



Field Report: IRAQ

January 7, 2005

Centurion Risk Assessment Services

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CONTACT US

E-mail

main@centurionsafety.net

Tel

+44 (0)1264 355255

+44 (0)7000 221221

Mobile

+44 (0)7785 248934

Fax

+44 (0)1264 355322

+44 (0)7000 221222

Web

www.centurionsafety.net

www.aidsafety.net

www.themediasafety.net

Post

P O Box 1740

Andover

Hants SP11 7PE

United Kingdom

GENERAL

As 2005 unfolds and with the build-up to the January 30 election and canvassing well under way, incidents are on the increase. Anyone attempting to make progress in the election process is liable to be a target, and the death toll has increased enormously.

Police and high-profile political figures have been assassinated in an attempt to demonstrate to Iraqis that no one is safe, and attacks are expected to continue to disrupt the electoral preparation. Iraq is seeing a thrust from the insurgents against ethnic groups and election workers. The violence is likely to get worse over the next few weeks.

Most people in the security advisor role agree that there is a very strong possibility of a "spectacular" in the form of a large attack and/or explosions close to or on the day of the elections.

Incidents continue in the outskirts of Baghdad and the rest of the country with concentrated attacks in Mosul and Kirkuk.

Firefights continue throughout the main cities and towns, and the Green Zone in Baghdad is continually being engaged in some form of attack.

The threat remains high to all Western females, media and NGOs throughout the country.

Some charities have departed Iraq because of the threat of possible attacks in the next few weeks.

Intelligence gathering from the insurgents on all potential targets has increased with more skill. This has improved due to the assistance in planning and operations from outsiders who are still entering the country solely to offer their military expertise in the preparation of attacks against Coalition forces.

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Many thanks to Centurion advisors, media and others in Iraq for providing information for this Field Report. It really is very much appreciated and essential for all operating in Iraq.

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VEHICLE & ROAD SECURITY

Car bombs continue throughout the country, especially in Najaf and Karbala which are clearly designed to ignite Shi'ite-Sunni strife to make the country ungovernable.

The road between the Amman border and Baghdad is still rife with attacks with hostages being taken and sporadic high-speed chases with small arms fire. Trucks with mounted machine guns are seen frequently in the attempted ambushes. Again, this route is not safe and not recommended, however some vehicles are passing without any incident and others are fraught with difficulties.

Mortar attacks continue with an increased threat to the hotel complexes. Rounds sometimes fall short of their intended target but still cause widespread damage and fatalities to other unsuspecting locations.

COMMUNICATIONS

The telephone network, especially mobile systems have been affected on numerous recent occasions and will no doubt continue with the build-up of the elections. Think ahead and ensure you have alternative means such as Thurayas/ Iridium/sat phones, etc and a radio link is established between your teams at all times.

AIR TRAVEL & AIRPORT ROAD

The airport road remains a dangerous place to travel even with the increase of Coalition force security. Travel to, and from the airport, is still being disrupted by numerous incidents or suspect vehicles at the airport checkpoint causing delays. Even the military hardware (armoured vehicles) are at times told not to use the route due to continuing threats from ambushes and IEDs.

Most attacks along this route have been very well planned by the insurgents with the tactic of "cut-off" groups and "spotters" on the high vantage points such as buildings to give warning of intended targets such as Western or Coalition force vehicles.

Yet even with attacks on a daily basis this is still the best way in and out of Iraq.

KIDNAPPINGS

Kidnappings continue throughout Iraq, some of them ending in the death of the victim. These events are still bringing home the reality of the lack of awareness by contractors, NGOs and some media personnel.

Kidnappers continue the tactic of observing their targets during the day as well as night, but victims have usually not been aware of this happening.

Again, it is crucial that all Westerners become more observant and prepare themselves in case of a potential hostage-taking attempt.

As with many incidents in hostile environments, too many people are becoming complacent on the basis that "it will never happen to me". This is foolhardy. The latest reports on these kidnappings should serve as a wake-up call to everyone operating in Iraq.

IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices)

These continue to be one of the most feared threats in Iraq with an increase throughout the area. In one period alone it was reported that suicide bombers averaged one a day.

Some of the larger explosions are designed to attract the Coalition forces' attention so the smaller well-planned attacks can take place unnoticed until it is too late. These tactics by the insurgents are being used on a more frequent basis.

As the elections approach all major election places will be potential targets, as crowds will inevitably gather. The insurgents will no doubt observe these places, and suicide bombers will be ready to move in to disrupt any potential progress. If these places are already known, there will be a great possibility that IEDs may be planted in advance.

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BUILDING SECURITY

All security measures should be established by now. Safe rooms, strong doors, safety measures against IEDs, suicide bombers, fire, mortar attacks, rocket attacks and ground attacks should be known to all. If necessary test them to see that they work; if an emergency occurs it may be too late.

OTHER INCIDENTS

Election workers were executed on a street in Baghdad.

Drive-by shootings continue against local officials and main police stations.

Oil drums have been placed at numerous points along roads in the Mosul area. There is a strong possibility that insurgents will use these at a later date, possibly as IEDs. If something is in place for a long time, it eventually becomes part of the scenery and people become complacent and forget about them until it is too late. Be observant and report anything suspicious.

Car-jackings, looting and other criminal activity continue throughout Iraq. Some of the vehicles reported stolen have been seen in a different town with armed insurgents driving at speed either to or from an incident.

Police uniforms and ID cards are still being stolen and used by insurgents to their advantage. Utmost caution is needed if being told to pull over by "police" on the roads or approaching what appear to be police checkpoints.

Insurgents are still paying some locals handsomely to observe Westerners' movements to and from their residences. Change your routines at every possible opportunity, whether on foot or in vehicles, in order to make yourself a hard target. If you are a hard target, the insurgents will select a softer target that is not so observant or aware.

Attacks against ministries, local police stations and infrastructures continue, despite so-called

improvement in their security.

Sniper attacks are quite frequent throughout Iraq. Do not stand still on the streets or on assignment in one place too long, keep moving about, and make yourself a hard target. They will see you but you will not see them!

Fuel shortages continue with increasingly long queues at most fuel stations. Some have and will continue to get out of hand with the intervention of security forces firing in the air to control the crowds at times. These crowd disorders could well become more aggressive nearer the election date, where patience will be tested as fuel becomes even scarcer.

PERSONAL SECURITY AWARENESS

There are two possible attacks envisaged over and above the usual threats occurring daily in Iraq before and up to the elections. These are many unannounced attacks – where insurgents swarm without any prior civil disorder to attack hotels, bureaus, embassies, polling stations, etc. Insurgents may use mortars and rockets as well as diversionary tactics with IEDs.

The second is the escalation of an attack from a street protest to a mob riot to ground assault. A combination of these could occur, especially with explosions to offer distractions so other ground assaults can take place.

Vigilance is still one of the major keys to survival against insurgents. Any small irregularity or change of detail should be noted and classed as suspicious and reported to either your security advisors or direct to the security forces.

Personnel working on contracts in Iraq are still under major threat, as well as media, NGOs and aid workers.

With the elections drawing closer the media will play a greater part. This will bring unwanted attention to anyone reporting and filming anything to do with the elections.

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You may be targeted at some point so vigilance and taking advice from your security advisors is essential. The safety aspect of travelling to an event has to be given proper consideration. This decision needs to be discussed within your bureau with the safety advisors.

It is strongly advised not to outstay your welcome whilst reporting/filming as it will not take long for the insurgents to hear of your presence. Basically, get in, film, and get out.

As a reminder: Anyone entering Iraq should receive a thorough update of activities and threats for the area prior to their deployment in order to bring them up to speed about the dangers they will be going into. They should also be reminded to bring their protective equipment such as body armour and helmets in case the situation worsens within the next few weeks.

All personnel should be reminded that when operating near Coalition forces they might become a target, either directly or indirectly. This threat increases from opportunist shooters to well planned IEDs.

Due to the continuing increase of attacks and threats throughout Iraq, remember that every individual should pack an emergency grab bag just in case you need to move at short notice.

With Coalition security forces continually under threat, it is strongly recommended that you do not get too close to their vehicles as in most cases if you are not recognised your vehicle will be shot at as a warning. The rule of not passing military convoys is now in force so no one is allowed to overtake these patrols or convoys. If you do the Coalition forces will open fire on you. If you feel that your security will be jeopardised whilst travelling at slower speeds than normal when stuck behind these security patrols, it is strongly recommended that alternative routes be found. There is, however, some form of security in travelling with the Coalition forces but, again, this has to be outweighed against the possibility of IED attacks against them whilst moving from A to B.

It is recommended that enough supplies including fuel to be stored well in advance of the elections to last at least one to two weeks after the elections have finished. This is in case the fighting increases and continues in your immediate area where a total shutdown on your operations may be necessary.

All first aid kits must be checked and additional items may be necessary. All medical plans should be revisited and updated if needed. Check everything.

All perimeter security and guards should be inspected and tested in case of ground attacks by insurgents.

SUMMARY

The long-term view is that concentrated attacks are likely in order to disrupt anything that could improve stability in Iraq. An increase in kidnappings and murder is also predicted.

The period over the elections is certainly going to be very unsettled and no doubt violent. All plans regarding security, actions and escape plans should already have been implemented, tried and tested.

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