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Security Operations in a Semi-permissive War Zone & Protective Security Details in Iraq

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UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Before moving forward with a solution, one must first appreciate the problem and its various manifestations. In this case, the challenge is the running of corporate and governmental security operations in an active insurgent environment.

The current situation on the ground in Iraq is quite unique in the history of counter insurgency warfare, and even though lessons can be learned from other models such as Northern Ireland, security providers are now confronted with a number of quite unique problems.

For one, security providers have been obligated to provide high-end civilian security in what could be considered a semi-permissive war zone. The missions that security providers are being tasked with in Iraq in general and Baghdad in particular, have historically been handled by armored military units in places such as Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Further more, as major corporations compete for the contracts to rebuild Iraq, the sheer volume of security providers running around in armored SUVs is unprecedented in the history of post-war reconstruction efforts.

To meet the government, military and private sector's growing demands for security services, security providers have been forced to violate the most basic tenants of security by establishing **predictable patterns of movement** in and around Baghdad. On any given day in Baghdad, dozens of protective security details (PSD) are channeled into predictable choke-points in and around the Green Zone (now the International Zone), the Palestine & Sheraton Hotels, Camp Victory, the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) road, and on the major arteries in an out of the city.

This level of predictability creates numerous targets of opportunity for the insurgents and a situation that would under normal circumstances be considered unacceptable in the protective security industry. One of the first rules of security states that if intelligence

indicates that a specific location is dangerous, simply avoid it. Unfortunately this is not possible in Baghdad. Everyone needs to go to the Green Zone and to BIAP so the roads and entrances to these become unavoidable hazards.

Looking at the “US Secret Service model” of security, when governmental security agencies make movements with heads-of-state or VIPs, they make these movements at unpredictable times in armored sedans and SUVs, running advanced route reconnaissance and multiple decoy teams. When they are forced into a predictable location, for example, for an announced political visit or photo op, the security agencies first saturate the area with ground teams and then utilize counter-snipers or designated defensive marksmen (DDM) to act as over-watch.

However, many of these tactics would not work in Baghdad since they would be beyond the financial resources of the client and operational capabilities of the security providers. An affordable 2-vehicle PSD would turn into an 8-vehicle movement with advance teams and designated marksmen.

CURRENT SITUATION IRAQ – AN OVERVIEW

Iraq can be considered semi-permissive environment in that a significant amount of productive work can be achieved, but contractors do not have total freedom of movement. Civilian contractors and governmental clients know that it is unwise to leave the security of the military bases or secured compounds such as the Green Zone, Palestine and Sheraton Hotels, and Camp Victory without an armed escort in armored vehicles.

Even with PSDs and professional armed security, elevated threat levels will periodically make movement between specific locations inadvisable. Sound intelligence and an understanding of the current situation should always drive the operational side of the security effort and ground movements. However the situation on the ground in Baghdad can change rapidly making it all but impossible to stay abreast of emerging threats.

Very few companies have the OP-CON or communications infra-structure to identify changes in the threat or traffic choke points and get this time-sensitive information out to their PSDs on the fly.

After the fall of Baghdad, when US troops were welcomed by the Iraqi people, a massive reconstruction process was launched by the Department of Defense (DOD) and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), support by several major US construction entities. This was done under the assumption that the peace would hold and the Iraqis would become willing participants in the reconstruction process.

However, as a direct result of civil unrest, ethnic and religious rivalry, and rampant criminal activity, the peace did not last and US military personnel, coalition troops, and foreign contractors became the targets of insurgent attacks. These attacks were backed by former Saddam loyalists, Fedayeen guerrillas and foreign jihadis; and soon spread to acts of intimidation and violence targeted at Iraqi civilians supporting the reconstruction effort.

The early attacks ranged from direct small arms fire (SAF), to indirect fire rocket and mortar attacks, to roadside IEDs. This then escalated to vehicle-borne car and truck bombs (VBIEDs) driven by suicidal fanatics. Many of the less effective attacks were perpetrated by young, unemployed men paid by former Ba'ath Party Saddam loyalists. The more sophisticated military-type attacks were executed by guerrilla-trained Fedayeen Saddam and foreign Jihadis financed and trained by Wahabbi and Al Qaeda type movements.

As of late March 2004, spurred by the killing and mutilation of four Blackwater contract security personnel in Falloujah, the violence in Iraq rose to a new level. Military and civilian contractors came under frequent attack from not only Saddam loyalists and insurgents, but also radicalized Shi'a militias and religious fundamentalists.

As the US Marines prepared to enter Falloujah in early April, insurgents launched pre-emptive strikes against US forces in the neighboring town of Ramadi; and simultaneously, the Shi'a militias loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr (aka Mooky) initiated attacks from Sadr City in eastern Baghdad all the way south to Najaf and Karbala. This situation continues as of this date (June 2004) with Sadr offering rewards for the killing or capture of coalition soldiers.

INSURGENT ATTACK METHODOLOGY

Parts of Iraq have turned to classic counter-insurgency guerilla warfare with relatively small numbers of insurgents and fundamentalists utilizing five primary methods of attack.

1. Small arms attacks with rifles (AK47s, AKMs, AK74s) and light machineguns. These are usually hit and run type attacks.
2. Attacks on buildings and vehicles with RPGs (rocket propelled grenades)
3. Mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and roadside booby-traps
4. Indirect fire mortar and rocket attacks, from distances of up to 18 km in some cases with 122 mm and 127 mm rockets.
5. Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) driven by suicide bombers, frequently directed at military and police checkpoints or recruit depots.

Of these, the IEDs pose the greatest threat when moving about Iraq in vehicles, while mortar and rocket attacks pose the greatest risk to fixed base operations. While roadside IED incidents have become a daily occurrence, mortar attacks have increase three fold since January 2004 with over 1,000 in the month of April.

RPGs are prolific in post-war Iraq so are often used in attacks on vehicles and buildings. The RPG-7 is a reloadable, simple to operate, shoulder-fire weapon that can be loaded and fired by one man. The RPG launches an armored-piercing projectile with an effective range of 300 meters on moving targets, 500 meters on static targets, and has a burn-out range of just over 900 meters. Fortunately, the insurgents have not demonstrated any high degree of proficiency or accuracy with these weapons however, they do occasionally get lucky.

The insurgents have demonstrated an equal lack of capability with their mortar and rocket attacks. In many instances the projectiles impact several hundred yards from any buildings or troop concentrations and statistically 50% do not detonate on impact. This

can also be attributed to the fact that while the insurgents possess the actual projectiles, they lack the launch tubes and sights required to achieve any level of precision.

In addition to direct attacks, in recent months the insurgents and fundamentalists have engaged in numerous kidnappings of foreign coalition workers and soldiers. In some instances the victims have been killed; in some they have been released; and in one the victim was able to escape to safety.

INSURGENT TARGET SELECTION

Many of the attacks launched by both the insurgents and the fundamentalists are **planned attacks** but their victims are often **random targets** of opportunity. Although the terrorists' greatest animosity is directed towards US and coalition occupation troops, the military presents more difficult targets to hit than the police and civilian population. This includes private security contractors.

Attacks continue against the CPA, Green Zone, military convoys and military bases, which are usually considered hardened targets, but many attacks have also been launched against softer targets such as police stations, government officials, government offices, NGO buildings, and private security convoys.

The chance of being attacked when moving between points in and around Baghdad is as much a matter of chance as design. IEDs are placed and ambushes staged for the first or most suitable target of opportunity to come down the road. However, the one road that has been hit with regularity is Route Irish between the Green Zone and BIAP, and the most dangerous choke-points are the checkpoints entering the Green Zone.

The obvious problem for the PSDs is that there is only a limited number of checkpoints in and out of the Green Zone, and only a limited number of routes to the BIAP, Camp Victory or the major hotels utilized by contractors.

SPECIFIC ATTACK ANALYSIS

There have been three noteworthy attacks on civilian security providers in recent months (early 2004).

1. The attack on the Blackwater team in Falloujah
2. The attack on the CRG PSD entering the Green Zone
3. The attack on the Kroll team north of Baghdad

In all three cases there is no indication that these teams or their clients were selectively targeted by the insurgents. It was in all likelihood a case of the attackers setting an ambush in an ideal location, such as a checkpoint or overpass, and these teams driving into the kill zone.

In all three cases it can be noted that the SUVs they were driving were simply not up to the level of concentrated fire or method of attack they were exposed to.

It could be argued that the Blackwater team was slaughtered because the other vehicles in the convoy were unable to come to their assistance, but in all likelihood they were killed by the initial burst of fire or overpressure from an RPG.

In the case of the under-vehicle explosive attack on the CRG vehicle, the victims were again killed by the initial blast. The possibility of driving or shooting their way out of the situation was not an option. However, the #2 vehicle did come to the aid of the survivor.

With the Kroll team it was surprising that small arms fire alone was able to bring all three vehicles to a stop within the kill zone, including two armored SUVs. All three vehicles were abandoned under fire when the five survivors commandeered a passing car.

However, in all three cases, the security providers have continued to run operations in the face of an on-going insurgent campaign. Even if the location and timing of the specific attack was unknown, the threat had been identified and accepted, as is the case with all PSD operations in Iraq. So where standard security doctrine is based on **risk avoidance**, Iraq has driven security providers into a policy of **risk acceptance**. For some PSCs the level of acceptable risk is higher than for others and has become known euphemistically as “pain tolerance”.

This then raises the question of whether the security tactics, procedures and equipment are sufficient to meet the identified and accepted threat. Obviously even armored SUVs are not designed to survive a direct coordinated attack with military-grade weaponry.

With **risk acceptance** comes the obligation by the security providers to supply their PSDs and clients with the best of service and equipment at all levels to meet the identified threat. The changing nature of the threat may also require a change in tactics and methodology.

Continued – Part 2

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