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**PUBLIC ORDER INCIDENTS IN BASRAH**

A total of fourteen British soldiers were injured today (22<sup>nd</sup>) during public order disturbances in Basra.

All those hurt were quickly evacuated to the British military hospital at Shaibah by road or helicopter. None are in a life-threatening condition, although three are described as “seriously injured”.

One soldier was hurt during the initial protests, before an explosive device and a number of petrol bombs detonated close to British troops some time later. Thirteen more soldiers were injured by these devices.

In response to petrol bombs being thrown, British personnel fired a number of baton rounds in self-defence. No live rounds or tear gas were used at any time. There is no evidence that the incident was terrorist related. Investigations are on-going, but at present the attack, which took place at 13:46hrs local time, is being treated as a public order incident.

The demonstrations in Basra City are thought to have centred on demands for further employment opportunities with the new police and security forces. The situation was described as “calm but tense” by early evening.

Major Tim Smith, the British military spokesman in Basra, said:

“Thankfully none of the soldiers is in a life-threatening condition. I want to commend their restraint under enormous pressure in dealing with the situation with the minimum of force.

“There is no evidence whatsoever to link this incident with any other, or with political events elsewhere. We are treating it only as a public order matter.

“Incidents like this are extremely rare in Basra. We have the consent and support of the vast majority of people here and will continue to work with them to improve both security and opportunity for all Iraqis in this region.

“Our priority now is to inform the families of the men who were hurt today, and until we have done so we will not be going into more detail.