate in the immediate future. US and Iraqi forces appear to be positioning themselves to directly tackle Sadr supporters in and around the Imam Ali Mosque. If US forces do enter the mosque, violent repercussions can be anticipated. Reprisals may stem not only from the Shi'a population in Iraq, but also those in neighbouring Iran. Violence is likely to spread to the neighbouring holy city of Karbala and also to Kufa.

The ongoing clashes have caused further problems for the country's vital energy exports. On 11 August, it was reported that employees had ceased working at a pumping station in the predominantly Shi'a area of Nassiriyah in protest at actions in Najaf. The plant pumps vital fuel to Baghdad. It is believed that further actions of this industrial nature will take place in the coming days if, as is likely, the situation in Najaf is not resolved. The withholding of fuel from Baghdad will no doubt have serious repercussions perhaps in the form of protests and/or violence.

The Salvadorian MNF contingent operating in Iraq has been warned via an internet statement that Iraq will be turned into a 'hell' for them if a new contingent is deployed to Iraq. The warning on 12 August was the second to El Salvador in as many days.

Italy has received what is purportedly a final warning to remove its contingent from Iraq. The threat, once again from the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades, was issued on an Egyptian Islamist website and stated "Either you get rid of that incompetent Premier Silvio Berlusconi or Italy will truly burn." A deadline of 15 August has been given by the militant group for Italy to remove its forces. The

deadline corresponds with the timeframe set in a similar warning on 1 August where 15 days were given for compliance.

The employees of private South Korean companies operating in the vicinity of Erbil (where Korea's forces are based) are to be protected by the Kurdish Peshmerga who will be paid bodyguards of the civilians. At least 40 civilians are involved in the construction of facilities in the northern city. While being under the protection of the Peshmerga will no doubt provide some security for the South Korean workforce, it is also possible that the Korean's association and growing relationship with the Kurdish population could ultimately put them at risk of attack and/or abduction by elements hostile to the Kurds. In February this year, Musab al-Zarqawi threatened to target the Kurds in an attempt to provoke civil war in Iraq. Offices of Kurdish political parties have also more recently been targeted. Furthermore, factions within the Kurdish community could compete for the lucrative body guarding positions. As in other areas of the world where rival groups compete for the positions offered by foreign companies, there is potential for tensions and violence to arise.

On approximately 19 August (dependent on lunar calendar), the Martyrdom of Imam Ali un Naqi will be marked. The Imam (the tenth holy Imam) was poisoned in Samarra in the Islamic year 254 AH by the Abbasid Caliph Mu'taz. The anniversary might provoke demonstrations and possibly violence in Samarra (especially in light of recent Shi'a hostilities).

### **Summary**











Violence has persisted, particularly in the centre and the south of the country where the Mehdi Army has clashed with Iraqi forces and the MNF. This situation looks likely to continue at least over the weekend period. Sadr himself has pledged to remain in Najaf until the last drop of his blood is spilt, and while in the past he has made similar pledges and then reneged on them, it does not appear that he will be able to back out this time without losing respect from his followers. Clashes in Najaf, and Fallujah have utilised US air support, and small arms fighting has also been reported.

Reports on 11 August quote 'unidentified Iranian officials' from the Revolutionary Guard as admitting to providing assistance to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi inside Iraq. Apparently, the assistance included the ability to cross the border between Halabja and Ilam and even access to Revolutionary Guard training camps in Mehran.

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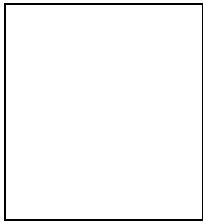

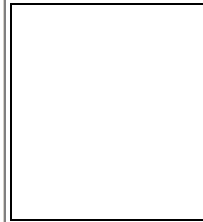
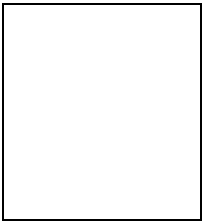

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