

JIC Assessment 31 March 2004

IRAQ SECURITY: PROSPECTS

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on Wednesday 31 March 2004.

Key Judgements

- I. Islamist extremists, a hard core of former regime elements and other disaffected Iraqis will seek to increase the level of violence in the lead up to, and beyond, the transition of power on 30 June. They will continue to attack the Coalition backed authorities.
- II. Most attacks will remain low level and principally in the Sunni Arab areas across central and northern Iraq. But high profile attacks, mainly using suicide bombers, could be conducted against targets anywhere in Iraq. The level of violence is undermining Iraqi confidence in the Coalition and its objectives.
- III. Islamist extremists are finding it difficult to operate. But they will pose a continuing and dangerous threat, particularly those associated with al Zarqawi. Attacks by them upon Iraqi Shia and Kurds risk stirring up inter-communal violence. A failure by the security forces to contain the violence could lead to a failure of the political process and a breakdown of law and order.
- IV. There are no indications of a national unified resistance developing in Iraq. But there is growing local overlap and operational co-ordination between different elements of the anti-Coalition forces. This may be the start of a broader based Sunni Arab opposition.
- V. The success of the political process will be linked inextricably with the effectiveness of the security response from the Coalition and Iraqis, and other measures to isolate and undermine support for terrorists.
- VI. The Iraqi security forces will not be ready to cope with the security situation in July and the following months without significant continuing external help. Anti-Coalition forces may exploit Coalition Forces structural changes, devolution of greater responsibility to the developing Iraqi security forces, or early disengagement by Coalition Forces.

IRAQ SECURITY: PROSPECTS

This paper, commissioned by the FCO and OD Sec, looks at the current security situation in Iraq and how it might develop against the backdrop of the evolving political process and the reconstruction of new Iraqi security forces. The Islamist extremist presence was discussed in greater detail in [JIC Assessment of 10 March 2004]

Background

1. Attacks on Coalition Forces (CF) reached a peak in November 2003 and have since fallen and levelled off. But the number of deadly suicide attacks targeting Iraqis – security forces, Kurdish political parties, the Shia – has increased significantly since the turn of the year. There has also been a recent increase in attacks on foreign civilians. These attacks, mounted by a range of anti-Coalition forces, risk destabilising Iraq and undermining the political process. The success of the political process, with the impending transfer of sovereignty, is inextricably linked with the effectiveness of the security response from CF and Iraqis, and other measures to isolate terrorists and undermine their support. So far those signed up to the process show no sign of wavering. But the security situation remains volatile.

Political context

2. The political process is fragile, but making slow progress. The Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) signed on 8 March is a real step forward but remains contentious. [...] The current delicate balance between key parties is being maintained. But, no credible national parties (or leaders) have emerged and the Sunni Arab population still largely feels disenfranchised. The Shia political leadership appears to accept the process and fears of disengagement have so far proved unfounded. They, and the Shia community, responded to the Ashura attacks with restraint (as did the Kurds after Irbil).

The threat

3. Most low level attacks occur in a narrow, principally Sunni Arab, area across central and northern Iraq. Suicide attacks, though less numerous, have occurred across a wider area including as far south as An Nasiriyah. Predominantly Kurdish and Shia areas have remained relatively calm, reflecting a greater degree of consent to the Coalition presence and objectives. This picture is likely to remain unchanged unless anti-Coalition forces succeed in stirring up inter-communal violence, or economic and social conditions enable them to exploit wider popular dissatisfaction.

4. The precise numbers involved in, or supporting, anti-Coalition activity is not known. The scale – currently over 200 incidents every week – suggests thousands, not hundreds, have been involved. Anti-Coalition forces include a range of groups with differing motivations, some distinct, some overlapping. They can loosely be categorised as former regime elements (FRE); Islamist extremists (indigenous and foreign); and disaffected (mainly Sunni) Iraqis, motivated by a variety of grievances. The relative threat from these groups remains difficult to gauge – many attacks cannot be attributed to specific groups.

5. Frequent small scale attacks, mostly upon CF, produce a steady flow of casualties and are undermining public confidence in the Coalition and the wider political process. If maintained, they could

have an incremental debilitating effect on Coalition effort. Suicide attacks, mostly using vehicle borne IEDs (VBIEDs), have been by far the most lethal. High profile attacks on the Shia or Kurds, the UN, new Iraqi institutions or more vulnerable Coalition partners, pose a significant and potentially very damaging threat.

6. Although some may have drifted away from anti Coalition activity since Saddam Hussein's capture, **FRE** opposition continues to be determined and violent: most, particularly small scale, attacks are probably still conducted by FREs. Indications of professional planning and expertise reflect the involvement of former Republican Guard, Iraqi Intelligence Services and other security professionals. The loss of jobs and prestige through de-Ba'athification; political disenfranchisement and the fear of Shia domination underpin their violence and support. Political objectives are not clear, and there is no visible political structure. A hard core, believing they have nothing to gain from the new order, will continue to carry out attacks.

7. **Islamist extremists** (Ansar al-Islam, Al Qaida, the al Zarqawi network and others) aspire to attack those they see as the enemies of Islam, but thus far the jihad appears to lack a unified long-term aim. [...] Recovered documents linked to al Zarqawi list not only American and Iraqi security forces, but also Shia and Kurds as main targets. [...] This, or repetition of the Ashura attacks, could severely test Shia forbearance and raise inter-communal tension. Further attacks on the Kurds could strengthen pro independence aspirations. They will also cause revulsion amongst the wider Iraqi public and could limit support for the extremists. Attacking the Coalition remains the immediate objective, but mujahidin will continue to travel to Iraq as long as the occupation and a US backed Iraqi administration presents targets. All those working for, or supporting, the Iraqi transitional government, are liable to be attacked as collaborators – and not just by Islamist extremists.

8. A further source of resistance to the Coalition may increasingly be **disaffected Sunni Arabs** – not necessarily connected to the former regime – who fear Shia domination and are frustrated by lack of money and jobs. Their motivations are diverse: anti-Americanism, Iraqi nationalism, insensitive CF actions, tribal and clan loyalties, criminal financial gain and other grievances. And some Sunni Arabs are increasingly attracted to a radical Islamist ideology.

9. [...] Some volunteers may simply be selling their services to the highest bidder. But this may also be the start of a broader-based Sunni Arab opposition - the scale is not clear. However, there is no sign of the disparate anti-Coalition forces coming together nationally to form a unified resistance to the Coalition or new Iraqi authorities.

The security response

10. CF continue to enjoy success against anti-Coalition forces, inflicting losses and disrupting operations, although the effectiveness [...] is patchy, notably in the MND Centre South area of responsibility. Intelligence indicates that some groups, notably foreign extremists, are struggling to operate in the security environment, facing effective CF operations and the hostility of the local population. But anti-Coalition forces have proved resilient and able to maintain a consistent level of violence. They may target their activity to exploit CF structural changes, the devolution of greater responsibility to the developing Iraqi security forces, or early disengagement by CF.

11. The regeneration of the domestic **Iraqi security forces** (ISF) is well underway (Annex A). Progress has been mixed and their future internal security role remains uncertain. The Iraqi Army will not be able to assume significant security responsibilities until next year. But, the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps (ICDC) is well established and increasingly able to take on low level security duties. The Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) is being formed, but its effectiveness is untested and its relationships with other new intelligence organisations are still not clear.

12. The **Iraqi Police Service** (IPS) is fully recruited, but as yet lacks capability to operate in a dangerous security environment and deal with high crime levels. IPS effectiveness will be constrained by a number of factors. Some specialist skills, for example criminal investigation, may require the recruitment of officers from the former regime. This may dent public confidence – with fears of a return to Ba’athist policing methods. [...] *[Precise wording redacted on grounds of national security. It explained that the JIC had assessed that the new force was probably prone to corruption and infiltration by anti-Coalition sympathisers.]* But overall the ISF have proved robust in the face of sustained attacks, and despite high casualties, morale (although patchy) has stood firm. Recruitment has not been significantly affected, although retention may be suffering.

13. We judge that the difficult security situation, exacerbated by a lack of confidence in the ISF, will lead to increased reliance on **local militias**. [...] *[Precise wording redacted on grounds of national security. It explained that the JIC had assessed that the Peshmerga was well established in the Kurdish region and efforts to disband it would probably be resisted.]* Shia militias, mainly Badr Corps, but also al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army, have been providing local security for some months. The Ashura bombings have reinforced Shia doubts about whether the authorities can ensure their safety and have prompted some to consider forming further militias. The expansion of militias will continue, particularly if the security situation does not improve. Their objectives will not always coincide with those of the Coalition and could undercut the authority of the CF/ISF. These groups have their own political agendas and some of their methods are illegal. (The militias themselves will become illegal if not absorbed into the ISF, which itself may present further security challenges.)

14. Iraqi security structures will be far from fully developed or capable by July. Security will remain the responsibility of the follow on Multinational Force (MNF). Co-ordination arrangements between the MNF and the Transitional Authority have not been agreed and may prove contentious. Border entry and security controls around Iraq need much work to restrict the movement of mujahidin. Principal entry routes remain through Syria, Iran and Saudi and all borders remain porous in places.

Regional responses

15. [...]

16. [...]

Prospects

17. Opinion polls suggest security remains the overwhelming concern of most Iraqis. In the short term – in the lead up to transition on 30 June:

- Anti-Coalition forces will seek to increase the current level of violence.
- Most attacks will be small scale conducted by FREs in central and northern Iraq. Large scale attacks (most using suicide bombers) will also continue, mainly carried out by Islamist extremists. A wide range of targets will continue to be attacked.
- Further assassinations of leading figures or mass casualty attacks against ethnic or religious groups could lead to the failure of the political process. If security forces are unable to contain the spread of violence this could lead to regional sectarian conflict and a breakdown of law and order.

In the longer term - post transition and into 2005:

- The security situation will remain volatile. It will worsen if anti-Coalition forces are able to exploit transitional security arrangements between the MNF and ISF.
- The situation will improve if:
 - Central government acquires greater legitimacy, inclusive of all - including Sunni Arabs.
 - Indigenous security forces are ready to take over responsibility from CF, and enjoy the confidence of the Iraqi population.
 - Economic and social conditions improve, particularly reduced unemployment.
 - Coalition resolve and the commitment of the International Community is maintained.
- The Iraq jihad will provide a pool of experienced and motivated terrorists able to mount attacks in Iraq and elsewhere.

ANNEX A: IRAQI SECURITY STRUCTURES

New Iraqi Army (NIA)

Planned Strength	35000	(28 battalions)
Current Strength	5275	
Trained	3589	

Iraqi Police Service (IPS)

Planned strength:	75000
Recruited:	78224
Trained:	15000

Iraqi Border Police (IBP) and Customs Officials

Planned Strength	25727	(16892 Dept Border Enforcement (DBE), 8835 IBP)
Current Strength	18132	(9873 DBE, 8259 IBP)
Trained	17990	

Iraq Riverine Patrol Service

Planned Strength	495
Current Strength	297
Trained	109

Iraqi Civil Defence Corps (ICDC)

Planned Strength	40100
Current Strength	34106
Trained	32078

Facilities Protection and Security Service (FPSS) (Iraqi Ministries now have responsibility for this service and estimate the requirement at 90,000 personnel)

Iraqi Coastal Defence Force (awaiting delivery of equipment and boats)

Planned Strength	410	
Current Strength	215	
Trained	205	(initial training only)

Note:

The Iraq Counter Terrorist Force (ICTF) is being established as a small Special Forces unit to fill a capability gap in the Police forces. The planned strength is 200; 70 are currently under training in Jordan, and a further batch of 70 have been recruited.