



# Field Report:

## IRAQ

May 28, 2004

Centurion Risk Assessment Services

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### GENERAL SITUATION

The situation in Iraq remains very unsafe and volatile with a high rate of IEDs, ambushes, car-jackings and kidnappings. Constant aggressive actions by Sadr militiamen and Sunni insurgents in areas of downtown Baghdad continue, especially after dark. The situation has been worsened by a resurgence of attacks by Sadr militiamen and the return of a number of Sunni insurgents who recently fled the Fallujah fighting and make their way to Baghdad. Insurgents are not being choosy about who they want to target, but emphasis is definitely on all Western personnel.

Coalition forces continue to come under attack from RPGs and small arms fire in the evenings, in and around Baghdad. There have been a number of direct warnings about attacks specifically directed against the civilian component of the CPA and other international interests.

Reports state that US forces have started to close their camps in and around Baghdad as the June 30 handover date approaches. They are in the process of handing over control to specific groups of the Iraqi authorities and the new Iraqi army. This new army is being trained by the US but is poorly equipped and ill disciplined. Recruits are also being hindered by sporadic attacks on their bases and vehicles by insurgents. This is obviously undermining the authority and demoralising the new army. The same goes for the local police, as reports state that 50% of the police force never turn up for work and 10% of those who do turned against the Coalition forces.

This has an added knock-on affect to the whole general security in the areas throughout Iraq. Some companies have thought about this already and have moved out of Iraq completely until the new government is established. They are waiting to see what the overall security will be like. As Iraq moves towards the government transfer date, it is expected that the insurgents, especially those whose commitment is to Islamic extremist groups, will try to step up attacks in an attempt to create an environment of instability, undermine the new interim government and try to exploit ethnic and sectarian divisions.

There is talk of a ceasefire in Najaf and, of course, everyone is focussing on June 30 and what will or will not happen.

Baghdad is still suffering power shortages, which only add further to Iraqis' frustrations against the Coalition forces. Movement by all foreigners in Baghdad is very risky and not advised unless heavily guarded, and even this doesn't always protect you as diplomats found out earlier this week.

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

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## CONVOY – VEHICLE SECURITY

The main highways are still under continuing threat from vehicle ambushes especially on the main routes from Amman to Baghdad, the Turkish border to Baghdad, and the route from Basra to Baghdad.

The number of personnel using armoured saloon-type cars rather than the armoured vehicles that bear resemblance to the forces' vehicles has increased, thus providing additional security as the occupants are blending in with the local inhabitants and other vehicles out on the streets. However, companies have retained their "heavy" armoured vehicle capability in case they need to make an emergency escape from their residences, and by using these types of vehicles they will increase their chances of survival in a sustained attack.

Reports state that there has been an increase in US military presence in the area between Ramadi and Baghdad due to the number of car-jackings and ambushes. This presence has obviously reduced the threats in that specific area, however the insurgents have moved their operations further up the route. As soon as the security forces depart those areas, no doubt the insurgents will return.

The main route from Amman to Baghdad has been used safely on more than a few occasions by media companies and safety advisors. They did not encounter any problems on this route on those dates and times when they travelled. However, they do emphasise that they were probably lucky as later in that day other civilian vehicles were targeted and one person was severely injured in one of those attacks.

**If using these routes do not stick to specific timings or routines, seek knowledge and advice from your safety advisor, and disclose your intended travel plans only to the people who really need to know.**

Basra has suffered numerous attacks on convoys just lately, especially on the Basra–Umm Qasr/Safwan road heading towards the Kuwait border.

**Remember: no route can be guaranteed safe as the attackers move around the areas looking for easy targets. If there are no Coalition forces in that specific area the attackers will set up and wait for the next vehicle. Stay alert, and if in doubt of what lies ahead on the road you are travelling, then turn back and attempt the route another day.**

## AIR TRAVEL

As mentioned above, due to the main routes still being under attack or cordoned off by the Coalition forces, air travel is still the main option used by most companies. The main airport road still remains vulnerable to attacks from insurgents, and these are happening all too frequently with the use of IEDs to initiate the attacks.

Coalition aircraft have again come under fire from small arms and an explosion in two locations in Baghdad.

## KIDNAPPINGS

These are continuing throughout the areas in Iraq. The assessment is that this threat will continue against members of the international community, as it does against Iraqis who have been seen collaborating with the Coalition forces.

**If you are still working in Iraq, then we strongly advise you to read the [Advice on Kidnappings](#) notes issued with the previous Field Report on April 30. If you should be unfortunate to be taken hostage, this advice will have prepared you in how best to deal with the situation, especially if you are seized and isolated from the rest of your team. You can also find this advice in the Field Reports sections of our web sites for the media and humanitarian relief communities at [www.themediasafety.net](http://www.themediasafety.net) and [www.aidsafety.net](http://www.aidsafety.net).**

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## IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices)

As always, these remain a favourite weapon of the insurgents against anyone passing the area where they are laid. IEDs still come in numerous forms and are either command detonated, radio controlled or triggered manually by their intended victim. They are becoming harder to spot, but you must remain vigilant and observe ahead of you for any signs of IEDs. **If in doubt, stop and go back or choose an alternative route.** Latest reports about the recent IED that killed security forces on approach to the “green zone” was that it was a magnetic mine that destroyed the vehicle and not, as originally believed, an RPG or IED. Therefore we have added additional information on Booby Traps and IEDS at the end of this report so that you can refer to it for further information if and when needed.

## BUILDING SECURITY

Improvements to places of work and residences continue to go ahead, especially with the approach of the impending handover date since nobody really knows how security will be affected. However, additional security equipment has been installed. Some companies have established retractable spikes to reduce drive-by shootings near their residences and offices. Locks and bars have been installed on all major entries and exits to buildings. Anti-bomb blast screening has been added to the inside of all windows and security grills to the outside to reduce the threat from grenades being thrown into the buildings.

If the Coalition forces pull out from hotel and residential areas where most Westerners reside and hand over the security to the local Iraqi police force and possibly the new Iraqi army, then security is likely to suffer. This is rather worrying to most occupants residing in these areas and hotels as it does not instil great confidence. Overall security in these areas is thought likely to lapse, resulting in insurgents being able to get closer to their intended targets and victims.

**Emergency evacuation plans, if not already in place, are highly recommended.**

If not already in use, the idea of safe houses should also be implemented. By this, we mean the sharing of residences in different areas for cases of emergencies, if under attack. Liaison between companies and individuals on this issue is strongly recommended. Most media companies already have this in place.

## OTHER INCIDENTS

Within a recent 24-hour period there were 28 hostile incidents in Baghdad alone. These involved IEDs, shootings, RPG attacks, grenades and rocket attacks.

Reports from southern Iraq state that some vehicles are using red tape placed vertically on their bumpers. This, in the past, has been used to identify the secret police, but in two recent attacks against convoys the cut-off vehicle has had this marking on its bumper. It is believed to be a warning to other locals to keep well back and out of the way. Such markings were reported to have been seen around the Safwan area. We have reported in the past that vehicles from the UN and other organisations have been stolen and then used in attacks.

**Be aware that insurgents will try to imitate other security force/police vehicles in order to give a false impression and make an attack easier.**

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A Russian company is terminating its work in Iraq after two of its employees were killed this week travelling through Baghdad.

Karbala, Amarah, Nasiriyah and Basra, where the US military bases are, are being targeted nightly by mortars and RPGs. On one night alone approximately 60-80 rounds were fired at one of these bases in Nasiriyah. The Italian unit based around that area cannot secure the area due to limited resources.

Locals are continuing to conduct recces and gather intelligence on the Coalition forces' movements. A couple of people have been detained and found to be in possession of sketches, timings, routes and information on the type of vehicles using that specific route. **This comes down to avoiding set patterns, and avoiding movement with the military as you may, unintentionally, become the target.**

An artillery shell was found on the side of the road, thought to have been ready for use in an IED incident. The shell was found to contain two chemicals that combine on impact, which then would produce Sarin gas. The shell was obviously not being used for this purpose as it is believed that the personnel trying to utilise this shell in an IED did not know of its actual contents.

If this is one shell of a stock of shells then it is worth remembering that others may be used in the near future in IEDs and if the users find out exactly what they contain then it might be worth remembering where you left your respirators and canisters!

## PERSONAL SECURITY AWARENESS

Due to recent reports and coverage of incidents involving Coalition forces and prisoners there was an incident in which approximately 200 media personnel gathered in one specific location to obtain information and footage. A mortar round landed close by -- only 300 metres from this mass media gathering. Had it landed 50 metres closer quite a few people would have sustained injuries. And if that mortar round had landed within 50 metres of the group there would have been many fatalities and injuries. The point here is: **try to avoid areas where there will be a build-up of Western personnel.** We appreciate the job of the media is to be there to report breaking news but just be aware that insurgents will also know that there may be high press interest and they, too, can set up weapon systems in minimal time and direct their fire on you.

**It is still advised that no-one moves around Baghdad at night time due to the high incidence of attacks.**

High profile locations such as hotels accommodating Westerners, embassies, police stations, etc remain high on the target list. Choke points and locations where Westerners tend to meet are also seen as highly vulnerable to hostile surveillance and targeting.

In addition, recent events in the areas of Baghdad and Mosul support earlier reports that insurgents in those areas are increasing their efforts to kill members of the international community.

*If you have any safety information or hear of events that have occurred in Iraq and feel it may assist others in their safety please e-mail them to us and state whether or not you are willing for your name to be published.*

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## VEHICLE BOMBS (Under Vehicle Improvised Explosive Device - UVIED)

### DEFENCE

The only defence against such attacks is:

- Constant vigilance
- Parking your vehicle in a secure garage/area
- Keep it in well-lit areas (if possible) if no garage is available
- Keep it away from the road where possible
- Adopt good personal security
- Get a good vehicle alarm
- Leave your vehicle in a well lit, public, and well-populated area (if possible)
- Inform the local guards of the threat of vehicle bombs so they become more vigilant

### CHECKS

You should conduct the following:

- Check your vehicle every time you want to use it
- Always lock the vehicle
- Ensure the sunroof and windows are closed and locked
- Clear out the boot/glove compartment of all unnecessary items
- Place strips of thin clear tape over the doors, boot and bonnet, (if the tape is unstuck, it is likely that someone has been tampering with the vehicle).
- If your vehicle is dusty or lightly dirty this is not a bad thing, as you will see if anyone has been tampering with your vehicle by the marks they will leave.

### IF RETURNING TO YOUR VEHICLE AFTER TIME AWAY

- Search the vehicle without touching it
- Check wheel arches, bumpers and any spoilers
- Check for false panels under the mud flaps
- Inspect the locks for any sign of tampering
- Do not use under-vehicle search mirrors as they have their limitations. Some are a waste of time and you will miss out visually. The only way to inspect the underside of your vehicle properly is by getting down on one knee and physically inspect it with the naked eye
- Check externally for any wiring that should not be there
- If parked near a wall or other vehicle, check between for wires and pressure plates
- Look for disturbed areas on the vehicle - fingerprints, etc in the dust/dirt
- Look through the windows down the inside of the doors, in the foot-wells, at the interior ceiling and the back shelf.
- Beware of fresh paint or glue
- Check for additional panels on inside of door/floor/under carpets
- Check under all seats and under the steering wheel.

### IF YOU ARE SUSPICIOUS ABOUT YOUR VEHICLE

- Move out of the area and advise any passers-by to do the same
- Try to inform your safety advisor or the Coalition forces immediately
- Keep alert and inform all passers by to get back and find an alternative route
- Remain calm
- One of the first rules of counter-terrorism is to know what is normal so you can recognise the unusual. Always be alert for suspicious-looking or unfamiliar objects or people.
- If you think an object may be a bomb, it is to be regarded as a bomb until proven otherwise by a trained technician or Coalition forces.