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Raw Intelligence Report: Conditions in Baghdad

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Editor's Note: What follows is raw insight from a STRATFOR source in Baghdad, Iraq. The following does not reflect STRATFOR's view, but provides a perspective on the situation in Baghdad.

After the fall of Baghdad in 2003, the city was a nice place despite the lack of law enforcement and government. By February 2004, most businesses were operating, people were happy and stores were open until midnight. There was no shortage of fuel, and electricity was more reliable. The city was very clean, and the crime rate was low. There was also no fear of kidnapping or car bombs. It was a functioning city with law, even without law enforcement. There was even a lion in the Baghdad Zoo, though I heard it later died.

On March 2, 2004, explosions shook the Shiite Kazimiyah district, killing tens and wounding hundreds. These explosions were the start of more attacks and car bombings between the Shia and Sunnis that increased in later years. In 2003 and 2004, Baghdad was a city where I envisioned living permanently one day. That is not the case now.

The roads are in very poor condition, with lots of garbage everywhere — some of it dating back to 2003. Many streets are blocked with concrete walls. There are many checkpoints inside the city manned by soldiers and police, but they did not seem to be well trained or prepared for potential threats. I hardly saw them checking cars or asking people for identification. We drove 400 kilometers (250 miles) and encountered more than 26 checkpoints; none of them stopped us to ask for identification. The soldiers and police at the checkpoints do not seem to be loyal to the Iraqi state but are there to get their salaries and make a living. The taxi driver told me that since the government does not enforce the law, the soldiers do not want to ask for identification and

hold people accountable because they fear reprisals later. Therefore, they let everyone go and avoid problems.

At every checkpoint, there are devices the soldiers hold that detect explosives and guns, making it difficult to carry guns or explosives in a car. This made me wonder how so many assassinations have been carried out with guns with suppressors. I was told that most of the assassinations are inside jobs; the officials do not like each other and try to have each other killed. The officials' guards are allowed to have guns, and it is these permitted guns that are used in some of the assassinations.

Traffic is another problem in Baghdad. There are traffic police on the streets, and there are traffic lights to regulate the traffic, but no one cares about the police or whether the light is red or green.

Early one morning, we headed to the Green Zone, the "safe" area where foreign embassies are located. In fact, the Green Zone did not seem safe. There were many security clearances — two Iraqi checkpoints and a U.S. Embassy checkpoint manned by Africans (security companies hire many workers from Africa). The African workers board buses and ask for identification and check the badges of people in cars. After entering the Green Zone, there are other checkpoints where people need to show special badges. Cell phones are banned, as is water and other liquids. We were not allowed to take some of my daughter's medicine with us. The speed limit is 5 miles per hour, and there are very hard road bumps inside the Green Zone that I believe could break the chains of tank treads.

There is no sign of life inside the Green Zone. It is fully militarized and seems more like a military camp than anything. I did not even see a store inside the parts of the Green Zone we drove through.

Electricity is yet another problem in Baghdad and other areas. During the hot summer, there are fewer than 10 hours of electricity per day. People are very angry about this and hold the government responsible. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki promised in February to improve services. The people said no improvements have happened since then — there are shortages of electricity and water, sewage services are lacking, and there is unemployment.

According to the people I spoke with, the city is fully under Shiite control. I don't mean just the security establishment, but the stores and businesses, too. During the sectarian conflict, most Sunnis left their houses and stores, which were taken by Shiite families who are unwilling to return them. The Sunni districts of Baghdad have been surrounded by concrete walls (like those found in Israel), and there are only one or two gates to get in and out. This has made the Sunnis unhappy, and they see it as a tool to control them rather than to protect them.

Corruption has made many officers and government employees rich. You can get an Iraqi passport for \$1,500. When you go to any government ministry, nothing is done for you unless you pay them. The taxi driver handling some government staff said, "You need to understand that especially in the passport department, the officer tells you that you can't get a passport and then he gets up and goes to the toilet. You need to follow him and give him some money; toilets

are where the bribes are given.” He added that this is true for every government establishment, not just for passports.