



Iraq 2011 Crime and Safety Report: Baghdad

Riots/Civil Unrest; Crime; Terrorism

Near East > Iraq > Baghdad

4/21/2011

Iraq 2011 Crime and Safety Report: Baghdad

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Iraq is rated as a critical threat for terrorism and political violence by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security. Despite the general decline in terrorist-related violence, the security situation in Iraq remains fluid. Terrorists and insurgent groups continue to conduct large-scale, lethal attacks that often target personnel and facilities associated with both American organizations and the Government of Iraq. Insurgents also continue to carry out effective small-scale attacks throughout Iraq that cause fewer casualties but hinder free movement and influence public opinion regarding safety and security.

Crime Threats

There are no reliable crime statistics and/or crime reporting mechanisms in Iraq. Individuals associated with the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad are required to travel with a protective detail, limiting potential criminal threats against embassy personnel. Kidnappings for political or monetary gain are common throughout Iraq. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad recommends that individuals travel with Personal Security Details (PSDs) to limit potential terrorist and criminal threats.

Road Safety

Road conditions throughout Iraq are good, and roads are generally well constructed. Urban roads are usually constructed with asphalt, while rural roads are usually constructed with dirt and gravel. Vehicle security checkpoints and dense urban populations often cause significant vehicle congestion. Moreover, there remains a continual threat of roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad recommends that individuals employ additional security measures, to include PSDs, when operating in Iraq.

Political Violence

Since the beginning of the U.S.-led military surge, Iraqi and U.S. military forces have achieved numerous tactical successes against al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), Jai'ish al Mahdi (JAM), Asaib al Haq (AAH), and other terrorist networks, limiting the groups' abilities to launch a sustained terrorist campaign. However, despite the general decline in terrorist-related activity throughout Iraq, foreign and indigenous terrorist groups remain capable of conducting deadly attacks throughout the country. Other attacks that continue to threaten personnel working in Iraq include, but are not limited to, kidnapping, IEDs, rocket/mortar attacks, complex attacks



involving several mechanisms of assault, suicide vest attacks, and sniper operations. The proliferation of such attacks indicates the willingness of groups listed above to use terrorist attacks for politically motivated gains, and also the level of impunity with which these groups still operate. While the total number and lethality of attacks has decreased over the past year, some months spike, while others have fewer attacks throughout Iraq, with the majority occurring in areas of Baghdad, Mosul, and other centers of population.

In addition to terrorist-related violence, civil demonstrations, to include political and religious rallies, are common in Iraq. These rallies have been targeted by AQI and other indigenous terrorist organizations; however, the frequency of such attacks has declined as compared to the extreme violence of 2006 - 2007 due to ongoing improvements in the general security situation and a continually increased capacity of the Government of Iraq to exercise its responsibilities for safety and security.

Indigenous Terrorist and Militia Groups

Indigenous terrorist groups and Shi'ite militias are responsible for the majority of attacks occurring in Iraq today. These groups are largely identified by their religious or political affiliations. Since the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraqi cities in 2009, indigenous terrorist groups and Shi'ite militias have increased attacks against targets associated with the Iraqi government. These attacks are intended to discredit the Iraqi government. AQI and the Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM), a Shi'ite militia associated with the nationalist Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, are both considered indigenous organizations, although both receive significant monetary and logistical support from international sources. American personnel and organizations continue to be targeted by these groups, but Iraqi government personnel and assets remain the preferred target due to their accessibility and political importance.

International Terrorist Groups

Foreign fighters comprised the bulk of the AQI terrorist network during the height of the Iraq insurgency; however, the composition of AQI has gradually changed since the beginning of 2007. According to recent U.S. military statements, today AQI is largely a terrorist network made up of small, roving cells that get most of its weapons from within Iraq.

During the height of the insurgency, AQI and Iraq's various indigenous insurgent groups actively and passively cooperated; however, as the insurgency matured, AQI's fundamentalist ideology began to alienate large segments of this local fighter base, particularly in Iraq's Anbar province. AQI attempted to reinvigorate its local base of support in 2006 by creating the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an umbrella organization that was intended to place an Iraqi face on the insurgency. However, these outreach initiatives were largely unsuccessful. Although many of the Sunni groups work together at the local level, AQI does not officially have a relationship with the other groups, and has publically called them apostates.

Unlike previous AQI failures, the current AQI leadership has increased the ratio of Iraqi to foreign-born fighters within the organization and has successfully enlisted the support of other indigenous insurgent groups to its cause. In early November, ISI issued another online



statement attempting to rally local support against the Iraqi government. However, despite AQI's ability to increase its local support, the group's ranks have not yet swelled.

Civil Unrest

Civil unrest is rare in Iraq. Although religious and political events often attract large numbers, these events can occur without incident. However, as previously mentioned, political and religious marches and rallies are a popular target for indigenous fighters. Sometimes religious celebrations are marked by IED and suicide vest bomb attacks on the pilgrims resulting in many killed and wounded. This year, GOI expected fewer casualties during the most recently completed pilgrimage, due to GOI's increased security. Nonetheless, there continues to be numerous and a variety of threats against the pilgrims, including IEDs and suicide vests. American personnel and organizations however, are rarely impacted by these attacks. Movements are sometimes restricted due to pilgrims blocking routes.

Post-specific Concerns

Iraq's environment is harsh. Temperatures can range from 30 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter months, to 140 degrees Fahrenheit during the summer months. Dust storms, which can reduce visibility and impede aircraft, occur frequently during the spring. Iraq's environment can change quickly, and American personnel should plan accordingly.

Police Response

Iraqi security forces maintain a large presence in most major urban areas to limit potential terrorist, insurgent, and militia activity. Iraqi checkpoints and security stations are manned at all times and Iraqi police and military units normally respond rapidly to all incidents. Iraqi Police and Army have permanent manned checkpoints and security stations, and also routinely set up temporary checkpoints lasting only a few hours. However, Iraqi police and military units are still undergoing training in techniques and procedures. These units are not as organized or capable as U.S. police and military units.

Americans should avoid unauthorized photography, especially of Iraqi security forces, which is strictly prohibited. Iraqi military personnel may confiscate equipment and temporarily detain individuals taking unauthorized photographs.

Police Detention or Harassment

American personnel should cooperate and follow instructions if approached by Iraqi security personnel. Ultimately, all personnel operating in Iraq are subject to Iraqi law. The U.S. Embassy is limited as to what, if any, assistance can be rendered in the event of police detention or harassment. However, detained American personnel should notify the U.S. Embassy by calling the American Citizen Services Emergency Line at 0770-443-1286, or the Regional Security Office's Tactical Operations Center (TOC) at 318-239-2833, or via cell phone at 0770-443-3836 or 0770-443-3837.

Victims of Crime

Victims of crime should notify the U.S. Embassy by calling the American Citizen



Services Emergency Line at 0770-443-1286.

Medical Emergencies

Iraqi hospitals and emergency medical services are limited. Local hospitals have substandard staffing and equipment. Individuals associated with private businesses operating in Iraq are ultimately responsible for arranging their own medical care; however, American personnel who require emergency medical services can contact the RSO TOC for information purposes. Iraqi hospitals should be utilized only as a contingency for urgent life or death emergencies. Medicorps, a privately owned medical clinic, has facilities at the Victory Base Complex (VBC), which is operated by the U.S. military and is located near the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). Access to this medical facility is normally restricted to those who have access to VBC, but it is available to provide care in emergency situations. Medicorps is staffed and equipped to handle all non-life threatening emergencies, medical evacuations via helicopter, and general dentistry. Medicorps contact number is 703-621-6507 or 0771-103-2674 (cell).

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Travelers to Iraq should utilize all available security assets to minimize any potential terrorist or criminal risks. Individuals should vary routes and times of travel, as well as locations and arrival times to avoid any travel patterns. If PSD teams are available, they should be utilized to maximize safety. Travelers should not travel alone. If possible, use a minimum of two PSD personnel to decrease the potential for abductions. PSD personnel can also be used to render assistance in the event of an emergency.

It is strongly recommended that all American citizen travelers enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program in order to receive messages from the Embassy about safety and security. Travelers can enroll through www.travel.state.gov. It is also recommended that travelers consult the Country Specific Information and Travel Warning for Iraq, located on the same website.

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

Regional Security Office Tactical Operations Center (TOC) (24 hrs): 318-239-2833/3343

Medical Unit: 318-239-3173

Consular Affairs (American Citizen Services 24-Hour Emergency Line): 0770-443-1286

OSAC Country Council

There is an active country council program in Baghdad. American personnel and organizations interested in participating in the country council should contact OSAC's Middle East Coordinator for additional information.