



# Field Report: IRAQ

October 25, 2004

Centurion Risk Assessment Services

## INDEX

- GENERAL
- FLIGHTS
- CONVOY & VEHICLE SECURITY
- IEDs
- KIDNAPPING
- GENERAL SECURITY
- FIRST AID TRAINING & FIRST AID KITS
- OTHER INCIDENTS
- HOTELS & BUREAUS
- SUMMARY

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## GENERAL

Coalition Forces continue to come under attack from various insurgency methods ranging from small arms fire to well-planned rocket and mortar attacks. The majority of attacks on the roads are still from IEDs. Attacks continue to be on the increase especially in areas in Iraq where even last month there were no reports of fighting. Foreigners, local people assisting the Coalition Forces or anyone assisting in the rebuilding of Iraq are being targeted with threats of a hostage take-down, point blank shootings and pre-planned ambushes.

Reports of kidnapping, vehicle hijacking and coordinated assaults continue daily. The continuous use of IEDs is claiming fatalities and injuries every day. Drive-by shootings continue in the centre as well as the north of Baghdad.

## FLIGHTS

The threat to all aircraft going into Baghdad International airport remains high, especially from ground-to-air missiles. Insurgent attacks have been deterred lately since Coalition Forces have increased mobile patrols in the vicinity of the airport.

The road to the airport remains unstable, even as Coalition Forces conduct security patrols during the morning and afternoon.

## CONVOY & VEHICLE SECURITY

Ambushes continue throughout the area. The usual main areas around Baghdad remain the attack points, especially the road from the city to the airport and any potential choke points. Varying routes and timings is important to everyone.

Attackers are using roadside IEDs, small and large ambushes, "snap" attacks as well as well-planned raids on military convoys and selected targets. Grenades are still being dropped from overpasses, and illegal vehicle checkpoints continue.

*continued on page 2*

*Many thanks to Centurion advisors, media and others in Iraq for providing information for this Field Report.*

# Field Report: IRAQ October 25 2004

Insurgents have increased their attacks on convoys, specifically targeting soft-skin vehicles as some of the attackers now have sports utility vehicles (SUVs) with light machine guns mounted on top. They are getting bolder and better coordinated and are mounting attacks at any time of the day.

SUVs remain a favourite target. Main organisations continue to use transportation that blends in with local vehicles in order to reduce the likelihood of attack. However, since the assailants are conducting better surveillance on their intended victims they are more aware of this and through their observation they are targeting these vehicles and personnel as well.

Normal saloon cars offer no protection against these sorts of attacks, even small arms fire. Armoured saloon cars are expensive but well worth the cost if they afford decent protection.

The decision whether to travel on the roads while these attacks continue is obviously down to you as the organisation on the ground. However, it is strongly recommended that you seek the advice of your safety advisors (if deployed with you).

Vehicles are still being stolen and made to look like agency vehicles and emergency vehicles, resulting in total unawareness of an attack on unsuspecting victims. As usual, if you are unsure about a vehicle or its occupants, leave the area immediately. Report the incident to the local military force or to your safety advisor.

There is an increase of attacks on the roads in the north. Armed attackers continue to be very active throughout that area.

Car bombings are still a regular occurrence nationwide. Targets have included convoys, checkpoints, recruitment centres, infrastructures, police stations, etc.

## IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices)

As mentioned on numerous occasions before, IEDs continue to cause a severe problem for everyone

operating in Iraq, especially as they are well planned and well hidden and of course can be disguised as virtually anything. Command-detonated explosions are a particular hazard.

The sophistication and new ideas for the use of IEDs has improved and they can be detonated by anything that has a power charge and is capable of sending a signal, thus eliminating the need for telltale command wires. Such devices are being found on a daily basis throughout the regions.

The discovery of caches of weapons and ammunition and bomb-making equipment continues but not on the level it once was. This is mainly due to the insurgents either hiding them so well or, like most terrorist cells, moving caches from one area to another and breaking the bulk of the supplies down into several smaller caches in order to disguise them or make them easier to hide.

Supply lines of weapons, ammunition, IED kit and other main insurgency stores are frequently crossing Iraq's borders in numerous ways. So, once one cache of weapons is discovered by the Coalition Forces, another comes in across the border.

## KIDNAPPING

As reported in the world's press, kidnaps continue daily, from local people being taken off the street to anyone seen to be representing the West. These kidnappings are just the ones that are reported; many are not.

Again, these attacks are becoming more sophisticated and planning has obviously been taken in order to observe, reach and snatch their target.

Reports suggest that the insurgents are trying to target and take hostage anyone (especially from the hotel complexes), who may have an ID, DoD pass or any form of pass that may enable an insurgent, possibly a suicide bomber, to gain access to the Green Zone and other secured areas.

There are strong rumours that a few local workers within these complexes are informing assailants

# Field Report: IRAQ October 25 2004

about those residing in these complexes and hotels. They are also giving names, organisations and daily routines to these attackers, in order to assist them in their hostage taking or attacks. These locals are either infiltrators or their families have been threatened in order to obtain and pass this information on.

All information on specific people, targets etc, makes the job of a potential hostage taker easier. It is strongly recommended that only people required to know information on daily routines, trips to airports, emergency routes, meeting places, set up of organisations, rosters etc keep it to themselves. If information has to be passed between personnel operating with or around local workers in complexes, you should refrain from open discussions about work routines and only discuss essential and important information behind closed doors.

Surveillance from the assailants has increased drastically on the side of the planning for a hostage take. Recent hostages have reported that their captors had been watching them for a few days, to see who they were, where they went, where they resided and worked, and who they associated with. Some of these hostages mentioned that they had become a target because they were operating alone. One hostage who was released was definitely told by his captors that they knew who he was and who else was in the complex because one of the local workers inside the complex had informed them. The hostages who have reported this information are the lucky ones; they were released.

## GENERAL SECURITY

All personnel deploying to Iraq require some form of awareness training for Iraq. Iraq is not like Afghanistan or Bosnia. This is terrorism with, unfortunately, devastating results, in most cases for “neutral” individuals, as well as Coalition Forces.

**It is no good deploying to places like Iraq without security protection, sound security advice, correct protective equipment, first aid kits and awareness training for the areas you are going into. Gone are the days when people can walk around in a**

**war zone taking pictures as they wish. Iraq is different. Even media veterans are saying that this is a different war.**

Remember also that, as an individual, once in Iraq you should not expect other media companies, NGOs and businesses and their security advisors, to provide you protection whenever you require it. Advice is always free, but people need to understand that the advisors have a job to do and other people to look after.

As I type this I know some of Centurions’ advisors in Iraq are speaking to freelancers to offer some sound advice, because at the present time some of those freelancers are concerned for their safety, especially after the spate of attacks and hostage taking.

All paperwork, personnel letters, addresses, etc should be disposed of properly either by burning or shredding. Do not leave any paper or information around that you do not want people to see. It could and will put you and others at risk.

Media personnel when operating on the ground should remember not to “jump in” to a story or event. Instead, take a couple of seconds to observe, assess the situation, plan where you will go and proceed with caution, remembering that a lot of the explosions have a secondary device within the area and that they sometimes pack a lot more explosives than the first device.

## Emergency “Grab Bag”

People should start to think about an emergency “grab bag” similar to a small rucksack which contains the necessities: water, food, passports, visas, spare money, battery for phone, map of area, spare vehicle keys, etc.

This is grabbed in cases of emergencies as you leave the building, room or vehicle in case of attack. At least with whatever necessities you have in the bag you will be self sufficient for the first 24 hours.

# Field Report: IRAQ October 25 2004

## FIRST AID TRAINING & FIRST AID KITS

With the increase in attacks, personnel still cannot rely on the emergency services reaching them in time if injuries are serious. As mentioned before, it should be the responsibility of all personnel to be well trained in aspects of first aid, especially when operating in such a volatile region. All personnel, including locally hired staff, employed by organisations should be well trained in the use of the first aid kits.

Individual first aid kits should be provided and allocated to individuals containing items such as: First field dressings (*FFDs or Shell dressings*), assorted plasters, sterile dressing, resuscitation aid, tuf-cut scissors, bandage, Quick-clot, sterile gloves, etc.

*Items are down to the individual but essentials are needed. Remembering that you may not be in any fit state to use the kit on yourself, if you have a good first aid kit and a colleague is assisting you with your injuries then at least you know that he/she has the essential items of first aid stores to cope with your injuries (if they have first aid skills of course!).*

All vehicles and buildings/bureaus should carry a larger comprehensive first aid kit, and this should include items such as: first field dressings (*FFDs or Shell dressings*), assorted plasters, sterile dressings, resuscitation aids, tuf-cut scissors, sharp scissors, bandages (assorted sizes), Quick-clots, sterile gloves, cas-straps, tweezers, sutures, sterile needles, Ashermans chest seals, sterile swabs, assorted airways, safety pins, roll of plaster, zinc oxide tape, IV set/solutions, water-burn gel treatment, triangular bandages, sterile wipes, cannulas, syringes, forceps, emergency blanket, etc.

Again, the list is not exhaustive but it must be comprehensive so as to cover several casualties.

Centurion offers the new RSS (Rucksack Stretcher System) designed for the media, NGOs and aid agencies in mind. The RSS – an ingenious daysack – has a built-in extendable backboard which is not

visible from the outside. The RSS has an external removable first aid roll down bumbag, containing all first aid stores, which once unzipped can fit around the waist. All other major bulky items of first aid kit are placed in the removable side pouches that, when removed from the daysack, are zipped together to form a smaller daysack which has built in shoulder straps.

This then leaves the main body of the RSS to be unzipped at the sides and laid out flat.

Inside the RSS are all the carrying handles and securing straps including head/chin securing strap. The head and foot extensions of the rigid backboard are extended depending on length of casualty. Once this is done and all straps are extended, the whole thing is turned over enabling the board to become rigid as it locks on itself. The casualty is lifted into the system, the shoulder and waist straps secure the top part of the casualty and the other built-in leg and feet straps secure the lower body.

The stretcher is now ready to be lifted. This can be done as a two-, four-or six-man lift as there are eight built-in stretcher handles along the sides.

The stretcher can also be carried by inserting two long poles through the carrying handles at the side for ease of lifting and carrying. Many media companies are using these around the world for first aid trauma bags that also double up as a stretcher. They are also ideal as a quick response bag in their vehicles, bureaus and offices.

For more information and pictures on the RSS visit [www.centurionsafety.net](http://www.centurionsafety.net) or contact us direct in the UK for more details and brochures.

## OTHER INCIDENTS

- Reports state that attackers are using larger weapons in the form of belt-fed machine guns. The attackers have realised in most cases that the smaller arms such as the AK47 lacks the initial power and accuracy when attacking targets such as vehicles, therefore these belt fed guns have bipod legs for stability and offers better accuracy and rate of fire.

# Field Report: IRAQ October 25 2004

- There have been a several occasions where the major complexes have come under attack from rockets, RPGs and mortars. This emphasises the need for emergency procedures and grab bags.
- Travel at night is still not recommended, and especially not on your own.
- Criminal activity continues to increase, from muggings, robbery, attacks and smuggling. Criminal activity is still widespread and most of it is linked to kidnapping. Thieves and locals are being offered money by potential kidnappers for information on Westerners or even “delivered” persons.
- Personnel from all countries involved in the reconstruction programme in Iraq continue to be targeted.
- Haifa Street is still regarded as out of bounds as it is highly dangerous at the moment.
- Insurgents are still disguising themselves as either police or security personnel, which puts them in a better position to act before their victim realises what is going on.
- October 31 sees the anniversary of the Battle of Badr and there is a real chance of increased violence throughout the areas.
- Places in the north such as Kirkuk, Tikrit and Mosul are seeing incidents on a daily scale, involving IEDs, well-planned attacks, mortars etc. Reports say that these incidents will become worse as the week progresses with Ramadan and the Islamic commemoration dates.
- There still seems to be a lot corruption within some of the local police.
- Letter bombs may become an increasing threat particularly to Iraqis working for the Coalition Forces.
- The usual targets such as ministries, Coalition Forces, police and their HQs are still under major threat.

## HOTELS & BUREAUS

The emphasis is on the ongoing improvement of all security wherever media, NGOs and other Western organisations are operating and residing. Hotels are being watched more and targeted, so vigilance is important.

All personnel in the hotel complexes and bureaus require to know the emergency procedures set in place and all should exercise in the drills, not just for fire but just as importantly for mortar and rocket attacks and explosions.

These places will continue to be a threat especially as Westerners are frequenting and using them as often as they are.

## SUMMARY

**As most reports are mentioning, the increase of attacks will continue especially with the November 2 elections looming in the USA.**

**Coalition Forces have been strengthened and moved to such areas like Fallujah in case of increased tensions.**

**Threats as mentioned above will continue for a very long time to come.**

**Iraq continues to be a very unsafe place to be. Those people thinking of going there need to think it through seriously, especially if you are a freelancer, aid worker or employee in the construction industry. You may not necessary have the security and back-up there to provide you with some sense of safety.**

## Centurion Risk Assessment Services