

Leading academic suggests fate of Five kidnapped Britons

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A leading expert on Iraq has made several suggestions as to where the five kidnapped Britons might be.

Prof Scott Lucas said: "Politically we can make a few guesses as to what is happening here."

He believes that the seizure of the Britons may have been prompted by intensified operations, including airstrikes, by American and British forces in Baghdad and Basra last week, during which a top ranking official in the Mehdi Army, Abu Qadir, was killed.

"In the aftermath of that, the Mehdi Army promised revenge attacks against British targets. I don't think it is a leap of faith to think that that's a possibility – retaliation for the slaying of one of its most prominent figures."

Yet Professor Lucas believes the feasibility of a connection to other countries within the region is also significant. "In January this year US forces went to Erbil where they took five Iranians, without arrest, without legal process. When something like that happens, there are no rules.

"If the Iranians are linked to Shi'a militia in Iraq, either directly or through a faction, then it is within the realms of possibility that Iran has agreed to the kidnapping with a view to trading."

Professor Lucas concludes that claims of a new democracy in Iraq and improved law and order are rhetoric. "Whoever has taken these five British hostages and whatever their fate, one thing is clear: that the increase in troops, detentions, killings in Iraq, is not providing more security – it is providing less."

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Notes to Editors

Professor Lucas, from the University of Birmingham's Department of American and Canadian Studies, is a leading specialist on US and British foreign policy and the situation in Iraq.

The full podcast is available at <http://www.uscanada.bham.ac.uk/news/index.htm>.

Professor Lucas is **available for interview** on 07939 520001 / email: w.s.lucas@bham.ac.uk

You can also contact Anna Mitchell in the Press Office on 0121 414 6029 / 07920 593946.

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