

Iraq security field report - July 14

Attacks on US forces are still going on but the Americans have been responding to these attacks much quicker than before and have had several kills this week. Even so, a US convoy was seriously hit last night in Baghdad. There are still problems on the Jordan-to-Baghdad road and there have been hijackings and deaths on the Baghdad-to-Kuwait road.

Vehicles - Tinted Windows

US forces have issued a warning that from 20 July 2003 all darkened vehicle windows are banned and such vehicles will be confiscated if black windows are not removed. Our advisors in Baghdad are unsure how this will be enforced but most companies operating there have vehicles with blacked-out glass, including the armoured cars. If US forces confiscate these vehicles some media companies will be without transport.

Armed Attack

A grey 7 series BMW number NE0426 or 246 containing 4 men (two young and two old) dressed in Western-type clothes attempted to stop a media convoy en route to Jordan. This car is the one believed to be involved in several other robberies involving media and NGOs. This information was passed on to the American forces.

Forged Press Passes

Two Iraqi men turned up at a large US media company office in the Palestine Hotel with false press passes. They said they were to start work as drivers for the company on 15 July and they had purchased the jobs from a man on the street who was recruiting men for jobs with the media. They said they had paid \$100 to the man and just called in to see what was expected of them and what time they should turn up for work. The cards bore their photos and were pretty good.

Basra

Al-Mirbed Hotel in Basra has secure parking and armed guards. However our advisors saw several of the British armed guards who were working for this company at the hotel. One of them was trying to unload his side arm in the lobby, and making a poor job of it (this is bad weapon safety procedure – it should always be done outside in a safe area). Be aware if staying in residences such as hotels that have armed security: the security may look good but the operatives carrying and using the weapons may be poorly trained, so the risk of injury could come from them through carelessness and not only from the armed gangs patrolling the streets.

Basra seems safe enough at present but at night there is still a lot of shooting. We have been told that this is just to let other armed gangs know that they are still there and still have their guns and are willing to use them if needed.

Hospital

The Italian hospital in Baghdad seems to be the best bet if injured and has all the equipment in place to take care of casualties. They have stated that they would treat journalists if they required medical assistance.

The phone number of the hospital is: 0088 216 511 01336

Director: Gigi Tonoro.

Carabinieri guard the place.

They fly casualties to Rome on or about the 14th of each month.

The hospital is 2 km from the Al-Mibed Hotel in South Wathiq Sq. off Qutaila St. Grid MGRS 4712 8554.

American troops have pulled out of Najaf and left it in the hands of the local police force. An unconfirmed report stated that two missiles were fired at an aircraft landing at Baghdad International Airport. One missile went under the aircraft and the other over it.