

LATEST SECURITY REPORT FROM CENTURION ADVISORS IN IRAQ

27 February 2004

GENERAL

Coalition forces and civilians continue to sustain considerable numbers of fatalities and injuries. Attacks have increased over the last few weeks, not just against Coalition forces but also any non-Iraqi organisation.

Due to the large amount of external contract workers employed in Iraq the targeting of innocent victims is becoming easier as there are now more to choose from. Incidents include kidnapping, vehicle hijacking and coordinated assaults with small arms fire and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Small arms fire is still backed up by RPGs.

The main road between the city and the airport remains a threat to all Westerners travelling in that area. While in the past most attacks were against Coalition forces vehicles, targets now also include any vehicle suspected of carrying Westerners or Iraqis assisting Coalition forces.

Security in Baghdad has not improved since the last report. There is still a marked rise in combat indicators, information collecting and targeting that have all the hallmarks of likely future attacks.

Central Baghdad is still open to regular attacks by day as well as night. Mortar attacks still occur on different targets all round the city.

Tensions remain high on both sides throughout Iraq.

There are continuing reports in the north from the Kurds informing all NGOs, Westerners and civilian contract workers to leave the area including Mosul, Kirkuk and Erbil. It is believed that there may be a massive uprising that could lead to a civil war. Differing reports emerge from people travelling through that area. **It is worth keeping a close eye on the situation.**

There have been another couple of warnings of intended attacks on hotels where Westerners are residing.

FLIGHTS/AIRPORT

The international airport in Baghdad is still a very dangerous area. Generally, attacks are on the increase. It has been reported that the attackers are using SS30 and SS40 rocket systems (of which they have large numbers), as these were supplied to Iraq in the 1980s.

The threat to all military and civilian aircraft arriving at and departing from the airport is still very high, with reports of rounds striking aircraft on approach.

CONVOY/VEHICLE SECURITY

Ambushes continue in the usual areas. However, due to other incidents such as IEDs, the presence of Coalition forces in certain areas has had the effect of reducing some potential attacks. Attackers tend not to pounce until the forces have left those areas.

Even with daily reports reaching the Coalition forces the main areas in question are still not patrolled on a regular basis.

There have been many vehicle hijackings on the highway between An Nasiriyah and Safwan in the south. No warnings are given. The attackers just open fire on vehicles in order to make them stop. A contractor's vehicle was fired on and all occupants on board were wounded. The attackers even kidnapped two of them. Those two people are still missing, and the area remains highly dangerous.

The other area that is listed as to '**STAY OUT**' of is the Al Mahmudiyah to Al Hilla road. This is the area where media personnel were attacked recently and still remains a high attack area.

When travelling, all organisations are advised to alternate their choice of vehicles if and when possible, adding to the 'breaking of routine' and not 'setting a pattern' even on a

daily basis.

IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices)

There is a growing trend of attackers recruiting youngsters to throw drink cans at the security forces. These cans contain small but effective IEDs. There is also evidence that the IEDs are still being tied to lamp posts and underneath drain covers.

As always these continue to cause severe problems for everyone operating in Iraq.

Command-detonated explosions are a particular growing hazard. They are disguised as anything from garbage, rocks and drink cans to disused vehicles. They are still being placed on major installations such as railway lines, roads, pipelines and culverts. They are being used extensively on known Coalition forces routes and areas of known designation.

The sophistication of IEDs has improved and will continue to improve as weeks go by. Even though most IEDs have been detonated by command wires, the trend is leaning more to detonating them remotely by the use of cell phones, pagers and even radio controlled devices such as those used for model cars, etc.

Devices are still being found on a daily basis, and targets appear to be varied but mainly aimed at police forces and bases, Coalition forces and anyone seen associated with the Coalition forces in general.

A pipeline was blown up by the use of an IED north of Mussayib and severe damage was reported.

Secondary devices are constantly being used at the scene of the majority of explosions. These are planted to kill follow-up personnel, rescue workers and anyone else in the immediate vicinity. The attackers would have worked out where the security forces would place the initial cordon and then situate their secondary IED as close to that area as possible to cause maximum casualties.

There is no real answer to this secondary explosion tactic apart from taking extreme caution when approaching the scene with your crew. Coalition forces will also be more alert, suspicious and nervous as other civilian vehicles approach, especially ones similar to those being used by news organisations.

Not all vehicle explosive devices work. A council member whose car would not start inspected his vehicle and noticed that an IED had been placed under the bonnet.

KIDNAPPING

All Westerners, especially businessmen working in the reconstruction of Iraq and the international media, remain at high risk of being kidnapped. Kidnapping is a daily hazard right across Iraq even for local people. Children have been snatched for a ransom of as little as \$50.

GENERAL SECURITY

Drive-by shootings continue throughout the main areas where Coalition forces are concentrated.

Weapons and ammunition caches are still being reported with finds including night vision goggles, AK47s, pistols, sniper weapons, surface to air missiles, RPGs, ammunition varying from artillery shells to small arms, rifle grenades, radios, military maps, uniforms, binoculars, large quantities of money, heavy machine guns, explosives, detonating cord, mortars and rounds and vehicles primed ready for attacks for use by suicide bombers.

Numerous vehicles of all types and models are being used in shootings, attempted robberies, grenade attacks and IEDs.

OTHER INCIDENTS

Numerous mass graves have been found recently. Coalition forces report there are 263 mass graves in Iraq, including 40 that contained evidence of systematic killings. Extreme caution

and vigilance is required at these sites in case of impending attacks or IEDs.

An American print media organisation operating in Baghdad noticed an increase in surveillance on its bureau and personnel by Iraqis. This was a serious incident and was reported to the security forces with as much information about the suspects and vehicle as possible. **The organisation did the right thing by packing up and moving to a more secure area.**

An act of sabotage was reported on a military cargo train after it was derailed near Rumaylah. Some 50 looters with 9 vehicles, 2 motorbikes and 2 trucks were reported to have looted three railcars. All the looters carried small arms.

The Deputy Police Chief of the West Baghdad HQ was assassinated in a drive-by shooting at the same time as two other police officials were assassinated at a different police station at Al Zayouna.

In Fallujah, 30 to 40 attackers conducted a deliberate attack on the police station, resulting in numerous casualties on both sides.

SUMMARY

Our advisors have been giving local fixers, drivers, etc training in driving skills, evasive driving techniques, first aid, general awareness security and communications security. **Training should be given to all people employed by such organisations operating in Iraq, especially if Iraqis are driving you and working alongside you. You never know, their first aid training may save your life.**

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