

Is There a "Civil War" in Iraq?

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Introduction

The AOL short version of the Merriam Webster dictionary defines civil war as "a war between opposing groups of citizens of the same country" The Webster's New World Dictionary, 3rd College edition, defines it as "war between geographical or political factions of the same nation."

The level and sources of violence in Iraq has clearly reached the level where they clearly meet this definition. The trend data issued by the Department of Defense in its August Quarterly Status Report are provided in the attached analysis (Note the numbers in the graphs are derived by CSIS, but the graphs are direct copies from the graphs in DoD report).ⁱ They show a roughly 10 to 12-fold increase in sectarian violence over the last year, as well as a steady trend towards more violent civil war.

There are no reliable data on total killed and wounded to draw upon. The word casualty is defined to include both killed and wounded, but most attempts to count "casualties" only include killed – a measure that does not meet the dictionary definition of the term and grossly understates the level of violence. Not only are there usually more wounded than killed, the violence contributing to "civil war" also includes kidnappings, "disappearances," forced relocations or ethnic cleansing, blackmail and intimidation, and people driven into exile.

The highest estimate of the killed -- the results of the Lancet study -- presents serious credibility problems.ⁱⁱ These results describe a state of violence so different from that reported by the MNF-I and reporters on the scene that either this one study is right or MNF-I, the Iraqi government, and every reporter actually in Iraq is radically wrong.

The results of the Lancet study must still be considered, however, because they portray a state of conflict that has taken on the character of a serious civil war since June 2005. The Lancet mortality data show:

- 2.6 "excess deaths" per thousand people in March 03-April 04 (range of 0.6-4.7)
- 5.6 per thousand in May 04-May 05 (range of 2.7-8.6)
- 14.2 per thousand in June 05-June 06 (range of 8.6-21.5)

What may be easier to understand, is that the Lancet study also says that -- as of July 2005 - some 601,027 (429369-79663) had died since the fall of Saddam Hussein, most by gunfire.

It is important to note that this total compares with far lower estimates of about 44,000-49,000 killed for Iraq Body Count, and a maximum of around 128,000 killed for an Iraqi NGO of limited credibility.ⁱⁱⁱ MNF-I and the Iraqi government have not issued recent official counts but if past and partial estimates are extrapolated to include the killed

excluded from the count, they seem to make estimates of killed that total around 60,000-80,000, with 100,000 as the outlying total.

When *any* of these sources of such numbers are put in the broader perspective that wounded almost always exceed killed, and that 100,000s of Iraqis are being displaced or exiled, the resulting totals range from around 2% to more than 5% of the total population.

In addition, kidnappings, extortions, and intimidations affect much of Iraq, and are common in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Basra, (40% of the population) and in Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Diyala, and Baghdad Provinces (about 45% of the total territory). Sectarian violence is also rising in the Tarneem and Najaf Provinces.

This is a civil war.

Trends in Attacks and Violence and Their Impact on Iraqi Force Development

The growing increase in insurgent and sectarian violence was all too clear during the course of 2006. Despite of a variety of new operations in Baghdad and the country as a whole during the summer, the Department of Defense quarterly report on “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq” for August 2006 reports that the average number of weekly attacks continued to increase. Attacks against Coalition forces, the ISF, the civilian population, and infrastructure, increased 15% between May 2006 and the beginning of September, and Iraqi casualties increased by 51% compared to the previous quarter.^{iv}

The Department of Defense report states that the majority (63%) of the attacks it could count over this period were directed against coalition forces. However, the insurgents did not seek close engagement with Coalition forces and the majority of attacks against Coalition forces consisted of IEDs, small arms fire and indirect fire weapons.

The Department of Defense report states that Baghdad and Anbar continued to be the most volatile provinces, accounting for 55% of attacks, and that four provinces – Anbar, Baghdad, Salah al Din, and Diyala – with 37% of the population accounted for 81% of the attacks during May 20, 2006 to August 6, 2006.^v

This calculation, however, ignores the fact that these provinces include the majority of the Sunni population – a clear measure of civil war. Moreover, it is based on a massive undercount of actual violence, since it does not many, if not most, low level incidents where the source of an attack cannot be confirmed, and makes no effort to estimate “softer” forms of ethnic and sectarian violence like intimidation and non-violent ethnic cleansing. While not meaningless, this count is so narrowly defined as to grossly understate the level of civil conflict in Iraq.

The reality is that the drift towards a major civil war has become steadily more serious in Kirkuk, and Basra, and in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Diyala Provinces. This is indicated by the fact that another chart in the Department of Defense report shows that roughly 68% of the population in the Tikrit/Baquba area and some 43% of the population in the Kirkuk area have no confidence in the ability of the government to improve the situation in Iraq.^{vi}

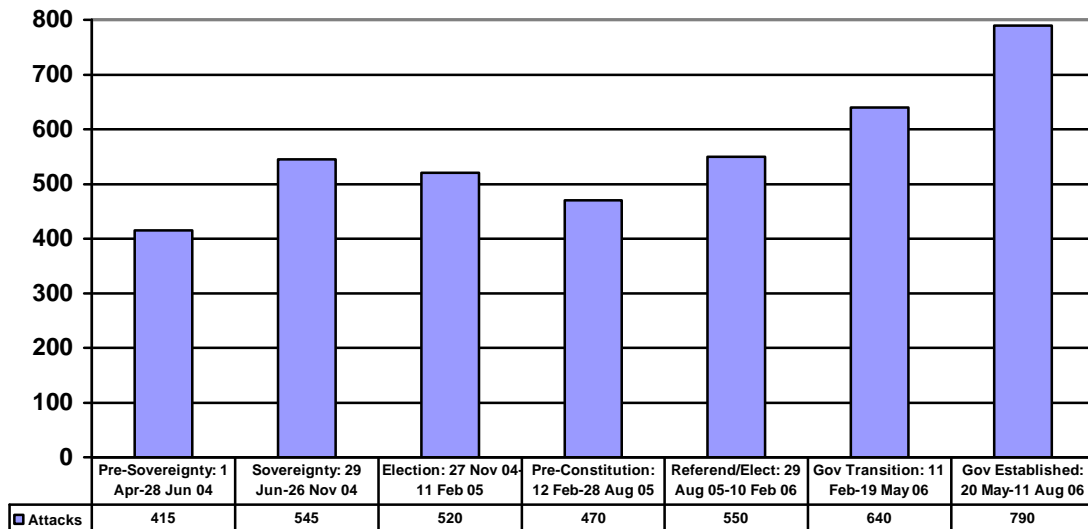
In fact, the report notes that, “sectarian violence is gradually spreading north into Diyala Province and Kirkuk as Sunni, Shi’a, and Kurdish groups compete for provincial influence...In the Southern, predominantly Shi’ia region of the country, political and tribal rivalries are a growing motive behind violence, particularly in Basrah, with limited anti-Coalition forces, attacks are likely undertaken by rogue Shi’ia militia.”^{vii}

The drift towards a steadily more intense civil conflict is also reflected in another chart in the Department of Defense report that reports on a Department of State poll that asked Iraqis if they were concerned that a civil war might break out in Iraq. The results are shown in **Figure 1**. No one asked Iraqis how many felt they were already in a civil war, but other surveys indicate the answer might often have been yes. These results are clearly reflected in the Department of Defense report in several other areas:

- A sharp decline has taken place in the number of Iraqis in the Baghdad area who believe that the security situation will improve in the next 3, 6, and 12 months. Nearly 80% felt it would improve in the next 12 months in January 2005. The figure is now under 50%. Less than 20% now feel it will improve in 6 months and less than 5% feel it will improve in 3 months. (p. 38)
- The drift towards a steadily more intense civil conflict is also reflected in another chart in the Department of Defense report that reports on a Department of State poll that asked Iraqis if they were concerned that a civil war might break out in Iraq. More than 50% of Iraqis in the south and mid-Euphrates said “yes.” So did roughly 80% of Iraqis in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Tikrit/Baquba, and more than 90% of Iraqis in Mosul. No one asked Iraqis how many felt they were already in a civil war, but other surveys indicate the answer might often have been “yes.” (p. 35)

Figure 1

Percentage of Iraqis Concerned About an Increase in Sectarian or Ethnic Violence in Iraq in June-July 2006



Source: Adapted from: US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 37.

Press reporting and MNF-I reports indicate that situation has steadily deteriorated in all of these areas covered in the Department of Defense report since the August cut off date.

According to a June 2006 UN report, an increasingly complex armed opposition continued to be capable of maintaining a consistently high level of violence across Iraq. The worst-affected cities were Baghdad, Basra and Kirkuk. Serious sectarian violence took place in the Ninewa, Salahuddin, Anbar, and Diyala governorates, while other areas, particularly Kerbala and Tarneem governorates; saw an increase in the number of violent incidents.^{viii}

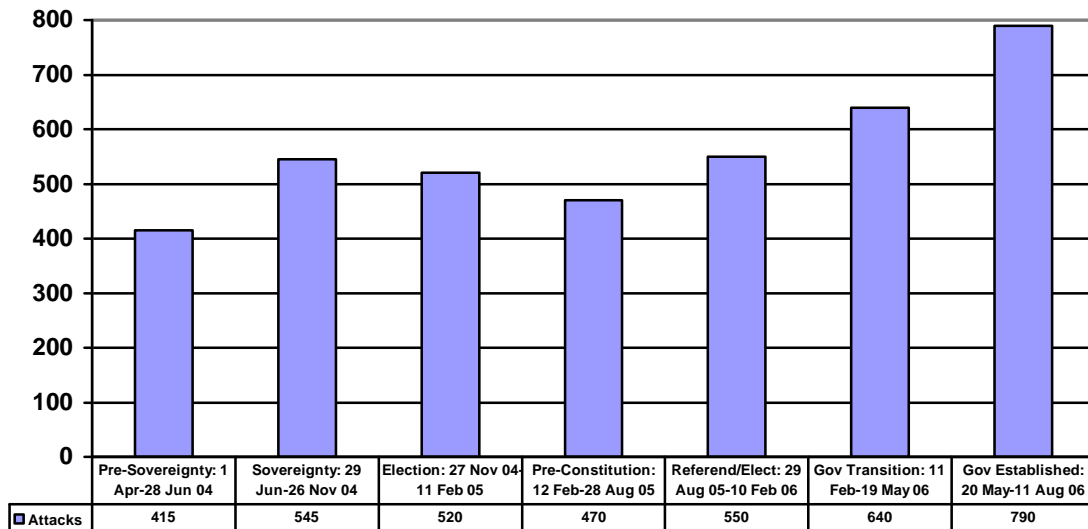
Overall Attack Levels

Attack levels continued to follow the seasonal pattern of increasing through the spring and summer and decreasing in the fall and winter months. Overlaid on this seasonal variation, however, was a trend of increasing violence. Overall, attacks increased by 23% from 2004 to 2005. The number of attacks rose to the highest level ever in July 2006. Indicating increasing violence, total attacks reported from January 2006 through July 2006 were about 57 % higher than the total reported during the corresponding period in 2005.^{ix}

Figure 2 shows the ebb and flow of weekly attacks during different periods and the overall increase in attacks, reflecting the record highs during the summer of 2006.

Figure 2:

Average Weekly Attacks by Time Period 1 Apr 04-11 Aug 06



Source: MNC-I, as adapted from: US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 31; Note: +/- 5% margin of error .

Rising ISF and Iraqi Civilian Casualties

ISF and Iraqi civilians suffered the majority of casualties even though they only received a minority of the overall number of attacks, the Figure 3 illustrates the ever increasing number of Iraqi casualties, even as the Coalition casualties stabilized. Overall, Iraqi casualties increased by 51% over the previous quarter. Additionally the proportion of attacks targeting civilians increased from making up 11% of all attacks in April 2006 to 15% of all attacks in June 2006. In Baghdad attacks against civilians began at a higher

percentage in April (15%) and reflected a greater increase than in the country as a whole, climbing to 22% in June.^x A report by UNAMI’s Human Rights office stated in September that 3,590 civilians were killed in Iraq during July and 3,009 during August.

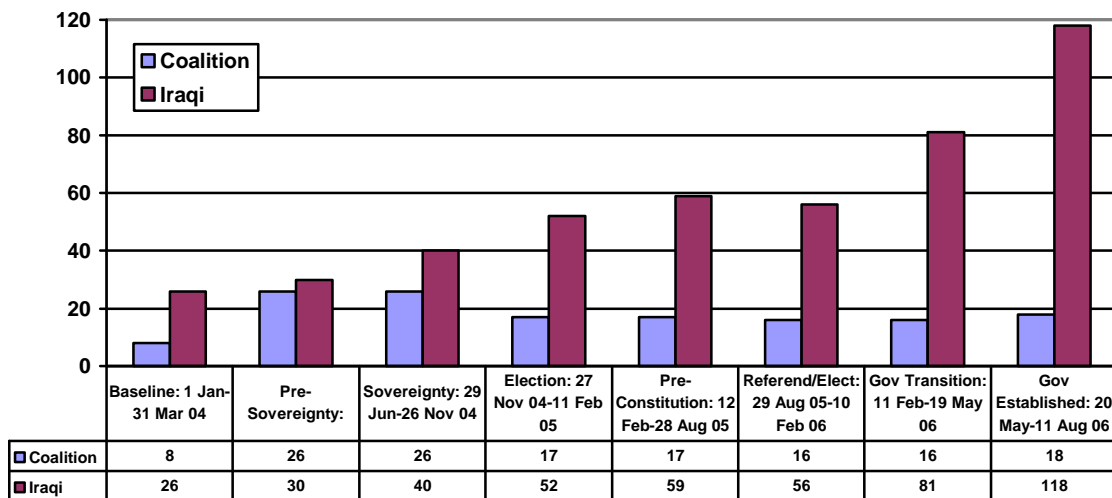
These figures come to a two-month total of 6,599 civilians killed, a record high, increasing from the 6,000 that were killed in the previous two months. For Baghdad, the numbers were 2,884 in July and 2,222 in August, the decrease most likely being the result of greater security because of the “Together Forward” large-scale sweeps. The numbers in Baghdad included body counts from both the morgue and from hospitals in the capitol.

Some American officials said that the morgue’s numbers were inflated. In addition to the record number of civilian deaths, 3780 Iraqi civilians were wounded in July (number estimated) and 4,309 in August, marking a 14% increase. While the numbers decreased from July to August in Baghdad, casualty figures climbed in other areas, notably in Diyala and Mosul, and “further increases were evident towards the end of the month in Baghdad and other governorates.”

The US military initially claimed that new security measures had caused a significant drop in civilian murders in Baghdad during August. However, it later admitted that these numbers did not include mass attacks in either months count, which when included showed less improvement in the overall number of civilian deaths in the capitol for July and August. Casting further doubt on the existence of significant improvements in the numbers of civilian casualties, the report suggested that while the many deaths occurring in Baghdad were relatively well reported, the numbers reflect a low count of casualties for areas outside the capitol because of data collection difficulties. Anbar Province, for example, which includes Fallujah and Ramadi, reported no deaths in July.^{xi}

Figure 3

Average Daily Casualties*-Iraqi (including ISF) and Coalition 1 Apr 04-11 Aug 06



*Casualty data reflect updated data for each period and are derived from unverified initial reports submitted by coalition elements responding to an incident; the inconclusivity of these numbers constrains them to be used only for comparative purposes.

Source: MNC-I, as adapted from: US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 32; Note: +/- 5% margin of error

Torture, Kidnappings, and Disappearances

Torture continued to be widespread, not only by death squads, but also in official detention centers, where some detainees showed signs of beating, as well as use of “electrical cables, wounds in different parts of their bodies, including in the head and genitals, broken bones of legs and hands, electric and cigarette burns.” Bodies found in Baghdad (most likely victims of death squads) often showed signs of torture that included “acid-induced injuries and burns caused by chemical substances, missing skin, broken bones (back, hands and legs), missing eyes, missing teeth and wounds caused by power drills or nails.”^{xii} These victims were frequently found dead on the streets with execution style gunshot wounds.

The increase in violence not only caused problems in terms of security and increased casualties, but also caused problem in political and economic spheres. The State Department reported to Congress in July 2006 that the recent increase in violence had hindered Coalition efforts to engage with Iraqi partners. For example, sectarian divisions and violence frustrated Iraqi government efforts to foster reconciliation.

Kidnappings and threats to embassy personnel made some Iraqi ministers reluctant to meet US personnel. A lack of security also hindered relations between Provincial Reconstruction Teams and provincial leaders. The UN noted that security problems were hampering reconstruction efforts, that the diplomatic community remained under serious threat, and that international agencies needed improved security to provide their services.^{xiii} Overall, the State Department argued that a basic security level was a prerequisite for improvements in other realms, which together would help achieve the conditions for withdrawing US forces.^{xiv}

Increasing Sectarian Violence

What had become a Sunni insurgency during 2005 increasingly became a sectarian struggle between Sunni and Shi'a factions during 2006. Much of the violence was concentrated on controlling the capital leading to the overwhelming majority of casualties being reported in Baghdad. However increasing violence between Sunni and Shi'a extremists, violence between Kurds and Arabs took place in virtually every mixed area in Iraq.^{xv}

Moreover, the increase in sectarian violence led not only to death and injury but also to further displacement. The UN estimated that about 150,000 Iraqis had fled from their homes as of June 30, 2006, primarily because of direct or indirect threats against them or attacks on family members and their community. Because internally displaced persons' were competing for limited services, their plight could lead to further intercommunal animosities and generate further displacement.^{xvi}

In its August report to Congress on stability and security in Iraq, the Department of Defense acknowledged these trends noting:

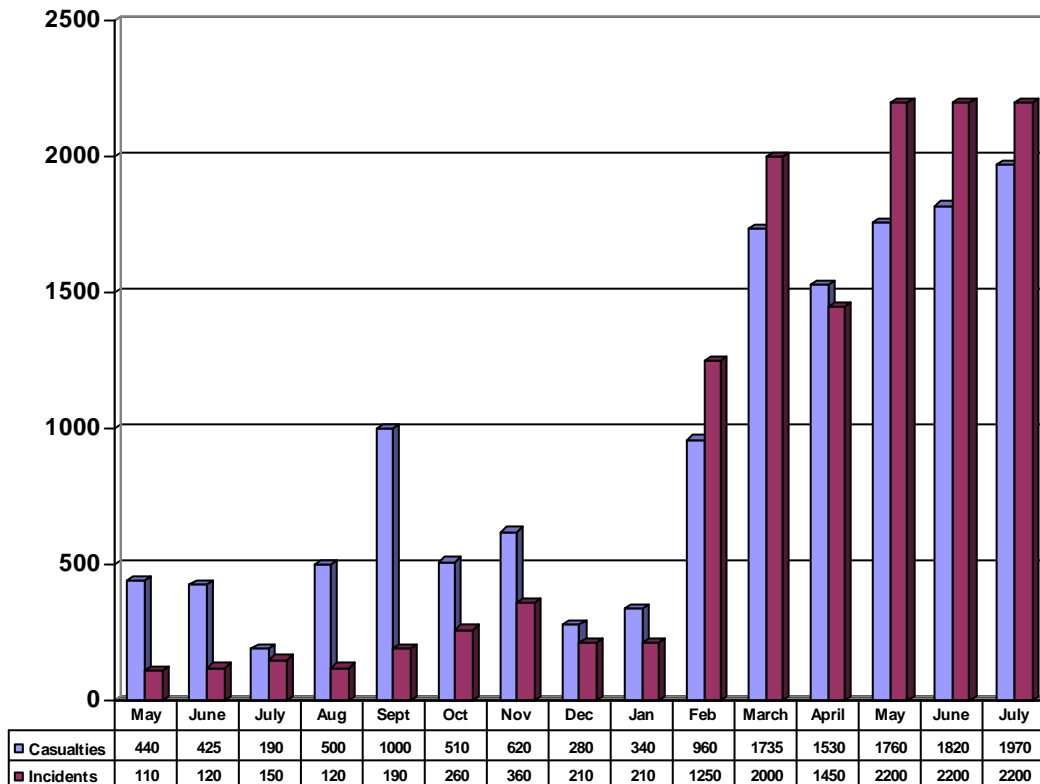
Setbacks in the levels and nature of violence in Iraq affect all other measures of stability, reconstruction, and transition. Sectarian tensions increased over the past quarter, manifested

in an increasing numbers of internally displaced persons. Sunni and Shi'a extremists, particularly al-Qaeda in Iraq and rogue elements of Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM), are increasingly interlocked in retaliatory violence and are contesting control of ethnically mixed areas to expand their existing areas of influence.^{xvii}

In an interview with The Associated Press on September 21, 2006, General Casey emphasized the changing nature of the insurgency, saying, "We're starting to see this conflict here transition from an insurgency against us to a struggle for the division of political and economic power among Iraqis."^{xviii}

Figure 4:

Sectarian Incidents and Violence: May 2005 – July 2006



*Casualty data reflect updated data for each period and are derived from unverified initial reports submitted by coalition elements responding to an incident; the inconclusivity of these numbers constrains them to be used only for comparative purposes.

Source: MNC-I, as adapted from: US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 35; Note: +/- 5% margin of error

ⁱ US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, pp. 32-34.

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- ⁱⁱ Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy, Les Roberts, "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey," Published online October 11, 2006, www.thelancet.com ,DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(06)69491-9 1
- ⁱⁱⁱ "The Iraq Body Count Database," <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/>.
- ^{iv} US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 3.
- ^v US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, pp. 31, 32.
- ^{vi} US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 7.
- ^{vii} US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 28
- ^{viii} General Accounting Office, "Stabilizing Iraq: An Assessment of the Security Situation," September 11, 2006, p.5-6
- ^{ix} General Accounting Office, "Stabilizing Iraq: An Assessment of the Security Situation," September 11, 2006, p.5
- ^x US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 31.
- ^{xi} Wadhams, Nick. "UN: Civilian death toll in Iraq climbs again, to more than 6,599 in July and August," Associated Press, September 21, 2006.
- ^{xii} Richard A. Opiel Jr., "U.N. Finds Baghdad Toll Far Higher Than Cited," New York Times, September 21, 2006, and "Kidnappers Using Victims As 'Suicide' Bombers," USA Today, September 22, 2006, p.4, and Wadhams, Nick. "UN: Civilian death toll in Iraq climbs again, to more than 6,599 in July and August," Associated Press, September 21, 2006. Quotes from Richard A. Opiel Jr., "U.N. Finds Baghdad Toll Far Higher Than Cited," New York Times, September 21, 2006.
- ^{xiii} General Accounting Office, "Stabilizing Iraq: An Assessment of the Security Situation," September 11, 2006, p.8
- ^{xiv} General Accounting Office, "Stabilizing Iraq: An Assessment of the Security Situation," September 11, 2006, p.2
- ^{xv} General Accounting Office, "Stabilizing Iraq: An Assessment of the Security Situation," September 11, 2006, p.13-14, and *US Department of Defense, Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 27.*
- ^{xvi} General Accounting Office, "Stabilizing Iraq: An Assessment of the Security Situation," September 11, 2006, p.14
- ^{xvii} US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, August 2006 Report to Congress, p. 3.
- ^{xviii} "AP Interview: U.S. Gen. George Casey says conflict in Iraq changing from insurgency to internal struggle for power." The Associated Press in the *International Herald Tribune*, September 21, 2006.