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Country Reports on Terrorism 2010 - Iraq

Overview: Iraqi and U.S. security forces worked together and continued to make progress combating al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), affiliated Sunni terrorist organizations, and Shia insurgents. Terrorist attacks primarily targeted Iraqi and U.S. security forces and government officials, but they were also aimed at stirring ethnic tensions among Iraqi sectarian groups and minorities.

AQI adapted to changing conditions and remained capable of large-scale and coordinated attacks. However, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) also improved its capabilities in combating terrorist networks with better targeting and capture and detention of terrorists. AQI operated primarily in regions with majority Sunni Arab populations, particularly focusing its efforts in and around Baghdad and Ninewa. The group targeted the ISF, government infrastructure, and sectarian groups in an effort to induce them to emigrate and to erode Iraqi security and governance capabilities.

Sunni leaders in Iraq have overwhelmingly rejected AQI and its extremist ideology. The Sons of Iraq (SOI) who cooperated with the security authorities continued to be a valuable asset in countering AQI. Some of AQI's members have defected, and the group has lost support in key mobilization areas, disrupting its infrastructure. On December 23, the ISF arrested 93 suspects in a crackdown of AQI bases in Anbar province.

Iran continued to fund, train, and provide weapons and ammunition to Shia extremist groups that carried out attacks against Iraqi and U.S. forces. Although attacks by these groups have decreased, their Iranian-supported networks continued to operate throughout Iraq's southern provinces. The Iraqi government pressed senior Iranian leaders to end support for Shia militias, and its national unity efforts to involve Iraqi Shia groups with Iranian ties, such as Asaib ahl al Haq (League of Righteousness), in the political process, have contributed to decreased Shia-linked violence. The ISF also carried out operations throughout southern Iraq and in Baghdad against extremists trained and equipped by Iran, including the Promised Day Brigade and Kata'ib Hezbollah (Brigades of the Party of God).

Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandiyah (JRTN), a Sunni nationalist insurgent group with links to the former Ba'ath Party, also continued attacks during the year. JRTN targeted Iraqi and U.S. forces, Iranians, and Iraqi Shia groups whose members work with Iran.

Foreign fighters, though greatly diminished in number from previous years, continued to enter Iraq, predominantly through Syria. AQI and the group's Sunni extremist partners more often used Iraqi nationals, including women, as suicide bombers. According to Iraqi

Ministry of Interior (MOI) security officials, however, four of the five terrorists who attacked the Our Lady of Salvation Church on October 31 were foreigners and 12 other terrorists, mostly foreign, have been implicated in planning the church attack, as well as planning to attack the French Embassy and the Ministry of Planning.

2010 Terrorist Incidents: The deadliest bomb attacks during the year were against security forces, government buildings, and western targets, and included:

- On January 25, suicide bombers struck in quick succession near three Baghdad hotels frequented by Western journalists killing at least 38 people and wounding more than 100.
- On January 26, a suicide car bomber sheared off the front of the main police crime lab in Baghdad, killing 21 and wounding 80.
- On April 4, at least 42 were killed and 249 injured as three bombs struck the Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, and German embassies.
- On June 13, gunmen and suicide bombers attacked the Central Bank of Iraq, killing at least 18 and wounding dozens.
- On July 18, a suicide bomber killed 32 SOI fighters waiting for paychecks at a center west of Baghdad and wounded 20.
- On August 17, a suicide bomber blew himself up among hundreds of army recruits in Baghdad, killing 60 and wounding 128.
- On August 25, terrorists unleashed a wave of coordinated attacks in 13 towns and cities across Iraq, including hit-and-run shootings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), killing 51.

Major attacks late in the year that also targeted religious and sectarian groups included:

- On October 31, AQI members seized an Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad, killing 58 and wounding 70 with combined IEDs, suicide vests, and small arms fire.
- On November 8, three VBIEDs detonated in the Shia holy cities of Najaf and Karbala killing 19 people and injuring 75, including Iranian pilgrims.
- On December 30, insurgents targeted Christian homes and neighborhoods in Baghdad with IEDs, killing two.

Legislation and Law Enforcement: The Government of Iraq took a number of steps to improve border security. A Council of Ministers' resolution called for a "unity of effort" among all government agencies at all Iraqi ports of entry (POEs). In addition, the MOI and the Minister of Interior for the Kurdistan Regional Government agreed to integrate all POEs in the Iraqi Kurdistan region into the Iraqi government's POE structure. Also, the Iraqi Customs Police returned to duty at the port of Umm Qasr after a two-year absence. Their presence has improved control over imports into Iraq.

The Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF), an agency handling terrorist cases, fostered a collaboration between investigators from Iraq and the United States. The MCTF investigated terrorism, high-profile violent crimes, and murders conducted by terrorists and members of organized criminal enterprises. Iraqi partners conducted complex criminal and counterterrorism investigations, which led to coordinated prosecution of defendants in Iraqi criminal courts. Seventy-two percent of the cases opened and assigned to the MCTF were capital cases involving terrorism.

Iraq continued to face significant challenges moving criminal cases from arrest to trial.

The Iraqi government carried out few investigations of alleged sectarian-based crimes; arrests following a murder or other crimes were rare. U.S. and third-country law enforcement officials have trained Iraqi investigators and judges in investigative methodology and forensic evidence collection during the year.

Judicial security was a challenge. Judges investigating and adjudicating terrorism cases faced threats to their personal safety and that of their families. It is likely that some terrorism cases were dismissed due to actual or implied threats. To ameliorate this threat, the Chief Justice of the Higher Judicial Council appointed a cadre of judges to hear terrorism cases; these judges lived in secure apartment blocks. In addition, the government moved several judges hearing terrorism cases from Mosul to Baghdad to protect their safety.

Countering Terrorist Finance: Iraq is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF). The Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) has a Financial Intelligence Unit called the Money Laundering Reporting Office (MLRO), which is still in the early stages of development. Iraq has not yet had a mutual evaluation, a compliance test by the Financial Action Task Force-International Monetary Fund of its anti-money laundering/counterterrorist financing (AML/CTF) regime. While the Director of the MLRO has undergone training on AML/CTF at the Federal Depository Insurance Corporation in the United States, Iraq appeared to have done little to enhance the MLRO to meet international standards. Iraq's AML/CFT legislation neglects to adequately outlaw money laundering and the financing of terrorism and conflicts with other areas of Iraqi legislation. The AML/CFT law was written in 2004 and requires amendment to bring it to international standards.

Regional and International Cooperation: In September, Iraq attended a security meeting held in Bahrain with the interior ministers from Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey, as well as the UN, the Organization of Islamic Countries, and the Arab League. The participants issued a joint 20-point statement that stressed the importance of Iraq's internal security to the region and recommended the creation of "cooperative mechanisms" to further address regional security issues. Iraq, Turkey, and the United States continued their formal trilateral security dialogue as one element of ongoing cooperative efforts to counter the Kurdistan Workers' Party in the region.

Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Iraq's MOI initiated a program to counter violent extremism and youth radicalization by making documentaries about terrorists in detention and about victims of terrorism. The Iraqi government also developed programs to counter violent extremist propaganda and to provide local youth positive examples and role models in society. These included USAID projects for at-risk youths and 4H Clubs. The UN Children's Fund in Iraq initiated a project to provide reintegration services for children released from pre/post trial detention. The United States supported a Government of Iraq program to provide local support following the release of militants in order to decrease recidivism and facilitate integration into local communities.
