

LATEST SECURITY REPORT FROM CENTURION ADVISORS IN IRAQ

3 February 2004

GENERAL

The primary threats in Iraq remain from former regime loyalists and groups of Islamic extremists. Both continue to adapt their tactics in reaction to the security measures implemented and change them frequently. In general the attacks, especially on Coalition forces, have become more coordinated and effective.

Attacks on civilians and contract personnel also remain on the increase. Numerous attacks recently have been directly against people employed or wishing to be employed by Coalition forces. They have caused many fatalities and serious injuries, and have involved attacks from car bombs and suicide bombers.

The attacks continue to be from improvised command-detonated "daisy linked" explosive devices or mortars backed up with RPGs and small arms fire.

There seems to be an increase in civilians informing Coalition forces of hidden caches and Iraqis hiding weapons and munitions in their houses. These have resulted in numerous raids uncovering hundreds of weapons and munitions.

Intelligence sources inform us that there are now organisations in Iraq concentrating on taking individuals hostage.

CONVOY – VEHICLE SECURITY

With the latest incident involving media personnel in a vehicle ambush south of Baghdad still high in the news, all of us at Centurion send our sincere condolences to the families and colleagues of the journalists who have lost their lives.

Armed hijackings are still reported on the usual route between Baghdad and Amman, usually involving the same vehicles that have on many occasions been reported for other attacks not just on lone vehicles but convoys in general. In most recent cases, in the area south of Baghdad, attacks have occurred on a daily basis resulting in fatalities and severe injury among civilians. These types of areas should be avoided at all costs until Coalition force security measures improve.

Several convoys, both civilian and military, have been attacked by the normal means of IEDs followed by RPG rounds and small arms fire, usually from AK47s.

A blue pick-up truck and an orange and white Passat have been reported at numerous incidents where attacks on security forces have taken place.

Trucks have been stolen on numerous occasions resulting in blankets, stereos, money (large amounts) jackets and numerous foreign currencies being taken. The thieves said that the robberies were "tax for Saddam".

Numerous vehicles ranging from saloons, taxis and pick-ups have been stolen and kitted out with IEDs ready for deployment against Coalition forces.

Security forces were caught in an IED ambush and reports said that a red Volkswagen Passat - number plate: 238066 - fled the area.

A contractors convoy was caught in an ambush by a black BMW and a silver Mercedes south of Tikrit. These vehicles have been reported on numerous occasions.

A civilian bus hit a mine causing the deaths of three local personnel.

A contractor convoy travelling north from Baghdad came under attack from three men in a maroon car that had been following the convoy for some time.

AIR TRAVEL

Potential attacks on all aircraft including fixed wing and helicopters continue with failures apparently due to badly constructed weapon systems or even from firer's error. However, they do continue to be a major threat to internal flights.

These attacks on aircraft are random so the decision to fly to speed insertion in to and out of Baghdad is down to the individual's personal risk assessment, taking into account the alternative of travel by road which could involve ambushes/robbery and also potential injury to all passengers travelling from Jordan to Baghdad.

A 747 crew reported they were fired on after take-off by a surface to air missile. Reports stated a blue and white truck was seen leaving the area.

A helicopter was hit by a SAM near Habbaniyah.

A SAM attack was reported on an aircraft two to three miles south of Baghdad airport.

Small arms fire is reported on a daily basis firing on any aircraft around the airport region and even when the targeted aircraft is not in range.

The road to and from the airport is still subject to attack. Recently there were three large explosions resulting in numerous injuries. Convoys are still attacked carrying supplies coming in by air. Minibuses have been stopped and passengers relieved of their possessions including money, cameras, watches and other personal valuable. The attackers are reluctant to take mobile phones and passports, obviously because they can be traced.

Aircraft on internal flights have limited space and it seems the media do not have the same priority on booking seats as NGOs and aid agency staff. **Contingency plans for travel should be set in place in case air travel from Amman to Baghdad is not possible.**

DEMONSTRATIONS

Numerous demonstrations have occurred in most towns especially in Baghdad. These range from out of work Iraqis to people intent on causing disturbance between Coalition forces and locals. **Utmost caution is required in filming or travelling through any area of potential trouble. If reporting in these circumstances you must be aware of your surroundings as well as the mood change usually incited by certain individuals within the crowd. In disturbances the decision to wear some form of protective jacket is important. Low profile/covert low velocity body armour which can be worn under an outer garment is better than none at all. This will provide protection against small arms fire but just as importantly attacks from items such as batons, metal rods, etc.**

A large demonstration consisting of approximately 1,000 people formed at the city hall in Al Kut with people demanding food, jobs, fuel and money. Shots and grenade explosions were heard in the immediate vicinity.

There have been six separate reports of armed Iraqis carrying AK47s in the middle of demonstrations waiting for targets of opportunity such as Coalition forces. This way, once they fire their weapon they can disappear into the crowd.

LOCAL ASSISTANCE

There is a definite increase of Iraqis assisting Coalition forces in unearthing caches of weapons and munitions and also informing the security forces about people opposed to the CPA.

The weapons caches reported by civilians include mortars, SAMs, RPGs, assorted small arms and thousands of rounds, GPS devices loaded with waypoints set as possible potential targets, vehicles kitted out for IEDs and mortar firing posts, mortars, mortar rounds, radios, grenades, anti-tank weapons, SIM cards for sat-phones, ID cards, detonator cord, various literature, chemical warfare equipment, TNT, flares, body armour, Sangar ground to air

missiles, blasting caps, IED/bomb making equipment including batteries, circuit boards and spools of wire, tank rounds, bomb fuses, artillery rounds, sniper scopes, atropine injectors, PE-4, propellant sticks, illumination rifle grenades, 50 signal mines, bayonets, millions of old dinars, C-4 explosives, shotguns and home-made rocket launchers.

IEDs (Improved Explosive Devices)

IEDs continue to take lives of civilians as well as security forces. They are still being hidden alongside roadsides in numerous shapes and disguises. **Utmost vigilance is required. Do not take anything for granted in any shape or form or even attractive items – leave them all alone.**

Mine attacks are on the increase again following a discovery of 84 anti-tank mines and 42 anti-personnel mines. These are used in-conjunction with IEDs alongside the roads or main routes such as bridges.

These devices are planted in the most unusual places. A military patrol found an IED consisting of a 155mm artillery shell concealed within a tree limb which was rigged with a pager. Another IED was found inside a carcass of a dead dog. IEDs have been found surrounded by concrete ready to be used in potential attacks.

A small green car filled with artillery rounds and grenades detonated near Baqubah, as well as an Iraqi suspect being detained.

Numerous IEDs made from SA6 warheads have been discovered.

With the use of secondary devices it is worth remembering that they are designed and placed to hit the follow-up security forces and rescue workers. They are placed to cause maximum fatalities and destruction. These are used worldwide in numerous organisations and the ones designed and being used in Iraq will become more sophisticated and effective as the days pass.

OTHER INCIDENTS

There have been too many assorted incidents over the last period to report or list. Those mentioned below are only a very small percentage of these, and they are occurring daily throughout Iraq.

- Hand grenade attacks continue on isolated open vehicles. Grenades are also thrown from people in crowd disorders.
- An Iraqi police chief was murdered by unknown gunmen near Mussayib in a drive-by shooting.
- All types and models of vehicles are being used in drive-by shootings from buses to trucks to saloon cars.
- Many cases of illegal fuel smuggling have been reported throughout the country. Fuel is being smuggled in everything from barrels to large trucks and water carriers and a van with 300 gallons on board.
- Two gunmen shot and wounded the President of the Al Adi Neighbourhood Advisory Council.
- Local police detained an American who said he was a member of the press but he could not produce any credentials to substantiate his claim. Numerous press passes and ID cards have been stolen, usually in ambushes on the main highways. **If your pass is stolen or lost it is strongly urged that you report it to one of our advisors or the local military forces.**
- A train was stopped, set on fire and looted of its contents.
- A train was derailed near Al-Basrah and equipment was stolen.

- Many police stations are being targeted with RPGs and small arms fire.
- There is no longer a curfew in Baghdad, therefore it is now easier for insurgents and criminals to move around at night.
- An RPG round was fired on a police station near Mosul. Three suspects were seen driving away in a gold Opel.
- Thirty-six people were seriously injured and four were killed when a man detonated explosives packed around his body near a mosque near Baqubah.
- Hand grenades are frequently tossed into open vehicles from bridges and buildings especially in built-up areas, resulting in injury and sometimes death to the local population.
- A police station was broken in to and weapons and ammunition were stolen.
- The Belad police station was attacked by rockets fired from a stationary pushcart. A white minibus with a yellow stripe was observed leaving the site after the explosions.

On a Personal Note

The following was sent to Centurion by an individual, (for which we thank you for your correspondence and cooperation), in assisting and improving the safety of all foreign nationals and locals working and living in Iraq.

"Please be informed that an NGO in Baghdad has reported that in mid January a white Datsun car, model 1979, showed up at their office and their apartments. The guards at the office asked it to stop and it did not and warning shots were fired. The car fled the scene. Soon after, the same vehicle was seen outside the NGO apartments and the guards responded in the same manner.

"This is the second time that a white Datsun has appeared around their office area, but the first time at the apartments. The NGOs believe they are attempting to steal vehicles. In the perpetrators' car there were three people. All NGOs are advised to keep your guards vigilant, as it was proven on many times and especially in this case the guards were efficient enough to respond in the proper manner given the circumstance.

"All personnel should consider the option of 'are we being followed, if so by whom, vehicle colour type, how often, how many personnel in vehicle, descriptions if possible."

Vigilance is of paramount importance to everyone in Iraq as these types of "visits" could be more than possible vehicle thefts; they could lead to attacks on offices and accommodation.

SECURITY NOTES

Our advisors have been involved in the following safety and security amendments and improvements. These are only a selection of a long list of improvements to the bureaus/residences, etc that the advisors are assisting in:

- * Improved defences around residences and bureaus.
- * Sentry positions sandbagged.
- * New locks on all gates, doors and windows.
- * Sentry positions on roof.
- * Radios for all sentries.
- * Uniform (include warm clothing for sentries)
- * Recording of all personnel visiting.
- * Escape routes established.
- * Liaison with Coalition forces and local police.
- * Orders produced in association with CPA rules and regulations.
- * Orders for sentries/armed personnel in English and Arabic.
- * Inclement weather shelters for local guards.
- * First aid kits re-vamped and located in all vehicles and key points in offices and residences.
- * New communications sets for crews and security staff, etc.

- * Updated system for all drivers and vehicles.
- * Liaison with US intelligence services.
- * Close Circuit TV (CCTV) for all dead ground areas around offices and residences.

PERSONAL SECURITY AWARENESS

When living in this environment it is necessary to follow a few basic rules so that everyone remains as secure and as safe as possible. The following advice is designed to make your life safer, not more difficult.

Hotel:

- * When in your room, keep the door locked.
- * Hide all valuables and cash.
- * Keep body armour and helmet close at hand.
- * Have a torch by the side of your bed.
- * Keep a crash bag packed.
- * Keep your curtains drawn, especially in the evenings.
- * In an evacuation, do not start to pack personal gear, grab your crash bag, body armour and helmet and move to the muster point or emergency point.
- * Report anything suspicious, no matter how trivial it may seem.
- * Familiarise yourself with the route to the emergency/muster point.

Vehicles:

- * Have a safety advisor with you at all times.
- * Login and out of bureaus.
- * Check the threat assessment of the intended destination.
- * Take a sat-phone and radio.
- * Check the vehicle internally and externally before opening the doors.
- * Ensure driver knows where he is going.
- * Travel with the doors locked.
- * Keep body armour between you and the door (if not already wearing it).
- * Use extreme caution when approaching checkpoints.
- * Use extreme caution when approaching a military convoy and keep your distance.
- * Try to vary routes whenever possible.

Awareness:

- * Do not become complacent about your surroundings.
- * Avoid setting patterns.
- * Avoid cafes, restaurants and places frequented by other Westerners.
- * Do not wear clothing with media logos.
- * Do not discuss plans in local places.
- * Be sensitive to local customs and habits.
- * Always be observant for people following you either on foot or in vehicles.
- * Always expect the unexpected.
- * If it looks suspicious, it probably is.
- * When visiting bomb threat areas, always be aware of secondary devices, if possible film and report from a distance.
- * Do not pick up any attractive item unless you have just dropped it – it could have been turned into an IED.
- * Do not take any unnecessary risks.
- * Plan all news gathering operations and ask your advisor for input – DON'T BE PROUD!

SUMMARY

With ongoing attacks on all Coalition forces and anyone from the Western world including locals seen assisting and being employed by the media the incidents have not decreased.

With the increasing attacks on the known stretches of highway it is seriously worth considering NOT using those routes but seeking alternatives where possible.

All personnel deploying or deployed in Iraq should be medically trained and conversant with all items in the first aid kits carried.

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

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