

## The Latest Violence in Iraq

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### Q1: Does the latest uptick in violence mean that the surge in Iraq failed?

**A1:** So far, the surge has failed in its stated goal of translating security gains in the country into political reconciliation among the Kurdish, Arab Shi'ite, Arab Sunni, and other minority populations (and the various groups and tribes within each of these populations). Even political accommodation—a less heartfelt form of “getting along” than reconciliation—has not occurred to an adequate degree. The Council of Representatives of Iraq has not passed all of the necessary reforms to set the scene for a stable country, and those laws that have been passed have in many cases not been applied by the fledgling government. And while the surge, coupled with U.S. political accommodation with some previous Sunni and Shi'ite insurgent factions, succeeded in drastically reducing violence across the country from record highs of the summer, a good day in Iraq still means an average of a dozen Iraqis dead and many more injured, along with a continued stream of attacks on U.S. troops. By any measure, it is unlikely that the United States can draw down below 140,000 troops any time soon. The Iraqi minister of defense estimates that he will not be able to provide for Iraq's internal security until 2012 and border defense until 2018.

### Q2: What is causing the uptick in violence?

**A2:** This latest uptick is caused by different geographies of violence in Iraq. Most of the “baseline” violence is perpetrated by the remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq, which was and is mainly an Iraqi Sunni Arab—run organization despite its name and the foreign nationality of many of its suicide bombers (the majority from Saudi Arabia and North Africa). The organization transformed over the past eight months and moved from Anbar Province and the ring of towns around Baghdad to the area surrounding Mosul, further north. It continues to disrupt the country with countless bombings, kidnappings, and executions, killing Iraqis and Americans wherever it can, in loose coordination with other groups of “irreconcilables”—Sunni Arab Ba'athist leftovers from the Saddam era who are extremely angry about the “awakening” elsewhere in Sunni Iraq. Additional increases in violence are accounted for by the loosely confederated followers of Moqtada al-Sadr and his 60,000-strong militia (*Jayyish al-Mahdi*, or JAM), who for the most part had been observing a ceasefire for the past seven months.

### Q3: What does it mean that the Sadrists are no longer observing the ceasefire and the predominantly Shi'ite government of Iraq is now fighting the Shi'ite Sadrist movement?

**A3:** An already fragmented society, Iraq continues to cleave. The government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is composed of two main factions: Al Dawa (Maliki's party) and the Supreme Islamic Iraq Council (SIIC), led by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. They are especially displeased with Moqtada al-Sadr because of his enormous political popularity. The fighting that has occurred this week has been concentrated in Baghdad and the southern province of Basra, which the British turned over to the Iraqis in December 2007. The situation in Basra is less about Sadrists than it is about various Shi'ite factions fighting for control of the oil-rich region. The good news is that the ground operation to bring order to the province is being conducted at the behest of the government of Iraq and by Iraqi Army and police forces—something that would have been impossible a year ago due to a lack of capacity on the part of the Iraqi security forces. The bad news is that the Shi'ite power struggle in the country may have only just begun. Iraq may choose its next government by the barrel of a gun and not at the ballot box.

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