

## **LATEST SECURITY REPORT FROM CENTURION ADVISORS IN IRAQ**

**25th March 2004**

### **GENERAL**

Coalition forces continue to sustain considerable numbers of fatalities and injuries, the majority through IED attacks. Attacks have increased over the last few weeks, not just against Coalition forces but also any non-Iraqi organisations. There is a definite increase in foreign personnel being targeted with "point blank" shootings and pre-planned ambushes directly targeting anyone seen associating with Coalition forces.

Reports of kidnapping, vehicle hijacking and coordinated assaults are on the rise. 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.

The spate of attacks on Westerners in and around Baghdad has become a serious worry to all personnel deployed. The guarantee of personal safety is still in question especially with the impending withdrawal of Coalition forces from the immediate area.

### **FLIGHTS**

The threat to all aircraft going into Baghdad International airport remains high. Despite this, flights are continuing, although some flights are being cancelled without warning. Baggage allowance is still restricted so all additional baggage needs to travel by road.

***Remember that all types of aircraft, from the UN and civilian to the military, are seen as potential targets.***

### **CONVOY/VEHICLE SECURITY**

Ambushes continue throughout the area. These are not just in the usual places but basically anywhere where there is an opportunity to do so. Reports say that the attackers take anything that is valuable, omitting passports, credit cards and mobile phones.

In a majority of the cases the attacks are violent so utmost caution and commonsense is required in all situations. ***Do not antagonise attackers as some of the latest reports state that Westerners were arguing with attackers. This will make the situation worse, resulting in injury and possibly death.***

Off-road 4x4 sports utility vehicles (SUVs similar to GMCs) remain a favourite target. Some organisations are still using transportation that blends in with local vehicles in order to reduce the likelihood of attack. However, as attackers are aware of this tactic and through their observation, they are targeting these vehicles as well.

**Please be advised that attacks are becoming increasingly more violent, with the use of small arms and RPGs as well as IEDs. Therefore some organisations are using armoured vehicles again. They may be slow but they offer the essential protection required in these incidents. Saloon cars offer no protection against these sorts of attacks.**

The decision is always 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*).

There are reports that vehicles are still being stolen and painted to look like the aid agency, ambulances and local police vehicles, resulting in total unawareness of an attack on unsuspecting victims. Again, 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.

One of our advisors travelling from Karbala to Baghdad encountered up to 15 checkpoints on one route alone, but at the same time a majority of vehicles passing through were not stopped or checked. Security was pretty lax in this instance.

**The roads to the north continue to be a "hot spot" for armed attacks and robberies and should be avoided if possible.**

Local police lightly patrol the road from Amman to Baghdad, and armed attackers continue to

be very active throughout that area.

### **IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices)**

These continue to cause a severe problem for everyone operating in Iraq. Command-detonated explosions are a particular hazard. They are still being disguised as practically anything in order to confuse passers-by. The sophistication 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 tell-tale command wires. Such devices are being found on a daily basis throughout the regions.

Numerous caches are found daily containing all bomb-making kit, weapons and ammunition. The supply of these is common and even with all the border checks there will always be a sufficient amount entering Iraq to be used in terrorist attacks.

### **KIDNAPPING**

Kidnaps, mostly of businessmen, government officials and Iraqis assisting Coalition forces, are still taking place. The victims' families are also severely threatened in order to deter all liaison with Westerners.

### **GENERAL SECURITY**

Iraqi police are being heavily targeted resulting in many fatalities and injuries. Civilians in the immediate vicinity are also being caught in these attacks. There is no warning of these attacks and some of them are initiated by suicide bombers in vehicles.

**There is an increase in the incidence of attackers dressing like Iraqi police and setting up "dummy" road blocks. *Extreme caution is required when approaching all checkpoints. Do not do anything that will antagonise checkpoint personnel. Remember that if the checkpoint is legitimate then your immediate actions will be noticed and may seem to be suspicious to the guards, possibly resulting in shots being fired or a "cut off" squad (Coalition forces) intervening and stopping you further back down the road.***

Media crews have reported on several occasions that they have been beaten and threatened by local police and marshals in areas where there is concern about filming specific incidents or crowd trouble.

Iraqis working alongside the media are increasingly becoming targets, as reported recently when a car with armed assailants pulled up alongside the fixer's vehicle and opened up with numerous rounds, killing the person instantly.

Due to the increase of "body guards" working alongside the military and foreign diplomats, there has been an increase of these people and vehicles (all looking and dressed the same) turning up at the same location. This is sometimes unavoidable. However, these will become an easy target as most of their white Land Cruisers all have large antennas on the front making identification all too easy. If these vehicles and personnel all turn up then it may be a good idea to vacate the area in case of a surprise attack.

Travel at night is still not recommended, especially in and around Baghdad. Police are gradually taking over areas in the city but are still not entirely competent in their role. Police are still one of the main targets of the attackers.

Due to the military withdrawing to seven bases around the outskirts of Baghdad, this will mean a delay in them reacting to major incidents within the city itself.

Hilla and the immediate area is still out of bounds so do not go in to that area.

Criminal activity continues to increase in all areas, even where there is a heavy presence of security forces.

Military forces have removed the crash barriers between Fallujah and Ramadi to limit the placing of IEDs.

Personnel from all countries involved in the reconstruction programme in Iraq continue to be

targeted. There is a definite increase in these reports and ensuing fatalities. Attacks continue, from "snap" drive-by shootings to pre-planned IEDs being placed on known routes and buildings of these personnel.

### **BASRA**

The area to the south of Iraq, including Basra, has become more unstable. With the large explosion last week in the centre of Basra, in particular, tension has increased.

British forces have recently been injured in increased civil disturbances in and around the area. Numerous incidents involving IEDs have occurred. With the continuing revenge attacks and attacks on the British forces, the area remains a threat to anyone travelling through or residing in Basra.

### **OTHER INCIDENTS**

Snipers have finally come to the fore as shown in the recent incident involving two foreign workers heading to the Ministry of Power. We have mentioned in previous reports that arms caches including sniper weapons and rifle scopes have been found. With the use of long-range sniper weapons, travel and safety around the region has become more hazardous.

### **HOTELS & BUREAUS**

The emphasis is on the improvement of all security wherever media, NGOs and other Western organisations are operating and residing. Hotels are still being targeted so vigilance is important. Some of the local guards around the hotels are in need of a warning as they seem to lack concentration when on duty. A word of warning to them may not go a miss especially as the attacks have increased.

### **TRAINING – SAFETY AWARENESS**

There is still a lack of safety and security within some of the organisations deploying to Iraq. Training in awareness of what is happening is essential. With the increase in the number of civilian organisations being awarded contracts throughout Iraq, they are also being rewarded with injuries and fatalities, as they are not ensuring safety awareness training prior to deployment.

Organisations are deploying their staff to Iraq without body armour (either covert or overt), without first aid kits, and worst of all without any awareness training. It does not help either those already in situ or the Coalition forces if personnel arrive without a clue as to what is going on and without the necessary safety equipment.

Organisations sending people to Iraq without proper safety and awareness training may believe it is a cheaper option in the short term but long term could prove fatal.

All organisations have a responsibility to provide adequate safety awareness training and safety equipment to all their staff before deploying them to places like Iraq.

### **FIRST AID TRAINING**

This is a definite must for all personnel deploying and deployed in Iraq. With the increase in attacks, personnel can no longer rely on the emergency services reaching them in time if injuries are serious. 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. Gone are the days when you could rely on someone else to administer first aid to your colleagues. All personnel, including locally hired staff, employed by organisations should be well trained in the use of the first aid kits.

### **SUMMARY**

All personnel deploying to Iraq must be briefed fully on the incidents and how dangerous Iraq has become. Many people from many different organisations have appeared in Baghdad not realising how bad the situation actually is, resulting in too many fatalities.

Threats and attacks are still made against Iraqi nationals working for the CPA, police, NGOs, media, embassies, diplomats, hospitals and workers, contractors, civilian aircraft, national staff, hotels and politicians – basically anyone not assisting in the attacks on Coalition forces.

***No one is bullet proof. Body armour jackets need to worn in any situation in which it is deemed necessary. Radios should be carried at all times, as good communications are essential.***

***When safety advisors give advice it is given for good safety reasons, not to make life difficult for those they are there to help.***

***IMPORTANT: General awareness should remain to see if anyone is observing, videoing or photographing their location, whether it be a hotel or bureau or individuals. If this is the case, it is of paramount importance that such sightings be reported to Coalition forces or advisors.***

***Many thanks to Centurion advisors and other sources in Iraq for providing information for this Field Report.***