

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

**August 27, 2003**

### **GENERAL**

The nature and intensity of recent security incidents in Iraq gives great cause for concern.

A series of unrelated incidents in Baghdad and in the North and Western regions indicates a definite increase in the use of all forms of weaponry against coalition forces and Westerners operating in Iraq. Daily attacks are conducted against coalition forces and are happening more frequently in random fashion, using a variety of techniques.

The primary threat remains from attacks using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Although they are designed to injure or kill coalition forces they are also causing a major threat to all media, aid agencies and business personnel throughout Iraq.

Most reports state the IED attacks are being supported by the use of RPGs and small arms.

There are reports that hundreds of Islamic militants have returned to Iraq since the end of the war intent on planning to conduct major terrorist attacks.

The situation in Basra remains tense. It is reported that more demonstrations and violence are expected as the electricity has not really improved in Basra and fuel supply is tentative, especially cooking gas required for homes. There seem to be more pictures of Saddam Hussein reappearing in and around Basra.

The main areas of concern on increasing security are Ramadi, Fallujah and Baquabah, basically an area of 150 km around Baghdad.

The number of incidents around Mosul is growing, while the region between Baghdad and Hilla remains the scene of repeated security incidents.

Karbala has also seen a resurgence of tension.

The region of Kut is still said to be tense following various criminal-related incidents.

Continued civil disturbances are reported in Diwaniya, with reports of local government offices being attacked and looted.

Shops are continuing to close in Baghdad earlier than usual due to the threat of bombings being used against Westerners.

### **CONVOY – VEHICLE SECURITY**

Armed hijackings are reported daily especially on the usual route between Baghdad and Amman. In one case up to 18 vehicles were reported to have been stopped and robbed. There have been other attacks on other vehicles but the victims have not made reports.

A large convoy of 20 cars was robbed 30 km from the Jordanian border. Two vehicles containing armed attackers who blocked the whole road stopped the convoy. The vehicles were a Nissan pick-up and a Toyota 4x4 – a total of eight occupants with AK47s and pistols. No injuries were reported; all they wanted to do was rob the convoy of mobiles, a laptop and money.

The Chief of Police was ambushed by two cars full of gunmen near his home north of Baghdad and in the gun battle that followed 14 people were wounded and two killed. The Police Chief was shot twice in his leg.

Two clergymen were stopped at gunpoint and robbed of all their possessions on the road from Amman to Baghdad.

Police have reported that the number one crime in Iraq at present is the theft of vehicles,

mostly for use in drive-by shootings or for convoy attacks.

Gunmen who surprise drivers and passengers, especially at traffic lights and on scheduled routes, are stealing hundreds of vehicles each week. Use of such tactics of even attacking people outside their homes and garages is becoming more common.

Many vehicles have been stolen from near the area of Canal Hotel in Baghdad where a lot of NGOs/UN staff stay.

There seems to be an increase of crowds demonstrating on the roads north of Diwaniya as they establish road blocks out of anything that happens to be in the vicinity, forcing vehicles to turn around and go back the way they came. Vehicles that do not obey such commands are having their windows smashed by iron bars and rocks.

Stone throwers on the way to Safwan attacked a UN convoy. No injuries were reported.

A 12-vehicle convoy was stopped on the Baghdad–Amman road. The apparently very well organised attackers managed to get away with over \$20,000 worth of equipment.

There was an attempted car-jacking involving an NGO's 4x4 jeep in Baghdad recently, the attackers firing several shots. No injuries were reported as the driver managed to conduct evasive driving techniques and get away. This incident emphasises that any vehicle can become a target. It was reported after this incident that the attackers' vehicle had been noticed observing the NGO vehicle days before the attack.

**It is important that everyone who has a vehicle ensures that every window and door is locked even when away from the vehicle for a short period of time. Where possible ensure vehicles are under security and cover at night if possible.**

Concern from all advisors in Baghdad is the increasing rate of freelance “hangers on”, attaching themselves to the end of organised convoys, placing more pressure on the advisors to look out for them. Once on the road the “hangers on” start to upset the routine of convoy security by trying to get in front as it is the rear vehicles that normally get hit in attacks.

If you are a freelancer thinking about going to Iraq (or even a freelancer already in Iraq), speak to a Centurion advisor. They will include you in the convoy, releasing the pressure on yourself and the whole safety of the convoy.

There seem to be too many “rogue” people in and around Baghdad conducting their business without concern for the safety of themselves and especially no concern for safety for the media and aid teams already working in the areas. If you are one of these people, stop and think about what you are doing.

Armoured vehicles still remain the means of transport for protection. Agreed, they are slower but the benefits they provide in protection far outweigh any soft-skinned vehicle.

**Do not become the next target, be observant, report anything suspicious, avoid set routes and routines, employ the use of anti-surveillance procedures. If in doubt ask the Centurion advisors on the ground for advice about this.**

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

The use of IEDs is becoming more widespread, especially in the use of remote-controlled devices that limit the danger to attackers. There have been a number of grenade/IED attacks all over Baghdad, all near hotels where the media, aid agency and NGO staff are staying.

These still seem to be the ideal weapon of choice for attacks against coalition forces in and around Baghdad. These incidents are rising every day. Attackers are becoming more sophisticated and mortars are being used more frequently.

Targets such as pipelines and essential infrastructure installations like electricity compounds are under threat and some have already been attacked over the last week.

Three IEDs were used in the same attack when a convoy carrying US forces passed by. Several injuries and one death were reported.

**Coalition forces have adopted a new debussing procedure: they check the immediate area around the vehicle prior to debussing when reacting to an incident. The advice is that all media, aid agency staff and business personnel do the same, remembering that an IED may have been hidden to hit the coalition forces but you may be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Again, increased awareness should be in force. If in doubt about what to look for relating to signs of IEDs speak to the Centurion advisors in Baghdad and Basra.**

It was reported that an anti-tank mine exploded under an armoured vehicle which was then followed up by an RPG attack. Attackers have even fired RPGs at main battle tanks hoping for a result.

An anti-tank mine was discovered and detonated after it was placed to hit a military convoy. This was backed up by an IED.

An IED disguised as a water bottle was thrown at the US military; no casualties were reported.

An IED was tied to a lamp post in Basra but discovered prior to detonation.

An IED was found on the main road to the airport (Al-Raseed Road) in Baghdad.

Mortars are being set up near road junctions and detonated by command cord by Iraqis trying to hit US vehicles. If you are travelling with the US military be aware of these situations and wear the correct body armour and helmets.

An American film crew was set upon while filming a grenade attack in the city. The attackers took their frustration out on the crewmembers as they were Americans, shouting that the US military had caused this due to them killing an Iraqi who threw the grenade. This sort of thing will happen time after time especially as these incidents become more common so be aware of impending trouble especially if an Iraqi is killed or injured. **While you are getting the footage think about escape routes and minimise the time you spend in any one area.**

For more detailed information about IEDs please refer to past reports on the The Media Safety Net.

## **FLIGHTS**

According to reports permission has been granted from the Iraqi Interim Council for seven international airlines to operate flights in and out of Iraq starting shortly. These look as if they will be flying into Basra. One of the airlines is British Airways, which received permission from the US-led administration in Iraq. BA will plan to fly twice a week via Kuwait to Basra if security measures are in force.

The flight into Baghdad via Beirut seems to be working but flights can vary in timings and cancellations at short notice can be expected.

## **PPE (Personal Protective Equipment - Body Armour)**

Emphasis needs to be directed at the correct use of body armour. We all appreciate that it is hot and some jackets, particularly old versions, are cumbersome and too heavy, but people are sometimes forgetting to use them. **If you decide not to wear the protective equipment initially at incidents, it is imperative that it is at least close-by and ready to use if the scenario and threat changes.**

If you are unsure what level of protection your body armour can give you seek out the Centurion advisor for advice.

A worrying factor is the increasing number of incidents where camera crews are being mistaken for attackers shouldering RPGs. Remember that from 100 metres away and further,

a cameraperson looks like an attacker with an RPG. As the distance increases so the similarities between camera and RPG increase. This is especially true if operating around coalition bases. If in doubt speak to the forces providing security, inform them where you will be filming from and what you are filming. The more soldiers you inform the less likely they will mistake you as an attacker with an RPG.

If coalition forces tell you to leave the area do so, otherwise you may become a victim if caught with a crowd.

**It needs to be emphasised that any soldier inside a tank or armoured vehicle has limited vision on who or what the target could be. If they are in doubt they will shoot first and clear the mess up diplomatically later. If in doubt about your security in and around coalition forces then re-think your plan. Is it worth your being seen as a potential target or is it worth getting back into your vehicle and moving off?**

## **OTHER INCIDENTS**

- Coalition forces discovered a supply of surface to air missiles as well as numerous other arms dumps including small arms and various munitions.
- Coalition forces have been attacked on numerous occasions by RPGs over the last week.
- A large group of Iraqis demonstrated in front of the Governorate office – they looted the offices of the mayor and set numerous vehicles on fire.
- Iraqi gunmen in a drive-by shooting attacked a coalition base. The attackers were in a four-door saloon; use of small arms was reported.
- Numerous coalition forces are being attacked daily by RPGs, IEDs, small arms fire and grenades. Numerous coalition forces have been injured.
- A US base was attacked by RPGs and mortars – no injuries reported.
- Two soldiers from the Ministry of Health were shot and wounded north of Mosul.
- A single assailant armed with an RPG attacked the power plant north of Mosul.
- There is still no more information regarding the perpetrators of the recent attack on the UN complex. The motivation behind the attack still remains unclear and the FBI is still conducting investigations.
- Police currently providing static duties will be replaced by personnel from the newly formed Facility Protection Services Force (FPSF).
- A parcel containing two hand grenades was found near a pipeline and was diffused by coalition forces.
- A military convoy was attacked by small arms and petrol bombs were thrown resulting in a vehicle being totally burnt out. A suspect was arrested and his house immediately searched resulting in the discovery of small arms and materials to construct IEDs.
- Numerous grenades have been thrown at US convoys in and around Baghdad.
- A US soldier returned fire into a crowd, hitting and killing an Iraqi assailant and narrowly missing a cameraman's head. This is a lesson we should all be aware of when filming amongst crowds – inevitably there will be gunfire from both sides so utmost caution is needed not to become a victim whilst filming and reporting. Straight after this attack the other soldiers trained their weapons on the media crews in the area who were trying to film the incident.
- Coalition forces shot dead two gun runners/dealers near Tikrit who were trying to smuggle weapons south.

- There was an attack on an Iraqi jail by mortars, killing nine people and wounding 64.
- Two surface to air missiles were fired at a Chinook helicopter in Tikrit area; no casualties were reported.
- Another two missiles were found nine km from Baghdad airport (this type of ground to air missile has a 15 km range). They were discovered mounted with radar technology and ready to fire.
- Vehicles are being stoned more frequently. This is believed to be down to resentment at the lack of water, fuel and electricity that was promised and as yet is still to be seen.
- The owner and local security staff had to fight off a local crowd as they tried to ransack his hotel. Some of the local guards fired down on to the crowd from the rooftop.
- Two CPA employees in civilian attire were shot and wounded in an assassination attempt as they walked out of a restaurant in Baghdad in broad daylight. **Everyone working in Iraq should take note of this as it could add to problems regarding personal safety and security. It is believed that this is the first direct assassination attempt on international staff in this manner.**
- The local doctor at the mortuary is concerned about the number of suspicious deaths - 40 each day!

## **HOTELS**

Coalition forces are in the process of improving security in and around the Palestine and Sheraton hotels, diverting all traffic. They will be using four metre concrete walls similar to those in place around the Al Rashid hotel. The Al Hamra hotel as well as the Flowers hotel have many expats staying there as well as media, and the police and coalition forces regularly patrol past these buildings. They also employ armed local security guards carrying AK47s. These hotels are not 100% secure but a deterrent is in place and provides sensible protection in a respectable district where the locals are happy to have the business.

## **SUMMARY**

Most of Baghdad and surrounding areas in Iraq remain dangerous with increasing attacks on forces and minor attacks on Westerners. The overall trend observed is that of a deterioration of the security environment in the country.

**The situation throughout Iraq, especially in and around Baghdad and Basra, is changing frequently. All Westerners, media, NGOs and aid agency staff need to be on the alert for any potential incident. These incidents occur without any warning at all. Be prepared, have the right protection equipment, carry and know how to use first aid kits and ensure all of your crew know how to administer first aid.**

The security situation is still high to all in situ who are not Iraqi, however the danger and threats are also to the local fixers and drivers employed by outside companies who also require sufficient training in awareness, driving and first aid skills.

Many incidents are not making the headlines – most of them are not being reported at all by the forces involved as they are possibly trying to minimise the threats and play down the overall threat to all involved in working in Iraq.

The danger of media and aid agency staff accidentally being injured by coalition forces has to be emphasised again since the recent killing of the Reuters cameraman working near US forces. It is imperative to assess the situation that you are going into, whether it is a convoy or providing aid to local villages.

**Think about the whole picture: what if this happens? What if we get attacked? Should I be wearing body armour? What if we become provoked? How will we deal with the**

**situation? What first aid kit do we have? Do we have an escape route? Are the vehicles in good order?**

**It is strongly recommended that everyone take strict security measures, respect curfew times in force and road movement and security planning and preparedness by the advisors.**

Be aware at all times of potential hostile surveillance on your vehicles, bureaus and accommodation buildings. Terrorists and armed attackers rarely make attacks or conduct potential operations without a period of observation and surveillance prior to the attack. The mode of attacks at present has the hallmarks of well-planned ambushes and isolated attacks. Make everyone aware of the concerns for safety.

Some media crews and aid agency staff are still working in Iraq without advisors. These advisors not only provide security and watch people's backs while the media and aid agency staff go about their work, they are also there to provide on-site first aid training, general awareness training and driving advice to local fixers, etc.

Centurion advisors, as well as being in Iraq, have been on assignment with media crews, NGOs and aid agency staff in danger zones worldwide including Afghanistan, the Middle East, the Balkans and Asia. Companies will continue to use them as they are proving to be of a huge benefit to the people on the ground. If you require more information about the use of Centurion advisors or on the training we provide and how we may be able to assist you then please contact us at the numbers below.

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