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Iraq's Evolving Insurgency and the Risk of Civil War

**Democracy, Deadlock, and Death Squads:
Developments in the Summer of 2006**

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Executive Summary

The rising insurgency in Iraq has become a “war after the war” that threatens to divide the country and thrust it into full-scale civil war. It dominates the struggle to reshape Iraq as a modern state, has emerged as a growing threat to the Gulf region, and has become linked to the broader struggle between Sunni and Shi’ite Islamist extremism, and moderation and reform, throughout the Islamic world.

Since its inception in the spring of 2003, the nature of the insurgency has evolved from a struggle largely limited to a confrontation between Coalition forces and former regime loyalists to a much more diffuse conflict, involving a number of Sunni groups, Shi’ite militias, and foreign jihadists.

While Coalition forces engaged in initiatives to stem violence, train Iraqi forces, and build public faith in political institutions, ethnic and sectarian tensions simultaneously pushed the country closer toward civil war. Sunni insurgents consolidated their base of domestic support, and attracted foreign fighters. The February 22 bombing of the Golden Mosque catalyzed Sunni-Shi’ite clashes. Different factions built up their militias, and infiltrated the new Iraqi security forces. Shi’ite death squads became more prevalent, and the Shi’ite community itself fragmented into rivaling groups. Tensions between Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomans intensified the ethnic dimension of the war. Ultimately, these developments had the effect of blurring the distinction between the threat of an insurgency and that of a civil war.

In the summer of 2006, Iraqis faced unprecedented levels of violence, carried out by a tangled set of warring factions. As the nature of the insurgency became more complex, the prospects for national reconciliation grew more distant.

Changes in the dynamics of the fighting, and the character of the insurgency, largely centered on the following set of emerging trends:

- Ethnic and sectarian fighting was eclipsing the dominant threat posed by Sunni insurgents, both in terms of inflicting the majority of Iraqi casualties, as well as hindering political, social, and economic progress in the country. But while the visibility of the Sunni Arab insurgency declined amid heightened sectarian violence, it continued to pose a strong and viable danger to stability operations.
- Violence carried out by Sunni and Shi’ite factions appeared to be carving Baghdad, and the country as a whole, into sectarian zones, protected by various armed groups. Increasingly, violence became part of a sectarian struggle for territorial gains.
- Attack patterns indicated an upsurge in civilian casualties, which peaked in July, as well as an increase in the frequency of attacks against US and Iraqi forces, primarily in the form of roadside bombs.
- Ethnic cleansing was forcing many Iraqis to relocate to areas where they were in the sectarian or ethnic majority, or flee the country altogether.
- The influence of militias was growing as a key obstacle to Coalition forces, underscored by a sensitive confrontation between Moqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army and the United States.
- The Shi’ite community was showing signs of internal divisions—demonstrated through open confrontations between rivaling factions, and fragmentation within militia groups.

- US attention focused on curbing the heightened concentration of violence in Baghdad, while violence outside of the capital continued to intensify, particularly in key areas such as Basra, Kirkuk, and Mosul.
- Kurds were persistently pushing for complete autonomy, threatening constitutional deadlock, as well as intensification of the conflict over Kirkuk.

On the political front, the appointment of the Ministers of the Interior, Defense, and State for National Security Affairs in early June marked the complete formation of the national unity government. At that time, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki laid out three primary pillars for his national strategy going forward: (1) working to heal ethnic and sectarian strife through a campaign of “national reconciliation;” (2) strengthening Iraq’s security forces, and either absorbing or disbanding militias; and (3) rebuilding Iraq’s infrastructure.

The cornerstone of al-Maliki’s program for political inclusion was the National Reconciliation and Dialogue Plan, which aimed to draw insurgent elements of the armed opposition into the political process. The initiative demonstrated unprecedented will by the nascent Iraqi government to put key issues on the table, and to engage in unified talks with Sunni insurgent groups. But the final document, emerging after rounds of debate, was little more than a vague statement of principles that skirted divisive issues, including conditions of amnesty for insurgents, and the disbanding of militias. And the controversy unleashed in the process, revealed conflicting agendas within the fledgling government, deeply divided along sectarian lines, and plagued by historical tensions.

While political negotiations came to a standstill, US efforts to strengthen Iraqi forces—supported by al-Maliki’s commitment to the process—moved ahead. American troops began handing over security control to their Iraqi counterparts. In July, Muthanna became the first province to be placed completely under Iraqi authority. But even as the number and capabilities of Iraqi security forces became more robust, overall security conditions in the country were rapidly declining, leading some to question whether the new Iraqi security structure—infiltrated by an assortment of militias—could successfully secure the country without reverting to US capabilities.

Amid widespread violence in the country, economic conditions continued to deteriorate. Iraqis faced a severe fuel crisis, joblessness, high inflation rates, and a burgeoning black market. Sorely-needed reconstruction projects were hampered by insurgent attacks, rampant crime and corruption, a lack of consistent funding, delays, and poor logistical planning.

As the threat of civil war loomed over Iraqi society, some politicians engaged in serious discussions on how to segregate the country along sectarian lines. Confronted by an increasingly volatile political, security, and economic environment, al-Maliki’s ambitious national strategy was outstripped by more immediate concerns of holding the country together, and restoring public faith in his government, which risked becoming a hollow shell of authority.

Meanwhile in Washington, US officials came under increased pressure to explain, and address the sharp deterioration in the Iraqi security environment. In spite growing skepticism of the US presence in Iraq, the administration was firm in its resolve to stay the course, and remain in the country until the it was secured. But to date, this

determination has been accompanied by policies that reflect US ideology rather than realities on the ground. To counter backsliding trends in Iraqi society, the US administration would need to match its firm resolve with new strategies that incorporate lessons from past mistakes, and adjust to the complexity of fighting an increasingly diffuse, uncertain, and lengthy war in Iraq.

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The “War After the War”

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As different actors swarmed the security environment, the threats to Iraqi security grew more complex, and US efforts to bring stability to the country became more uncertain. It was increasingly difficult for US forces to characterize the perpetrators of attacks, and identify whether acts of violence were coordinated or sporadic, national or local, and to what extent they involved a central command.

Ultimately, these developments had the effect of blurring the distinction between the threat of an insurgency and that of a civil war.

Developments in the Summer of 2006

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Meanwhile in Washington, US officials came under increased pressure to explain, and address the sharp deterioration in the Iraqi security environment. In spite growing skepticism of the US presence in Iraq, the administration was firm in its resolve to stay the course, and remain in the country until the it was secured. But to date, this determination has been accompanied by policies that reflect US ideology rather than realities on the ground. To counter backsliding trends in Iraqi society, the US administration would need to match its firm resolve with new strategies that incorporate lessons from past mistakes, and adjust to the complexity of fighting an increasingly diffuse, uncertain, and lengthy war in Iraq.

Working Toward National Reconciliation

On June 25, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki presented a 24-point "National Reconciliation and Dialogue Project" to the Iraqi Council of Representatives, as part of his efforts to stem sectarian and ethnic violence in the country. The document—a product of rounds of debate within the Iraqi government, as well as talks involving Iraqi President Jalal al-Talabani, US ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad, and seven Sunni insurgent groups—aimed to draw insurgent elements of the armed opposition into the political process. On the day of its release, Mr. Maliki announced in Parliament "for he who wants to build, we offer a hand with an olive branch."

Among its provisions the plan proposed limited amnesty to insurgents, offered a review of the de-Ba'athification process, and provided compensation to victims of attacks by terrorists or Iraqi and coalition forces. A number of points were included to win Sunni support, including the amnesty provision, a review of laws banning high-ranking members of the former ruling Ba'ath party from public posts, and a proposal to negotiate rules of engagement with American forces to prevent human rights violations during military operations.²

Skirting the Issues

The document however, quickly drew criticism for its failure to address a number of key and divisive issues. Most notably, the document was ambiguous in specifying which insurgents would be granted amnesty, omitted mention of a timeline for the withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq, and failed to lay out how the Iraqi government would deal with militias.

Article 5 broadly stated that prisoners who were not "involved in crimes, terrorist activities and war crimes against humanity" would be eligible for amnesty, given that they renounced violence and supported the national unity government. But it remained unclear whether insurgents, who killed Iraqi security forces or more contentiously, those who killed American troops, would be included in the amnesty plan. The original

concept, indicated in earlier drafts of the document, was to provide a broad amnesty to detainees who were not involved in the “shedding of innocent Iraqis’ blood.”

The rewording of the amnesty provision in the final document reflected a compromise between competing interests in the national unity government, as well as pressure from Washington. During negotiations, religious Shi’ites opposed amnesty for Sunni insurgents, and while the US government supported efforts to co-opt insurgents into the political process, lawmakers were quick to lobby against amnesty for those who took part in the killing of American soldiers.

The national reconciliation plan was also criticized for glossing over the issue of coalition troop withdrawal. While it called for the strengthening of Iraqi security forces to take over the role of coalition troops, there was no mention of developing a concrete timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces—a provision that was included in an earlier draft of the initiative, but subsequently omitted. The plan also included a lofty proposal to “solve the problem of militias,” without clearly detailing what this meant, and how it could be achieved.

More broadly, the complexity in developing the reconciliation plan revealed a struggle faced by the Iraqi government in trying to achieve two cross-cutting aims: coaxing insurgents into a participatory role in the political process, while simultaneously trying to project resolve in its crackdown on violent groups and establishing distance from armed factions. On the day al-Maliki launched the plan, he called on insurgents to “lay down their arms and join the democratic process,” but earlier stressed that “reconciliation and national dialogue does not mean honoring and reaching out to the killers and criminals.”³ The severity of the challenge the Iraqi administration faced in balancing these two principles was exacerbated by the embedded affiliation of government groups with militias.

A couple of days after al-Maliki presented his National Reconciliation plan, he publicly announced that insurgents who attacked American forces would not be pardoned under the new amnesty. When asked to identify which groups and individuals would be eligible, he cited Iraqis who had carried out “sabotage” against the government, though only “minor” acts, as well as those who had joined the insurgency as an act of resistance against the American-led process, but had not killed anyone. He said it would also apply to members of the Ba’ath Party of Saddam Hussein who renounced their allegiance.⁴

Reactions from the Sunni community to the National Reconciliation Plan were mixed. Some elder Sunni politicians, such as Adnan al-Dulaimi, as well as the Sunni Endowment, endorsed the plan, whereas the Mujaheddin al-Shura Council announced in an online statement that “there will be no reconciliation with the apostates, nor will our swords be put in their sheaths.”⁵

A member of the Islamic Army of Iraq, said that violent attacks would continue so long as American troops were in Iraq. Adnan Thiyab al-Jubouri, a Sunni member of Parliament commented on the difficulty in bringing insurgents to the negotiating table: “We worked hard trying to make one of the resistance groups accept the reconciliation project but we failed. We’ve been in direct contact with most of them, except al-Qa’ida.

They said it is impossible for the Iraqi armed resistance to stop. They insist that this is their right to get rid of the occupation.”⁶

Bringing Sunni Insurgents On-Board

In spite of the controversy surrounding the reconciliation plan, there were some encouraging developments. When the initiative was introduced, several Sunni-led insurgent groups approached top Iraqi government officials to begin negotiations.⁷ And symbolically, the plan represented al-Maliki's commitment to the new Constitution, and his political will and determination to embrace national unity, engage in negotiations with armed groups, and to offer amnesty.

Sunni cleric Ahmed Abdul Ghafour al-Samaraie offered the support of the Sunni Endowment, the government agency responsible for Sunni religious affairs. He called, however, on the government to move quickly to address gaps in the plan, including the disbanding of militias, and the release of all prisoners who have not been convicted. “We bless the initiative,” but al-Samaraie added, “We think that the first step to be taken regarding this plan is to disband armed militias because the government will not be able to impose the law on everybody with the presence of those militiamen that consider themselves above the law.”⁸

Four days after the Prime Minister presented the initiative, 11 Sunni insurgent groups offered to immediately halt attacks on American-led forces in Iraq if Washington and the Iraqi government agreed to withdraw all coalition forces from the country within two years. Eight of the eleven insurgent groups that approached al-Maliki's government came under the umbrella group of the 1920 Revolution Brigade. The Islamic Army in Iraq, the Mohammed Army and the Mujahedin Shura Council were not part of the offer to the government.

Although Prime Minister al-Maliki did not dismiss the proposal, in televised remarks, he said that the timetable demand was unrealistic since it was not certain whether Iraqi forces would be prepared within that timeframe to deem a foreign presence unnecessary.⁹ And while this particular arrangement never materialized, in the following weeks, 22 Arab Sunni groups had agreed to join al-Maliki's initiative of national dialogue.¹⁰ In addition, a group of 18 senior officers of the former Ba'athist regime had met with President Jalal Talabani to discuss ways of integrating hundreds of Arab Sunni cashiered officers and non-commissioned officers into the Iraqi forces.¹¹

Differences Unravel

The first reconciliation meeting of the Supreme National Committee for Reconciliation and National Dialogue was held on July 22 and brought President Talabani, Prime Minister al-Maliki, top Shi'ite and Sunni officials, and other dignitaries together to discuss how to move forward with the national reconciliation plan. The committee included legislators, in addition to religious and tribal leaders.

As the meeting convened, debate quickly focused on the details of the amnesty provision—particularly the question of whether detainees who killed members of the American forces should be eligible for pardon. Some, including al-Maliki, argued, “all

those whose hands were tainted with blood should be brought to justice,” defending his earlier stance on the issue.

The Sunni speaker of Parliament, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani contended, “If we punish a person who killed an American soldier, who is an occupier, we should punish the American soldiers who killed an Iraqi who fought against the occupation,” a perspective shared by many Sunnis. Al-Mashhadani continued, “In my point of view, the person who killed Americans in defense of his country, in other countries, they would build a statue for him.”¹²

As officials and analysts assessed the prospects for Iraqi national reconciliation, some felt that some members of the Sunni community were warming to the idea of joining the political process, and showed increased propensity to abandon violence as a means of advancing political goals.

During a July 11 address at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said that “a major change, a tectonic shift has taken place in the political orientation of the Sunni Arab community” as Sunnis are re-conceptualizing the new government and distancing themselves from the insurgency. “Sunni Arab leaders are realizing that nostalgia for their past dominance is not the basis for a realistic political strategy,” he said. Consequently they are more willing to engage in formal political procedures in the direction of national reconciliation.¹³

At the same time, sectarian violence did not wane following the introduction of the national reconciliation initiative, but rather reached heightened levels in the ensuing months. And the surge in Shi’ite militia-related violence hurt efforts to draw Sunni insurgents into the political process. In early August, Gen. Casey said, “The people who are talking to us on the Sunni side have gone to the ground and don’t really want to talk to us right now.”¹⁴

Perhaps partially due to the plan’s vagueness, or its lack of implementation guidelines, the initiative did not appear to carry the weight required to end the political deadlock perpetuated by sectarian and ethnic differences in Iraq. And the growing violence served as a firm reminder that, in spite of concessions made by the Shi’ite-led unity government, some Sunnis would not accept to lose power to the Shi’ite majority, or ideologically accept the US presence in Iraq.

Heightened Sectarian and Ethnic Violence

The month of July introduced a new wave of sectarian violence—largely characterized by tit-for-tat reprisals led by Sunni groups and Shi’ite militias, which increasingly appeared to be dictating the flux of violence in Iraq. In an address at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad warned that sectarian violence had overshadowed the threat posed by the Sunni insurgency as the main obstacle to achieving stability in Iraq. “A year ago, terrorism and the insurgency against the coalition and the Iraqi security forces were the principal sources of instability,” he said. “Violent sectarianism is now the main challenge...It is imperative for the new Iraqi government to make major progress in dealing with this challenge in the next six months.”¹⁵

Since the spring of 2006, the primary threat to Iraqi security has generally evolved from “terrorism” to “insurgency,” to “ethnic and sectarian violence” that is pushing the country toward civil war. In an expanded section on the security environment, the August 2006 Quarterly Report to Congress “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” addressed shifts in the nature of the insurgency:¹⁶

Rising sectarian strife defines the emerging nature of violence in mid-2006. Since the last report, the core conflict in Iraq changed into a struggle between Sunni and Shi’a extremists seeking to control key areas in Baghdad, create or protect sectarian enclaves, divert economic resources, and impose their own respective and religious agendas. Death squads and terrorists are locked in mutually reinforcing cycles of sectarian strife, with Sunni and Shi’a extremists each portraying themselves as the defenders of their respective sectarian groups. However, the Sunni Arab insurgency remains potent and viable, although its visibility has been overshadowed by the increase in sectarian violence.

Deadly Reprisal Attacks

Four of the bloodiest attacks of the year took place in July, killing 220 people among them.¹⁷ Increasingly, attacks involved large-scale revenge killings, targeting of holy sites, and inflammatory exchanges of blame between Sunni and Shi’ite factions. In the first 18 days of July, sectarian or insurgent-related violence claimed the lives of at least 695 Iraqis, and wounded 1,029.¹⁸

These numbers represented a sharp increase over figures reported during the same period in 2005, when the Associated Press count showed that at least 450 Iraqis were killed.¹⁹ There was an average of 34 attacks per day in the week following July 13 in and around the capital—representing an increase of 40 percent from the 24 registered attacks between June 14 and July 13.²⁰

The cycle of violence in July began with the bombing of a small Shi’ite mosque in the Jihad neighborhood of southwest Baghdad on July 8. The following morning, in what was widely interpreted as a reprisal attack, Shi’ite militiamen rampaged through the Sunni neighborhood of Jihad in Baghdad, indiscriminately executing those identified as Sunnis. According to witness accounts, the gunmen set up checkpoints along main commercial streets and demanded identification cards, forced Sunnis out of their homes, or off sidewalks, and executed them in brought daylight. The death toll from the shootings varied; while the American military reported fewer than a dozen killed, some news agencies put the figure at over 50.²¹ Only hours after the rampage, two car bombs exploded near a Shi’ite mosque in northern Baghdad, killing at least 17, and wounding 38 according to the Associated Press.

Several Sunni Arab political and religious leaders blamed Iraqi and American security forces for their failure to prevent the violence. Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister for Security Affairs Salam al-Zobai accused the Ministries of Defense and Interior of collaborating with the militias to carry out attacks. “Interior and Defense Ministries are infiltrated,” he said. “And there are officials who lead brigades who are involved in this.”²²

Collaboration between security forces and the militias ranks among the most sensitive, and potentially volatile issues in Iraq. The following witness account of the July 9 Jihad killings was reported in the Washington Post:²³

Saleh Muhammed, an Amiriyah resident, told a Post special correspondent that he dialed 130 into his cellphone, Baghdad's emergency number. "The Mahdi Army has attacked Amiriyah," he told the Interior Ministry dispatcher.

"The Mahdi Army are not terrorists like you," said the dispatcher at the ministry, which is controlled by a Shi'ite party and operates closely with militias. "They are people doing their duty. And how could you know that they are the Mahdi Army? Is it written on their foreheads?" He hung up the phone.

Meanwhile, al-Maliki's office moved to distance itself from al-Zobai's statement, reporting that his comments "do not represent the government's point of view."²⁴ Some Jihadi residents and Sunni Arab leaders accused the Mahdi Army of committing the killings, but the organization denied the allegations. Some US officials said that the Mahdi army, which once confined its activities to protecting the cleric's territory and trying to gain control of towns in southern Iraq, had become a criminal organization engaging in "homicides, kidnapping, and robberies in the Baghdad area."²⁵

The country's largest Sunni bloc said that it would end its 10-day boycott of Parliament in the interest of national unity following the attack. (The bloc had suspended their participation on July 2 after a colleague, Tayseer Najah al-Mashhadani, was kidnapped).

On July 12, gunmen kidnapped a group of people at a parking lot of a bus station, and killed 22 of them in execution-style slayings. All of the victims were Shi'ites. And five days later, masked gunmen carrying rocket launchers and grenades killed at least 42 people in a predominately Shi'ite market in Mahmoudiya. While the details of the attacks were not clear, several witnesses said that the violence began when Sunni gunmen opened fire on a funeral for a member of the Mahdi army, killing nine mourners.²⁶

The following day, at least 45 Iraqis were killed and 88 injured in a suicide bombing near a Shi'ite shrine in the southern city of Kufa. The attacker drove a minivan to an area where Shi'ite laborers gather in search of work, offered them jobs, and loaded the minivan with volunteers before detonating the vehicle. In the wake of the attack, the Shi'ite television station Al-Forat broadcast inflammatory remarks by Shi'ites who blamed the attack on Sunni extremists, and expressed frustration that Sunni politicians were unable to prevent the Sunni insurgent uprising. The main Sunni bloc condemned the Shi'ite-dominated security forces for failing to control the situation, and argued that the attack likely came in retaliation for the kidnapping of seven Sunnis, whose bodies were discovered the day before in the town of Mahmoudiya.²⁷

The Ominous Question of Civil War

During this period of violence, al-Maliki was cautious in his comments—likely struggling to acknowledge the recent surge of militia activity in spite of his government's efforts to curb sectarian violence, including the implementation of a much-touted security crackdown in Baghdad and the introduction of the National Reconciliation Plan in June. At a July 10 press conference though, he said, "I don't see the country falling into a civil war, despite the regrettable activities of certain people who ignore that Iraq is united."²⁸

Other assessments of the situation however, were grimmer. Increasingly, Iraqi politicians, as well as some US officials, were speaking of the beginning of a civil war, or questioning the capability of the nascent government to hold the country together. Wafiq

al-Samarrae, an adviser to Iraqi President Talibani said on Al-Jazeera on July 10, "We've said it several times that there are people who want to create civil war. Today this country is on the verge of civil war, not sectarian strife."²⁹ A Shi'ite legislator Haidar al-Ibadi echoed this observation: "Certainly, what is happening is the start of civil war. It is a dangerous situation in which the people involved now are being dragged into massive killings."³⁰

The cycle of reprisal killings weakened the credibility of al-Malaki's government, and widened the political fault-lines in an already-fragile government. A leading Sunni legislator, Salehh al-Mutlek, said, "This is a hopeless government. It has not done one good thing since it started, and things are getting worse, not better...The parliament cannot reach practical solutions because their minds are concerned only with their sect and not the interests of the nation. It looks like the government is going to collapse very soon."³¹

According to an article in the Miami Herald, some US officials acknowledged privately "that their hopes that Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki will be able to rein in Shi'ite militia groups and persuade Sunni insurgents to negotiate may be misplaced." "Many of the government's leaders," they noted, "were themselves linked to Shi'ite or Kurdish militias or guerrilla groups."³²

In late July, Rida Jawad al-Takki, a senior Member of Parliament from the Shi'ite Alliance Bloc said, "The situation is terrifying and black...We have received information of a plan to divide Baghdad. The government is incapable of solving the situation."³³

Meanwhile, in Washington, Gen. John P. Abizad told a Senate Committee on August 3, "I believe that the sectarian violence is probably as bad as I've seen it, in Baghdad in particular, and that if not stopped, it is possible that Iraq could move towards civil war"—a statement that represented perhaps the most sober official military assessment since the commencement of the war.³⁴ Following General Abizad's testimony, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee and a staunch supporter of the president, Senator John W. Warner of Virginia, said that if Iraq slid into civil war, the committee may need to re-examine whether the authorization for the use of American forces in Iraq was still applicable.³⁵

And US officials were facing increased pressure at home to acknowledge and justify the deteriorating conditions in Iraq. Defense Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld responded to Senator Hilary Clinton's criticism of the administration's "record of incompetence in executing" its war-fighting policy by saying, "First of all, it's true, there is a sectarian conflict in Iraq, and there is a loss of life. And it's an unfortunate and tragic thing that's taking place. And it is true that there are people who are attempting to prevent that government from being successful," but, he added, "the idea of them prevailing is unacceptable."³⁶

The surge in violence exacerbated the internal displacement crisis in Iraq. According to Sattar Nowruz, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, in only one week in July, 1,117 families abandoned mixed areas for Shi'ite and Sunni strongholds. He said that nearly 27,000 families, or the equivalent of 162,000, people

have registered for relocation since the February 22 bombing of the Shi'ite shrine in Samarra, and this internal migration was "a dangerous sign" of religious segregation.³⁷

The rise in sectarian violence led some families to "swap houses" so that they were able to live in neighborhoods that were predominately inhabited by Iraqis of their same sect. Followers of Moqtada al Sadr capitalized on this growing trend to garner support among Shi'ites by helping them transition to their new neighborhoods. Sadrist welcomed new families to the area, secured their streets and strategically relied on their control of ministries of education and trade to help relocated families enroll their children in new schools, and transfer their food ration cards to the new community.³⁸

As ethnic fault lines were deepening in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most prominent religious authority in the country, issued a statement saying that the time has come for "all those who value the unity and future of this country" to "exert maximum efforts to stop the bloodletting." He called on "all Iraqis of different sects and ethnic groups to be aware of the danger threatening the future of the country and stand side-by-side against it."³⁹

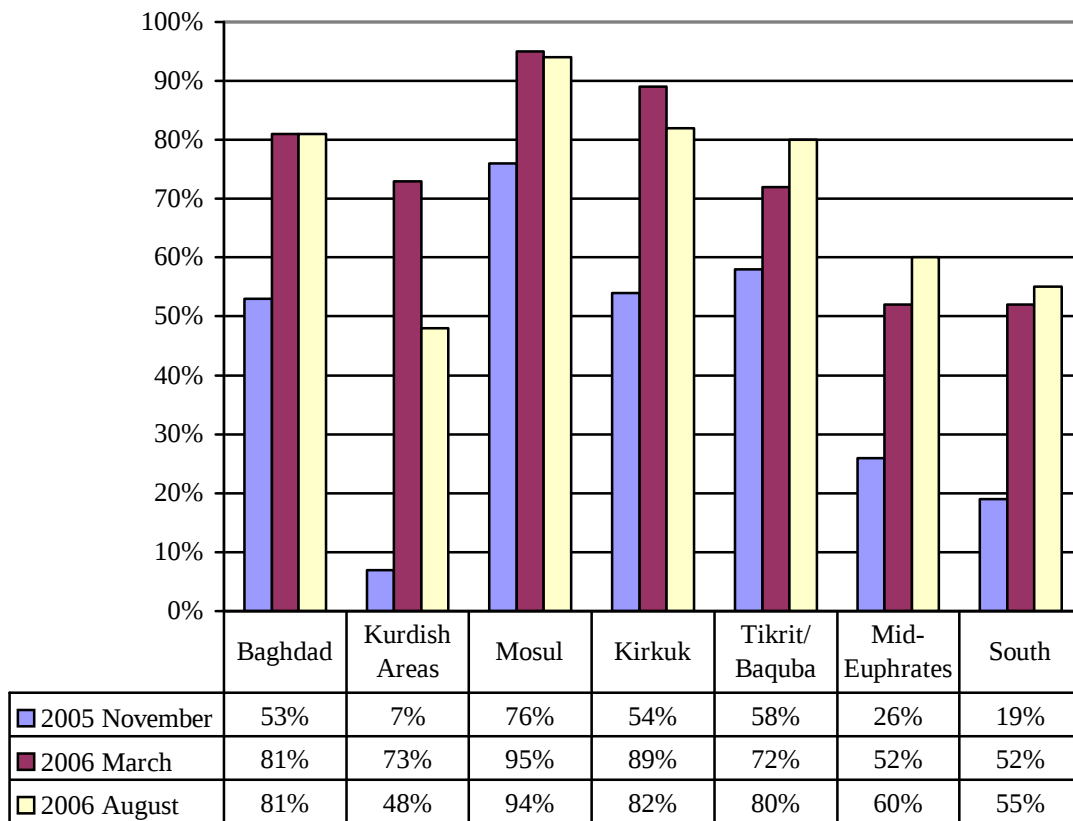
The August 2006 DoD Quarterly Report to Congress, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," noted the risk of rising sectarian tensions "manifested in an increasing number of execution style killings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians, and increasing numbers of internally displaced persons." And while the report stated that the "conditions that could lead to civil war exist in Iraq," it maintained that "the current violence is not a civil war, and movement toward civil war can be prevented."⁴⁰

The report included polling data on the level of public concern that Iraq would slide into civil war over time, broken down by region. The graph, reproduced below as Figure 1, indicated a general rise in public concern of civil war. The marked increase since the February 2006 bombing of the Golden Mosque did not generally show signs of decline in the August polling, particularly in mixed and Sunni areas—suggesting that al-Maliki's efforts at national reconciliation largely failed to calm heightened fear of civil war.

Amid the growing sense that the country was on the brink of a civil war, the fledgling Iraqi government faced a renewed sense of urgency to contain sectarian violence, and exert authority over an increasingly factionalized Iraq. If Iraqis became skeptical of the government's ability to protect them, they would be more likely to turn to religious-based militias for security. Al-Maliki's new government would then face the risk of becoming a hollow shell of official authority held up by the American presence, while real power was vested in the hands of militia members—presiding over a failed state.

Figure 1: Concern of Civil War: November 2005-August 2006

Percent of respondents that were very/somewhat concerned that a civil war might break out



Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, August 2006, p. 35.

Data points are estimates from figure in the DoD document.

Department of State, Office of Research, November 2005/March 2006/August 2006

Sample sizes: November 2005: Baghdad-1,365; Kurdish Areas-637; Mosul-521; Kirkuk-213;

Tikrit/Baquba-597; Mid-Euphrates-1,017; South-910

March 2006: Baghdad-213; Kurdish Areas-313; Mosul-123; Kirkuk 112; Tikrit/Baquba-211; Mid-Euphrates-550; South-448

August 2006: Baghdad-911; Kurdish Areas-469; Mosul-371; Kirkuk-142; Tikrit/Baquba-361; Mid-Euphrates-678; South-684

Margin of error: $\pm 4\%$ for the overall sample, but varies among regions.

Growing Divides: Talk of Segregating the Country

Violence carried out by Sunni and Shi'ite factions—which targeted civilians or drove them out of an area on the basis of their sect—appeared to be carving Baghdad into sectarian zones, protected by various armed groups. Increasingly, analysts were describing violence in the capital as part of a sectarian struggle for territorial gains to control Baghdad, and Iraq as a whole.

The Sunni strongholds in Baghdad include Ghazaliya and Ameriya in the west of the city, Karkh on the west bank of the river, and Adhamiya on the eastern bank of the river. To the east, lies the most prominent Shi'ite stronghold of Sadr City. Kadhemiya and Shuala to the northwest, are also predominantly Shi'ite areas. Among the flashpoint areas are the southern suburb of Dora, the Jihad district in the west, Sayediya and Ameriya in the southwest, and along the border between Shuala and Ghasazaliya.⁴¹

In early August, Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi proposed a plan to form a National Guard unit, the first official Sunni militia, which would personally protect the legislator, as well as the Sunni stronghold Adhamiya, an area flanked by Shi'ite districts. The initial stages of the plan reportedly aimed to recruit 350 former army personnel who were to be trained as part of the Defense ministry, and would be offered \$700 per month.

The plan likely came as a response to an earlier announcement by Abdelaziz al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), that called for the creation of “public committees” to supervise neighborhoods.⁴²

At the same time, some leaders of Iraq's Shi'ite bloc openly began to promote a plan to partition the entire country along sectarian lines to curb violence. They advocated the creation of federal regions—similar to the Kurds' enclave in the north—that would have independent defense forces, and autonomous control over oil resources in their territory.

Abdelaziz al-Hakim pushed a proposal that would create a nine-province district in the south, a largely peaceful area that holds 60 percent of the country's oil reserves. Cabinet ministers, clerics, and ministers, promulgated the plan.⁴³

According to the Iraqi Constitution, any of Iraq's 18 provinces, or a group of provinces, could hold a referendum on the formation of a “federal” region. But the Constitution left the definition of federalism vague, without specifying the conditions of such autonomy. The question of control over oil exploration was also skirted in the Constitution. According to the provision's ambiguous wording, the federal government was allowed to administer “current” fields, provided that the revenues were divided in “a fair manner” among the regions.⁴⁴ On August 7, Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region published a draft version of a law that would grant itself the right to control petroleum operation in its own region, in addition to the province of Kirkuk.⁴⁵

Many Sunni leaders criticized the new push by the Shi'ite bloc to partition the country, arguing that these new calls were driven by Shi'ite ambitions to consolidate power, and to control oil reserves. Adnan Dulami, a leading Sunni Arab politician said, “controlling these areas will create a grand fortune that they can exploit. Their motive is that they are thirsty for control and power.”⁴⁶

Most analysts agreed that the process of segregating Iraq into geographical regions would be a massive logistical and political undertaking, and would pose significant challenges. Since Iraq does not divide neatly along ethnic lines, any effort to segregate the country would involve large-scale relocations, and would likely lead to greater occurrences of “ethnic cleansing.”

A number of areas, including Baghdad, Diyala, northern Babil, and southern Salahuddin were truly mixed areas, comprised of a patchwork of Sunni and Shi'ite villages. Kirkuk, like Baghdad, was a deeply divided city. Other areas such as Basra and Mosul had significant minority populations. Determining how to divide and organize the security forces, and addressing oil fields, facilities, exploration, and revenue rights posed further complications to any proposal to divide the country.

Additionally, it was unclear how widespread public support was for such a proposal. A poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) from June 14 to 24, 2006 indicated that the majority of Iraqis disagreed with calls for the segregation of their country along religions or ethnic lines.⁴⁷ Sixty-eight percent of respondents strongly disagreed with the notion of portioning the country, 12 percent disagreed, 5 percent agreed, 8 percent strongly agreed, and 9 percent did not know or did not respond. The regional breakdown of the responses is depicted below in Figure 2. All regions, with the exception of the Kurdish areas, expressed reluctance to divide Iraq.

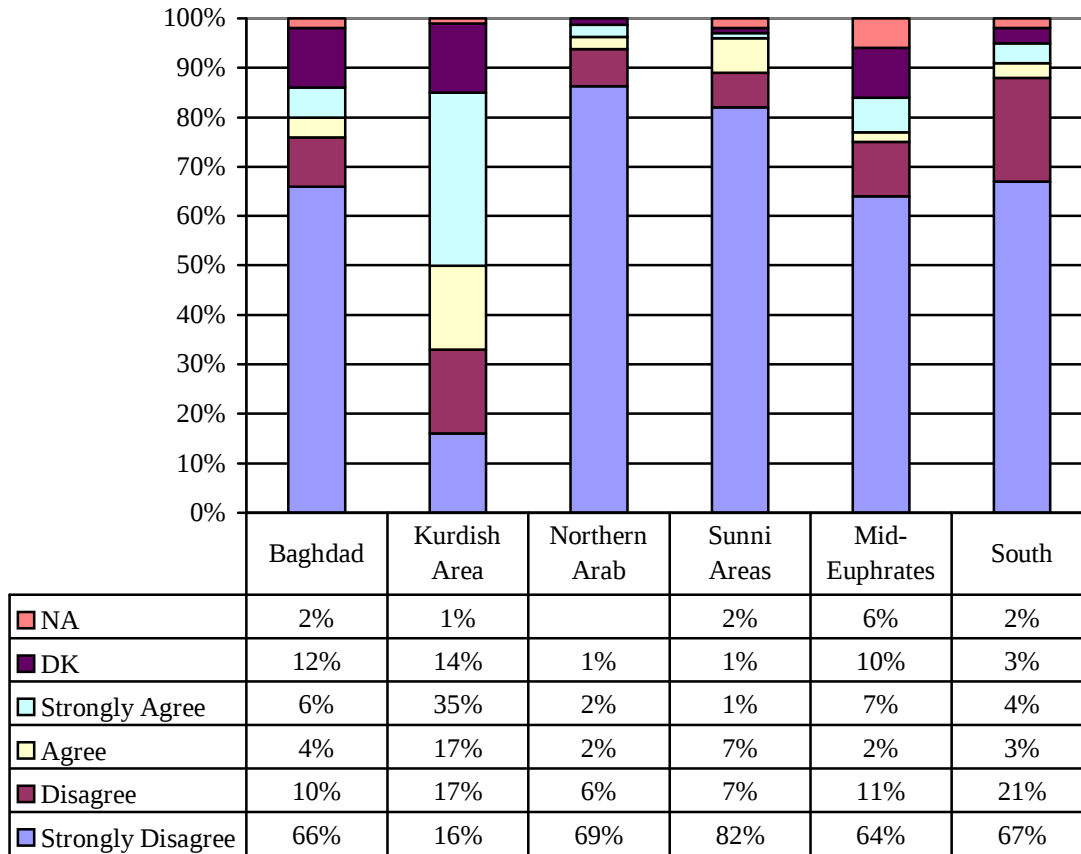
While the data lent support to the claim that Iraqis generally wanted the country to stay together, the results of the survey, like all polling data, had to be interpreted cautiously.

- First, the polling was conducted prior to the marked escalation in sectarian and ethnic violence in July. Iraqis may warm to the proposal of dividing Iraq if the threat of full-scale civil becomes more acute.
- Second, while Iraqis might broadly agree to the notion of a united country, they are likely to express sharp differences on a fundamental issue—how power should be distributed among the various factions in the country. A more robust analysis of the prospects for national unity would need to address underlying fault-lines concerning the balance of power.

The growing fragmentation in Iraq served as a pressing warning that the al-Maliki government had to act far more quickly and decisively, and that Iraq's various factions did not have time to bargain by attrition to prevent the country from slipping into civil war, or dividing along sectarian lines. And the United States had to be prepared to rush in if it would help move political comprises forward—but the growing resilience to US efforts in Iraq was writing on the wall that the odds of success seemed to be deteriorating for months.

Figure 2: Separating Iraq Along Sectarian Lines – Regional Breakdown, June 2006

Some people are calling for the segregation of Iraqis according to religious or ethnic sect. Do you agree or disagree with this suggestion?



Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Stepped-Up Security Efforts in Baghdad

The recent Coalition effort to “re-take” Baghdad began on June 14, 2006, the day following President Bush’s visit to Baghdad to express his confidence in the new government. The crackdown was dubbed “Operation Together Forward,” and drew on some 42,500 Iraqi troops and 7,200 American soldiers in a large-scale undertaking to curb sectarian violence in the capital.⁴⁸

The details of the operation, including its predicted duration, were not disclosed, but the operation was said to include a substantial increase in standard security measures through the implementation of patrols, checkpoints, and curfews. A curfew was put in effect from 8:30 pm to 6 am everyday, and on Fridays, cars were prohibited from the streets for four hours in the afternoon around prayer time. Numerous patrols and checkpoints were planned as well, and citizens were not allowed to carry guns on the street outside their homes.⁴⁹

Maj. Gen. Abed Jassem, of Iraq’s Ministry of Defence said that the operation would focus on “hot spots” in the capital, and troops would conduct targeted raids and searches in known insurgent areas. Gen. Jassem also stated that two key goals of the stepped up security presence were to restore public confidence in Iraqi forces, and to integrate the militias into the security forces. He added that a separate operation was being planned for the province of Diyala, where al-Zarqawi was killed days earlier, just outside of Baghdad.⁵⁰

Operation Together Forward Falls Short

Progress from Operation Together Forward turned out to be slow and, as violence in the capital reached heightened levels in July, the plan was widely dismissed for failing to achieve its desired aims. Around two weeks after the security initiative was implemented, General William Caldwell announced that violence in Baghdad had decreased only slightly. “We do not see an upward trend,” he said. “We...see a slight decrease [in violence] but not of the degree we would like to see at this point.”⁵¹

By the end of July, Caldwell acknowledged, “We have not witnessed the reduction in violence one would have hoped for...”⁵² In July, there were 558 violent incidents in Baghdad, up 10 percent from the four-month average. These attacks resulted in 2,100 deaths, 77 percent of which were attributed to sectarian violence.⁵³

That same week, General George Casey acknowledged that the increase in sectarian violence could require US forces to deploy more troops in Baghdad. During a news conference with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on July 12, Casey attributed the spike in violence in July to Sunni terrorists affiliated with Al Qaida, and Shi’ite “death squads” engaging in indiscriminate attacks against civilians.⁵⁴ Rumsfeld said that the number of Iraqi and American forces had increased to about 55,000 from 40,000 in attempt to curb the surge of violence in the capital.

The August 2006 DoD Quarterly Report to Congress, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” acknowledged the failure of the security operation to curb high attack levels seen in May and June, citing that “the average of 23.7 attacks per day across Baghdad’s

10 districts was virtually unchanged from the 23.8 average daily attacks that occurred the month prior to the operation.” The report also noted that “the rate of sectarian-style killings continued to rise, primarily in and around Baghdad.”⁵⁵

In Iraq, Prime Minister al-Maliki stressed that the national reconciliation plan was “the only and last way to save the security and political situation in the country.” “We all have this last chance to reconcile and work hard to avoid conflict and the blood,” he said during a July address to Parliament. “If it fails, God forbid, I don’t know what will be Iraq’s fate.”⁵⁶

Round II in the Battle for Baghdad

In late July, Pentagon officials announced a security plan to increase the number of US and Iraqi troops stationed in the capital. General John P. Abizad, head of US Central Command said in a July 21 interview, “The country can deal with the insurgency better than it can with the sectarian violence, and it needs to move decisively against the sectarian violence now.”⁵⁷

The security plan involved the addition of the Army’s 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team and four military police companies, boosting US troop levels in Baghdad by more than 4,000, to be matched by the addition of at least 4,000 Iraqi soldiers. The plan would temporarily increase the US presence in Iraq to above 130,000.⁵⁸ The core security operation was planned to last three months, and would target militia-run death squads.⁵⁹

Major General Caldwell declared in late July, “whoever wins the Baghdad area, whoever is able to bring peace and security to that area, is going to set the conditions to stabilize this country.”⁶⁰ And in late August, US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad asserted that the United States simply “[could] not achieve its goals of a democratic, stable and secure Iraq if the unacceptable levels of violence” in Baghdad persisted.”⁶¹

He outlined three principle components of the Baghdad Security Plan:⁶²

1. *Stabilizing Baghdad zone by zone.* Four Iraqi Army battalions, two Coalition brigades and five military police companies will be redeployed to Baghdad, resulting in more than 12,000 additional forces on the city’s streets. The National Police will simultaneously undergo intensive retraining, with each brigade to be subjected to a three-day assessment period, with its leadership evaluated and, if necessary, replaced. Each brigade will subsequently receive additional training focused on countering violent sectarianism before redeployment.
2. *Disrupting support zones.* Even as Iraqi and Coalition forces concentrate on securing specific neighborhoods, they will continue to conduct targeted operations in other zones that are staging areas for the violence. This includes targeted raids and other operations on areas outside of Baghdad’s center, where planning cells, car-bomb factories and terrorist safe houses are located. This will degrade the ability of the terrorists and death squads to mount offensive operations into the areas we are working to stabilize.
3. *Undertaking civic action and economic development.* After joint Coalition and Iraqi military operations have secured a neighborhood or district, a structure of Iraqi security forces sufficient to maintain the peace is expected to be left in place and reinforced with the capacity to undertake civic action and foster economic revitalization. This will be supported with \$500 million in funds from Prime Minister Maliki’s government and at least \$130 million of US funds.

In addition, a moral compact between the religious leaders of the two Islamic communities—which will ban sectarian killings—will delegitimize the violence. Such a compact would deny the killers a political or religious sanctuary while Iraqi and Coalition forces deny them physical shelter. For the longer term, the plan seeks to induce insurgents and militias to lay down their arms by implementing a program to demobilize unauthorized armed groups. It will also review the implementation of the de-Ba'athification process—referring those accused of crimes to the judiciary and reconciling with the rest.

Defense experts and political officials expressed diverging points of view on whether the second phase of Operation Together Forward would be successful in curbing sectarian violence. Supporters of the plan stressed that Baghdad was the “center of gravity,” and its security was paramount to stabilizing the country. Sending additional US troops to back Iraqi forces, would allow the Iraqi public to feel safer and more confident. Brig. Gen. Jaleel Khalaf, commander of Iraqi troops in western Baghdad said that the plan would bring much-needed experience and equipment to Iraqi forces in the capital.⁶³

At the same time, many Sunni Arab political and religious leaders were warming to the idea of increased US troop levels in the country, fearing that a security vacuum would lead to civil war.⁶⁴ Increasingly, it appeared that Iraqis were looking to the US military to manage their conflicts—a development likely fueled by sectarian tensions, and skepticism of the capabilities of Iraqi forces.

Some questioned, however, whether deploying more American troops in the capital would curb or provoke insurgency-related violence. The plan could have a backlash effect—fostering greater resentment toward the US presence in Iraq, and eroding Iraqis' confidence in their own security forces. By invoking images of an American “occupation,” insurgents could capitalize on the stepped-up US security presence to depict America as the enemy. The plan could also be perceived seen as a step back in an effort to push Iraqi troops to the forefront.

Mahmoud Othman, A Kurdish lawmaker and member of the Supreme National Reconciliation Committee said, “The goal has always been to decrease the presence of US troops in the urban areas. Now they're coming back.”⁶⁵ And the failure of the first phase of Operation Together Forward to create stability in the capital fed uncertainty about a second attempt. Senator John McCain, Republican representative of Arizona, said the plan of sending more US troops was similar to playing a game of “whack-a-mole.”⁶⁶

Violence in Baghdad, as well as in other parts of the country, was driven by a complicated assortment of political, economic, social, sectarian, and ethnic variables. And it was unclear whether a heavier US presence could do more than temporarily pause an escalation in violence.

The Ebb and Flow of Violence

The new security crackdown initially showed signs of curbing violence in the capital. At an August 28 press briefing in Baghdad, General William Caldwell cited “progress toward reducing the number of kidnappings, murders and sectarian violence” in areas where Iraqi and Coalition forces were operating. He said that the number of average killings in Baghdad dropped 46 percent from July to August, and that the number of insurgent attacks in the province declined to an average of 23 per day.⁶⁷

In spite of these developments, there were strong reasons to remain cautiously optimistic. It would still be months before the long-term impact of the security crackdown could be accurately inferred, and a lull in violence was not necessarily a prelude to a more secure environment over the long run. But perhaps more significantly, although Zalmay Khalilzad described the latest operation as “the most concentrated, focused effort to date in the capital,”⁶⁸ the approach remained susceptible to many of the same obstacles that hindered past efforts:

- A concentration of troops in Baghdad tended to push the action outside of the capital to other areas where Iraqi and US military capabilities were less prevalent.
- While a heavier troop presence could temporarily tone down the violence, insurgents would likely adapt to the emerging security environment, and resort to new tactics. Militia members could easily lay low, wait out the Iraqi government and coalition operations in Baghdad for several months, then regroup and operate at the margins, or shift to other areas.
- Without steady follow-up in terms of political settlement, government services, and rule of law, having troops “pacify” a city often had little lasting value. And such follow-up efforts would require significant levels of commitment, resources and time, from both United States and the Iraqi government.

Health Ministry officials reported a marked surge in violence at the end of August and early weeks of September. According to morgue figures, at least 334 people were killed in Baghdad between August 27 and September 2. The majority had been kidnapped and tortured, before they were tied and shot to death.⁶⁹ Authorities said that at least 394 other people in Iraq were killed by other means of violence including bombings, mortar attacks and gunfights.⁷⁰

In Adhamiya, a predominantly Sunni neighborhood of northeastern Baghdad, dozens of dead bodies were discovered each week, and one particular street became so notorious for its body dumps that residents referred to it as “The Street of Death.”⁷¹

The Baghdad morgue reported receiving 1,535 bodies in August. And while the tally represented a 17 percent decrease from numbers in July, they still indicated strikingly high levels of violence, and contradicted earlier claims by American officials that death rates had significantly declined.⁷²

Looking at the Numbers: Attack Patterns and Levels of Violence

While accurate numbers on the frequency of attacks and the number of casualties in Iraq are impossible to obtain, trends in the numbers that are available provide a rough gauge of the level of relative violence.

A Murky Assessment from the Pentagon Quarterly Report

The August 2006 DoD Quarterly Report to Congress, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” incorporated analysis of attacks trends and violence from May 20 to August 11, 2006—a period defined politically by the full establishment of the new Iraqi government.

The text of the report noted that the average number of weekly “attacks”⁷³ increased by 15 percent in the period denoted “government established” (May 20-August 11, 2006) since the previous reporting period, denoted as “government transition” (February 11-

May 19, 2006). However, the accompanying graph provided in the report, reproduced as Figure 3 below, showed an increase closer to 25 percent. The raw numbers, requested by reporters from the Associated Press and Reuters, indicated a 23.5 percent increase of average weekly attacks from the previous reporting period.⁷⁴ Weekly attack rates in July 2006 were flagged as the highest since the inception of the insurgency.

The report also noted that 63 percent of the attacks in the May to August reporting period were targeted at Coalition forces, the majority of which were considered “stand-off” attacks, which do not involve close-up confrontations between Coalition forces and insurgents. Rather, “such attacks typically consisted of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), small arms fire, and indirect weapons.”⁷⁵

The Quarterly Report cited a substantial increased in the number of attacks directed against civilians:⁷⁶

Nationally, in April 2006, civilians were the target of 11% of attacks; this increased to 15% in June 2006. Baghdad showed a more pronounced shift in the targeting of civilians compared to the national trend. In Baghdad, civilian targets comprised 15% of total attacks in April and 22% in June.

Although 63 percent of attacks were directed toward coalition forces, Iraqi security forces and civilians incurred the overwhelming majority of casualties. As depicted in Figure 4, Iraqi casualties increased by 51 percent compared to the previous quarter, making Iraqi casualties roughly seven times higher than Coalition casualties.

The data of the total number of attacks by province, illustrated in Figure 5, showed that the majority of attacks were concentrated in four of Iraq's provinces—Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala and Salah ad Din. While these four provinces comprised around 37 percent of the population, the report noted, they accounted for 81 percent of all attacks. And Anbar and Baghdad, in particular, accounted for 55 percent of all attacks.

The report also pointed to a relatively steady decline in the weekly number of attacks on critical infrastructure, although there appeared to be a discrepancy on the rate of this decline over the past quarter. While the text indicated that the number of weekly attacks on infrastructure decreased from “an average of five per week to an average of two per week” since the past reporting period, the accompanying graph, reproduced as Figure 6 below, showed that the number of attacks decreased from an average of two per week to an average of one per week.

In spite of this discrepancy, the report still made the valuable point in noting that the relative decline in attacks on infrastructure did not reflect their individual or collective impact. Rather, the decrease in numbers was “disproportionate” to their effect for a variety of reasons. Most significantly, the rate of repair to damage from past attacks was lagging. In addition, Iraqi officials were often slow in reacting to attacks, and initiating the appropriate repairs. And then, such repairs were often hampered by insurgent attacks or other criminal intimidation of maintenance workers. Therefore, the report concluded that “although the number of attacks is decreasing, the essential service infrastructure will continue to be a high-value target for enemy elements.”⁷⁷ The analysis failed to suggest, however, that a decline in infrastructure attacks may also be a reflection of the fact that attackers were increasingly concentrating on targets designed to incite civil war.

The data on sectarian incidents in the report, depicted in Figure 7, showed a marked increase in the number of casualties, and a steady heightened state of the number of incidents.

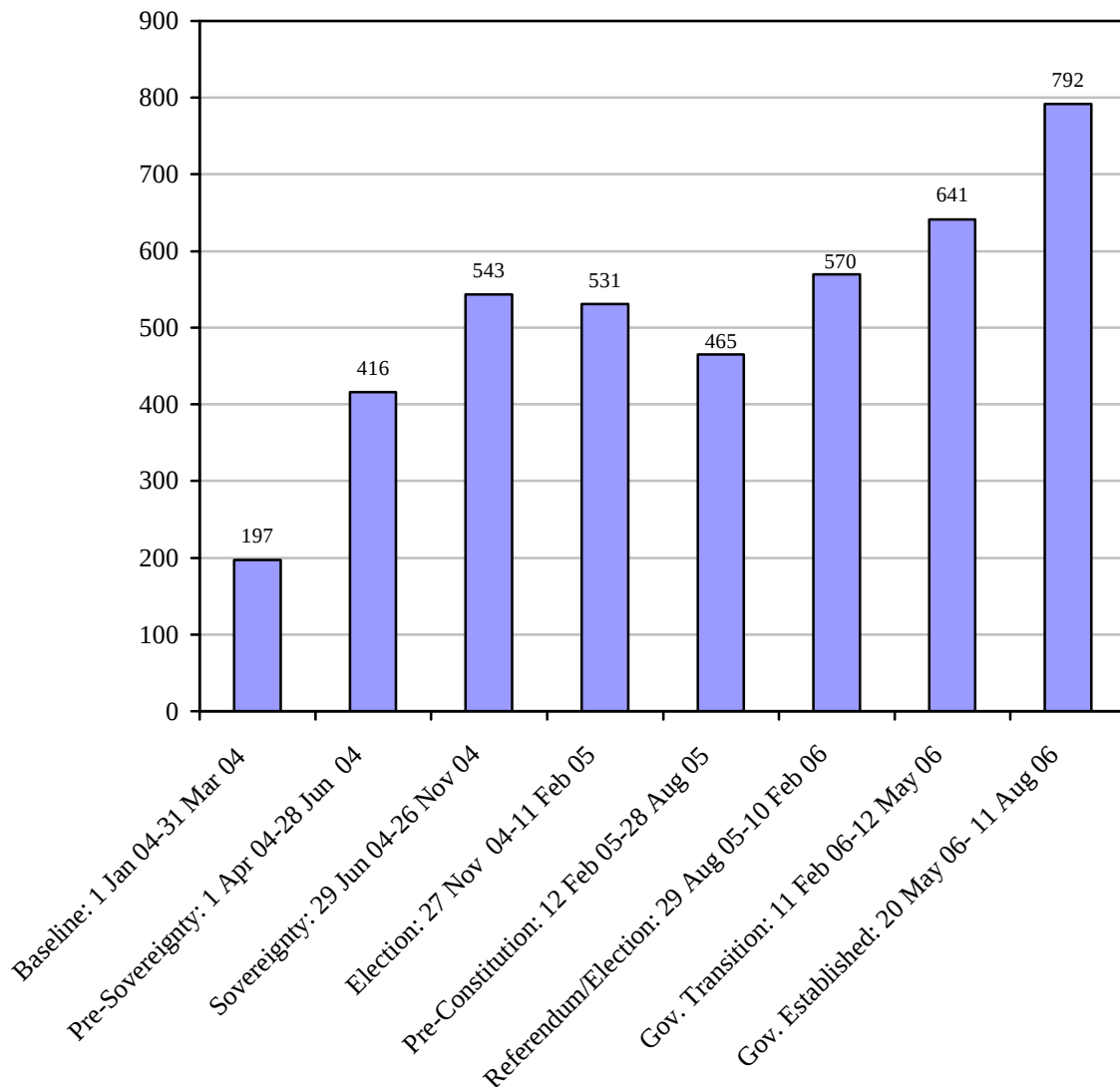
While the attack trends analysis provided in the August 2006 DoD Quarterly Report to Congress showed improvement over past reporting—particularly in its assessment of the growing risk of civil war—the applicability and robustness of the data were limited by a number of shortcomings:

- *The variables were poorly defined, particularly in reference to what was counted as an “attack” and a “sectarian incident.”* The text defined an attack as a specific incident reported in the Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) Significant Activities database, which included known attacks on coalition forces, the ISF, the civilian population, and infrastructure.⁷⁸ However, it appeared that these attacks were largely limited to incidents that could be clearly assigned to insurgents, thus overlooking broader patterns of sectarian and ethnic violence (such as disappearances, kidnappings, “mystery killings,” and soft ethnic cleansing).

Reporting in the DoD document, that 63 percent of all attacks were directed toward Coalition forces suggested an emphasis on “insurgency,” as opposed to “acts of civil war.” Most other reporting indicated that Iraqis had become the primary target of attacks (including the graph on average daily casualties in the Quarterly Report, depicting an overwhelming ratio of Iraqi to Coalition casualties).

The conceptualization of “sectarian incidents” was similarly left ambiguous in the report, and it was unclear how “sectarian incidents” were delineated from general “attacks.” More generally, it appeared that the Quarterly Report was averting acknowledgment of a significant development in Iraqi violence—that incidents of insurgency and civil war were blurring together.

- *This omission of clear numbers made it difficult to verify trend analyses, and draw accurate conclusions from the data.* The apparent discrepancies between numbers provided in the text and those illustrated in the graphs on average weekly attacks, and average weekly attacks on infrastructure, signaled the need for supplying raw numbers in the report.
- *The lack of subcategories on the type and nature of attacks had the effect of oversimplifying dynamics of the fighting.* The main figure, for example, on average weekly attacks (See Figure 3), did not break down the type of attacks to account for shifts from Coalition to Iraqi security forces and civilian targets, although the text addressed this trend. The figures on average daily casualties, and total attacks by province (See Figure 4 and Figure 5), similarly did not specify the nature of the attacks; consequently, it was unclear to what extent they reflected larger patterns in sectarian and ethnic violence. And the graph on sectarian incidents (See Figure 7), which should be addressing a key aspect in the development of the insurgency, did not include a breakdown by province, nor did it indicate whether incidents in Basra and Kirkuk were counted.

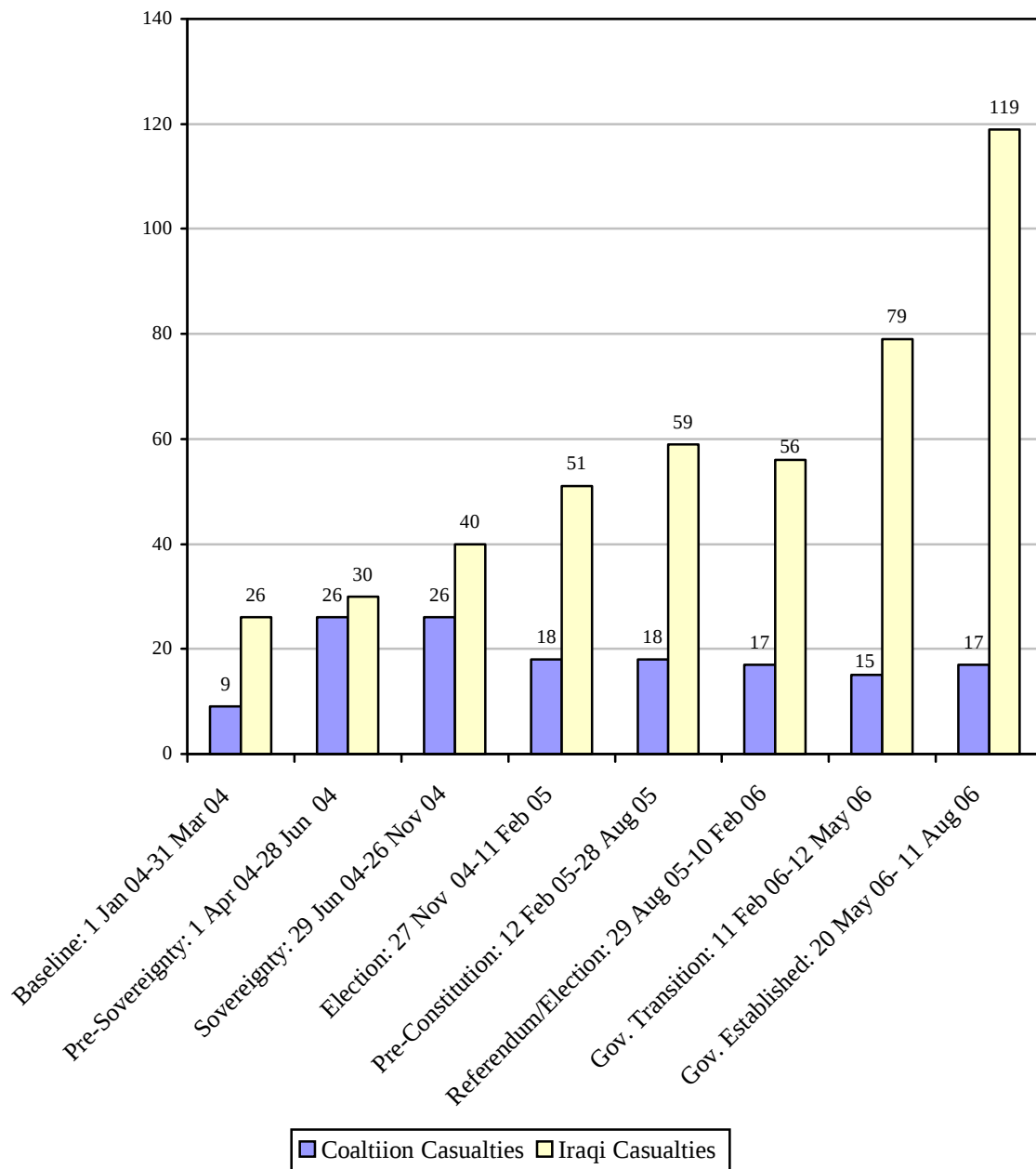
Figure 3: Average Weekly Attacks by Time Period: January 2004-August 2006

Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, October 13, 2005; And subsequent updates: February, 2006, p.27; May 2006, p.32; August 2006, p.33.

Data points are estimates from figure included in the above-mentioned DoD reports.

Note: The May and August 2006 documents did not include a "Baseline" period.

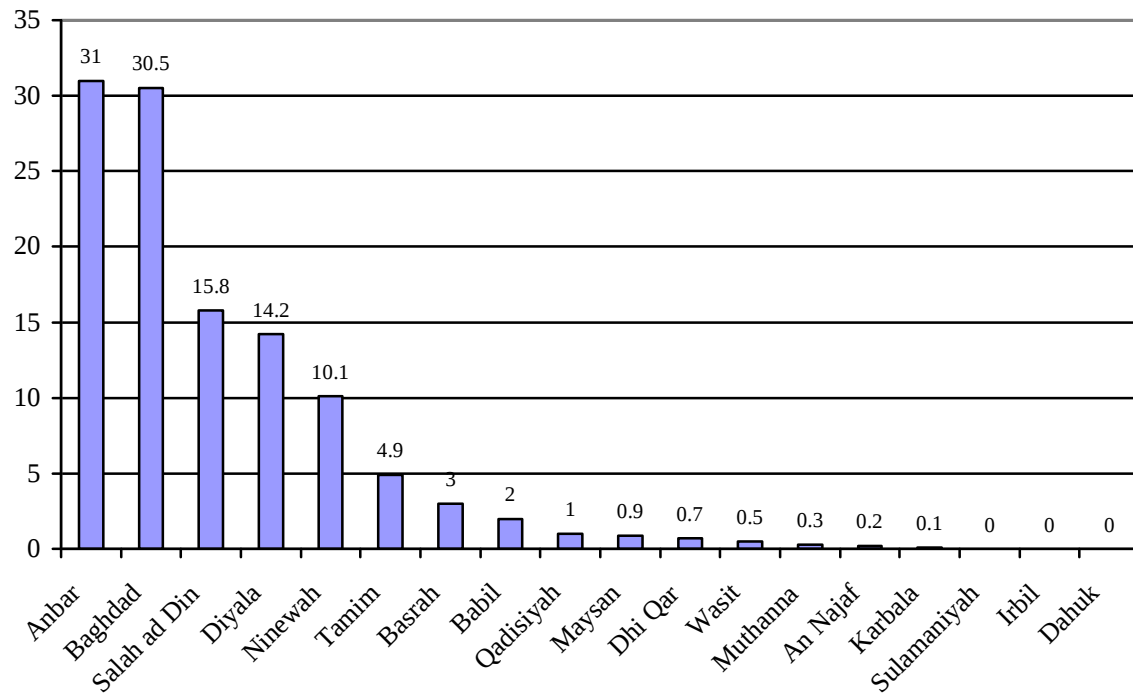
Figure 4: Average Daily Casualties – Iraqi and Coalition: January 2004-August 2006



Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, October 13, 2005, p.24; and subsequent updates: February 2006, p. 27, May 2006, p.33, August 2006, p.32.

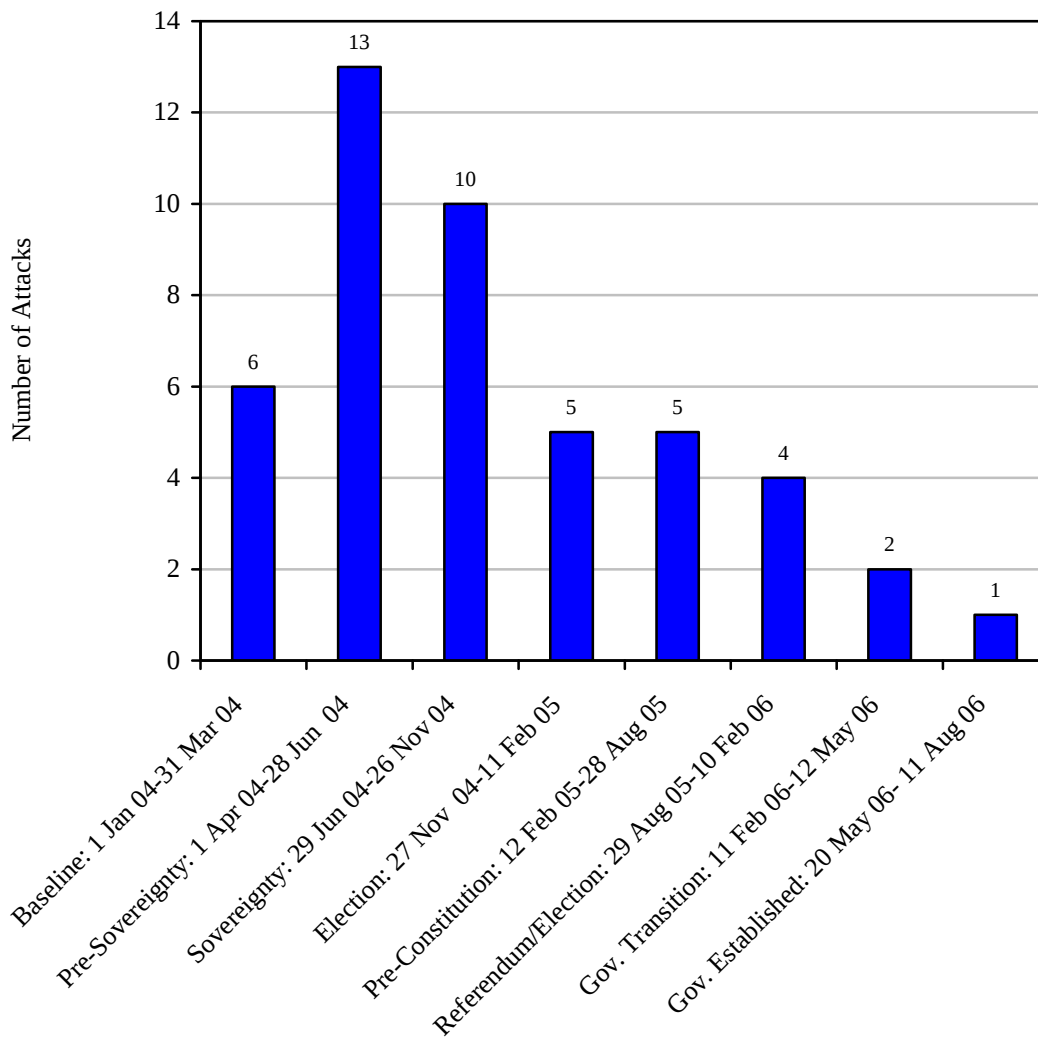
Data points are estimates from figure included in the above-mentioned DoD reports.

Note: The data are derived from unverified initial reports submitted by Coalition elements responding to an incident. These numbers should be used for comparative purposes only. The May and August reports noted that ISF were included in the totals for Iraqi casualties.

Figure 5: Total Attacks by Province: May-August 2006

Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, August 2006, p.32.

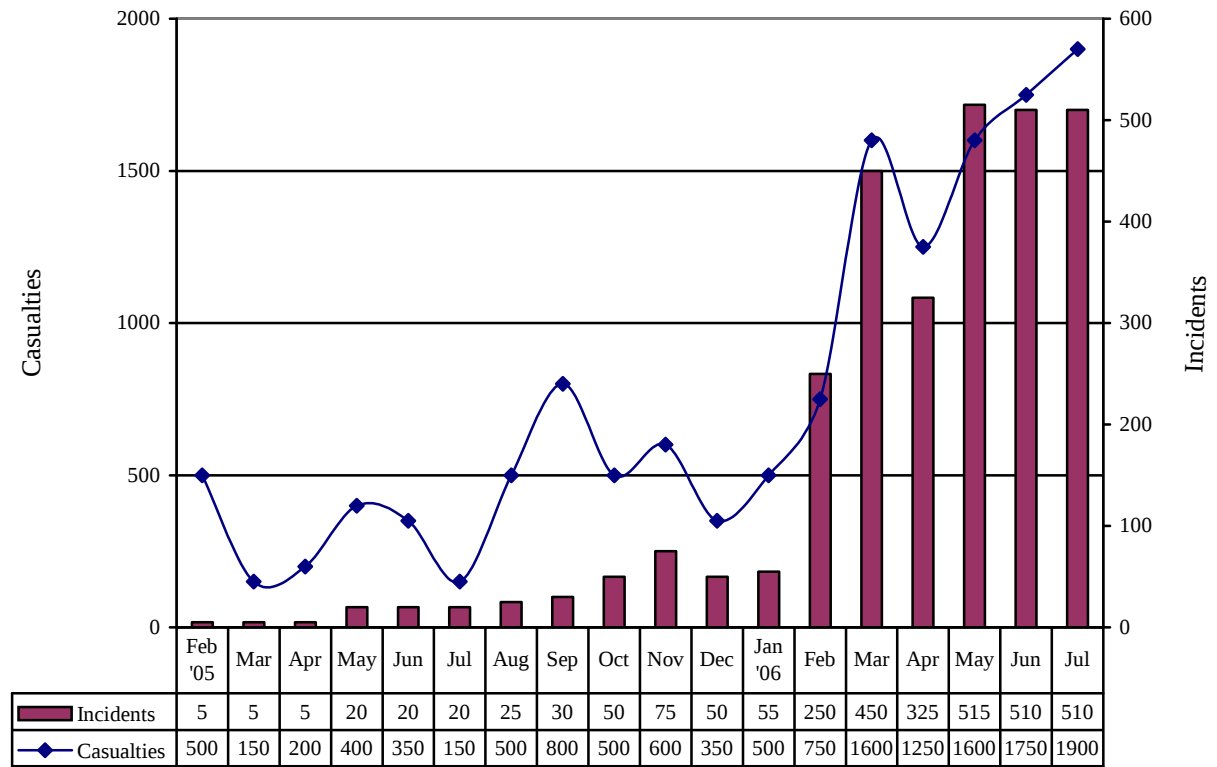
Data points are estimates from figure included in the DoD report.

Figure 6: Average Weekly Attacks on Infrastructure: January 2004-August 2006

Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, February 2006, p. 28; And subsequent updates: May 2006, p.37, August 2006, p.33.

Data points are estimates from figure included in the DoD report.

Note: Averages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Figure 7: Sectarian Incidents: February 2006-July 2006

Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, August 2006, p.35.

Data points are estimates from the DoD report.

Mounting Civilian Casualties

As depicted in Figure 8, data from official Iraqi sources indicate a general increase in the number of civilian casualties since the beginning of 2006, with a marked surge in July.

According to a report released by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), “a total of 5,818 civilians were reportedly killed and at least 5,762 wounded during May and June.”⁷⁹ The report, assessing conditions in Iraq over May and June, noted that “insurgent, militia, and terrorist attacks continued unabated in many parts of Iraq, especially in Baghdad.” It described humanitarian conditions across Iraq as follows:⁸⁰

Killings, kidnappings and torture remain widespread. Fear resulting from these and other crimes continued to increase internal displacement and outflows of Iraqis to neighboring countries. The negative effect of violence on professional categories, targeted by sectarian and criminal violence or displaced as a result, coupled with inadequate provision of basic services, also affected the level of education and health care received by the population. Women, children and vulnerable groups, such as minorities, internally displaced and disabled persons continue to be directly affected by the violence and the ongoing impunity for human rights violations. Organized crime and corruption have persistently added to overall insecurity.

The United Nations based its data relating to civilian casualties on tallies provided by the Ministry of Health, which tracked violent deaths recorded at hospitals around Iraq, and Baghdad's central morgue, where unidentified bodies were delivered. The report documented a general “upward trend” in civilian deaths since the summer of 2005. During the first six months of 2006, the death toll increased more than 77 percent from 1,778 in January to 3,149 in June.

According to the UN report:⁸¹

...figures from the Ministry of Health, which included counts from hospitals in all Governorates⁸² indicate that 1,294 civilians died as a result of violence in May 2006 (among them 58 women and 17 children) and 2,687 were wounded (among them 178 women and 41 children). In June 2006 1,554 civilians died violently (among them 66 women and 30 children) and 3,075 were wounded (176 women and 58 children). The overwhelming majority of casualties were reported in Baghdad. In addition, the Medico-Legal Institute in Baghdad (MLI) separately reported receiving 1,375 unidentified bodies in May and 1,595 in June 2006. The total figure of civilians killed in Iraq, adding the figures provided by the Ministry of Health and the MLI, reaches 2,669 civilians in May and 3,149 in June 2006. According to the Ministry of Health, from January to June 2006, there were 6,826 civilians killed and 13,256 wounded.⁸³ Including the figures of the MLI in Baghdad for the period, the total civilians killed in Iraq from January-June 2006 was 14,338.⁸⁴

The numbers presented in the report were somewhat questionable, but were still considered “the most precise measurement of civilian deaths provided by any government organization since the invasion and represented a substantial increase over the figures in daily news media reports.”⁸⁵ Indicating that an average of more than 100 civilians per day were killed in Iraq in June, at the time of its reporting, the death tally was considered the highest official tally of violent deaths since the fall of Baghdad.⁸⁶

While the numbers compiled by the United Nations represented an improvement over past official reporting, they were still prone to a variety of inaccuracies, and likely represented a significant undercount:

- First, the tallies were based entirely on numbers released by the Ministry of Health and the Baghdad central morgue—both of which have not traditionally compiled war casualty data in any sort of systemic or accountable manner, and were prone to data meddling.⁸⁷
- Second, the data could only cover deaths that were formally reported, thus overlooking scores of civilians who have been killed clandestinely, bodies that have not been discovered, or those kidnapped and left unaccounted.
- Third, the numbers likely focused—as most counts do—on deaths that occurred in Baghdad, since reporting of civilian casualties in other parts of the country were much less comprehensive.

Therefore, at best, this set of official figures only captured a physical count of the bodies that were turned in, omitting the many dead that never made it to a morgue or hospital.

David Lake, a member of the Center for Study of Civil War, an international group of scholars who study the causes and effects of internal strife, said, “The way to think about the violence is that it’s not just the insurgent attacks that matter”⁸⁸—an observation that many official polls tend to overlook as they often fail to mention or account for the number of war-related injuries, incidents of crime, kidnapping, torture, extortion, and other acts of violence. Consequently, official casualty tallies tend to under-report the scope and intensity of the violence in Iraq, and often over-emphasize attacks that occur in places that are widely covered, such as Baghdad.

On June 25, the Ministry of Health stated that the Iraqi death toll since 2003 exceeded 50,000—a toll that was around 20,000 more than estimates announced by the Bush administration.⁸⁹ The Baghdad morgue received 30,204 bodies from 2003 through mid-2006, and the Ministry of Health documented 18,933 deaths resulting from “military clashes” and “terrorist attacks” between April 5, 2004 and June 1, 2006.

The combined death toll reached 49,137,⁹⁰ and the Ministry of Health noted that the figure was probably significantly too low.⁹¹ The death toll did not include deaths outside of Baghdad in the first year of the invasion.

The morgue records showed that most of the casualties were civilians, as opposed to combatants, or security forces. According to morgue officials, “the vast majority of bodies processed had been shot execution-style. Many showed signs of torture—drill holes, burns, missing eyes and limbs. Others had been strangled, beheaded, stabbed or beaten to death.”⁹²

The deaths recorded by the Ministry of Health indicated that about 75 percent of those who died violently died in “terrorist acts,” typically bombings. The other 25 percent of the deaths were classified as “military clashes,” or incidents in which “innocent bystanders” were shot by Iraqi or American troops, in crossfire, or accidentally at checkpoints.⁹³

Notably, the classifications by the Ministry of Health did not include deaths caused by crime-related activities, which likely contributed to a significant number of those killed. This oversight was probably a reflection of vague documentation, or more likely was an indication that the distinction between homicide and sectarian violence had become increasingly blurred.

The May–June 2006 UNAMI update reported a wide-range of violence that led to civilian casualties, including:⁹⁴

bombings and drive-by shootings, from indiscriminate attacks, in neighborhood markets or petrol stations, or following armed clashes with the police and the security forces. Civilians were also targeted or became unintended victims of insurgent or military actions. Terrorist acts against civilians have been aimed at fomenting sectarian violence or allegedly motivated by revenge and have targeted members of the Arab Shi'a and Sunni communities, including their cultural symbols, as well as markets in Shi'a neighborhoods. Collusion between criminal gangs, militias and sectarian "hit groups," alleged death squads, vigilante groups and religious extremists, adds further complexity to the situation. Certain neighborhoods in Baghdad often witness fighting among armed groups, police, and Special Forces. Execution-style killings continue to take place in the streets of Baghdad and other locations, most notably in Babil, Basra, Falluja, Karbala, Kirkuk, Mosul and Ramadi.

Civilian casualties reached heightened levels in July—described by newspaper headlines as the “deadliest” for Iraqi civilians. According to figures released by the Iraqi Health Ministry and the Baghdad morgue, an average of more than 110 Iraqis were killed each day in July, and the total number of civilian deaths was 3,438 that month, representing a 9 percent increase since June. When the July tally was added to official figures reported in earlier months (collected by the United Nations), the total indicated that at least 17,776 Iraqi civilians died violently since the beginning of 2006, an average of 2,539 civilians per month.⁹⁵

The Baghdad morgue reported receiving 1,855 bodies in July.⁹⁶ According to the facility's assistant manager, Abdul Razzaq al-Obeidi, roughly 90 percent had died violently,⁹⁷ the majority of which had gunshot wounds in their heads—often an indication of death squad assassinations.⁹⁸

While the Iraqi Health Ministry did not release figures on the number of civilians wounded by attacks in Baghdad in July, the Ministry reported that at least 3,597 Iraqis were wounded that month outside the city, representing a 25 percent increase since June.⁹⁹ Gen. George Casey attributed 60 percent of the killings to Shi'ite death squads, and the rest to attacks by al-Qai'da and related groups.¹⁰⁰

In August, the Baghdad morgue reported receiving 1,535 bodies, representing a 17 percent decrease from July to levels near those recorded in June.¹⁰¹ The increase was expected to be greater, but a lull in violence in early August, was followed by a sharp upsurge later in the month.

According to the July-August 2006 UNAMI Human Rights Report, the number of Iraqi civilians killed in July and August reached 6,599.¹⁰² Relying on data provided by the Ministry of Health and the Medico-Legal Institute in Baghdad, the UN update states:¹⁰³

The number of civilians violently killed in the country was an unprecedented 3,590 in July (including 183 women and 23 children) and 3,009 in August (including 194 women and 24 children).¹⁰⁴ The number of wounded reached 3,793 in July (including 234 women and 72 children). The Medico-Legal Institute in Baghdad reported that the number of bodies brought to the Institute was a record 1,855 in July and 1,536 in August 2006; the overwhelming majority of the casualties died of gunshot wounds (1,417 in July and 1,091 in August).

Of the total number of civilians killed in July and August, 5,106 were killed in Baghdad (2,884 in July and 2,222 in August). While there was a decline in the death toll and the number of wounded in August, the report noted that “such reduction was

somehow offset by increases in other Governorates, most notably Diyala and Mosul.”¹⁰⁵

According to the report the death and casualty figures “reflect the fact that indiscriminate killings of civilians have continued throughout the country while hundreds of bodies appear bearing signs of severe torture and execution style killings. Such murders are carried out by death squads or by armed groups, with sectarian or revenge connotations.”¹⁰⁶

Questionable Reporting

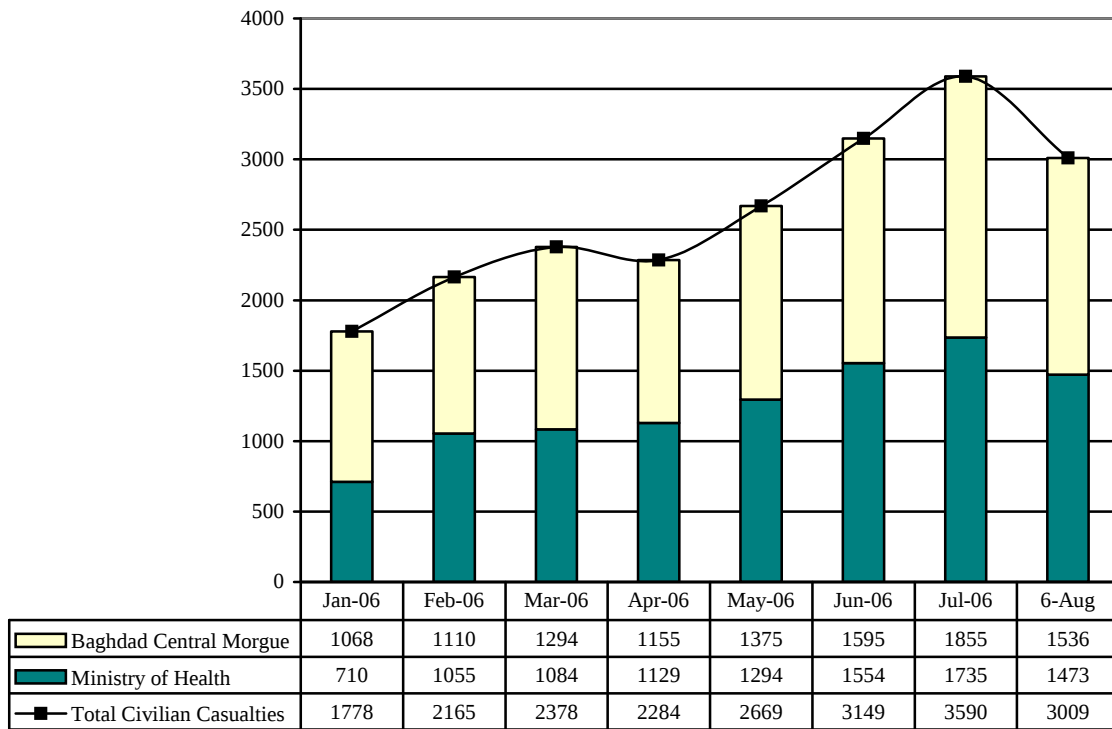
US officials initially claimed a drastic drop in the death toll in August, primarily attributing the decline to gains from the second phase of Operation Forward Together. In late August, Gen. Caldwell claimed that the number of deaths in Baghdad dropped 46 percent from July to August, and that the number of insurgent attacks in the province declined to an average of 23 per day.¹⁰⁷

However, estimates were continuously revised upward after officials said that people killed by bombs, mortars, rockets or other mass attacks were not included in the original counts.¹⁰⁸ According to the UN data, the number of deaths in Baghdad only declined from 2,884 in July to 2,222 in August.¹⁰⁹ The discrepancies raised serious questions about reporting accuracies, and possible efforts to cloud the severity of violence in Iraq.

Even official data from updated reports were highly questionable and were widely perceived to be undercounts. The July-August UNAMI human rights document noted that the Health Ministry did not report any civilian deaths during July in the province of Anbar—an extremely unstable area that includes hot spots like Ramadi and Fullujah. This note sharply contradicted general reporting on Anbar, which often cited continuous violence in the province. In early September, for example, the chief of intelligence for the Marine Corps in Iraq, Col. Pete Devlin, filed a classified report that largely concluded that the security situation in Anbar was hopeless, and that US efforts to stabilize the country were impeded by the lack of functioning government institutions, creating a void that was filled by al-Qa’ida in Iraq.

The faulty reporting by US sources underscored an important lesson of war—the need for providing accurate and credible data. If the United States is to successfully curb violence in Iraq, it will have to commit to providing a clear and accurate picture of conditions in the country, and building trust among its own citizens and the Iraqi public. It will also need to realistically confront a growing body of data that points to a rise in civilians casualties, attacks on US and Iraqi forces, and roadside bombs.

Figure 8: Civilian Casualties Reported by Morgue and Ministry of Health: January-August 2006



Source: UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, "Human Rights Report: 1 May-30 June 2006; 1 July-31 August 2006; Kirk Semple, "Iraqi Death Toll Rises Above 100 Per Day, U.N. Says," *New York Times*, July 19, 2006.

A Rising Number of Attacks on US and Iraqi Forces

The average number of American troops killed per month by hostile fire declined in the summer of 2006. Thirty-eight US soldiers were killed in action in July, compared to 42 in January—partly reflecting advances in armor and defense.¹¹⁰ However, the average number of daily attacks targeting US and Iraqi soldiers and police increased by 44 percent from June 2005 to June 2006, rising from 61 to 88.¹¹¹ And the number of wounded increased to 518 in July, up from 287 in July.¹¹² Explosive devices were responsible for slightly over half of the deaths.¹¹³ Over the summer, improvised explosive device (IED) attacks had increased to about four times their recorded levels in January 2004.¹¹⁴ The number of attacks directed at American and Iraqi military forces involving mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and small-caliber weapons has also increased.¹¹⁵

There were 1,481 IED attacks throughout Iraq in June, and 903 instances in which the bombs were found and neutralized, according to figures compiled by the American military in Baghdad. The figures marked a sharp increase since January, when there were 834 such attacks and 620 cases in which the bombs were found before they exploded.¹¹⁶

In July, the number of IED attacks rose to 2,625, of which 1,666 exploded, and 959 were discovered and neutralized before they went off. The figures indicated that the number of roadside bomb attacks had more than doubled since January when 1,454 bombs exploded or were found.¹¹⁷

According to a spokesman for the military command in Baghdad, 70 percent of the 1,666 bombs that exploded in July were targeting the American-led military force. Twenty percent were directed at Iraqi security forces, representing a 9 percent increase from 2005. And 10 percent of the bombs struck civilians, twice the rate from 2005.¹¹⁸

In August, around 1,200 IEDs were detonated, according to retired Army general Montgomery Meigs, head of the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization. Meigs said that despite the increase in the number of roadside bombs, nearly half were found and neutralized before they exploded, and the number of casualties incurred from such explosions remained relatively constant before they edged upward in recent months.¹¹⁹ “We’re making slow, grudging progress,” Meigs said, but forecast that his organization would “do better over time.”¹²⁰

Challenges faced by US efforts to curb the number of IED attacks in Iraq included:

- A recent decline in the number of tips from Iraqis that the military could act upon, known as “actionable intelligence.” While tips increased from 4,000 in January to a peak of 5,900 in April, they sharply declined in July to around 3,700.¹²¹
- The relatively widespread supply of artillery shells in the country, as well as an array of means to detonate them.¹²²
- The adaptability of insurgents to revise their tactics. According to Meigs, insurgents change triggers for IEDs every six to nine months to stay ahead of US military countermeasures.¹²³

The frequency of IED attacks was generally considered a significant indicator of the evolving strength of the insurgency since setting up roadside bombs required a network

of operatives including a bomb-maker, financiers to fund the operation, and individuals who planted the explosives, and set them off when the troops were approaching.¹²⁴

Meigs said that among the most lethal bombs were “explosively formed penetrators,” which could penetrate through an inch of steel. He added that attacks aimed at the bottom of armored vehicles have increased, particularly in Sunni areas of Iraq, and in Baghdad where coalition forces have concentrated their efforts to curb violence.

The Defense Department was arming around 30,000 Humvees with new armored doors, and allocated \$1.43 billion for jammers that disrupt electronic signals used to detonate bombs as part of its efforts to address the dangers of roadside bombs.¹²⁵

The August 2006 Pentagon Quarterly Report to Congress on Iraq indicated that the number of car bombs increased in the period from May 20-August 11, 2006 to levels last seen in the summer of 2004. According to the report, car bombs were largely centered on Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk, and the Western Euphrates valley, and were primarily directed toward civilians or Iraqi Security Force checkpoints.¹²⁶

The rising number of attacks on US and Iraqi forces contributed to the growing body of data and intelligence analysis that painted an increasingly sober picture of the levels of violence in Iraq. A senior Defense Department official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said, “The insurgency has gotten worse by almost all measures, with insurgent attacks at historically high levels.”¹²⁷

A nine-page classified report by the Defense Intelligence Agency that came out on August 3, titled “Iraq Update,” compiled recent empirical data on the number of attacks, bombings, murders, and other acts of violence, and included diagrams of actors involved in insurgent and sectarian attacks. According to several officials who read the document or received a briefing on its contents, it detailed deteriorating security conditions in Iraq and described the escalating risk of civil war.¹²⁸

Transferring Control to Iraqi Security Forces

Coalition forces handed over control of the southern Iraqi province of Muthanna to Iraqi forces on July 13, which became the first province placed entirely under Iraqi authority. In a joint statement, General George Casey and US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said, “The handover represents a milestone in the successful development of Iraq’s capability to govern and protect itself as a sovereign and democratic nation.”¹²⁹ Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki described the transfer as an important step in the process of transferring all 18 provinces to Iraqi authorities by the end of 2007.¹³⁰

On August 8, another security transfer took place. US military commanders handed over lead security control of Salahuddin, Nineveh, and Tamin provinces to the Iraqi army’s 4th Division. The territory extended from the foothills of Iraq’s eastern territory west to the Syrian border. While Iraqi forces would still need to depend on the US military for intelligence, logistical assistance, and heavy artillery, the transfer handed off to Iraqis “primary responsibility for coordinating, planning, and conducting security operations in the three-province area.”¹³¹

On the day of the security handover, Iraq's National Security Advisor Mowaffak al-Rubaie announced that "half of the Iraqi army [was] now under control of Iraqis," and added, "We believe they will be much more competent in fighting terrorism."¹³² General George Casey applauded the development, and said, "First we had to build and train them. Then we put them in the lead, and we'll ultimately help them become independent."¹³³

Although the transfer of security control to Iraqi forces represented an achievement for US efforts in Iraq, the deteriorating security conditions in the country seemed to overshadow the significance of these gains. According to a report by the Government Accountability Office submitted to Congress in July, "even as the number and capabilities of Iraqi security forces have increased, overall security conditions have deteriorated, as evidenced by attack trends, sectarian violence, and the growth and influence of militias."¹³⁴

While security control of the three-province area of Salahuddin, Nineveh, and Tamin was being handed over to Iraqi forces, more American troops were being deployed in the capital as part of the second phase of Operation Together Forward, implemented to curb sectarian violence in Baghdad. Such developments cast doubt on a linchpin of the current US strategy in Iraq—that training more Iraqi forces would allow American troops to return home.

Violence Outside of Baghdad

While attention was focused on the deteriorating security conditions in Baghdad, violence outside of the capital continued to escalate.

In southern cities such as Basra and Karbala, clashes between Shi'ite militias and Iraqi forces, as well as violence between rivaling militias, became increasingly prevalent. And northern cities, such as Mosul, were facing renewed waves of violence along ethnic and sectarian lines.¹³⁵

The Shi'ite South

Power struggles between warring Shi'ite factions became more frequent in the Shi'ite-dominated South. On August 16, Iraqi security officers raided the office of radical cleric Mahmoud Sarkhi al-Hassani after his followers reportedly tried to assume control of several districts in Karbala. Razouki, a senior official of another Shi'ite group, known as the Fadhila party, accused al-Hassani's followers of planning to take over religious shrines in the city. The clashes between al-Hassani's followers and Iraqi security forces led to the arrest of 281 members, but al-Hassani's followers later gathered in nearby towns and threatened to march on Karbala.¹³⁶

Rival Shi'ite factions, such as Sadr's Mahdi Army and Fadhila's armed wing, increasingly engaged in open armed conflicts in Basra. In June, hundreds of al-Hassani's followers attacked the Iranian Consulate after another Shi'ite cleric criticized al-Hassani on Iranian television, describing him as a "fake cleric," and a "pawn of Israel." Prime Minister al-Maliki declared a state of emergency in Basra and deployed several thousand troops to crack down on the militias with an "iron fist."¹³⁷

On August 16, supporters of Sheik Faisal, the leader of the Shi'ite Beni Assad tribe, stormed the governor's office in Basra accusing his supporters of assassinating their tribal leader. They blamed the rival Shi'ite Fadhila party of coordinating the attack, and demanded that the governor, who was also a member of the Fadhila party, arrest and hand over the killers. Sheik Faisal, the leader of the Shi'ite Beni Assad tribe was assassinated by unidentified gunmen two days earlier. His supporters accused the Fadhila party of planning the attack.¹³⁸

One of the key sources of contention in Basra, which contributed to a growing power struggle among political parties, was the issue of oil smuggling. A local official estimated the value of the smuggling trade at \$4 billion per year, or the equivalent of roughly 10 percent of the country's gross domestic product.¹³⁹

Contested Territory

In the demographically mixed and contested province of Diyala, which stretches from Baghdad to Iran, the sectarian power struggle continued to grow. Warring Sunni and Shi'ite factions competed for territorial control in tit-for-tat cycles of violence, primarily by targeting and driving out civilians on the basis of their sect. Since the summer of 2005 attacks in Diyala have more than doubled, and 60 percent of the more recent attacks were directed at Iraqi civilians.¹⁴⁰

Although Iraqi forces had grown increasingly capable and independent in the province, the growing threat of the sectarian power struggle underscored their limitations in containing the violence. These limitations were intertwined with growing public mistrust in the Iraqi security apparatus, which showed divisions along sectarian lines. Many posts, particularly those of police officers, were infiltrated by Shi'ite militia members—who were likely more devoted to their religious parties than the national unity government. In August, plans to withdraw American troops were abandoned and replaced with orders to increase US troop levels in the area.¹⁴¹

The influence of the Mahdi Army was quite prevalent in Khan Bani Sad, located 12 miles northeast of Baghdad in the province of Diyala. According to US and Iraqi forces, more than 100 militia cells operated in the city, setting up illegal checkpoints on the highways to Baghdad, kidnapping and murdering Sunnis, and launching attacks on Sunni villages to drive out their inhabitants.¹⁴²

In Mosul, tensions between Arabs and Kurds continued to incite violence. On August 4, insurgents used car bombs to attack local police, killing four officers and wounding eight before the situation was brought under control. Wathiq al-Hamadani, the city's police commander said, "Now we have total control over the security situation, and we are in complete control over all the streets and areas of Mosul" But attacks continued unabated.

On August 15, a suicide bomber drove his explosives-laden truck in to the headquarters of President Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, killing at least nine people, including four party members and wounding 36.¹⁴³

The Dire Situation in Anbar

The dangerous security situation in Anbar received renewed attention in September when the chief of intelligence for the Marine Corps in Iraq, Col. Pete Devlin, filed an unusual secret report concluding that the prospects for securing the province were dim, and that US security efforts in the area were largely hopeless.

Officials, who read the classified report, said that the strikingly pessimistic assessment represented the first time that a US military officer filed such a dire report from Iraq. The report was circulated among national security circles, and one Defense Department official said, "I don't know if it is a shock wave, but its made people uncomfortable."¹⁴⁴

Devlin's report described a dangerously fragmented environment in Anbar, where the local governments collapsed, and the central government exerted no authority—creating a political vacuum that was being filled by al-Qa'ida in Iraq.¹⁴⁵

The Rising Threat of Shi'ite Militias

Violence inflicted by Shi'ite militias developed into a key obstacle facing US military efforts in Iraq. In early August, General George Casey attributed the majority of recent violent deaths in Baghdad to Shi'ite death squads—signaling a shift in the main threats facing US operations in the capital, which originally centered on Sunni insurgents and al-Qa'ida elements.¹⁴⁶

The August 2006 DoD Report to Congress on Iraq warned that militias—whether legal or illegal—ultimately created "a more dangerous environment for the Iraqi community...Their continued existence challenges the legitimacy of the constitutional government and a conduit for foreign interference."¹⁴⁷

As part of renewed efforts to secure Baghdad, Casey asserted that US and Iraqi forces would dismantle all death squads, regardless of their affiliation. He stated, "We're going after people who are actively killing and murdering other Iraqis."¹⁴⁸ Shi'ite militias were often blamed for execution-style assassinations against Sunnis that involved massive "body dumps" across Baghdad and other parts of the country.

Renewed Tensions Between the Mahdi Army and the United States

On August 7, Iraqi troops and American security advisers led an air and ground attack on Sadr City, a stronghold of Moqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army. According to a US military statement, the operation was aimed at "individuals involved in punishment and torture cell activities."¹⁴⁹ Iraqi forces and US advisers came under fire that "lasted for the duration of the operation and continued as they left the neighborhood."¹⁵⁰ The raid killed three people, and wounded twelve others. And the noise from heavy gunfire and explosions sent civilians running for cover.

In a break with the United States on military tactics, Prime Minister al-Maliki sharply criticized the raid. He said, "This operation used weapons that are unreasonable to detain someone—like using planes."¹⁵¹ In a statement on government television, he said that he was "very angered and pained" and cautioned that "reconciliation cannot go hand in hand with operations that violate the rights of citizens this way."¹⁵² He said, "This operation is

rejected, and it was conducted without the agreement of the government...”¹⁵³ Al-Maliki apologized to Iraqis and said that “this won’t happen again.”¹⁵⁴

Al-Maliki’s response to the US raids in Sadr city reflected a problematic duality in his national policies. Although the Prime Minister has made repeated calls for the disarming of militias, he is reluctant to allow US forces to clamp down on the Mahdi army—a reminder of the complex and dangerous embedment of sectarian divisions in the new government.

An official from Sadr’s office, Abu Mustafa Saidi, said that during the battle, Sadr, who was traveling in Najaf, called on the militia leader to exercise self-restraint, and “informed them to make everything calm so the Iraqi and American soldiers would have no excuses for more attacks.”¹⁵⁵ Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group said that “unless directly provoked, Sadrists will lay low, because they know the Americans’ time in Iraq is coming to an end. Why would they risk another major loss of fighters if it’s not necessary. Americans in their eyes are already defeated—they’re going to leave.”¹⁵⁶

In spite of rising tensions between US forces and the Mahdi Army, the United States was careful to avoid an open confrontation with the militia. Following the attack on Sadr City, President Jalal Talabani met with top US commander in Iraq, General George Casey to discuss security operations in Baghdad. He told Casey that “it is no one’s interest to have a confrontation with Sadr’s movement.”¹⁵⁷ Sadr’s party, the Sadr Trend held 30 seats in the 275-member National Assembly, and controlled several ministries. According to Hiltermann, Iraq’s government was “ beholden to the Sadrists,” because of Sadr’s role in bringing al-Maliki to power.¹⁵⁸

The United States had to be cautious of demonizing Sadr, who had significant political clout, and a loyal following. Hiltermann warned, “To alienate [Sadr’s] people—who constitute the urban underclass in Iraq—is to invite revolution.”¹⁵⁹ According to the US military, there were between 6,000 and 10, 000 Mahdi army militiamen in Baghdad.

Since militias were tied to various factions in the Shi’ite-led government, and held significant popular support, the United States had to deal with the complexity of clamping down on militia-instigated violence without simultaneously alienating political leaders, and provoking public unrest.

Internal Shi’ite Divisions

Internal divisions within the Shi’ite community exacerbated the increasingly complex security environment in Iraq. In addition to the sectarian power struggle between Sunnis and Shi’ites, violence between rivaling Shi’ite factions and growing divides within Shi’ite militias, emerged as new threats to the country’s stability. Power struggles among political groups including Nuri al-Maliki’s Islamic Dawa Party and the rival Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and Sadr’s movement became more pronounced.

Reports indicated that Moqtada al-Sadr faced new challenges to his authority, as some followers were breaking away from his command, and independent cells were developing

within the Mahdi army. Additionally, serious tensions were emerging between Sadr and the mainstream “quietest” Shi’ite clergy.

Militia members, Iraqi politicians, and Western officials described the Mahdi army as an increasingly fluid organization that was splintering into factions of fighters, and local commanders were growing more distant from a central authority figure. According to US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad, “there are forces that are controlled by Moqtada, but there are commanders that are not controlled by him; there are death squads that are not controlled by him.”¹⁶⁰ Iraqi Col. Talib Abdul Razzaq, a battalion commander in Baghdad, said “each section of Sadr City has its own leader. But there is no coordination among them.”¹⁶¹

While the severity of this fragmentation was uncertain, it pointed to a larger obstacle in US efforts to curb violence in Iraq: as the insurgency evolved, it was becoming increasingly difficult for US forces to identify and characterize the perpetrators of violence. It was unclear whether acts of violence—from extrajudicial assassinations to criminal operations—were coordinated or sporadic, national or local, and to what extent they involved a central command. The August 2006 Quarterly DoD Report to Congress noted that the attacks in Iraq could not “be categorized as the result of a single organized or unified opposition or insurgency,” and warned that the security situation was “at its most complex state since the initiation of Operation Iraqi Freedom.”¹⁶²

While a structured force was more readily containable and apt for political bargaining, trends in the nature of the insurgency suggested that the United States might be struggling to fight a more diffuse, and amorphous enemy—for a long time to come.

Allegations of Iranian Support

US allegations of Iranian support for Shi’ite militias resurfaced in the summer of 2006.

In late June, General George Casey said that the American forces “are quite confident that the Iranians are providing weapons, improvised explosive devices (I.E.D.), technology and training to Shia extremist groups.” One indication of Iranian support is the increase in the number of attacks with bombs that feature shaped charges, which focus the explosive power in a single direction.¹⁶³ Casey also noted that extremist groups were conducting training in Iran, and in some cases, probably Lebanon, “using surrogates to conduct terrorist operations in Iraq...”¹⁶⁴

Assertions by Maj. Gen. Caldwell “that Shia extremist groups have received training through some sort of third element associated with Iraq,” re-emerged in mid-August amid a growing confrontation between the United States and the Mahdi Army, and rising tensions between the United States and Iran over Iran’s support for Hezbollah.¹⁶⁵

However, Gen. Caldwell appeared somewhat cautious in his statements. He did not allege that the Iranian government was directly involved in supporting Shi’ite militias, or that Iranian operatives were in Iraq, but rather Caldwell deliberately focused his statements on the role of proxy groups in providing weaponry and training to Shi’ites. He said, “There’s nothing that we have definitely found to say that there are any Iranians operating within the country of Iraq, but rather some clear surrogate elements have been doing this...We do believe that that some Shi’ite elements have been in Iran receiving

training. But the degree to which this is known and endorsed by the government of Iran is uncertain.”¹⁶⁶ Caldwell also refrained from identifying which Shi’ite groups Iran was implicated in supporting.

Officials from the Badr organization and the Mahdi army denied the allegations. Abdul Hadi al-Daraji, a Sadr spokesman said, “Usually such statements of the United States of America come after they have proven their incapability to control the security situation in Iraq...This is unrealistic. The Iraqis are not followers of Iran.”¹⁶⁷

Backlash from the Israeli-Hezbollah Conflict

The upsurge in violence in Iraq came at a time of heightened tensions between Israel and Lebanon. The Israeli army launched an attack on southern Lebanon on July 12, following Hezbollah’s capture of Israeli soldiers during a raid on northern Israel. Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki denounced the Israeli attacks on Lebanon, and said at a July 19 news conference in the fortified Green Zone, “The Israeli attacks and air strikes are completely destroying Lebanon’s infrastructure.” His comments marked a sharp break from President Bush’s stance, and they came in contrast to the lukewarm responses from some Sunni Arab governments, who were cautious to adopt a definitive stance on the aggression.

Some analysts perceived al-Maliki’s comments as a manifestation of the growing role of a Shi’ite Muslim identity across the Middle East and a movement toward the potential creation of a “Shi’ite crescent,” stretching from Iran to Iraq to Lebanon.¹⁶⁸

As the violent confrontation between Lebanon and Israel continued, demonstrations took place across the Middle East condemning Israeli aggression, and showing support for Hezbollah. On August 4, one of the greatest protests, organized by Sadr, was held in Baghdad, where hundreds of thousands of Shi’ites gathered yelling “death to Israel,” and “death to America.”¹⁶⁹

Sadr had earlier urged Sunnis and Shi’ites to unite so that Muslims would be able to defeat Israel. At a speech in the southern city of Kufa on July 21, he declared, “We promise you that we will not forget our people in Lebanon despite our suffering from the American occupation. I will continue defending my Shi’ite and Sunni brothers and I tell them that if we unite, we will defeat Israel without the use of weapons.”¹⁷⁰

He later pledged “to go to Lebanon to defend it if this would stop the war.” And declared, “We, the unified Iraqi people, will stand with the Lebanese people to end the ominous trio of the United States, Israel and Britain, which is terrorizing Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and other occupied nations.”¹⁷¹

The dynamics of the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict provoked a renewed sense of unity among some Arabs. Iraqi Vice President Abdul-Mahdi said, “These horrible massacres carried out by the Israeli aggression, like what happened at Qana, incite in us a spirit of solidarity.”¹⁷² The conflict was simultaneously creating a backlash effect against the United States. Given its ties to Israel, America was perceived as a cobelligerent—hurting US credibility in the region, and hampering the cause for political reform across the Middle East.

The Death of Al-Zarqawi and the Future of Al-Qa'ida in Iraq

On June 7, US air strikes killed al-Qa'ida's leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—an event that represented a significant political and propaganda victory for US forces and the new Iraqi government. The militant leader was killed near Baqubah with Jordanian assistance, which relied on human intelligence as well as the background landscape in one of the al-Zarqawi's video to determine his location.

In the week following al-Zarqawi's death, General Caldwell announced that more than 450 raids on suspected militant hideouts resulted in the capture of 759 “anti-Iraq elements,” the killing of 104 insurgents, and the discovery of 28 significant arms caches.¹⁷³ When one of the “top five” leaders of al-Qa'ida in Iraq, Mansur al-Mashhadani, was killed in a coalition air strike in Yusufiya on June 15, Caldwell commented that it would hinder the organization's ability to regenerate and reorganize itself.¹⁷⁴

President Bush called al-Zarqawi's death, “a severe blow to al-Qa'ida” and a “significant victory in the war on terror.” He warned however, “We have tough days ahead of us in Iraq that will require the continuing patience of the American people,”¹⁷⁵ and bluntly acknowledged, “We can expect sectarian violence to continue.”¹⁷⁶

Most analysts agreed that the death of al-Zarqawi represented at least a temporary victory for Coalition forces, but the larger questions of whether his death would significantly undermine the influence of al-Qa'ida in Iraq, or curb violence in the country were disputed.

Subsequent deterioration of the security environment in Iraq led Zalmay Khalilzad to conclude that “in terms of the level of violence, [the death of al-Zarqawi] has not had any impact at this point.” On July 4, the central morgue announced that it received 1,595 bodies in June, which represented a 16 percent rise since May. According to information provided by the morgue deputy, the death toll for June 2006 was roughly double the 879 bodies received in June 2005.¹⁷⁷

Shortly after al-Zarqawi's death, Al-Qa'ida in Iraq declared via an Internet statement that Abu Hamza al-Muhajir would become the organization's new leader. And on June 15, the US military officially reported that Abu Ayyub al-Masri was the same person described as successor to al-Zarqawi on the web posting.

Reacting to this announcement, US Major General William Caldwell said, “Al-Masri's intimate knowledge of al-Qa'ida in Iraq and his close relationship with [al-Zarqawi's] operations will undoubtedly help facilitate and enable them to regain some momentum if, in fact, he is the one that assumes the leadership role”¹⁷⁸

Brian Fishman, an associate in the Combating Terrorism Center at the US Military Academy at West Point wrote that a key challenge for al-Mujahid would be striking “a balance between appealing to secular and tribal Sunnis in Iraq, some of whom likely provided intelligence that helped doom Zarqawi, while maintaining an insular terrorist network that can sustain potentially weakening criticism from Islamic, Arab, and Western sources.”¹⁷⁹

Over the summer, there were signs that Zarqawi's successor was diversifying his support base. According to a Pentagon consultant, "Zarqawi was a hard-liner in his recruitment practices, while al-Masri adopted a "big tent approach. People who were previously excluded from Al Qaeda in Iraq because they [lacked] exceeding levels of fanaticism [were] now allowed in."¹⁸⁰

But in large part, concern over the heightened state sectarian violence in the country and the proliferation of death squads put discussion of the developing role of al-Qaeda in Iraq on the back burner. A US defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity said, "The sectarian violence is at such a decibel level that people aren't hearing the al-Qaeda in Iraq violence...It hasn't gone away, but you can't hear it over the din."¹⁸¹

In early September, Iraq's national security adviser Mouwaffak al-Rubaie announced the arrest of the second-most senior figure in al-Qaeda in Iraq, Hamed Jumaa Farid al-Saeedi, also known as Abu Humam or Abu Rana. Al-Rubaie described the arrest as a major strike against al-Qaeda, asserting, "We believe that al-Qaeda in Iraq suffers from a serious leadership crisis. Our troops have dealt fatal and painful blows to the organization."¹⁸²

But the arrest had to be put in perspective:

- First, it was unclear whether the characterization of Abu Human as the "Number 2" of al-Qaeda in Iraq was a meaningful one. While the command structure of al-Qaeda was unknown, some experts described it as a rather loose organization that could be characterized more as school of thought than a defined group.¹⁸³ Coalition forces have claimed a number of times in the past to have captured or killed the Number 2.
- Second, it was intuitive that another individual would take Abu Human's position and become the second-in-command. The organization relied on a cyclical process of recruitment, rather than a finite group of individuals.
- Third, the elimination of a senior figure was not necessarily indication that the group itself would weaken. The persistence of al-Qaeda after the death of al-Zarqawi demonstrated the organization's ability to adapt and regroup. And over the past two years, the ideological underpinnings of al-Qaeda have proliferated among Sunni Arab insurgent groups, indicating that its doctrine and strategies would likely outlive the loss of its leader.¹⁸⁴

The Kurdish Dimension: Dangerously Overlooked

The role of the Kurds in fueling separatism and pushing the country toward civil war has been dangerously overlooked in US assessments of risk in Iraq. Such indifference was reflected in the failure of the August 2006 Pentagon Report to Congress on Iraq to address the Kurdish dimension in its analysis on the concern of civil war. Additionally, US reporting tended to gloss over developments pertaining to the Kurds, often focusing on sectarian rather than ethnic strife.

The two major Kurdish parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) headed by Masoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Jalal Talibani, retain powerful militias, known collectively as the Peshmerga, which trace their origins to the Iraqi civil wars of the 1920s. They fought against the Saddam Hussein regime during the Iran-Iraq war and supported U.S. and Coalition military action in 2003. The Peshmerga groups of the PUK and KDP serve as the primary security force for the Kurdish regional

government. The PUK and KDP have insisted on keeping the Peshmerga intact as guarantors of Kurdish security and political self-determination.

The Battle over Kirkuk

A report released by the International Crisis Group in July addressed the “percolating conflict” in Kirkuk, which it described, as “equal parts street brawl over oil riches, ethnic competition over identity between Kurdish, Turkoman, Arab and Assyrian-Chaldean communities, and a titanic clash between two nations, Arab and Kurd.”¹⁸⁵ While Kurds continued to claim that they comprised the majority of the population in Kirkuk, American officials estimated that the ethnic breakdown was closer to one-third Kurdish, one-third Turkomans, and one-third Sunni Arab.¹⁸⁶

In the first three weeks of July, at least 84 people were killed in Kirkuk and its surrounding areas.¹⁸⁷ In late July, an Iraqi army official said that the region had “lately witnessed escalations of armed attacks against the security forces and Iraqi civilians.”¹⁸⁸ Iraqi police attributed the rise in violence to Sunni insurgent groups who were trying to make Kurdish residents doubt their sense of security. Some Sunni Arab leaders blamed the United States for shifting Iraqi forces out of volatile parts of the region, leaving areas with inadequate policing forces, and making them more vulnerable to attacks. Rakan Saeed, a Sunni Arab politician criticized Iraqi security forces for withdrawing from Hawija, an Arab city outside of Kirkuk, arguing that the “area needs more police elements, especially the places that see increased terrorist activity.”¹⁸⁹ US military officers contended that they were working to create an integrated force in the area.

The Role of Turkey

The Kurdish issue in Northern Iraq had significant regional implications and posed two major threats to Turkey. The first involved national security concerns of Kurdish rebels launching attacks in Turkish territory. Ankara was engaging in heavy diplomacy with both US and Iraqi administrations to crack down on Kurdish separatist groups in Northern Iraq, whose chief objective was the establishment of an independent Kurdistan in and around Turkey. Since 2004, the Kurdistan's Worker's Party (PKK)—which waged a separatist war in Turkey in the 1980 and 1990s—stepped up the frequency of its attacks against Kurdish security forces.¹⁹⁰

The second threat related to the concern that Kurdish autonomy in Iraqi would catalyze a separatist movement among Turkey's own Kurdish population. Fear of a Kurdish separatist movement within Turkey had policy-makers in Ankara consistently oppose the establishment of a strong autonomous Kurdish zone within Iraq.

Over the summer, there were signs that “the PKK's war [was] spreading in unpredictable directions,” and drawing in regional actors. In late June, the PKK accused Iran for launching attacks on its bases in northern Iraq—perhaps under Turkish auspices—and the organization threatened retaliation inside Iran.¹⁹¹ Turkey's ambassador to Washington announced later that Ankara had evidence that up to 3,000 fighters from the PKK had moved from positions in northern Iraq to the Turkish border in order to carry out operations inside Turkey.¹⁹²

In late August, Turkey began deploying forces along its border with Iraq in response to the failure of diplomatic efforts to deter the PKK from using bases within Iraq to launch attacks at Turkish forces.¹⁹³ While Turkey's build-up of forces was widely perceived to be a show of force, a political analyst in Istanbul, Cengiz Candar, added that it was also "a statement to the Americans that Turkey is uneasy and trying to follow up on its demands that the PKK be dismantled."¹⁹⁴

Reconstruction Efforts: Stumbling on the Building Blocks

While some reconstruction projects moved ahead in Iraq, such efforts were severely hampered by insurgent attacks, widespread corruption, a lack of consistent funding, delays, and poor logistical planning.

David M. Walker, head of the Government Accountability Office (GAO), testified before the House Government Subcommittee meeting on July 11 to examine the implementation of the Bush administration's 2005 "National Strategy for Victory." The complementary GAO report, "Rebuilding Iraq: More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve US Goals and Overcome Challenges," criticized the US administration's failure to identify "current and future costs," and "the sources of funding needed to achieve US political, security, and economic objectives in Iraq."

Involving a budget of \$21.9 billion, Walker described the Iraqi reconstruction program as the "largest...since the Marshall Plan." He linked setbacks in the reconstruction campaign to the faulty pre-war assumption that "there would be a permissive security environment...to allow reconstruction to go forward," and that "the Iraqi government would make important contributions" to such an effort largely through oil revenues.¹⁹⁵

The GAO director of international affairs and trade, Joseph Christoff, said that the Iraqi budget was paying for "what some could contend to be a bloated bureaucracy," and "ghost employees," as it was often difficult to discern who was working in the different ministries.¹⁹⁶

Stuart W. Bowen Jr., the US administration's special inspector general for Iraq reconstruction (SIGIR), issued a series of reports that addressed the severity of corruption in Iraq. Bowen uncovered "an \$8 billion gap in spending accountability by the defunct Coalition Provisional Authority, significant theft and fraud by military officers and an American businessman in the town of Hillah, incompetence in the construction of health care centers and oil pipelines, and a shortfall in what needs to be built with the money on hand."¹⁹⁷

Bowen's staff, as well as other US government agencies, have spearheaded efforts to establish financial watchdog organizations in Iraq aimed at curbing corruption. These included:¹⁹⁸

- *The Commission on Public Integrity*, which was established by the former CPA and concentrated on white-collar crime.
- *The Board of Supreme Audit*, which was responsible for examining the records of each Iraqi ministry.

- *Inspectors General* who responded to complaints of crimes or mismanagement and made referrals to criminal investigators if necessary
- *The Central Criminal Court of Iraq*, which tried both white-collar and violent crimes.

The Fuel Crisis

Corruption and insurgent attacks on pipelines contributed to the severity of the fuel crisis in Baghdad, where the price of black-market fuel reached as much as \$4 per gallon in August.¹⁹⁹ At that time, President Jalal Talabani said “I realize that people are really suffering from the lack of energy and security, but this not the fault of the government... Terrorists have blown up many power stations as well as the pipeline” that delivers crude oil from the northern fields around Kirkuk to the main refinery in Beiji, located 155 miles north of Baghdad.²⁰⁰

Oil ministry spokesperson Assem Jihad said that the Beiji facility had a capacity to refine 2 million to 2.25 million gallons of gasoline per day during the pre-war period, but had dropped to production levels of less than 260,000 gallons of gasoline per day. He attributed this decline primarily to electricity shortages, and threats to refinery operators.²⁰¹

The August 2006 DoD Quarterly Report to Congress identified four primary factors limiting production at the Beiji refinery: (1) maintenance issues with key components in the refinery, (2) an inefficient refining process, (3) an unreliable flow of crude oil into the refinery, and (4) security threats to personnel.²⁰²

In early August, the main oil facility in Latifiyah was forced to shut down after workers received death threats. According to the Oil Ministry, more than 250 Oil Ministry officials, workers, and security guards had been killed since the ousting of Saddam Hussein. And the US Energy and Information Administration estimated 315 major attacks on pipelines, electricity plants, and other energy infrastructure in the period from April 2003 to June 2006.

The oil crisis was compounded by a burgeoning black market and widespread theft and corruption. In 2005, 450 Oil Ministry employees were dismissed for illegally selling oil and petroleum products. According to the Oil Ministry's inspector general, Ali-al-Alaak, roughly \$4 billion worth of petroleum products were smuggled out of Iraq that year, including gasoline, and crude oil siphoned from pipelines.²⁰³

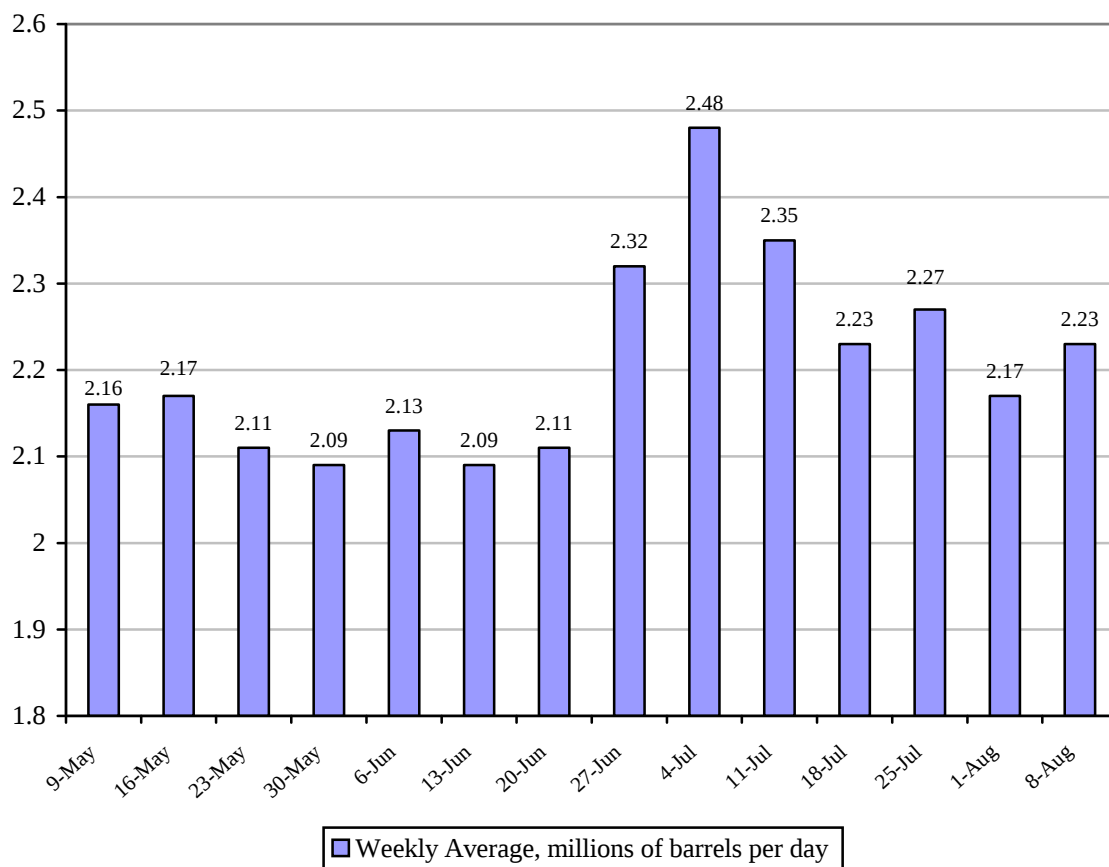
The August 2006 Pentagon Quarterly Report to Congress acknowledged that “poor maintenance, insurgent attacks, slow repair, and corruption have slowed progress” in efforts to rebuild Iraq's energy infrastructure. “Beyond attacks on various worksites,” the report noted, “terrorists have attacked crude export and petroleum product pipelines, impeding exports and the refining and distribution of petroleum products, such as gasoline and diesel.”²⁰⁴ In spite of these setbacks, the report noted that crude oil production increased by 18 percent since the previous reporting period to 2.2 mbpd (See Figure 9), but did not reach the Iraqi government's target level of 2.5 mbpd.

The report warned that an over-subsidization of fuel, with regular gasoline regulated at \$0.55 per gallon, and premium gasoline at \$0.90 per gallon, led to a “disconnect between supply and demand,” feeding black market activity and corruption.²⁰⁵ However, the

DoD document failed to address critical issues pertaining to the oil industry including field management and development, war flooding, and crude oil injection and overproduction.

In his July 11 testimony before the House Government Subcommittee meeting, David M. Walker, head of the GAO said that roughly 10 percent of Iraq's refined fuels, and 30 percent of its imported fuels were stolen. He partially attributed widespread theft in the industry to the over-subsidization of fuels which "[provided] tremendous incentives" for corruptive practices.²⁰⁶

Figure 9: Oil Production: May-August 2006



Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, August 2006, p. 21; Iraq Reconstruction Management Office.

Views From the Iraqi Public

The International Republican Institute (IRI) conducted a countrywide survey between June 14 and June 24, 2006, polling around 3,000 Iraqis on political, economic and security issues, and living conditions.²⁰⁷ IRI Executive Vice President Judy Van Rest said that while “the polls show the security and economic conditions remain dire...there is a lot of hope among ordinary Iraqis about the future.” Through everything that’s gone on,” she said, “there’s a strong feeling that that the country should stay together.”

Several public opinion polls were also included in the August 2006 Pentagon Report to Congress, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq.” The surveys were predominantly carried out by the State Department Office of Research over June and July.

Both sets of data—those compiled by the IRI and the State Department—were prone to a series of inaccuracies inherent in public opinion polling, but were likely to be more questionable because of inhospitable security conditions in Iraq, particularly in areas like Mosul, Anbar, and Baghdad. Moreover, polls often lack adequate explanation of methodology—such as whether control questions were used—making it difficult to ascertain the validity of the sample, and establish the true margin of error, a problem that was especially apparent in the Quarterly Report figures.

These two sets of polling data were gathered prior to the July peak in violence, and after Prime Nuri al-Maliki announced the new security crackdown for Iraq—factors that likely skewed the data toward a relatively more optimistic outlook. The surveys were also conducted shortly after the full creation of the Iraqi national unity government, and consequently reflected a time when Shi’ites and Kurds largely considered themselves “winners” of the political process.

Overall Direction of the Country

As indicated in Figure 10, most Iraqis felt that the country was “heading in the right direction,” by a 41 percent to 35 percent margin—reflecting a reversal from an earlier poll conducted in late March, in which 52 percent of those polled indicated that the country was going in the wrong direction, compared to 30 percent who said it was heading in the right direction. The regional breakdown for the more recent polling data, depicted in Figure 11, showed a strong divergence in opinion in the Northern Arab and Sunni Arab areas, where the majority indicated that the country was headed in the wrong direction. The following breakdown of reasons were cited when respondents were asked why the country was heading in the right or wrong direction:²⁰⁸

Right Direction		Wrong Direction	
Elected national government	31%	Bad security situation	34%
Freedom and democracy	21%	Presence of occupation	32%
Getting rid of former regime	13%	Sectarian conflict	32%
Elections	12%	Inactive government	7%
Having a constitution	7%	General instability	6%

Confidence in the Government

According to IRI polling, twenty-five percent of Iraqis expressed that they were very confident in the new Iraqi government, 33 percent were somewhat confident, compared to 7 percent who were somewhat unconfident, and 29 percent who were not confident. But the regional breakdown, illustrated in Figure 12, showed that the overwhelming majority (78 percent) of respondents in the northern Arab areas deeply lacked confidence in the government, and 52 percent of the respondents in Sunni areas were either very or somewhat unconfident in the government. When respondents were asked which issues should be given highest priority by the new Iraqi government, security, infrastructure, and economic development/job creation ranked as the top three areas.²⁰⁹

The August 2006 Pentagon Report to Congress on Iraq included a similar poll, assessing public confidence in the government to improve the situation in Iraq, depicted below as Figure 13. The State Department Office of Research conducted its survey shortly after the IRI polling period. While the data indicated that the majority of Iraqis had faith in the new government, confidence levels were notably lowest in mixed and predominantly Sunni areas, such as Kirkuk and Tikrit/Baquba.

Economic Conditions

IRI polling found that 59 percent of respondents said that the overall economic conditions in Iraq were poor, 26 percent said that they were fair, and 11 percent indicated that they were good or excellent (See Figure 14). When Iraqis were asked about their personal economic conditions, the distribution was fairly similar. Forty-nine percent said that the conditions were poor, 34 percent indicated that conditions were fair, 15 percent that they were good, and 1 percent that they were excellent.

As depicted in Figure 15, the regional breakdown of personal economic conditions showed noticeable variation across different areas in Iraq. Fifty-four percent of respondents described "good" personal economic conditions in Kurdish areas, whereas 82 percent and 67 described their situation as "poor" in Northern Arab and Sunni areas, respectively.

A poll conducted by the State Department Office of Research in June 2005, and repeated in July 2006, compared Iraqi responses to whether they felt that their household financial situation had improved from pre-war conditions. The results, recreated below as Figure 16, showed variation across regions, but Iraqi assessments were broadly more pessimistic in July 2006 than the previous reporting period.

Security Conditions

Seventy-five percent of Iraqis described their overall security conditions as "poor," according to the IRI polling data illustrated in Figure 17. However, when respondents were asked to describe security conditions in their respective neighborhoods, the distribution depicted a somewhat more optimistic assessment. Thirty-eight percent described the security conditions in their neighborhood as "poor," 20 percent as fair, 22

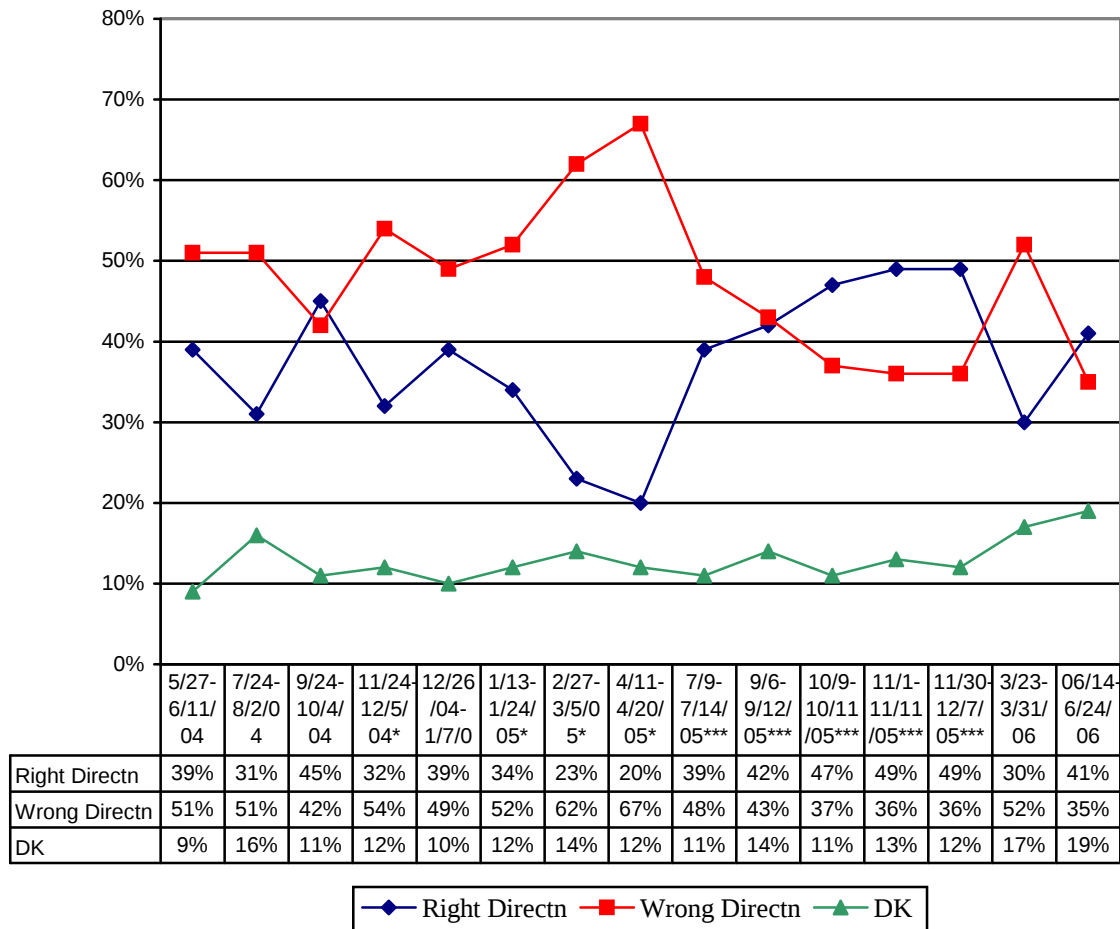
percent as good, and 18 percent as excellent (See Figure 18). The regional breakdown, of security conditions in different neighborhoods, illustrated as Figure 19, indicated that Iraqis in Kurdish areas felt the safest, with 77 percent describing personal security conditions as excellent. Responses from Northern Arab, Sunni areas, and Baghdad indicated much less secure environments in these neighborhoods.

The August 2006 Pentagon Report to Congress on Iraq included a poll assessing the level of Iraqi concern of sectarian and ethnic violence. The graph, depicted below as Figure 20, showed markedly high levels of concern in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Tikrit/Baquba, and generally high levels of anxiousness throughout the country.

Another graph included in the Pentagon report measured Iraqi confidence in various security forces—namely the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi police, the Badr Organization, the Mahdi Army and the Peshmerga—to improve the situation in the country. (See Figure 21). The text of the DoD report noted that confidence in the Iraqi Army remained relatively constant since the previous reporting period, with the exception of Baghdad, where public confidence in the Iraqi military rose from 69 to 78 percent. But the report later noted that this change was coupled with increased confidence in militias.²¹⁰ Confidence in the Badr Organization in Baghdad increased from roughly 23 to 42 percent since the last reporting period. Respondents in Kurdish areas reported increased faith in the Iraqi military, but they also voiced higher levels of confidence in the Peshmerga. Analysis in the DoD Report largely glossed over this set of data, at a time when militias were threatening to fill a widening security and political void.

Figure 10: Overall Direction of the Country: May 2004-June 2006

Do you feel that Iraq is generally heading in the right direction or the wrong direction?

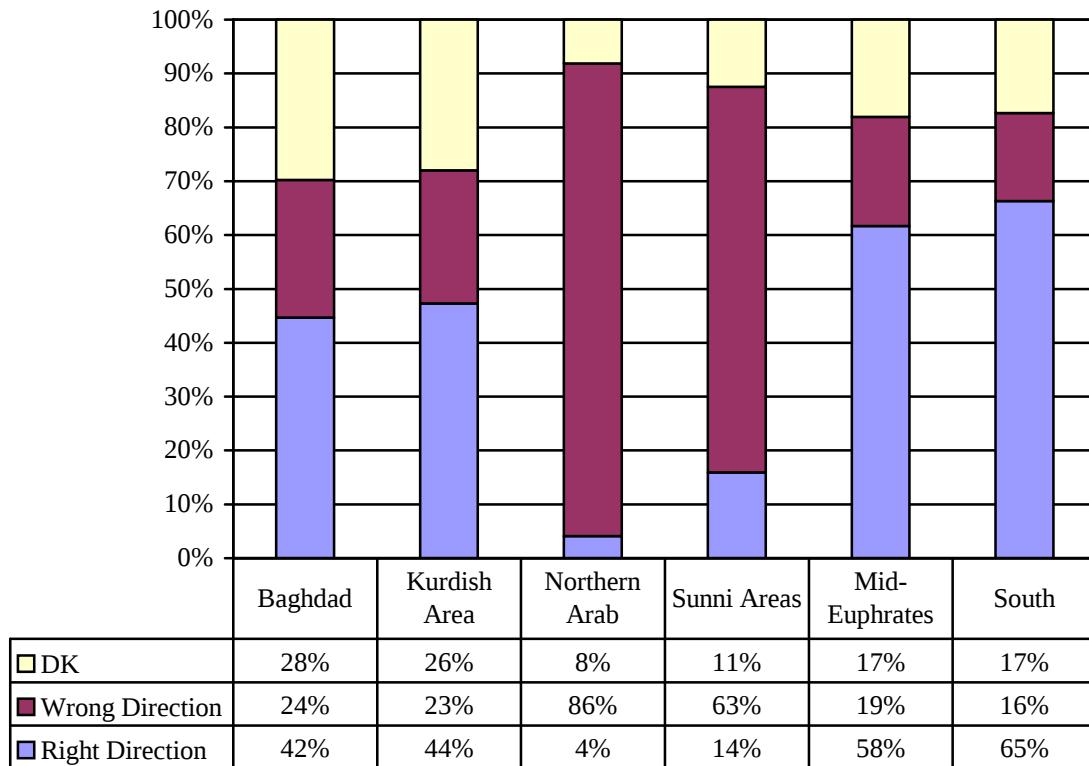


*Does not include Mosul, Anbar and Dohuk/ **Does not include Mosul and Dohul/ ***Does not include Anbar

Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Figure 11: Overall Direction of the Country – Regional Breakdown: June 2006

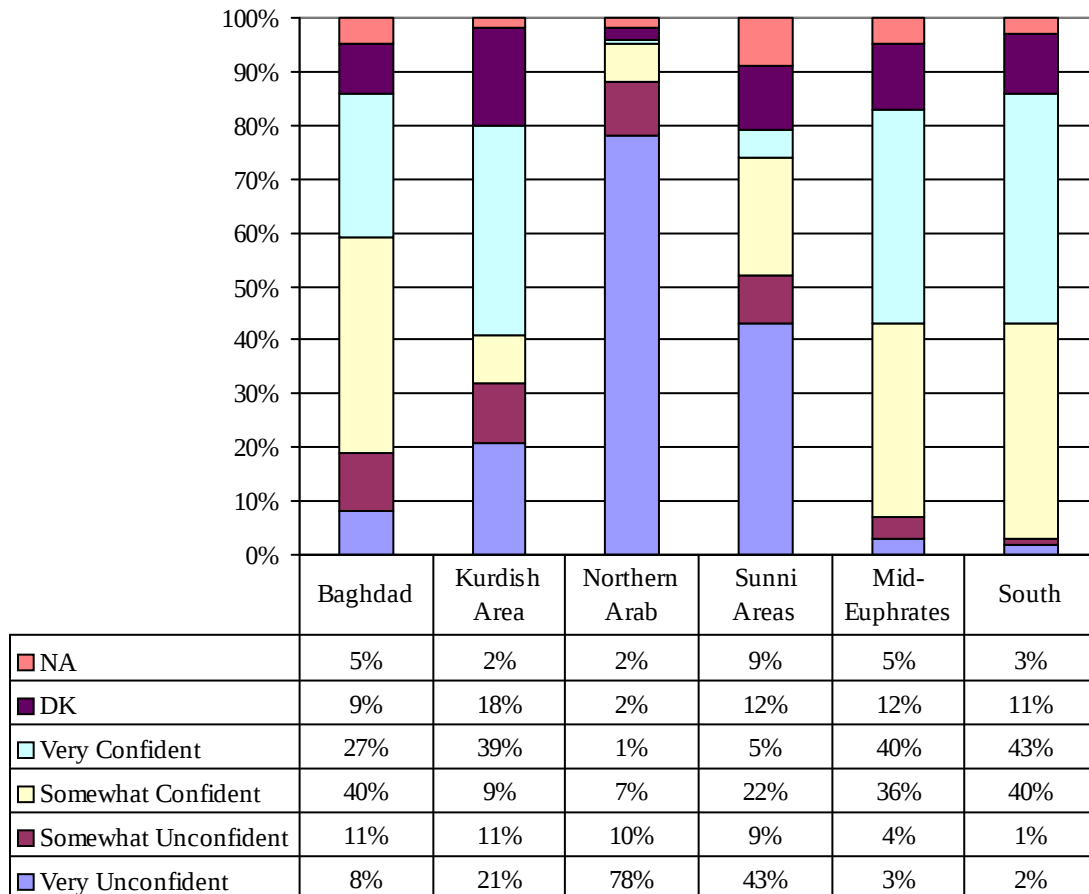
Do you feel that Iraq is generally heading in the right direction or the wrong direction?



Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Figure 12: Confidence in the Government – Regional Breakdown, IRI Reporting: June 2006

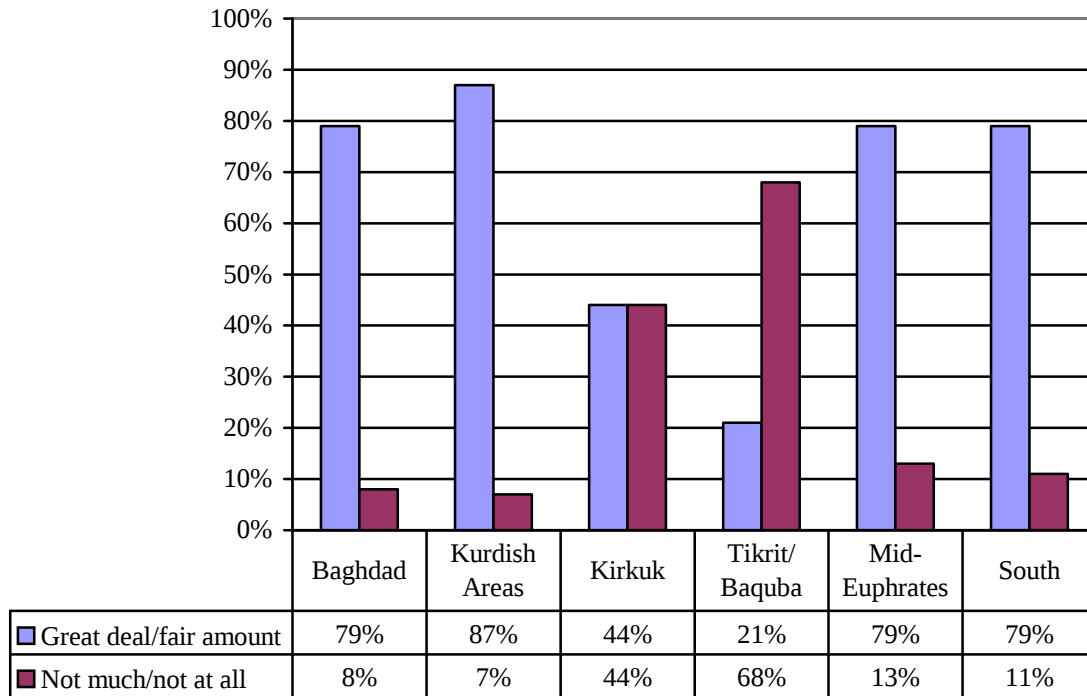
What level of overall confidence do you have in the government announced by Nouri Al-Maliki?



Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Figure 13: Confidence in the Government – Regional Breakdown, State Dept. Reporting: June 2006

How much confidence do you have in the new Iraqi government to improve the situation in Iraq?



Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, August 2006, p. 7.

Data points are estimates from figure included in the DoD report.

Department of State, Office of Research, June 21-July 6, 2006

Sample sizes: Baghdad-173; Kurdish Areas-308; Kirkuk-108; Tikrit/Baquba-210; Mid-Euphrates-523; South-437

Margin of error: $\pm 4\%$ for the overall sample, but varies among regions.

Note: Data from Mosul is not included in this chart. It was determined to be unreliable.

Figure 14: Overall Economic Conditions in Iraq: June 2006

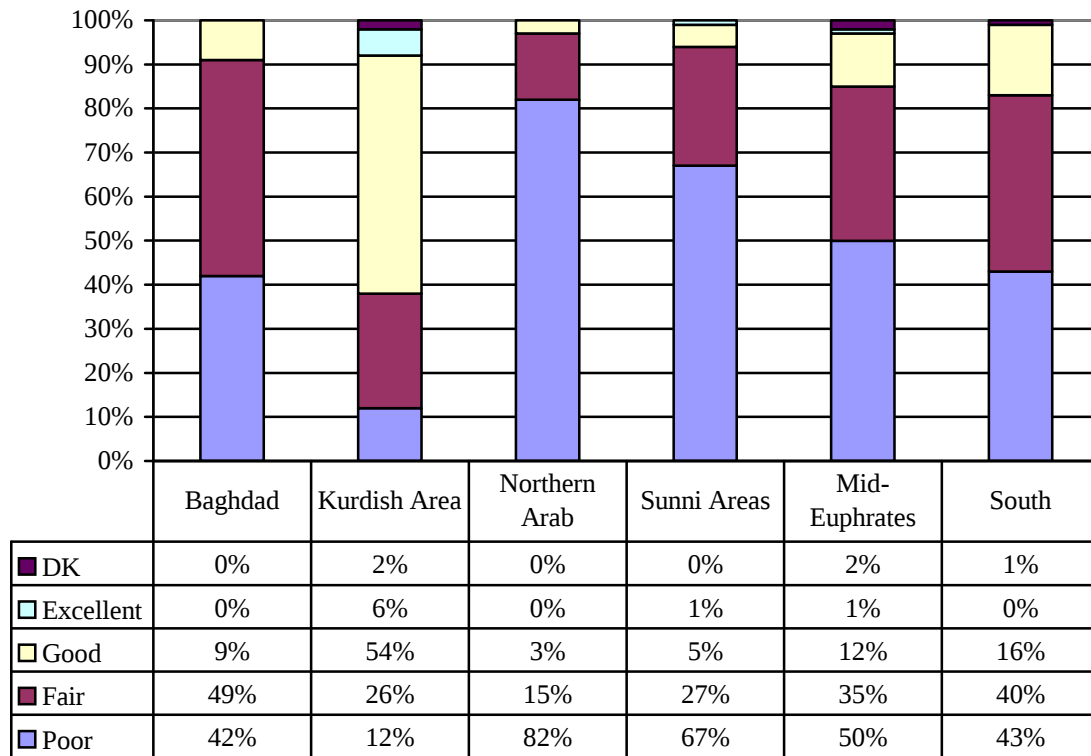
How would you rate economic conditions in Iraq today?



Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Figure 15: Personal Economic Conditions – Regional Breakdown: June 2006

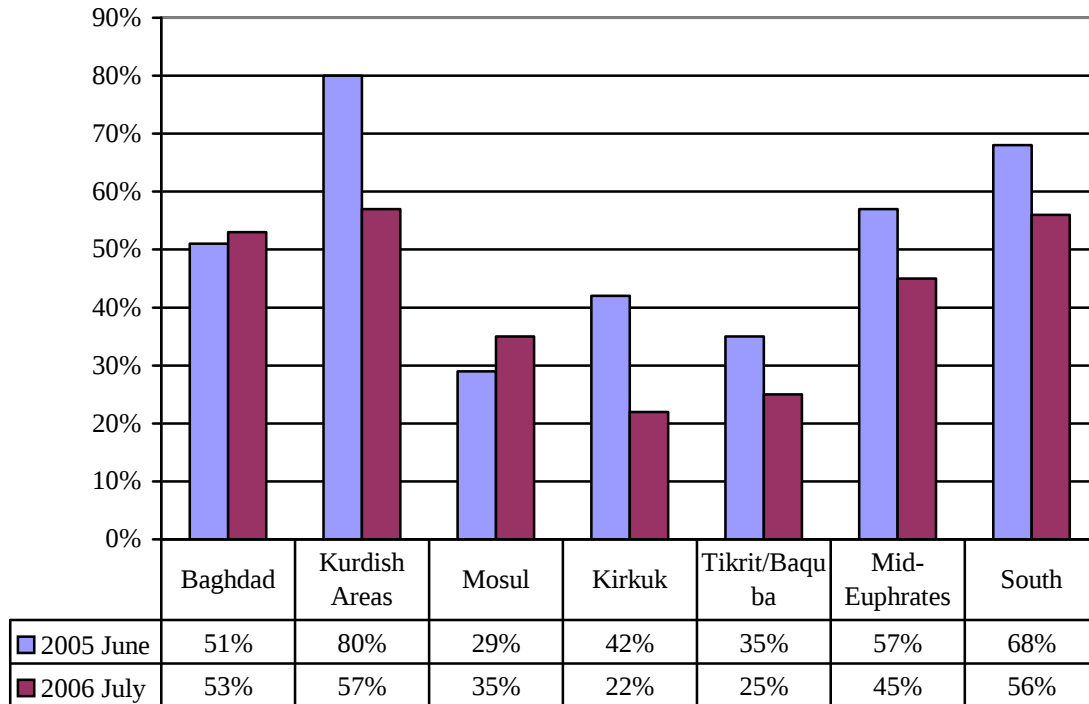
How would you describe your personal economic condition today?



Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Figure 16: Household Financial Situation: June/July 2006

Percent of respondents who expressed that their household's financial situation had improved compared to before the war



Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, August 2006, p. 18.

Data points are estimates from figure included in the DoD report.

Department of State, Office of Research, June 2005/July 2006

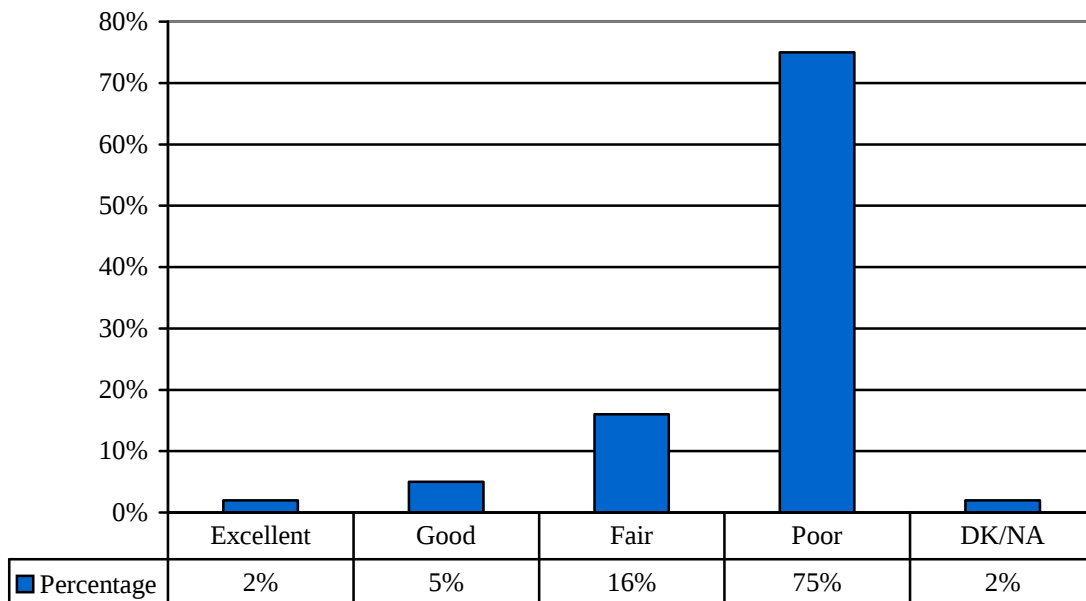
Sample sizes: June 2005: Baghdad-216; Kurdish Areas-344; Mosul 127; Kirkuk-115; Tikrit/Baquba-224; Mid-Euphrates-527; South-435

July 2006: Baghdad-173; Kurdish Areas-308; Mosul-111; Kirkuk-108; Tikrit/Baquba-210; Mid-Euphrates-523; South-437

Margin of error: $\pm 4\%$ for the overall sample, but varies among regions.

Figure 17: Overall Security Conditions in Iraq: June 2006

How would you describe the security conditions in Iraq today?



Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Figure 18: Security Conditions in Neighborhood: June 2006

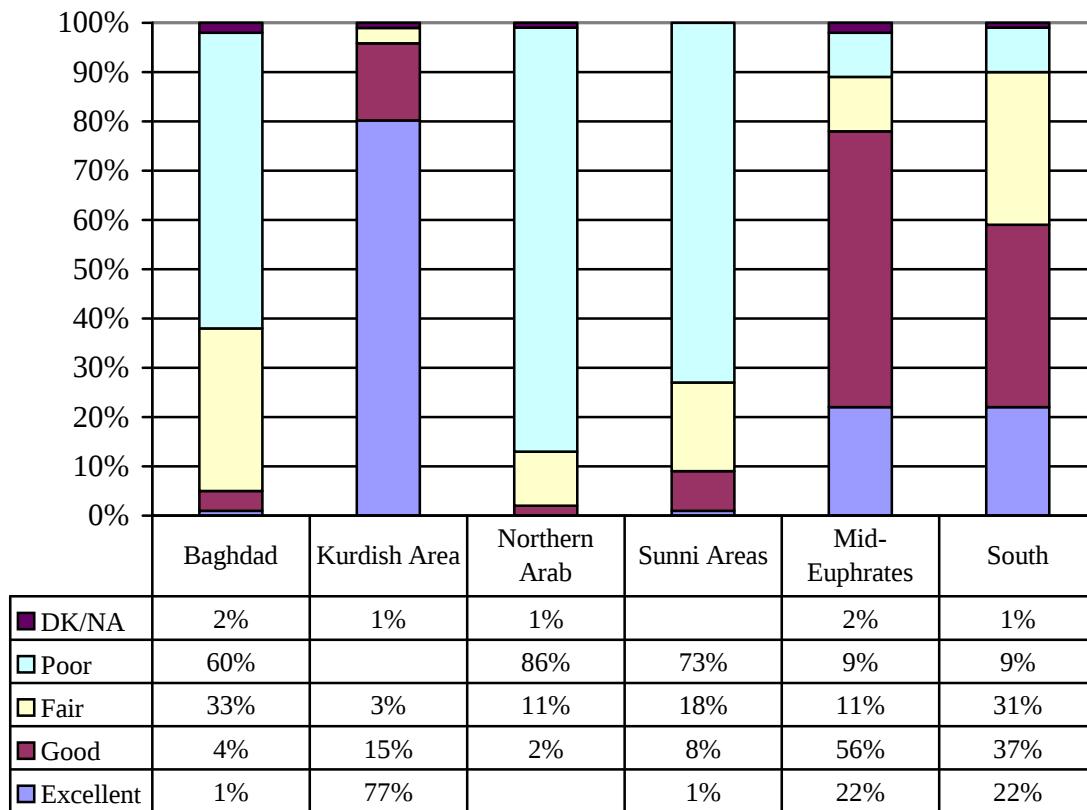
How would you describe the current security conditions in your neighborhood?



Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Figure 19: Security Conditions in Neighborhood – Regional Breakdown: June 2006

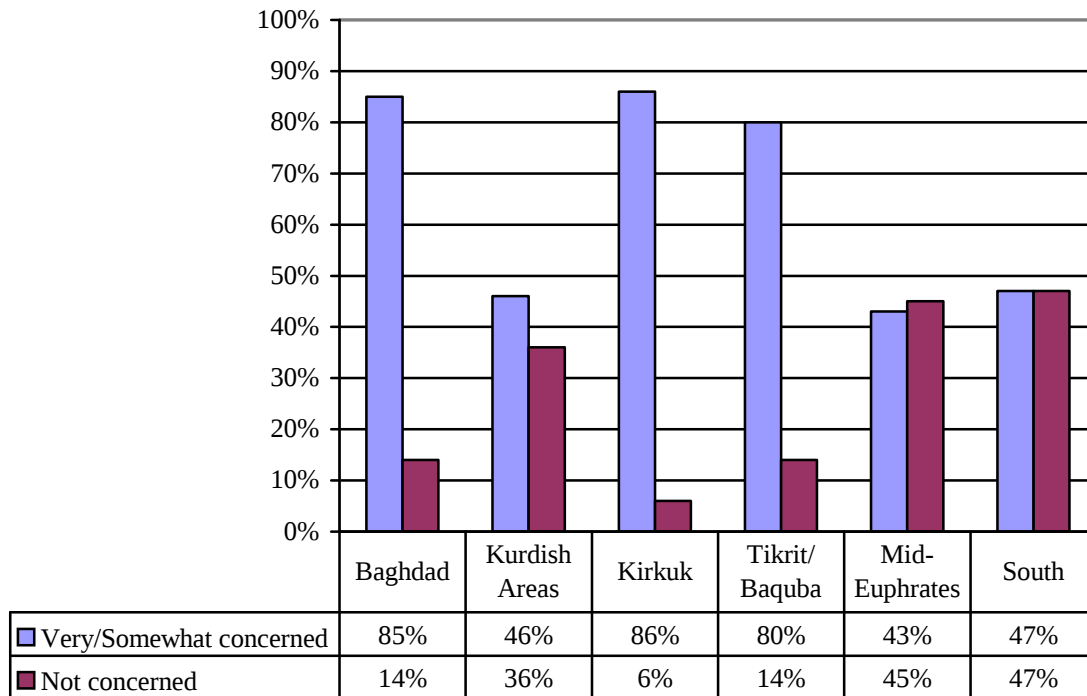
How would you describe the current security conditions in your neighborhood?



Source: International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," June 14-24, 2006.

Figure 20: Concern of Sectarian and Ethnic Violence: June/July 2006

How concerned are you about an increase in sectarian or ethnic violence in Iraq?



Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, August 2006, p. 38.

Data points are estimates from figure included in the DoD report.

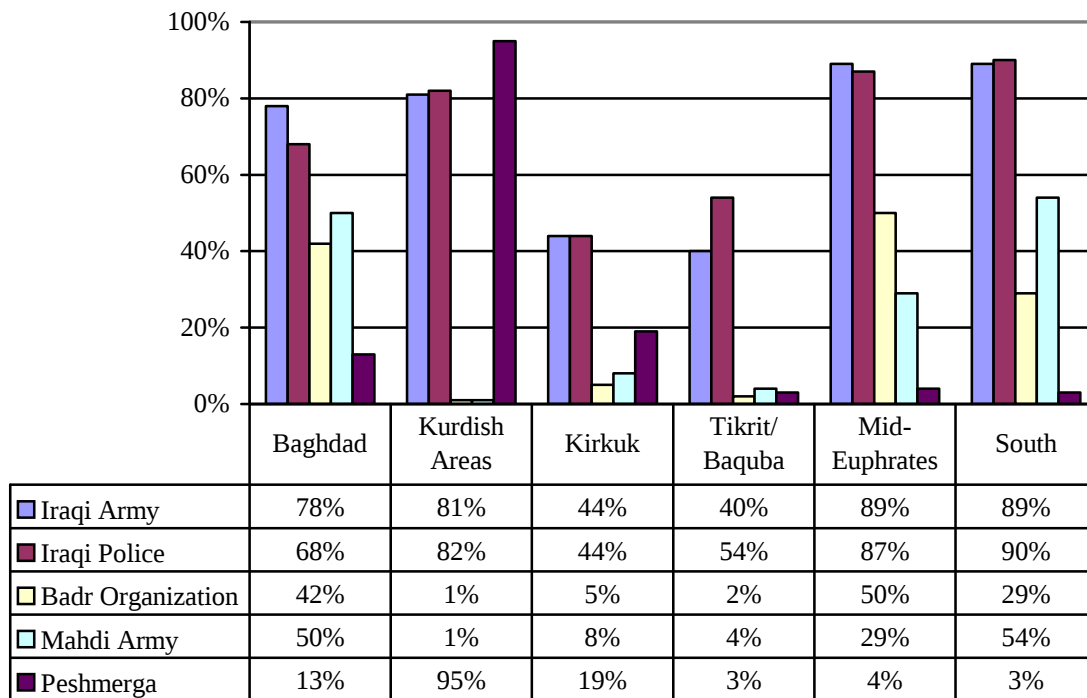
Department of State, Office of Research, June 21-July 6, 2006.

Sample sizes: Baghdad-173; Kurdish Areas-308; Kirkuk-108; Tikrit/Baquba-210; Mid-Euphrates-523; South-437

Margin of Error: $\cong \pm 4\%$ for the overall sample, but varies among regions.

Figure 21: Confidence in Different Security Forces: June/July 2006

Percent expressing confidence in _____ to improve the situation in Iraq.



Source: "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense Report to Congress, August 2006, p. 38.

Data points are estimates from the DoD report.

Department of State, Office of Research, June 21-July 6, 2006

Sample sizes: Baghdad-173; Kurdish Areas-308; Kirkuk-108; Tikrit/Baquba-210; Mid-Euphrates-523; South-437

Margin of error: $\pm 4\%$ for the overall sample, but varies among regions.

Note: Data from Mosul is not included in this chart. It was determined to be unreliable.

Wining or Losing the War: The US Role in Iraq

At a briefing on Capitol Hill in mid-July, General Peter J. Schoomaker, the Army chief of staff, was asked whether the United States was winning the war in Iraq. After a contemplative pause, he responded, "I think I would answer that by telling you I don't think we are losing."²¹¹ Schoomaker continued, "the challenge...is more complex, and it's going to continue to be...That's why I tell you I think we're closer to the beginning than we are to the end of this."²¹²

As the situation in Iraq became more uncertain, and the potential for civil war grew more eminent, the US role in reconstructing the country came under greater scrutiny. It appeared that the direction of the Iraq war was centered on a race between two competing forces. On one front, renewed efforts at political compromise and national reconciliation were drawing some elements of the opposition into the political process. On the other, heightened sectarian violence was pushing the country toward civil war. While the United States continued to press for the formation of lasting political compromise, it was still far from clear how, and to what extent, US involvement would ultimately sway the competition in either direction.

The outcomes to date do provide important lessons on how the United State should move forward in its strategy Iraq, and which mistakes it should avoid. Too often, it appeared that the US administration fell back on assumptions and strategies that reflected its ideology rather than the realities on the ground.

Notably, throughout the US presence in Iraq, the administration overemphasized the role of political benchmarks, such as elections, and their role in fostering democratic governance as part of a shortsighted strategy that ignored that the bridge from limited acts of liberalization to democratization was a tenuous one. The United States tended to act, however, as if elections alone could resolve hard fought political battles over nation building, trigger economic reform, and introduce a modern social order.

Democracy is not an end-goal, but rather a complicated system of political institutions, norms, and practices. And many societies have a higher priority for economic reform, dealing with demographic issues, and providing basic security for their ordinary citizens. More representative governments are needed, but productive democratic change requires social and economic stability, effective political parties, human rights, and the rule of law.

The notion that a deeply divided and politically primitive Iraq would quickly transition into a shining example of democracy that would transform the Middle East was never realistic. At best, Iraq will transform slowly and uncertainly over time.

It seems likely that the United States will have to slow its plans to reduce its military presence, adjust to new threats, and intensify its efforts to shape effective security and police forces if it is to deal with the growing risk of civil conflict during a period in which the new government must come to grips with all of the issues raised by the Constitution, and establish legitimacy among the Iraqi public.

Potential Outcomes

The positive side of events is that Shi'ite, Kurdish, and some key Sunni leaders still actively work for a united Iraq. More and more Iraqi forces are coming on-board, playing an active role, and taking over their own battle space. The insurgency so far lacks major foreign support, although it does get limited amounts of money, weapons, and foreign fighters. It does not have the support of most Shi'ites and Kurds, who make up some 70 to 80 percent of the population.

If Iraqi forces become effective in large numbers, if the Iraqi government demonstrates that its success means the phase out of Coalition forces, and if the Iraqi government remains inclusive in dealing with Sunnis willing to come over to its side, the insurgency should be defeated over time—although some cadres could then operate as diehards at the terrorist level for a decade or more.

The negative side, however, is that signs of progress in Iraq are overshadowed by the growing risk of the country sliding into a full-scale civil war. The efforts of the insurgents to divide Iraq along sectarian and ethnic lines are having some success and are leading to Shi'ite and Kurdish reprisals that are causing fear and anger among Sunnis. Shi'ite and Kurdish federalism, mixed with the rise of Shi'ite religious factions and militias, can divide the country. The Iraqi political process is unstable and uncertain, and parties and officials are now identified, and identifying themselves, largely by sect and ethnicity. Severe ethnic and sectarian divisions exist inside the government, and at the national, regional, and local levels. Popular support for the Coalition presence in Iraq is now a distinct minority in every Coalition country.

Iraq could degenerate into full-scale civil conflict or remain divided and/or unstable for some years to come. There already is limited popular support in the United States and Britain for a continued military role and major new aid programs, and continued political turmoil or serious civil war could make a continued Coalition presence untenable and drive US and British forces out of Iraq.

The possibility that the insurgency will drive Iraq's political and religious leaders and various elements of the Iraqi forces into warring Sunni, Shi'ite, and Kurdish factions continues to be a viable threat. Even the most committed leaders may be forced to abandon the search for a national and inclusive political structure if sectarian and ethnic fighting escalates out of control. Those that do not, may be replaced by far more extreme voices. The new Iraqi forces may also divide along ethnic and sectarian lines and much of the police and security forces already are divided in this way.

There is also a risk that Iraq could bring in outside powers supporting various factions: Iran supporting Iraqi Shi'ites, the Arab Sunni states supporting Iraq Sunnis, with the Kurds left largely isolated and facing increasing problems with the Turks. Any precipitous Coalition withdrawal would greatly encourage this possibility.

Much depends on the success of the Iraqi political process and how Iraqis deal with the range of issues raised by the Constitutional referendum. Much also depends on how well Iraqi forces succeed in becoming effective at both the military and political level, and in replacing Coalition forces. Finally, much depends on the ability of the new Iraqi government to take responsibility for what happens in Iraq, lead effectively, and establish

effective police and government services in the field—all areas where previous Iraqi governments have been weak.

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