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Iraq's Sectarian and Ethnic Violence and the Evolving Insurgency

Developments through mid-December 2006

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Updated: December 14, 2006

Executive Summary

The insurgency in Iraq has become a “war after the war” that threatens to divide the country and create a full-scale civil conflict. It has triggered sectarian and ethnic violence that 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 fighting in Iraq 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, which now involves widespread civil conflict.

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 deeper into civil war. The February 22 bombing of the Golden Mosque was the initial catalyst of Sunni-Shi’ite clashes. Different factions built up their militias, and infiltrated the new Iraqi security forces. Shi’ite militias became the primary challenge facing the Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, and the Shi’ite community itself fragmented into rivaling groups.

Sunni insurgents, under the new leadership of Abu Hamza al-Masri, continued to adapt their tactics to stay one step ahead of US military technology upgrades. Sectarian fighting in Baghdad and surrounding urban areas led Sunnis to join and seek the protection of loosely organized neighborhood death squads or insurgent 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 fall of 2006, Iraqis faced continued high levels of violence, carried out by a tangled set of warring factions. As the nature of the violence became more complex, the prospects for national reconciliation grew more distant.

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

- Sectarian fighting, led by the growth of some 23 militias around Baghdad, formed the foundation of the civil war.¹ Moqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army developed rogue components that acted outside of his command. Sunnis formed loosely organized neighborhood death squads in the urban areas, some with ties to al-Qai’da or ex-Ba’athist groups. Two large scale attacks formed the foundation of reprisal killings in the fall: On 14 November Shi’ite militias were accused of abduction 150 people from the Ministry of Higher Education and on 23 November Sunni militants were accused of killing over 200 in bombings in Sadr City.
- Baghdad and other major cities – such as Basra and Baquba - were almost completely divided into sectarian strongholds as both Sunnis and Shi’a fled neighborhoods in which they were a minority. Soft ethnic cleansing forced upwards of 400,000 Iraqis to relocate within Iraq since the February Samarra mosque bombing.²
- The Sunni Arab insurgency remained focused in the western Anbar Province and benefited from the relocation of US troops to quell sectarian violence in Baghdad.
- Attack patterns continued to focus on civilians with the average deaths per day rising to almost 100 in October. According to Iraq Coalition Casualty count, 3,539 Iraqi civilians died in September, 1,315 died in October, and 1,740 died in November. The US also saw an increase in attacks in the capital and IED attacks reached an all time high. 104 US troops died in October, the highest since January 2005. One-third

of the deaths were in the capital, but the majority of US troops were killed in Anbar Province. An additional 68 US troops died in November.

- The Shi'ite community was internally divided, increasingly along militia-support lines. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) was the most powerful political bloc, but al-Sadr's militia and its rogue components found widespread support from the Shi'ite population. An incident in Amara in October underscored the tensions between SCIRI and al-Sadr.
- US military 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 Baquba, Basra, Mosul, and Falluja.
- Turkey pledged their support for the minority Turkoman population in Iraq and urged Iraq to take action against PKK rebel activity in the Kurdish north. Kurds continued to conflict with Arabs in key cities such as Kirkuk and Mosul.
- Regional players, particularly Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran, and Turkey were increasingly concerned about the spread of civil war across the region.

On the political front, the government of Prime Minister al-Maliki was unable to make major progress in the reconciliation dialogue amid the security crisis. However, al-Maliki remained confident that a political solution to the sectarian bloodshed could be found. Tensions between Sunni and Shi'ite legislators reached an all time high as both sects accused each other of propagating sectarian killings by supporting death squads.

Both Sunni and Shi'ite political blocs threatened to boycott the Iraqi government of several occasions in the fall, which further prevented political progress. A Sadr bloc boycott in late November – aimed at opposing a meeting between Maliki and President Bush in Jordan - threatened to undermine Maliki's Shi'ite base of support. The US urged the Prime Minister to take military action against the Shi'ite militias, but he seemed confident that political compromise with al-Sadr would be more successful. In November Al-Maliki did propose a plan to reshuffle numerous cabinet positions, but the change had yet to be implemented.

Political negotiations failed to find a solution to the violence, but the US continued to hand over control of security operations to Iraqi Security Forces. By November the US military announced that over 300,000 Iraqi Security Forces had been trained and equipped. Many, however, had deserted, were on unauthorized leave, were not operational, or had died in the violence.

Sectarian killings and political stalemate pushed the country deeper into civil war. Operation Together Forward II in Baghdad was making slow progress in clearing the volatile neighborhoods, and the initiative lacked sufficient forces to maintain peace in cleared areas. At the end of November, the initiative had cleared eight neighborhoods. The US military had 150,000 troops in Iraq, but only 15,000 soldiers were participating in Operation Together Forward with 45,000 Iraqi troops.³ The US military planned to add 2,000 more troops to the fight in the capital at the end of the year as well as triple the number of US embedded advisors with Iraqi troops.

In November, the mass abduction of over 100 employees from the Sunni-led Ministry of Higher Education and the bombing of Sadr City that killed over 200 residents threatened to create reprisal attacks similar to those seen after the February Samarra mosque bombing. Shi'ite and Sunni and death squads prepared for mortar attacks and bombings and set up checkpoints around their respective neighborhoods. There was some evidence that Sunnis gangs had ties to al-Qa'ida and ex-Ba'athist groups, but they remained highly disorganized and local.

Baghdad was the center of the sectarian conflict, but violence spread to surrounding towns - particularly Baquba, Balad, and Amara - as the civil war threatened to engulf the entire country. In one week in Balad sectarian violence killed 80 Iraqis and forced the relocation of Sunni families. In Baquba bodies appeared on the street daily as Sunni insurgents and Shi'ite militias tried to force the other sect out of the city. The security situation also deteriorated in the southern Basra and Maysan provinces while fighting in the northern cities of Mosul and Kirkuk involving Shi'ites, Sunnis, Kurds, and ethnic minorities forced internal displacement. It was impossible to pinpoint the number of Shi'ite militiamen or Sunnis with ties to insurgent groups, but it was clear at the end of 2006 that sectarian violence was spreading out of the capital - nullifying the US and Iraqi military strategy of curtailing violence in Baghdad to stop the civil war. The UN estimated that sectarian violence killed 120 Iraqis a day.

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. Oil production remained below pre-invasion levels and electricity averaged only 6.8 hours a day in the capital in November. Education and healthcare in Iraq also began to show the effects of the civil war as the educated either fled the country or were assassinated.

In Washington, US officials came under increased pressure to explain, and address the sharp deterioration in the Iraqi security environment after a victory for the democrats in the November elections. President Bush also announced the resignation of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and appointed Robert Gates as his successor. The US military stated that the strategy to secure Baghdad was failing and that a change in direction was necessary. In spite of growing skepticism of the US presence in Iraq, the administration was firm in its resolve to remain in the country until it was secured.

Numerous panels in the US produced a wide range of options to prevent the crisis in Iraq from escalated to full-scale civil war. Common themes were the gradual withdrawal of US forces, an increased effort to advise Iraqi Security Forces, a push for political compromise in the Iraqi Parliament, and diplomatic talks with neighboring countries - namely Syria and Iran. Regional players grew ever more concerned in the fall of 2006 about the spread of civil war out of Iraq. The UN Security Council voted unanimously on November 28 to extend the UN mandate for coalition troops in Iraq.

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The “War After the War”

The insurgency in Iraq has become a “war after the war” that threatens to divide the country and create a full-scale civil conflict. It has triggered sectarian and ethnic violence that 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.

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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 deeper into civil war. The February 22 bombing of the Golden Mosque was the initial catalyst of Sunni-Shi’ite clashes. Different factions built up their militias, and infiltrated the new Iraqi security forces. Shi’ite militias became the primary challenge facing the Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, and the Shi’ite community itself fragmented into rivaling groups.

Sunni insurgents, under the new leadership of Abu Hamza al-Masri, continued to adapt their tactics to stay one step ahead of US military technology upgrades. Sectarian fighting in Baghdad and surrounding urban areas led Sunnis to join and seek the protection of loosely organized neighborhood death squads and insurgent 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.

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.

The Iraqi government as well struggled to find a middle ground in stopping the violence from spiraling out of control. The government of Prime Minister Maliki found itself accused of complacency in the sectarian conflict. Leaders appeared unable to compromise and make real political progress as the civil war unfolded. Iraqi Security Forces, particularly the police, lacked the trust of most civilians and US troops doubted their ability to take control of security. The nature of the “war after the war” had changed from simply an insurgency to a civil conflict in which all groups were taking arms for protection. The unfolding civil war had its roots in the lack of post-war planning by the US administration, and both US troops and Iraqi civilians were paying a very heavy price.

Developments in the Fall and Early Winter of 2006

The fall and early winter of 2006 was marked by the continuation of sectarian hostilities and civil war. The government did not appear any closer to curtailing militia activity in Baghdad and both US and Iraqi officials called into question the ability of Prime Minister Maliki to affect a positive outcome for the country. The following were the key developments:

- Operation Together Forward II continued in Baghdad with mixed results. Neighborhoods in which US and Iraqi troops were able to “clear, hold, and build” saw a decrease in violence, but Sadr City and other volatile neighborhoods in the capital remained militia territory.
- Shi’ite militias in Baghdad were deemed the primary threat to stability in Iraq. Moqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army appeared to have developed rogue death squads that did not answer his calls of restraint. Sunnis formed loosely organized neighborhood gangs – some with ties to insurgent groups – to revenge attacks by Shi’ite militias.
- Daily reprisal and tit-for-tat killings between sectarian death squads were the primary cause of Iraqi deaths. Reprisal attacks grew in scale and ravaged Baghdad, and became more common in the surrounding urban areas. On 14 November, 150 employees and visitors at the Sunni-led Ministry of Higher Education were kidnapped, forcing schools in Baghdad to close indefinitely and leading to a series of reprisal attacks against the Shi’ite-led Health Ministry. Multiple-bomb explosions in Sadr City on 23 November killed over 200 Shi’ites and threatened to create reprisal attacks on the scale of those seen after the Samarra mosque bombing.
- The US military announced a spike in violence in Baghdad in October due to increased numbers of roadside bombs and car bombs. US troops suffered heavily from IEDs and more accurate snipers.
- Sunni tribes in Anbar province agreed to aid the US effort against insurgents, but attacks continued regularly. Anbar continued to account for the majority of US casualties. Security in Anbar suffered from the relocation of US and Iraqi troops to Baghdad.
- Al-Qa’ida in Iraq remained strong under the leadership of Abu Hamza al-Masri and appeared to change its tactics and try to unite the Sunni insurgency.
- Political discourses centered on accusations between parties about militia involvement and support. Parliament found it difficult to find meaningful solutions to the security crisis when Sunnis, Shi’a, and Kurds blamed each other for the bloodshed. Sunni legislators and the entire Sadr bloc also boycotted parliament further hindering political progress. A National Reconciliation Dialogue was planned for December 16, 2006, but it was unclear how many parties would attend.
- Turkey urged the US and Iraq to crackdown on PKK activity in the Kurdish north. Turkey said that they would do whatever had to be done to protect the minority Turkoman population in Iraq and were unlikely to help stabilize Iraq until the US took a military stand against the PKK.
- US and Iraqi officials accused Syria and Iran of directly propagating the civil war. Iran stood accused of providing weapons to Shi’ite militias while Syria was criticized for allowing foreign insurgents through the border. The Iraq Study Group report recommended that the US seek a diplomatic dialogue with the two countries to help stabilize Iraq.

Working Towards National Reconciliation

Iraqi legislators focused on their sectarian and ethnic agendas and found little area for compromise. Prime Minister Maliki took a public stance against sectarian militias, but little action followed his rhetoric. Reports surfaced of further Shi'ite militia infiltration into the security forces and direct political support. Similarly, Shi'ite politicians accused Sunnis of supporting insurgents and al-Qa'ida in Iraq.

Al-Maliki continued to urge a political solution to the security crisis, and dissuaded US and Iraqi troops from attacking Mahdi Army members in Sadr City. The Iraqi government found itself under growing pressure to act quickly from both the US government and disheartened Iraqi civilians, who continued to pay the heavy daily price of civil war.

In a November 15 address to the Senate Armed Services Committee the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Gen. Michael Hayden, laid out the political ambitions of Iraq's three main sectarian groups:⁴

- The Shi'a today now focus on assuring that Iraq's new government reflects the will of the majority Shi'a population, making sure that the Ba'athists never regain power.
- Sunnis, on the other hand, view the Shi'a as Iranian controlled and the current government as predatory – or at least many Sunnis do
- The Kurds, for their part, want to keep and strengthen the substantial autonomy they've exercised for more than a decade.

David Satterfield, State Department Coordinator for Iraq, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Iraqi council of representatives accurately reflected the demographics of Iraq, but at the provincial and local levels, there needed to be new elections with Sunni participation. Mr. Satterfield said that many Sunnis boycotted the first local elections in 2005, but had participated in national elections and needed to be given another chance to have their say at the provincial level.⁵

Growing Divides: Segregating the Country

On October 11, 2006 parliament passed the law that would allow for the creation of federal regions, but the regions would not be official until 2008. Sunni and opposition Shi'ite parties boycotted the session to try and prevent the vote, but the remaining 140 legislators passed all 200 provisions unanimously. The law allowed different provinces to join together to form autonomous regions with their own powers.

In a November 15 briefing by General Abizaid, Commander of USCENTCOM, at the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Reed questioned the General about the creation of autonomous regions. Reed asked if segregating the country was part of a Shi'ite and Kurdish agenda and whether the result would be ethnic cleansing of Sunnis. Abizaid responded:⁶

The manner in which the issue of moving forward on the constitutional provisions for the formation of federal regions was handled shows not a dominant Shi'ite unilateral agenda, but rather cross-sectarian alliances in which Shi'a in the political process expressed very different view on what ought to be the course forward; in which Sunnis participated very much in the decision, along with Kurds, that put off for 18 months any step by provinces to take advantage of the constitutional provisions to form a federal region. We see this as a positive, not a negative, outcome.

Abizaid did acknowledge the divergent views of Shi'ite parties, but his statement failed to address the fact that Iraqi discussions on the segregation issue were a dividing rather than a unifying factor.

At the same briefing, David Satterfield, State Department coordinator for Iraq, said, "Partition in Iraq could only be achieved at an expense of human suffering and bloodshed and forced dislocation that would be both profound and wholly unacceptable." He added that the Kurdish region did not want to see Iraq segregated either because of the instability it would bring to its borders.⁷

The *Iraq Study Group Report* called federalism one of the "core" issues. The report acknowledged that a Sunni region in the west was not "economically feasible."⁸ Postponing any official separation until 2008 had momentarily put the issue on the back burner, but it remained one for the key issues hindering political reconciliation.

Political Answers to the Security Crisis?

Both US and Iraqi officials expressed concerns that the political situation was being driven by the sectarian security crisis unfolding on the streets. The "unity" government seemed unable to build consensus as sectarian parties argued over every minute detail, making Prime Minister Maliki's job nearly impossible. Al-Maliki was caught between the need to placate Sunnis by showing that Shi'ite militias would be disarmed and losing Shi'ite popular support, particularly of al-Sadr's Da'wa party, which held 30 seats in Parliament and controlled four ministries. Some Sunnis also voiced concern that al-Maliki was not securing a date for withdrawal of American troops and was collaborating with Iran. An Iraqi legislator described Mr. Maliki as "backed into a corner," and unable to keep the reconciliation dialogue moving forward.⁹ However, al-Maliki remained adamant in the fall that a political solution could be found for the security crisis.

Sunni and Shi'ite factions blamed one another of protecting their respective militias rather than the unity government. Both Iraqi lawmakers and civilians had reached a breaking point; Prime Minister Maliki had to deal with sectarian militias in some manner or his government would crumble beneath him. He announced plans to "shake-up" his cabinet, but the plan had yet to be implemented in early December.

Members of the Sadr bloc hindered political progress by boycotting Parliament from late November into mid December. Meanwhile, US military and civilian leaders and Sunnis urged Maliki to take a harder line against death squads. As Maliki faced growing pessimism about his ability to govern Iraq, the escalating violence prevented politicians from reaching any compromise or reconciliation.

On November 6, the Iraqi government announced that it had prepared a draft law that would allow the return of former Ba'ath government workers. Ali, al-Lami, executive director of the Supreme National Commission for de-Ba'athification, said the law would allow former Ba'athists, who disavowed the party, to return to government jobs or to receive their pension. Al-Lami said that if passed by Parliament, the law would apply to roughly 1.5 million former Ba'athists. He added that the top 3,000 Ba'ath government workers would only be given their pensions, but not be allowed to return to work, and about 1,500 of the highest level government employees would be given neither option.¹⁰

The *Christian Science Monitor* reported a month later that US representatives had been in discussion with ex-Ba'athists politicians and the old Iraqi army for several months in attempts to bring them into the political process – some three years after the CPA disbanded the old Army. The Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars, however, denied that any interaction with the US took place.¹¹

Tensions between political parties in November continued to prevent reconciliation dialogue from moving forward. On November 8, the General Conference of the People of Iraq, a Sunni movement headed by politician Adnan al-Dulaimi, said that it would withdraw from the political process unless attacks against Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad ceased. The statement accused Shi'ite militias of shelling and attacking Sunni districts and of infiltrating security forces. The General Conference also accused al-Maliki's government of pursuing a sectarian agenda and complacency in the civil conflict.¹²

Another report said that the National Concord Front, a bloc of three Sunni parties with 44 seats in Parliament, threatened to leave government and take up arms unless Shi'ite militias were dissolved. Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi said, "The government has not lived up to its commitments to the Concord, especially maintaining a balance among Iraq's different groups. This is due to those working in the ministries and state institutions."¹³

On November 12, Prime Minister Maliki announced that he would "shake-up" his cabinet. Sunni politicians called for a cabinet change since the summer, but for the first time al-Maliki affirmed his intentions. He made the announcement during a closed session of Parliament and did not release the names of the cabinet members that he was planning to replace or move to different positions. Maliki's planned redistribution had Sunni and Shi'ite support, but the *New York Times* reported that some Sunni legislators would not be convinced until the plan was actually implemented.¹⁴ Adnan al-Dulaimi said that Maliki was considering changing ten of the 36 cabinet posts. Although al-Maliki could not take a ministerial position away from a certain political bloc, he could choose more secular or moderate members within a bloc. A member of al-Sadr's political party said that he presented the prime minister with 18 resumes for the party's four ministerial positions.¹⁵

The same week that he announced the cabinet shake-up, Prime Minister Maliki met with USCENTCOM head Gen. John Abizaid. A statement from al-Maliki's office said that they discussed the security situation and the possibility of including Syria and Iran in direct talks.¹⁶

On November 16, the Iraqi government issued an arrest warrant for Sunni cleric Harith al-Dhari, Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani told Iraqiya state television.¹⁷ Al-Dhari - head of the Association of Muslim Scholars - was wanted for "inciting violence and supporting terrorism." The Association spokesman said the arrest warrant was political cover for "the acts of the government's security agencies that kill dozens of Iraqis every day." He also called on Sunni members of Parliament to leave the government in protest. Most Sunni legislators agreed that issuing an arrest warrant for a popular and powerful Sunni cleric was a politically poor decision that would further alienate Iraqi Sunnis.¹⁸

From Jordan, al-Dhari said, "The arrest warrant is proof of the failure and confusion of the Iraqi government." He added that he was simply the chosen scapegoat of the scared government, which he saw as illegitimate. He said he would return from Jordan at a later date.¹⁹

Key US officials also remained concerned that the inability of the Iraqi government to compromise would be its ultimate undoing. In a report to congress on November 15, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples, said, "Although a significant breakdown of central authority has not occurred, Iraq has moved closer to this possibility primarily because of weak governance, increasing security challenges, and no agreement on a national compact." He added that the inability of politicians to resolve key issues, particularly the militia problem, contributed to Sunni discontent.²⁰

On November 21, US-led forces conducted a raid on Sadr City, despite previous condemnation of such raids by Prime Minister Maliki. The military said that the US detained seven militia suspects, but Iraqi police Capt. Mohammed Ismail said that a boy and two other people were killed in the raid and 15 others were wounded. Speaking for outside a hospital morgue, Shi'ite legislator Saleh Al-Ukailli of al-Sadr's Da'wa party said, "I am suspending my membership in Parliament since it remains silent about crimes such as this against the Iraqi people. I will not return to Parliament until the occupation troops leave the country."²¹ Al-Maliki did not personally respond to the US raid, but it was clear that neither the US military nor the Prime Minister wanted to conform to other's strategy of how to defeat militias in the capital.

In the same committee hearing at which General Maples spoke, General Abizaid, commander of CENTCOM, told Congress that he expected joint Iraqi-US raids into Sadr City to increase. He said that all raids would be conducted with the approval of the Iraqi government, but that the "command and control arrangements are adequate for the current period." He also said later in the briefing that he expected al-Maliki to move against the Mahdi Army using the Iraqi Army and that the dismissal of Iraqi police officers known to have ties to militias was a step in the right direction.²² It appeared that the US military was determined to urge Prime Minister Maliki to take military action against militias.

The US military did report increased complicity from the Maliki government regarding US-Iraqi joint raids into Sadr City in early December. US forces continued to search for a missing army specialist suspected of being captured by the Mahdi Army. A US commander said, "We have a carte blanche at this point. Whereas before we had to tiptoe around these areas, now we can go in there as we like to search for our missing soldier."²³ However, it was unclear if Maliki had also sanctioned increased raids against militia suspects in Sadr City.

Tensions erupted in Iraq's Parliament in late November as reconciliation dialogue was again stymied by accusations between Sunni and Shi'ite parties. Jalal al-Deen al-Saghir of the Shi'ite Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) clashed with Sunni politician Adnan al-Dulaimi. Saghir complained that Shi'ites living in two mainly Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad - Adil and Jamiaa - were forced to support militias because they experienced daily attacks on their lives. "What has happened will open the gates of hell," Saghir said. "People will lose faith in this institution and then there will be no choice but to turn to the militias."

Saghir's comments drew an angry reaction from Dulaimi, head of the Sunni Accordance Front. "Everything Sheikh Jalal says is not true," Dulaimi said. "Sheikh Jalal is one of the sources of sectarian strife. He shouldn't talk like this. This is a conspiracy against us." Dulaimi added that he was being treated with disrespect, like "Iranians and Jews."²⁴ The accusations were an example of the tensions that plagued al-Maliki's government in the fall of 2006 and made reaching any kind of political deal to stop the sectarian violence almost impossible.

The political crisis worsened in response to the escalating civil war. Moqtada al-Sadr threatened to withdraw support for Maliki's government after the single largest attack since the US led invasion killed over 200 Shi'ites in Sadr City. Salih al-Ighaeli, a representative from Sadr's political bloc, said, "We announce that if the security situation and the basic services do not improve, and if the prime minister goes ahead and meets with the criminal Bush in Amman, then we will suspend our memberships with the Iraqi parliament and the government." President Bush was scheduled to travel to Amman, Jordan to meet with Prime Minister Maliki the following week.²⁵ A representative for al-Sadr said, "We blame the government for the attacks. We have no trust in the government or in the Americans." He stated that the US military needed to set a timetable for withdrawal or leave immediately.²⁶

Sadr's political bloc followed through with their threat to boycott the Iraqi Parliament when al-Maliki met with Bush in Jordan. Members of the Da'wa party called it an "indefinite suspension," but stated that the boycott did not mean they were withdrawing from the political process. The Sadr bloc's calls for immediate withdrawal of coalition forces put al-Maliki in an difficult position as Bush promised that US troops would stay until the government asked them to leave.²⁷

Falah Hassan Shenshel, a member of the Sadr bloc, said that boycotting politicians were working to organize a bi-sectarian alliance to end the US military presence in Iraq. When the Sadr bloc did not return to Parliament the after the talks in Jordan ended, al-Maliki called for an end to the boycott.²⁸

Sunni leaders also expressed disapproval of the Iraqi government. Sheik Harith al-Shari, the exiled and wanted leader of the Association of Islamic Scholars, said, "I call on the Arab states, the Arab League and the United Nations to stop this government and withdraw its support from it. Otherwise, the disaster will occur and the turmoil will happen in Iraq and other countries."²⁹

Prime Minister Maliki continued the cycle of blame, accusing Iraq's politicians of propagating the violence at the end of November. He said, "These actions are at most the reflection of political backgrounds and wills and sometimes the reflection of dogmatic, perverted backgrounds and wills. The crisis is political, and the ones who can stop the cycle of aggravation and bloodletting of innocents are the politicians."³⁰

On November 30, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a group of some 70 Sunni clerics from across Iraq were talking about forming a religious council to unite Sunni factions and have constructive talks with Shi'ites – particularly Ayatollah Sistani. A senior member of the Sunni Muslim Scholars Association said that the group was expected to form in coming weeks. Some clerics thought it was futile, but others said it was the last option to stop the bloodshed that the government was unable to contain. Clerics from the Muslim Scholars Assn. in Basra, Nasiriya, Amara, and Samawah issues statements condemning attacks on all Iraqis and supporting reconstruction of the Shi'ite shrine in Samarra.³¹

In contrast, secular legislator Saleh al-Mutlaq announced the formation of an alliance – the National Salvation Front – to unite in opposition against Shi'ite parties and Prime Minister Maliki. The alliance included Shi'ite and Sunni parties that supported regional or international conferences. The parties not participating were Sadr's Dawa party, SCIRI, and Kurdish blocs. The formation of the National Salvation Front deviated from the US led initiative urging all

politicians to support al-Maliki, but it remained politically weak compared to Dawa and SCIRI.³²

In mid-December several main political parties began talks to form a coalition to reduce the power of al-Sadr's bloc. The parties involved in the maneuvering were the two main Kurdish parties, the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party, and al-Hakim's SCIRI. The coalition would not try to oust Prime Minister Maliki, but rather reduce the power that al-Sadr held in Parliament.

The officials were debating whether to create the alliance within Parliament or to do so outside of the official political structure in order not to disrupt existing coalitions. One of the officials involved said, "There's no changing of blocs in the Parliament. We're talking about political forces rallying in the street to support the political process." He also added that Al-Hakim may have had the ulterior goal of pushing his candidate for Prime Minister, Abdul Mehdi.³³

Al-Maliki maintained that the violence in the fall and early winter of 2006 was rooted in the country's political crisis, which was characterized by accusations between lawmakers, the inability to compromise and present a solution to the violence, a lack of political clout, and little public support. The latter problem was clear when Shi'ites loyal to al-Sadr threw stones at al-Maliki's motorcade when he left the funeral for some of those killed in the Sadr City bombings on November 23. He was also met with shouts of "coward" and "collaborator" when he tried to calm the group of mourners.³⁴ Thus despite efforts to support his Shi'ite base and work for a political solution with al-Sadr, the Prime Minister appeared to be rapidly losing the support of both Sunnis and Shi'ites at the end of 2006.

Al-Maliki did announce that a National Reconciliation Conference would begin on December 16, 2006, but politicians could not even agree about who to invite. Shi'ites parties opposed including Ba'athist parties in the talks and the Sunni Muslim Scholars association said they would not participate until Maliki took action against Shi'ite militias.³⁵

In a speech at the United States Institute for Peace on December 14 Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi proposed several recommendations for progress in Iraq. Politically, he said that many of the problems in Iraq's Parliament came from the vague Constitution. He stated that he had signed the document with the understanding that many of the issues would be debated further in Parliament and amendments would be added, but he found that those discussions were superficial.

Al-Hashimi added that the Ministries were void of Sunnis – particularly the Health Ministry – and thus Sunnis had little trust in the government. He proposed an amendment that would create two deputies of differing sects for each of the ministries to make sure decisions and appointments were not sectarian. The ambiguity of the Constitution on federalism and control of oil resources was also preventing political progress, al-Hashimi said. He confirmed that his party, the Iraqi Islamic Party, had entered talks with SCIRI and Dawa to help solve the security crisis, which was the priority at the end of 2006.

The Vice President concluded that divisions among Sunnis and Shi'a began was the US assumed that Saddam Hussein's regime was solely Sunni and that Shi'a somehow needed to be compensated for the former regime. He thought the only way solve the problems facing Iraq at the end of 2006 was to transcend sectarian differences. He added that an admittance of mistakes by both Iraqis and the US would also Iraq move forward.

Doubts Arise about Prime Minister Maliki and the Government

Some US officials doubted whether Prime Minister Maliki had the “political will to weed out official corruption and tackle the brutal militias that were threatening to plunge Iraq into civil war.”³⁶ Al-Maliki was a compromise candidate whom the US originally thought could play peace broker between Sunnis and Shi’ites in Parliament, but six months after the creation of the Iraqi government, Maliki seemed unable to foster compromise and push political dialogue forward.

In early November corruption watchdog Transparency International rated Iraq in the bottom three most corrupt countries in 2006. TI said that the ongoing violence in Iraq led to the breakdown of “checks and balances, law enforcement and the functioning of institutions like the judiciary and legislature. If all that is under strain the very system that works to prevent corruption is undermined.”³⁷

On November 30, President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki met in Jordan to discuss the deteriorating security situation in Iraq – although al-Maliki delayed the talks for a day. President Bush said that he would question al-Maliki about Iraq’s plan for dealing with the sectarian violence and about his “strategy to be a country which can govern itself and sustain itself.” The administration had previously assured al-Maliki that the US fully backed his national reconciliation strategy, but it appeared that the US wanted to see expedient action from the Prime Minister in finding a political solution to the security crisis.³⁸

Many Iraqis expected little outcome from the meeting between the two leaders, and they were not disappointed. Iraqis interviewed on the street were increasingly doubtful that the government of Prime Minister Maliki would be able to stall the progress of the civil war. A cab driver in Baghdad most likely expressed the sentiments of many struggling Iraqis when he said, “Nothing will happen, and we will get no results and no solutions. We need a strong state that can make decisions, that can beat the bad guys, can beat the militias. This meeting is just for the media, and it’s not useful.”³⁹

As the two leaders met, the *New York Times* released a November 8 classified memo prepared for the President by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley. The memo expressed doubts that Prime Minister Maliki would be able to “rise above the sectarian agendas being promoted by others.” Hadley stated that the opposition Maliki had shown the US and the coalition in the fall was perhaps an attempt by the Prime Minister to show his strength to Iraqis. The memo cited several principal concerns about the national reconciliation government that all pointed to consolidation of Shi’a power in Baghdad:⁴⁰

- Reports of nondelivery of services to Sunni areas
- Intervention by the prime minister’s office to stop military action against Shia targets and to encourage them against Sunni ones
- Removal of Iraq’s most effective leaders on a sectarian basis
- Efforts to ensure Shia majorities in all ministries
- Escalation of Jaish al-Mahdi killings

Hadley was also concerned that the information that al-Maliki received was incomplete because of “his small circle of Dawa advisers, coloring his actions and interpretation of reality... The reality on the streets of Baghdad suggests Maliki is either ignorant of what is going on,

misrepresenting his intentions, or that his capabilities are not yet sufficient to turn his good intentions into action.”

Saddam Hussein's Verdict Announced

On November 5, an Iraqi court sentenced Saddam Hussein to death by execution for the killing of 148 Shi'ites in 1982 after an assassination attempt. Shi'ia were seen rejoicing in the streets the day of the conviction, but most Sunnis stayed inside, according the *Washington Post*.⁴¹ The global response, however, was mixed. President Bush and Iranian leaders commended the decision, but Europe and other Arab states questioned the sentence. European leaders spoke out against the death penalty, but did cite Hussein's crimes against humanity.

Lawmakers in Jordan and Egypt stated that the entire trial was illegitimate, calling it “American engineered propaganda.” Magda Adli of the Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo added, “Everyone knows that the crimes and the genocides committed by the occupation during the past four years against Iraqis are equivalent to four times the crimes they claim were committed by Saddam.” Others warned that hanging Hussein would turn him into a martyr figure and exacerbate the civil conflict.⁴²

Saudi analysts also questioned the credibility of the trial. One analyst said, “the trial was politicized and the outcome known... We all know that Saddam's guards are all Americans and the lawyers have been fired many times and the judges have been changed three times without any good reason. All these things prove that the judgment was biased.” He did not think that the outcome of the trial would affect violence in Iraq, however, because the fight was against the American occupation.⁴³

The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers of the Human Rights Council stated his strong objections to the proceedings of the trial. The main objections were the following:⁴⁴

- The restricted personal jurisdiction of the tribunal, which enables it only to try Iraqis.
- Its limited temporal jurisdiction. The competence of the tribunal does include neither the war crimes committed by foreign troops during the first Gulf war (1990), nor the war crimes committed after 1 May 2003, date of the beginning of the occupation.
- Its doubtful legitimacy and credibility. The tribunal has been established during an occupation considered by many as illegal, is composed of judges who have been selected during this occupation, including non Iraqi citizens, and has been mainly financed by the United States.
- The fact that the Statute of 10 December 2003 contains advanced provisions of international criminal law which are to be applied in combination with an outdated Iraqi legislation, which allows the death penalty.
- The negative impact of the violence and the insecurity prevailing in the course of the trial and in the country. Since its beginning one of the judges, five candidate judges, three defence lawyers and an employee of the tribunal have been killed. Moreover, another employee of the tribunal has been seriously injured.
- Finally, and most importantly, the lack of observance of a legal framework that conforms to international human rights principles and standards, in particular the right to be tried by an independent and impartial tribunal which upholds the right to a defense.

For Prime Minister Maliki in Iraq, however, the verdict came as a welcome political boost. Celebrating Shi'ites said that trial and conviction brought legitimacy to al-Maliki's government.

Saddam's sentence brought Maliki closer to his Shi'ite political base, but Sunnis only saw it as his tacit support of Shi'ite militias.⁴⁵

Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Salahaddin and Diyala Provinces were under a two-day curfew as Hussein's sentence was announced. Violence was minimal under the tight security, but even as the curfew ended, sectarian fighting continued only at its normal pace. It appeared that – for most Iraqis – the prospect of executing the former dictator came second to seeking revenge for more personal daily sectarian killings across Iraq. Hussein's second trial for human rights abuses against the Kurdish population was still underway.

US recommendations for Political Progress in Iraq

While a variety of panels in the US contemplated changes in US strategy in Iraq, some senior politicians laid out several steps that *Iraq* could take to alleviate the crisis. There appeared to be some consensus among policy makers in Washington in the fall of 2006 that regardless of American advice, the job of solving the crisis in Iraq was indeed an Iraqi problem. The Iraq Study Group Report stated, "The most important issues facing Iraq's future are now the responsibility of Iraq's elected leaders."⁴⁶ Most US recommendations pointed to the need for political compromise between sectarian groups in Iraq, but it would be up to Iraqi politicians – who most certainly did not present a unified front even within sects – to figure out *how* to reach a consensus.

In his November 8 memo, national security advisor Stephen Hadley proposed several actions that al-Maliki could take to quell doubts about his capabilities.⁴⁷ (The proposed actions that the *US* could take are outlined in the final section of this report).

- Compel his ministers to take small steps – such as providing health services and opening bank branches in Sunni neighborhoods – to demonstrate that his government serves all ethnic communities
- Bring his political strategy with Moqtada al-Sadr to closure and bring to justice any Jaish al-Madhi actors that do not eschew violence
- Shake up his cabinet by appointing nonsectarian, capable technocrats in key service and security ministries
- Announce an overhaul of his own personal staff so that it reflects the face of Iraq
- Demand that all government workers publicly renounce all violence for the pursuit of political goals as a condition for keeping their positions
- Declare that Iraqi will support the renewal of the UN mandate for multinational forces and will seek, as appropriate, to address bilateral issues with the US through a SOFA [status of forces agreement] to be negotiated of the next year
- Take one or more immediate steps to inject momentum into the reconciliation process such as a suspension of de-Baathification measures and the submission to the Parliament or Council of Representatives of a draft piece of legislation for a more judicial approach
- Announce plans to expand the Iraqi Army over the next nine months
- Declare the immediate suspension of suspect Iraqi police units and a robust program of embedding coalition forces in to MOI units while the MOI is revetted and retrained

In the time between Hadley's writing of the memo and publication by the Times, al-Maliki did announce plans to reshuffle his cabinet, dismissed and charged members of the MOI suspected of sectarian acts, and called for the expansion of ISF by close to 20,000 troops. The UN mandate on Iraq was unanimously passed on November 27 for another year.

In an address to the Senate Armed Services Committee on November 15, David Satterfield, senior advisor to the Secretary of State and coordinator for Iraq, outlined several requirements for national reconciliation in Iraq to be successful:⁴⁸

- Iraqi security forces, with coalition support, must achieve security conditions under which Iraqis can feel free to make the difficult choices necessary to pursue a national compact, a political reconciliation deal.
- The Iraqi government must reach out and engage all those willing to abandon violence and terror, including former members of the Ba'ath Party, while credibly threatening to combat those insurgents and terrorists who remain wholly opposed to a reconciled democratic Iraq.
- Iraqis must establish a robust process aimed at disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating members of armed groups into normal Iraqi society. And for this to be successful, such a DDR process has to acquire agreement on an amnesty plan that comprehensively gives militants incentives to return to civilian life.
- Iraqis must pursue and then must complete a new, modern, and comprehensive national hydrocarbon law, both to ensure that the country remains united, as well as to spur much-needed international investment. That can only come, will only come, when Iraq's laws are fully established and clear to all.

The Iraq Study Group Report also established a projected timeline for the Iraqi government:⁴⁹

By the end of 2006 – early 2007:

- Approval of the Provincial Election Law and setting an election date
- Approval of the Petroleum Law
- Approval of the De-Baathification Law
- Approval of the Militia Law
- Iraqi increase of 2007 security spending over 2006 levels

By March 2007:

- A referendum on constitutional amendments (if it is necessary)

By April 2007:

- Iraqi control of the Army

By May 2007:

- Completion of Militia Law implementation
- Approval of amnesty agreement
- Completion of reconciliation efforts

By June 2007:

- Provincial elections

By September 2007:

- Iraqi control of provinces

By December 2007:

- Iraqi security self-reliance (with US support)

Prime Minister Maliki had previously eschewed milestones set by the US government so it appeared unlikely that he would accept the hasty timeline by the Iraq Study Group. Other key recommendations to Iraq were a constitutional review, reintegration of Ba'athists and Arab nationalists into national life, sharing oil revenue, holding provincial elections, and delaying a referendum on Kirkuk.⁵⁰

There was no lack of options on the table as 2006 came to a close, although none could provide a silver bullet answer to the crisis.

A Rising Level of Conflict

Amid the growing sense that the country was in 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. Iraqis were skeptical of the government's ability to protect, and therefore turned to militias and neighborhood death squads for security. In Baghdad, militias held the real power in many Shi'ite strongholds while Sunni neighborhood gangs, "nationalist" insurgents, and al-Qa'ida in Iraq retaliated against Shi'ite militias. In October, deaths were averaging 100 a day in the capital as al-Maliki's government failed to find a political solution to stop the killings. The United Nations estimated that deaths averaged 120 a day in the fall. The number of attacks decreased in the weeks following the holy month of Ramadan, but violence was spreading from Baghdad into the surrounding provinces at a rapid rate. By all standards, Iraqi was in a civil war.

In classified reports and discussions the US military labeled Iraq as edging toward "chaos." USCENTCOM's "Index of Civil Conflict" tracked the transition from "peace" toward "chaos" in 2006. The Index showed that since the Samarra mosque bombing in February, Iraq had moved closer to civil conflict. The *New York Times* acquired a one-page CENTCOM slide that showed the spectrum and the indicators that caused the "critical" situation. Each indicator was given a degree of concern. The "key reads" included:⁵¹

- Political/religious leaders increase public hostile rhetoric (routine)
- Political/religious leaders lose moderating influence over public (significant)
- Provoking sectarian attacks/assassinations (irregular)
- Unorganized mass spontaneous civil conflict (routine)

Additional Indicators included:

- Militias expand security role (significant)
- Governance (significant)
- Police ineffectual (significant)
- Army ineffectual (irregular)
- Neighbors enable violence (irregular)
- Sectarian tensions/violence displace population (significant)
- Sectarian conflict between/within ISF (irregular)
- ISF refuse to take orders from central government, mass desertion (irregular)

- Kurds accelerate moves towards succession, annexing Kirkuk (irregular)
- Low level violence motivated by sectarian differences (critical)

In the fall and early winter of 2006, Baghdad remained the center of the violence. Sectarian militias fought to gain strongholds in the neighborhoods surrounding the green zone, which could virtually be mapped out according to the militia or neighborhood gang residents supported. The Mahdi Army had almost complete control of the eastern portion, but through low level ethnic cleansing by rogue Mahdi Army cells, the militia was gaining a foothold in the western neighborhoods. Sunnis relied increasingly on militias and neighborhood gangs for protection to seek revenge. Bodies appeared daily on the streets and several large scale bombings by Sunni insurgents against Shi'ites prompted reprisal attacks.

Operation Together Forward II had all but failed to secure Baghdad. The areas in which violence fell did so because militias forced sectarian relocation. By the end of 2006, there were few mixed neighborhoods left in Baghdad. Insurgents and militias resorted to mortar attacks across neighborhoods or suicide bombing in large marketplaces. Baghdad appeared to be close to the point of no return as US military offensives could do little against nightly revenge killings and suicide bombers in a city of 6 million.

Another snapshot of the spreading civil conflict occurred in ethnically mixed Diyala Province, just north of Baghdad. Membership in the Mahdi Army reached 6,000 to 8,000 in Diyala, but Shi'a civilians had for the most part been driven out of Baquba, the volatile provincial capital, but the Mahdi Army secured a Shi'a safe haven in Muqdadiya and Kham Bani Saad, just 12 miles south of Baquba. From those cities, militiamen could attack Sunnis in Baquba, who in turn relied on Sunni insurgent groups for protection.

A US commander in Diyala said of the situation, "We are really painting [Sunnis] into a box here. If you want to have a fight for the next 20 years, it's here. I can't imagine anybody who has seen war who wants that to happen. It's the innocents, it's there farmers out here, it's the kids who pay the price. But these interests are colliding and they don't care about that. Power is what they're after, consolidated and uncontested political power."⁵²

In the last week of November police found dozens of bodies of bodies on the streets of Baquba and Iraqi troops found a mass grave with 28 bodies just south of the city.⁵³ Fighting between Iraqi security forces and Sunni insurgents erupted, leaving more than 50 dead and dozens wounded. Suspected insurgents also attacked the overwhelmingly Shi'ite police headquarters in the city. The schools remained closed in the fall of 2006 and the streets were empty, even in daylight. Residents had little electricity and clean water as the security situation prevented planned reconstruction efforts.⁵⁴

However, Col. David W. Sutherland, commander of US and coalition forces in Diyala Province, denied that Baquba has shutdown due the security situation. He said the week's events were a "setback experience by the Iraqi police," but that the city was "fully operational." He said that the government center was open and most employees had turned up for work. He did concede, "Insurgent and terrorist organizations are attempting to destabilize the security forces, the government and the population through violence and misinformation. However, the government and the security forces are in control."⁵⁵ Baquba remained under a curfew for over a week.

In Baghdad and areas to the north and south, US and Iraqi sources characterized militias as the largest threat to stability. In an address to the Senate Armed Services Committee on November 15 David Satterfield, State Department Coordinator for Iraq, stated, "Sustained sectarian violence the associated rise in armed militias, and other extragovernmental groups are now the greatest threat to a stable, unified, and prosperous Iraq."⁵⁶

The September – October UN Assistance Mission to Iraq Human Rights report echoed Mr. Satterfield's assessment. The report said:⁵⁷

Much of the violence is carried out by militias and other armed gangs, some purportedly to grant the community protection that cannot be guaranteed by the state law enforcement agencies. Militias and other armed groups are said to be in control of whole areas in the east and west of Baghdad and continue to carry out illegal policing, manning of checkpoints and "dispensation of justice" through illegal trials and extra-judicial executions. They operate with almost total impunity... Many victims are kidnapped by militias at improvised checkpoints and then extra-judiciously executed. These tactics have been employed by both Sunni and Shi'a armed groups or militias to various degrees.

The *Iraq Study Group Report* said, "Militias are currently seen as legitimate vehicles of political action... Sunni insurgents will not lay down arms unless the Shia militias are disarmed. Shia militias will not disarm until the Sunni insurgency is destroyed. To put it simply: there are many armed groups within Iraq, and very little will lay down arms."⁵⁸ The Report stated that four of the eighteen provinces were "highly insecure" – Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala, and Salladdin. Those four provinces accounted for about 40% of the population.⁵⁹ The bleak assessment by the panel gave little hope that the level of violence would decrease anytime soon.

Defining the Conflict

On November 20, Iraqi Defense Minister Abdel Qader Jassim said, "We are in a state of war and in war all measures are permissible," according to Reuters. He made the remarks several days after the fate of dozens of employees kidnapped from the Ministry of Higher Education was still unknown.⁶⁰ The statement was one of the first acknowledgements by a cabinet member of the scale of the violence engulfing Iraq. It underscored the divisions between members of al-Maliki's government and made hopes of finding a political solution to the crisis nearly impossible.

A senior member of Iraq's government told the *Washington Post*, "[Iraq] is worse than a civil war. In a civil war, you at least know which factions are fighting each other. We don't even know that anymore. It's so bloody confused." Some world leaders, however, still hesitated to call Iraq a civil war, but most agreed that it was at the brink and urgent action was needed.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said in late November, "Given the developments on the ground, unless something is done drastically and urgently to arrest the deteriorating situation we could be there. In fact, we are almost there."⁶¹ Two weeks later, Annan revised his assessment and said, "When we had the strife in Lebanon and other places we called that a civil war; this is much worse."⁶² Prime Minister Maliki rebuked Annan's characterization of the stability of Iraq and accused the Secretary General of "burnishing the image" of Saddam Hussein.⁶³

In November several prominent US media agencies officially made public their use of "civil war" in describing the conflict. Even so, General Caldwell agreed with the President that sectarian violence was escalating, but the government had not fallen and was still effective so the country could not be described as being in a civil war.⁶⁴ US National Security spokesman

Gordon Johndroe said, "While the situation on the ground is very serious, neither Prime Minister Maliki nor we believe that Iraq is in a civil war."⁶⁵

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said when asked if a 'military victory' could be achieved in Iraq, "If you mean by 'military victory' an Iraqi government that can be established and whose writ runs across the whole country, that gets the civil war under control and sectarian violence under control in a time period that the political processes of the democracies will support, I don't believe that is possible."⁶⁶ Colin Powell also said in a statement that contrasted with the President's viewpoint, "Iraq could be considered a civil war."⁶⁷ And National Intelligence Director John Negroponte said that in many ways the situation in Iraq was more complex and more dangerous than the conflict in Vietnam.⁶⁸

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, leader of SCIRI, told President Bush in a meeting in Washington on December 4 that the only way to avoid full-scale civil war was "decisive strikes" against Sunni insurgents. Al-Hakim expressed concern that Shi'ite leaders were losing their ability to control the violence. He called clerics the "last fortress" against civil war, according to a *Washington Post* article.⁶⁹ Hakim had received widespread criticism the previous week when he commented that if full-scale civil war broke out, Sunnis would be the "biggest losers."⁷⁰

Despite building consensus in the US that Iraq was in a low level civil war, Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi said that there was no way Iraq would erupt into a full scale civil war – unless wives started killing husbands and vice versa. He stated that the levels of violence – although bad – did not take into account the fact that Sunnis and Shi'ites had intermarried and that in the past, there had not been a problem between the two sects.⁷¹

Regardless of what the conflict was called, it was clear in the fall of 2006 that the sectarian violence was spreading from Baghdad into surrounding provinces. The expansive urban area around the capital was just as ethnically diverse and residents in Baquba, Samara, Hillah and elsewhere became wrapped up in the cycle of revenge killings. Instances in the south in Basra and Maysan Provinces also critically raised into question the coalition's ability to stop full-scale civil war.

High Profile Abductions

On November 14, 2006 the largest mass kidnapping occurred since the US led invasion in 2003. Between 100 and 150 employees and visitors at the Sunni controlled Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Scholarships and Cultural Relations Directorate in the downtown Karradah district of Baghdad were kidnapped by about 80 gunmen. The Ministry was responsible for granting scholarships to professors and students wishing to study abroad. Witnesses said that the gunmen were dressed in police uniforms and cordoned off the street before they passed by four guards. The operation only took 15 minutes and the kidnappers locked the women into one room in the building and then separated out the males into Sunni and Shi'ites. But the Higher Education Minister said that both Sunnis and Shi'ites were kidnapped. He also announced that classes at Universities would be suspended until further notice to protect professors and students.⁷²

Government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh did acknowledge that the mass abduction was the work of militiamen who had infiltrated the interior ministry and were carrying out "organized" killings. Fourteen of the abductees were released unharmed the same day, but at least 40 were

still held. The Interior Ministry announced that five police chiefs were being held for questioning in the incident. Previous sectarian violence had pointed to the infiltration of the MOI by Shi'ite militias, but the Higher Education kidnapping proved the validity of Sunni accusations so strongly that it even surprised most Iraqis. Iraq's leading Sunni clerics' organization, the Muslim Scholars' Association, said in a statement, "This cowardly act confirms what we have always warned and we blame the government and the interior ministry for this crime."⁷³

A report the following day said that an Iraqi police raid during the night had freed the majority of the captives and that only two were still held. Al-Maliki also spoke at Baghdad University to calm students and professors and urge them to continue their studies in Iraq. He said, "The country is full of such gangs and militias but this will not drive us back from chasing them. Those who carried out the act are worse than takfiris (extremists) because they kidnapped intellectuals and prevented universities from executing their role." Maliki also told state news al-Iraqiya that the abductions were a result of a "conflict between militias."⁷⁴

A spokesman for Abed Dhiab al-Ujaili, the minister of higher education, disagreed with the government spokesman, saying that nearly 100 captives were still being held. The two spokesmen dismissed the other's comments as false and misleading. Al-Ujaili, a Sunni, also announced that he was stepping down from his cabinet position until all the captives were rescued. He accused al-Maliki's administration of politicizing the kidnapping and that it was "unacceptable behavior."⁷⁵ He also said that most of the hostages had been tortured and some killed. Al-Ujaili added, "I feel there is no effective government."⁷⁶ The disagreement underscored the inability of Sunnis and Shi'ites within the government to find any common ground, even when it came to simple numbers.

On November 17 another high profile abduction took place, this time in the southern Dhi Qar Province. Five civilian contractors working for the Kuwaiti based security firm Crescent Group were kidnapped from their vehicles at what appeared to be a police checkpoint. The convoy of 43 trucks supported by 6 security vehicles was stopped at Safwan. 19 trucks and one security vehicle were hijacked and 14 people were initially captured. Nine drivers from India, Pakistan, and the Philippines were released while four Americans and one Austrian were taken to an unknown location, according to the *Washington Post*. The private security firm, the Crescent Group, provided protection to convoys traveling in and out of Iraq.⁷⁷

USA Today reported that according to Iraqi police, the Austrian contractor was found dead and one of the Americans was seriously wounded; the other three Americans were still missing. British forces found them while searching a farm area around Safwan. A British military spokesman said that about ten gunmen had opened fire on the British forces, leading them to the bodies. Coalition forces continued to search for the three missing Americans.⁷⁸ British and Italian troops had handed over security control of Dhi Qar to Iraq in September and the abduction was the first serious insurgent attack in several months. As of early December the fate of the contractors was still unknown.⁷⁹

Reprisal Attacks

Reprisal killings, mostly in the form of assassinations or kidnappings followed by execution style deaths, were the primary cause of death to Iraqis in the early fall of 2006. By October, around 100 Iraqis were killed daily by various forms of violence, according to the Iraqi government.⁸⁰ One of the worst sequences of reprisal killings occurred in mid October.

On October 12, 17 Shi'ite farm workers from Balad were kidnapped and later executed in retaliation for the burning of three Sunnis the previous day.⁸¹ The workers had been hired to prune date trees in the neighboring Sunni town of Duluiyah. Two days later, Shi'ite militiamen retaliated for the kidnapping by attacking Duluiyah and the Sunni minority in Balad.

Shi'ite elders in Balad said that they had called on the Badr Brigade and Mahdi Army from Baghdad to retaliate. After several hours of street battles, there were at least 80 dead between the two towns, but most were Sunnis. Residents from Balad and Duluiyah said that civilians had taken up arms against each other, and Sunni and Shi'ite mosques in the respective towns called on people to defend their neighborhoods.⁸²

By the following day, the Sunni minority in Balad – where Shi'ite militiamen dressed in black patrolled the streets - had fled to Duluiyah.⁸³ Sunni families said that Shi'ite militiamen were going door to door telling them that they had two hours to leave or they would be killed.⁸⁴ A representative from the Iraqi Islamic Party said that 60 Sunni families were forced to flee Balad.⁸⁵ A Sunni farmer in Duluiyah said, "This has pushed us to the point that we must stop this sectarian government."⁸⁶ Residents in Balad also reported that 13 carloads of Shi'ites had been kidnapped in the third day of the fighting and had not returned.⁸⁷

Four days later, ISF were still deploying forces to deal with the aftermath of the violence. The US military had arrested two Iraqi police officers suspected of killing the Shi'ite farm workers.⁸⁸ Local Sunni police in Duluiyah, however, accused the ISF of working with Shi'ite militias during the fighting. A police officer said the violence between civilians in the cities was particularly vicious, even by Iraqi standards. He also said that the complete and sustained control of militias, which had traveled from Baghdad, within hours, was unusual.⁸⁹

The Sunni population in Balad was almost utterly displaced; only 6 Sunni families remained a week after the fighting broke out. Shi'ite militias patrolled the highway, but Sunni insurgents congregated outside the town limits, looking for a chance to retaliate. The Shi'ite residents, however, voiced anger over the Mahdi Army's presence in their streets and said that it was the ethnically diverse Iraqi army that eventually quelled the violence.⁹⁰

The sectarian fighting between the two towns was a prime example of the civil war endangering the future of Iraq. A government reconciliation dialogue conference had been scheduled for October 14, the day the violence broke out. However, the conference was postponed because sectarian tempers would be too heated for civil discussion.⁹¹ Yet with killings at 100 a day, it was unclear when lawmakers would be able to reach any compromise.

Tit-for-tat reprisal killings continued in November. Iraqi officials in Baghdad said that in the first week of November, the Adhamiya and Grayat neighborhoods along the Tigris exchanged mortar fire. At least seven Sunnis were killed in Adhamiya when mortar rounds from Grayat landed in a market. Three hours later, a suicide bomb detonated his explosives belt in a crowded café in Grayat, killing 17 and injuring 21. Although the two neighborhoods were adjacent, Sunni and Shi'ite victims had to travel extra distances to their respective sectarian controlled hospitals.⁹² The attacks continued the following day when seven mortars fell on Adhamiya, killing three and wounding fifteen.⁹³

The September – October UN Assistance Mission to Iraq Human Rights report said of reprisal attacks during the reporting period:⁹⁴

The purpose of targeted attacks has mainly been to eliminate prominent members of a community, seek reprisal for the death of a family or sect member, often sparking sectarian violence, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of revenge killings... Frequent revenge attacks are recorded against police stations and recruitment centers either in retaliations for the kidnappings and murders attributed to the militias or designed to intimidate individuals and institutions from collaborating with MNF-I or the Government.

On November 23, the deadliest sectarian attack in Iraq since the US led invasion in 2003 prompted another series of revenge attacks. Five car bombs exploded in Sadr City marketplaces mid-afternoon, killing more than 200 and wounding 250. The bombings were coordinated with Sunni insurgent attacks on the Shi'ite-run Health Ministry, in apparent revenge for the large-scale abduction at the Sunni-run Ministry of Higher Education the previous week.

In response to the bombings, Shi'ite militiamen from Sadr City fired mortars into the Sunni Adhamiya neighborhood, wounding ten. A representative for al-Sadr said, "We blame the government for the attacks. We have no trust in the government or in the Americans." The *New York Times* reported that Mahdi Army militiamen flooded the streets and vowed revenge against Sunnis and coalition forces.⁹⁵

The following day, Shi'ite militias attacked Sunni mosques throughout Iraq. Gunmen attacked two Sunni mosques in the Hurriya neighborhood in Baghdad with rocket-propelled grenades and burned two others. At least five were killed in the attacks, but the Association of Muslim Scholars said many more were killed.⁹⁶ Gunmen also opened fire on Sunni mosques in Baquba and Kirkuk, proving that sectarian conflict was no longer limited to the capital. Furthermore, families in Hurriya received letters threatening them to leave their homes within 72 hours, but militiamen forcibly expelled some.⁹⁷

A Sadr City shop owner expressed the sentiments of many Shi'ites; "The feeling of revenge is more now than for the shrine in Samarra; that was just the building, and we can rebuild it. But what can we say about a family that has lost six members?" In response, Sunni neighborhood gangs prepared for reprisal attacks worse than in February. A Sunni man in Adhamiyah said that the community appreciated US military checkpoints, but that they were ready to defend their neighborhood. In a testament to the escalating civil war he said, "There are no more normal people in Adhamiyah, *all* of them are angry."⁹⁸

A coordinated attack hit another Shi'ite neighborhood in Baghdad on December 2, 2006. Two car bombs exploded in the market area of Sadriya and another in the market at Hafidh Qadhi, 100 yards away. Mortar rounds showered the area only minutes later. The attack killed 60 and wounded close to 100. In apparent reprisal attacks, 55 bodies were found in Baghdad the following day, most of which showed signs of torture and bullet wounds attributed to Shi'ite militias.⁹⁹ Only ten days later a suicide bomber killed 60 and wounded 212 in a busy Shi'ite marketplace in central Baghdad where laborers were waiting for work.

Sectarian Displacement

Another key impact of the civil war in Iraq was the rising number of internally displaced persons. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were forced to leave towns in which they were a sectarian minority. Many found refuge with family or friends, but others were forced to live in temporary housing set up by aid organizations.

The numbers of internally displaced persons reported by international or Iraqi organizations varied somewhat and it was unclear what methods the agencies used to determine their

respective numbers. Yet, all the reports showed a dramatic increase in the number of displaced persons since the mosque bombing in February. Displaced Iraqis fleeing sectarian violence were forced to live in poor, often overcrowded conditions with little hope of finding meaningful employment. The refugee crisis was focused in Iraq itself, but in October the Immigration Minister announced that about 890,000 Iraqis had fled the country altogether – mostly moving to Jordan, Iran, and Syria.¹⁰⁰

Many Sunnis fled to Falluja from Baghdad because it was the closest Sunni dominated city from the capital. The US military estimated that in November 2006 about 150 Sunnis arrived from Baghdad. The city was still under tight US military control two years after battles between coalition forces and insurgents all but emptied the city. At the end of 2006, however, Falluja was a Sunni safehaven only 40 miles from the violence torn capital.¹⁰¹

Numerous Sunni families were forced to leave the mostly Shi'ite Hurriyah neighborhood in Baghdad in early December. Shi'ite militias – with affiliation to the Mahdi Army – stormed Hurriyah and order the remaining Sunni families to leave or their houses would be burned down. According to Iraqi army officers, more than 100 families packed a few belongings and fled to Sunni neighborhoods or refugee camps.

Witnesses said that Shi'ite militiamen entered the neighborhood and killed a Sunni man as he was leaving his house. Sunnis families took up arms for protection, but were outnumbered by the Mahdi army. The militias burned down a few houses before ordering the remaining Sunnis to leave immediately. One Sunni man said that he saw twenty bodies lying in the street after the worst of the sectarian fighting. A Shi'ite witness said that Sunni snipers firing on Shi'ites in the street started the conflict.¹⁰²

Iraqi army officers tried to convince Sunni families that they would be protected, but most chose to flee. Residents also said that Iraqi police commandos staying in the neighborhood after the worst of the violence to keep fighters out and protect the remaining residents. One man said that people were nervous with the commandos around because they were believed to be infiltrated by Shi'ite militias, but he said, "For now they are keeping the people separated and the fighters out. Usually they leave after a few days. I hope they stay."¹⁰³ The incident resulted in the segregation of one of the last mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad, as well as creating at least 100 new internally displaced persons.

Prospects were also dim for those displaced persons who could afford to flee the country. Neighboring countries were increasingly wary of accepting Iraqi refugees who could bring the sectarian war to their streets. The September – October UN Assistance Mission to Iraq Human Rights Report said that 44% of Iraqis seeking asylum in Syria were Christians. The emigration was a result of increased attacks against Christians in the fall of 2006. The UNAMI report also stated that the Sabeen-Mandean community decreased from 13,500 in 2001 to 4,000 in 2006.¹⁰⁴

The UNAMI report also said that 418,392 people had been displaced due to violence and 15,240 due to military operation since the attack on the Samarra mosque in February 2006. The report said that UNHCR estimated that an additional 1.6 million became refugees outside the country since 2003. Between 500,000 and 700,000 people relocated to Jordan, 600,000 to Syrian, and 100,000 to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In addition, 436,000 moved to Europe, the US, Africa, and Asia. Almost 3,000 Iraqis fled the country everyday. There was an approximate 50% increase in the number of asylum seekers in industrialized states between January and June 2006.¹⁰⁵

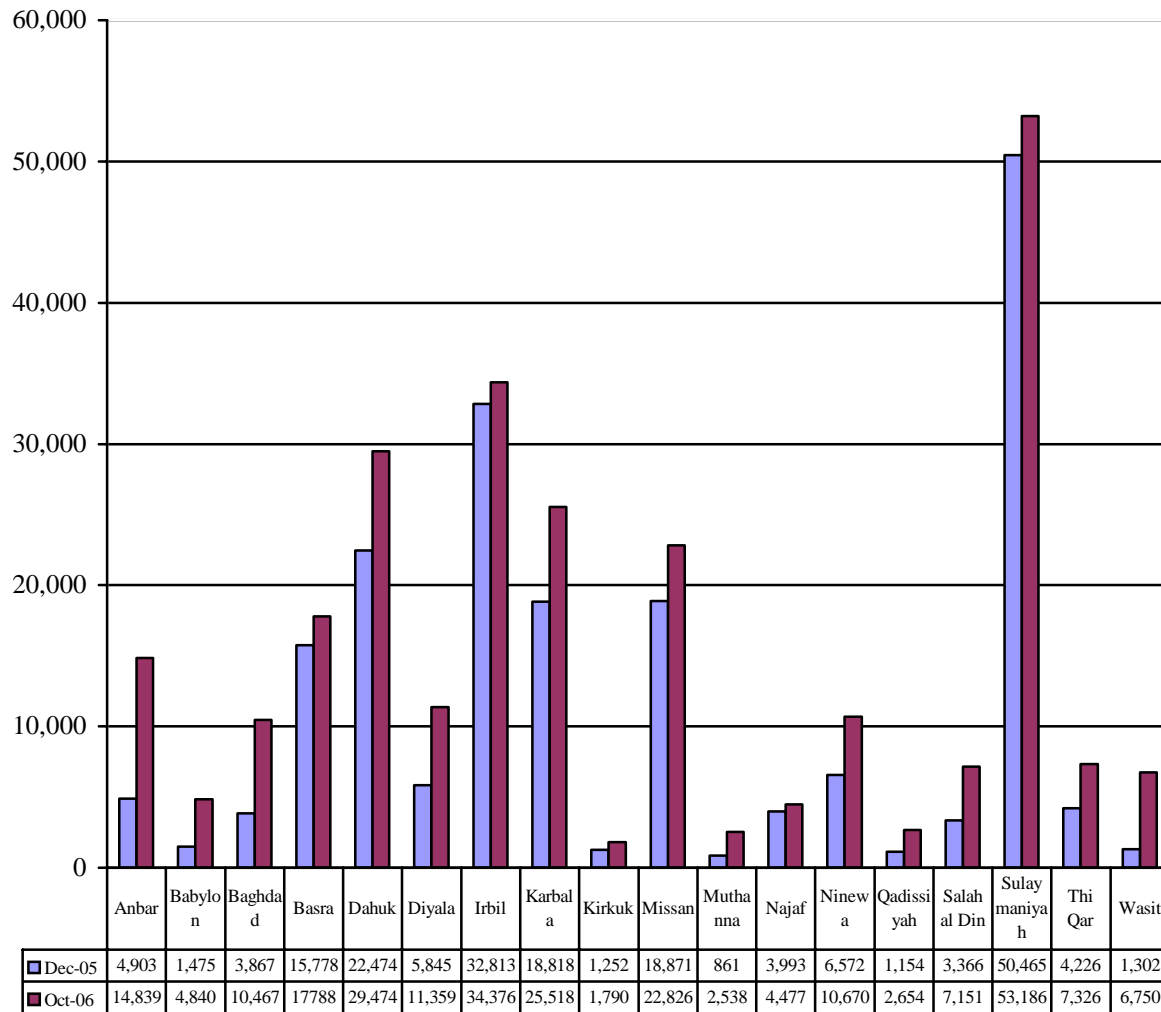
The November 23 bombings in Sadr City prompted another major outflow of Iraqis. At the end of a three-day curfew, hundreds of Iraqi families headed to the Baghdad Airport to escape reprisal attacks that threatened to match those seen after the February Samarra mosque bombing. Families that could not afford to leave the country stocked up on food supplies and kept children from school, the *Miami Herald* reported.¹⁰⁶

The *New York Times* reported on Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Jordanian officials estimated that nearly 750,000 Iraqis relocated to Amman – which had a population of 2.5million - since 2003. Jordan had previously welcomed Iraqi refugees, but concerns rose at the end of 2006 that Iraqis were adversely affecting Jordan's economic and security.

Jordan – a majority Sunni country - feared that fleeing Sunnis and Shi'ites would bring the sectarian war to the streets of Amman. Thus many Shi'ites trying to enter Jordan from Iraq said that they were being turned away and those living in Amman felt ostracized. Police in Jordan began cracking down on illegal refugees, but according to those interviewed in the Times article, Shi'ite were singled out for deportation – although the government denied the accusations.

Jordanians increasingly complained that Iraqi refugees contributed to a doubling in inflation and the cost of housing. Those Iraqis able to deposit \$150,000 in a bank account in Amman were still granted residency status, but it became much more difficult for refugees – especially Shi'ites – to find safety in Jordan at the end of 2006.¹⁰⁷

Figure 1: Number of Internally Displaced Families by Province/Major Cities: Comparison of December 2005 and October 2006



Total Number of Internally Displaced Families

Source: Adapted from material provided by United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq, October 2006, available at: www.uniraq.org

Human Rights Abuses

The September - October 2006 United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) Report on Human Rights stated that extremist groups continued to target ethnic and religious minorities. Violence increased against the Christian minority following controversial comments made by Pope Benedict XVI on September 12. UNAMI reported that extremist groups threatened to kill Christians unless the Pope apologized. Extremists also intimidated Christians into hanging banners condemning the Pope's remarks outside of churches in Iraq. On September 24 and 25 rockets were fired at the Chaldean church in Mosul an IED exploded inside the doorway. Also in Mosul, clergy said that priests in Iraq were too afraid to wear their clerical robes in public for fear of attacks.

The Sabeen-Mandean community reported increased attacks in the early fall of 2006. In October, four Sabeen-Mandean were killed. The minority says that they experience intimidation and social ostracization from neighbors or peers, but not from the official government of Iraq. Palestinian refugees in Iraq were also targeted during the reporting period. Refugees cited the use of mortars and light weapons to force them to relocate, but many had nowhere else to go and lacked legal documentation, according to the UNAMI report.

The total number of detainees in Iraq was slightly lower in September and October than in the previous two-month period. UNAMI expressed concern, however, that there had been no reduction in the number of detainees held by MNF-I, despite reports of their continuous release. The Human Rights report also cited the worrisome condition of juvenile detainees in Iraq. According to a law passed in March 2005, juvenile detainees should have come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, but due to lack of facilities, juveniles remained in the custody of the Ministry of Justice, which had previously been accused of detainee rights abuses.

In addition, UNAMI reported that Kurdish militias detained individuals in Kirkuk and transferred them to the Kurdistan without notifying proper authorities. An inspection of prisons in the Kurdish region found that some prisoners had "been arrested without judicial intervention; most were arrested under violent circumstances; they had been held without trial for long periods and there had been complaints by family member that prisoners were held at unknown locations."¹⁰⁸

Security Initiatives

Baghdad remained the center of the civil war, but sectarian violence was spreading throughout the country. Operation Forward Together made slow progress in the capital and lacked the forces to prevent the spread of fighting to the surrounding urban areas. In Anbar Province the Sunni insurgency battled US troops in the cities of Falluja, Ramadi, and Hit. Insurgent attacks preventing reconstruction efforts in Anbar from progressing and there was evidence that the police force was severely underequipped and underpaid. President Bush announced in mid-December that overall, 5,900 "enemies" had been captured in Iraq in the previous few months. The statement did not give a specific time period or identify the nature of the combatants.¹⁰⁹

Still Battling for Baghdad

By the fall, the security plan in Baghdad was fully directed by the Iraqi government. Al-Maliki was making the key decisions about force strength and where it should be applied. And the decision was clear that US and Iraqi forces would not be entering Sadr City – at least not by Iraqi sanction - to take out the Mahdi militia. The spokesman for the MNF-Iraq, Maj. Gen. William Caldwell, said that the US only provided advice to Iraqi national security staff. US military officials, however, made it very clear that they were ready to move against the Mahdi Army whenever the call came.¹¹⁰

Operation Together Forward II at best produced mixed results. Sectarian killings continued on a daily basis in many parts of the capital and the death toll in the fall months was marginally lower than the all time high the city witnessed in July.¹¹¹

The *Iraq Study Group Report* stated that there were 15,000 US forces involved in Operation Together Forward II in Baghdad. The Report labeled the results of the initiative “disheartening,” noting that violence increased 43% between the summer and October. The Iraqi Army provided only two of the six battalions intended for Operation Together Forward II and the Iraqi police were unwilling or unable to stop the violence.¹¹²

Suicide bombings reached their peak in the fall, but sectarian murders and executions were still the number one killers of Iraqi civilians, reported a *New York Times* article.¹¹³ US and Iraqi forces continued to find dozens of bodies dumped around Baghdad everyday, most showing signs of torture attributed to sectarian death squads. Mortar attacks also became a common method or targeting popular marketplaces.

In a November 15 address to the Senate Armed Services Committee, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency said, “Recent Coalition and ISF operations in Baghdad have achieved limited success.” He added that part of the security problem stemmed from al-Maliki’s “reluctance to conduct operations in Shia militia strongholds.”¹¹⁴ At the same committee hearing, General Abizaid, commander of CENTCOM, said that 80% of the sectarian killings in Iraq happened within a 35-mile radius of Baghdad.¹¹⁵

Senator Reed questioned General Abizaid, Commander of CENTCOM, about the length of time the US and Iraq had until the violence in Baghdad reached the point of no return - to which the answer was four to six months.¹¹⁶

Gen. Chiarelli, the day to day commander of US troops in Iraq, said that Operation Together Forward II had not produced the results that MNF-I was hoping for. He did say that the communities in which coalition troops were able to “clear and hold” were experiences an improvement in daily life. He said that the progress was slow, but that results were seen in some neighborhoods, such as Amiriyah and Dora.¹¹⁷

Progress and Problems in Anbar Province

US recruiting efforts in Anbar were hampered by the Iraqi government’s neglect to pay police forces. US Marine Brig. Gen. Robert Neller, deputy commander of US troops in Anbar, said that some police officers, most of whom were Sunnis, had not been paid in months. He added, “That’s why people in Anbar think the government in Baghdad doesn’t want them to succeed.” Officials in the capital said that policemen did not receive their checks because of corruption in

Anbar; officials in the western province submitted false names and pocketed the money for themselves, according to an advisor to the prime minister.

Gen. Neller said that US forces were making progress training their Iraqi counterparts despite the paycheck delays, but it did reduce Sunni support of the Shi'ite led government. In Anbar province in November 2006 there were 7,000 Iraqi police officers and 13,000 army soldiers, along with 33,000 US troops.¹¹⁸

US forces were also fighting against an intimidation campaign waged by Sunni insurgents. In the small town of Rawah, there were only seven police officers in November; numbers declined rapidly after insurgents killed a policeman in June and dragged his head through the marketplace. In Qaim along the Iranian border Mayor Fahrhan said that he desperately needed equipment and money to pay his police force. He said that he received no support from the national government.¹¹⁹

At the Senate Armed Services Committee briefing, Senator McCain asked General Abizaid if Anbar Province was under control. Abizaid said, "Al Anbar Province is not under control... I believe that you can't have a main effort everywhere and that the preponderance of military activity needs to go to the Baghdad area."¹²⁰

Gen. Michael Hayden, director of the CIA, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that approximately 10,000 Sunnis in Anbar Province were fighting the coalition presence and impeding progress in Iraq, but he added that they were not all "full time fighters."¹²¹

In late November, the US Marine Corp filed an updated report of Col. Pete Devlin's bleak August assessment of the fight in Anbar. The *Washington Post* reported that according to a US intelligence official, the report did not cite any improvement in Anbar since August. The assessment found, "the social and political situation has deteriorated a to a point" that US and Iraqi forces "are no longer capable of militarily defeating the insurgency in al-Anbar." The report added, "The potential for economic revival appears to nonexistent." The contents of Devlin's report entitled, "State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar" were previously not made public.¹²²

The bleak assessment of reconstruction and military victory in Anbar Province provided no reprieve from the reality of the escalating civil conflict in the rest of the country. If US and Iraqi forces were to continue fighting the insurgency, the operation would clearly take years – an option the US military would have to shelve if American public opinion and Congress forced gradual or immediate withdrawal.

In mid-December the first class of Iraqi policemen recruited by Sunni Sheiks in Anbar graduated. In September, the clerics had agreed to urge Sunni men to join the police force to fight against al-Qa'ida. Since the deal, police enlistments in Ramadi increased from less than 100 to the quota of 400 a month. US forces even created a special Emergency Response Unit to accommodate the excess volunteers.

Further, membership in Sawa- the official organization name of the clerics – rose to 60 tribal leaders. US troops were hopeful that the new police force would help stop the constant flow of al-Qa'ida attacks in Anbar, and bring the Sunnis closer to the political process. The military said that since the deal, attacks by local resistance fighters in Anbar dropped 40%, but attacks against US troops did not appear to fall; Anbar still accounted for the majority of US fatalities at the end of 2006.¹²³

Transferring Control to Iraqi Forces

In the fall of 2006, the quantity and confidence of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) had increased, but so had the level of violence. Police forces, especially in Baghdad, continued to be accused of having militia components.

Despite the transfer and the growth of Iraqi security forces, the US military was increasingly stretched in the fall of 2006. The US military had 141,000 troops in Iraq along with 16,500 military personnel from 27 coalition partners. Iraqi forces numbered 326,000 – 138,000 army and 188,000 police¹²⁴ – but the actual number of available forces was far lower due to desertions, authorized leave, and attrition.

In late September, the US informed Iraq's Interior Minister that the Iraqi police would lose vital US aid unless action was taken against human rights violators. The US was investigating violations of the Leahy Law, which prohibits the US from financing security forces committing "gross violations of human rights."

The incident under investigation was the ISF run prison in eastern Baghdad known as Site 4. In May, a joint US and Iraqi inspection of Site 4 found evidence of abuse and torture. UN officials said that 52 arrest warrants were issued, but none were carried out. Iraqi Interior Minister Bolani said that he had not taken further actions because he had not "received written confirmation that indictments had been handed up." Ambassador Khalilzad said that the Iraqi government had been notified of the investigation, but that he was sure the interior ministry would take whatever action was necessary to avoid violations of the Leahy Law.¹²⁵

On November 6, the Interior Ministry officially charged 57 employees with human rights crimes for their roles in the Site 4 abuses. They included 20 commissioned officers, 20 non-commissioned officers, and 17 policemen and civilians. The accused would face criminal trials in upcoming months and all were dismissed from their MOI jobs. UN officials said the charges were positive steps for the Iraqi government and that they hoped investigations into other human rights abuses would follow. Army Maj. Gerald Ostlund, a US spokesman on ISF training, said, "This is one step of many [Jawad al-Bolani] needs to take in this direction," but he added, "You fire somebody from the government here, what have you turned them into? What have they become the day after? Sometimes it is better to keep your enemies closer than your friends."¹²⁶

The September – October UN Assistance Mission to Iraq Human Rights Report stated that ISF faced "formidable challenges to [their] professional integrity and reputation as a result of their inability to defend the Iraq population from terrorist, sectarian, or revenge attacks." The report also contradicted reports by MNF-I and other US government sources that the number of trained and equipped ISF reflected their ability to take over security control. UNAMI noted that "absenteeism is widespread and there are reports that in Kirkuk alone, half of the 5,000 police force and 13,000 Army soldiers, are not reporting to duty at any given time, and many fail to return to duty."

The UNAMI report, however, did commend the Ministry of Interior for taking steps to increase the diversity of the Public Order Division in Ninawa Province and for dismissing ISF that had conducted sectarian acts of violence.¹²⁷

On November 13, US forces handed over security of part of Baghdad's volatile southern region to the Iraqi Army. US troops said that the evenly divided Shi'ite/Sunni 6th Iraqi Division was well prepared to take over security in the mostly Sunni area. The local US commander said that the new Iraqi leader, Col. Ali Fadil, was in charge of the most proficient of any Iraqi unit in the lead. US advisers would remain imbedded with the Iraqi troops and US forces would only be a call away if Fadil needed help.¹²⁸

The same day US commanders praised the Iraqi 6th Division in Baghdad, other US troops questioned the loyalty of the leader of the Iraqi 5th Division in Baquba. The government chose Brig. Gen. Shakir Hulail Hussein al-Kaabi over the summer to command the army in Diyala Province. Within weeks of his appointment, General Shakir approached his American counterpart with a list of names of people he wanted to arrest, according to the *New York Times* article. The Iraqi Army took the lead in Diyala in July, but with an average of ten killings a day – up from four in April – the US military postponed a planned October transfer of full operation control.

Shi'ite militias in Baquba and nearby towns grew in the fall and General Shakir did little to stop them, the US troops in the area said. In one incident, Shakir led Iraqi troops to arrest 400 Sunnis during a raid in Baquba. After that sectarian act, US commanders ordered Shakir to clear all operations with them first, a step backwards in the training process. US Col. Jones said, "It seems to be a deliberate attempt to make sure that the Sunnis are unable to organize politically here and represent themselves well in the next round of elections." Jones said that the Shi'ite control of the police forces was so complete that a Sunni deputy police chief was too scared to go to work.

US commanders were additionally frustrated in Diyala because General Shakir fired several well-trained and nationalistic commanders. Another commander under Shakir called him a "Mahdi Army commander." Despite the accusations, Shakir was promoted to Major General and a Defense Ministry spokesman said he received no complaints about him.

US troops in Diyala, many of whom headed back to the US in early November after a year long tour, said they were leaving on a "low note," and that the complete withdrawal of US troops in the ethnically mixed province would mean full-scale civil war.¹²⁹

The contrast between the success story of the commander of the Iraqi Army 6th division in Baghdad and the sectarianism of the 5th division in Diyala highlighted the frustration facing US troops charged with completing the training of ISF. However, General Abizaid said that the events recounted in the article were probably not "completely accurate."¹³⁰ It appeared in the fall that the rate at which ISF were trained and equipped was insufficient to control the spreading civil war. Sectarian death squads were simply too large and pervasive for ISF to control, even with coalition assistance.

MNF-Iraq spokesman Gen. Caldwell said that overall public confidence in Iraqi police was rising at the end of 2006, but that the Ministry of Interior needed more reform. He pointed to efforts by al-Maliki to put Iraqi police units through a "transformational training process, where they will learn how to be more effective leaders and improve their civil policing and collective operational capabilities."¹³¹ Gen. Caldwell's assessment, however, was in stark contrast to the frustrating experiences that returning US military advisors recounted.

In late November the *Washington Post* further reported on the deteriorating training efforts in Iraq – which diverged from the optimistic rhetoric of MNF-I. The article cited internal army documents containing interviews with US officers involved in the training process. Officers criticized almost every aspect of the training process and said that the US army did not support them while they were in Iraq.

The most common complaint of US military advisors was that the Army did little to prepare them for their mission. Others said that team members often lacked experience and training and thus were insufficiently prepared to help with the mission. The unavailability of interpreters was also a widespread problem and sometimes the interpreters did not speak sufficient English. An advisor in 2004, Maj. Robert Dixon, said that he did not have any interpreters at all. According to the article, there was no standardized rubric for advisers to follow and most of them had to feel their way through the process by trial and error.

Iraqi officers interviewed also complained that their US advisors were junior to them and lacked combat experience. A review at the US military's Center for Army Lessons Learned concluded, "Numerous teams have lieutenants... to fill the role of advisor to an Iraqi colonel counterpart." A US advisor said that sometimes advisors would call their Iraqi counterparts from the forward operating bases instead actively training them.

Lt. Col. Paul Yingling, a staff officer who helped train Iraqis in 2005 and 2006, said, "The thing the Army institutionally is still struggling to learn is that the most important thing we do in counterinsurgency is building host-nation institutions, yet all our organizations are designed around the least important line of operations: combat operations."¹³² At the end of 2006 the advisor training effort was starting to get the attention and status it deserved as the US military addressed sectarianism in the police and the overall inability of the ISF to take over security operations. However, all of the defects in the training process led to the problem that at the end of 2006, only a fraction of the Iraqi forces that had been trained and equipped were actually operational and effective.

Even so, General Abizaid said in a hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee on November 15, "It is clear that [US commanders and Iraqi leaders] believe Iraqi forces can take more control faster, provided we invest more manpower and resources into the coalition military transition teams, speed the delivery of logistics and mobility enablers, and embrace an aggressive Iraqi-led effort to disarm illegal militias." He added that "capable and independent" Iraqi forces would set the conditions for withdrawal of US combat forces. Senator Warner (R-VA) questioned General Abizaid further about the abilities of ISF and Abizaid responded, "I have confidence that the Iraqi army is up to the job, providing the Iraqi government shows the confidence in its own army and gives support to its own army to take the lead the way that they should... This has yet to be demonstrated."¹³³

The statement underscored the differences between the US military's approach to dealing with armed militias and al-Maliki's political solution - and what the US military perceived as the Prime Minister's lack of support for Iraqi military operations in Sadr City. Later in the briefing, General Abizaid said that he expected al-Maliki to move against the Mahdi Army using the Iraqi Army.

In addition, Abizaid said, "command-and-control arrangements are adequate for the current period, but they must be codified as we move ahead with Iraqi units taking more and more

leadership in combat operations... I think we need to have some very clear understanding of who moves forward with what types of units, who has the lead.” His statement drew into question whether US forces, Iraqi forces, and the Iraqi government had a clear idea of command structure as the US military transferred control to ISF.

He added later in the briefing that there needed to be more effective Iraqi troops rather than more American troops, at least in November 2006. The US military advised increased embedding of US training teams into the 91 Iraqi battalions in the lead. Further, General Abizaid said that US military commanders were discussing how to increase the pace of transition to ISF, but General Casey, commander of US forces in Iraq, had previously said that the process would take roughly 12 to 18 months to complete.

Abizaid remained confident in the overall ability of Iraqi troops, but recognized weaknesses; “I think that sometimes here in the US we tend to believe that every Iraqi unit’s not doing their duty. That’s not true. Most Iraqi units are doing their duty. Most Iraqi units are going into the field and fighting for their country. No doubt there are difficulties in some Iraqi units, and in the national police there’s more difficulties.” He said that one of the most difficult tasks in training Iraqi forces stemmed from the fact that Shi’a had long looked to militias for protection and support and that it took time to change that way of thinking.¹³⁴

Lawmakers close to Prime Minister Maliki said that he wanted increased control over ISF, particularly in Baghdad.¹³⁵ But the US Joint Chiefs of Staff announced in late November that two or three battalions of American troops were being sent to Baghdad from elsewhere in Iraq – possibly Mosul.¹³⁶ After meeting with President Bush in Jordan, al-Maliki said that ISF would be able to take over control of security by June 2007.¹³⁷

The Prime Minister’s assertion, however, was sharply called into question in the fall as it became obvious that ISF lacked the training, equipment, and force numbers they needed to take control of the volatile security crisis. Even the most capable of Iraqi Army forces, the 9th Mechanized Division, demonstrated that they still needed the support of US forces in combat.

A joint US-Iraqi raid in Baghdad’s Sunni Fadhil District turned into an ambush by some 100 insurgents, and the 9th Division crumbled under fear and pressure. US troops acknowledged that the fighting was tough and the insurgent’s attacks were coordinated, but Iraqi troops either froze or fired their weapons wildly. The raid had originally been planned as an Iraqi-led operation, but US soldiers said that they took over within minutes.

US troops said that some Iraqi soldiers refused to move into the buildings when the insurgent attacks came or they started firing at will towards friend and foe. Some ISF jumped into their trucks and tried to back away. Both US and Iraqi soldiers acknowledged significant collateral damage. In the end, US and Iraqi troops killed 20 insurgents and detained 43, but the result would clearly have been different without the US soldiers.

Further, an American advisor said that the 9th Division had at most 68% of its force at any given time. US commanders acknowledged that more preparation time would have significantly helped ISF, who only had three hours notice. Yet the incident drew into question the ability of ISF to stay and fight when challenged.¹³⁸

The US military planned to significantly increase the advisor effort in early 2007. At the end of 2006, some 3,500 US advisors were operating inside Iraqi Army and police units, but several thousand more were expected to join in the effort.¹³⁹ The military said that the number of

advisors in Iraq could triple or quadruple. US commanders were training officers already in Iraq to take on the advisor role so as to not overstretch the army any further. An advisor team leader said, “[Advisors] will have to come from resources in the country. As you stand up the teams, you stand down the combat units.” Pentagon officials said that the end goal was to create teams of 20-30 advisors for each Iraqi battalion.¹⁴⁰ The Iraq Study Group recommended increasing the number of embedded US troops to 10,000 – 20,000 from the 3,000 – 4,000 involved at the end of 2006, and advised that they be the most “highly qualified” US officers and military personnel. The training and equipping should be completed by the first quarter of 2008, the panel advised.¹⁴¹

The Study Group also recommended transferring the Iraqi National Police and Border Police to the Ministry of Defense so that police commando units would become part of the Iraqi Army. The Facilities Protection Services – heavily infiltrated by Shi’ite militias – should be brought under a reformed Ministry of the Interior.¹⁴²

The US 1st Infantry Division was pulled out of combat rotation so that soldiers to attend a 60-day training program on how to advise Iraqi forces, but some troops were reassigned without additional training. The US also said they would focus on cultural awareness and hands-on work with weapons in the advisor training process.¹⁴³ The question remained, however, if additional US advisors without much field experience could turn the Iraqi forces – infiltrated by militias and with questionable loyalties – into a capable force.

On November 22, British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett announced that Britain could hand over control of the southern Basra and Maysan Provinces in early 2007. The Province of Najaf was scheduled to be handed over to Iraqi forces in December 2006.¹⁴⁴

Iraq’s National Security Adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie said in mid-December that al-Maliki had presented President Bush with a plan for Iraq to have primary responsibility for ISF by early 2007. He said, “I think it is extremely important [US troops] reduce their visibility and they reduce their presence. They should be in the suburbs within greater Baghdad.”

Al-Maliki proposed that Iraq would have direct command of the two Iraqi divisions in Baghdad within a few months. The divisions would also be reinforced by two brigades – primarily composed of Kurds – from Sulaimaniya and Erbil. Mr. Rubaie added that the training and equipping of the extra forces would proceed ahead of schedule. ISF in Baghdad would focus on seven neighborhoods and impose checkpoints, although fewer than joint US-Iraqi teams opposed in 2006.

US troops would withdraw to the periphery of the capital to stop insurgents and bombers from entering the city limits. The proposal did allow for some American troops to stay embedded with ISF to advise them. Mr. Rubaie concluded, “We have to stand alone. We have to wean ourselves off the coalition and make our own mistakes and learn from our own mistakes.” Sunni politicians, upon hearing the proposal, expressed alarm, but said they did not suspect the US to comply and pull troops out of Baghdad because the US military knew Shi’ite militias would take over.¹⁴⁵

In a speak at the United States Institute of Peace on December 14, 2006 Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi stated that militia infiltration of ISF had to be addressed before other security problems could be solved. He advocated calling back members of the Old Iraqi Army to adequately represent all sectarian groups in the armed forces. He said that the US had to be involved in

“watering down” militia elements because the US had chosen and trained the heavily Shi’ite security forces and was responsible for disbanding the Old Army. The US military needed to set a conditional timeline for withdrawal, he said. He believed that if the coalition left in December 2006 militias would control Iraq chaos would erupt, but if US led forces stayed until they had reincorporated members of the Old Army and purged sectarian components – leaving ISF equipped, trained, and loyal to a united Iraq – then it would be time for US withdrawal.

The ability of ISF to take over was doubtful at the end of 2006. Iraqi police forces were not trusted by Sunnis and some Shi’ites and the Iraqi army did not have the force strength or training to secure the country. The Iraq Study Group quoted a senior American general who summed up the US police training efforts; “2006 was supposed to be ‘the year of the police’ but it hasn’t materialized that way.”¹⁴⁶ And Gen. Chiarelli stated, “The Year of the Police is going to take us longer than we thought it was going to take us.”¹⁴⁷

Reconstruction and Development Efforts: Stumbling on the Building Blocks

Reconstruction efforts were hampered by the security crisis and the lack of and misuse of funding. Reconstruction only began to receive the attention it deserved in mid 2006, but by that point the security crisis prevented significant progress. Economic growth in 2006 hit 4% - well below the 10% goal – inflation lingered around 50%, and unemployment averaged about 40%.¹⁴⁸

In remarks to the Senate Armed Service Committee on November 15, David Satterfield, State Department coordinator for Iraq, said that the State Department had increased staffing levels in Baghdad and at provincial reconstruction team outposts. He stated that twice the number of State Department employees was employed at those locations than in 2005. Satterfield also said that qualified officers were steadily volunteering for the dangerous yet crucial posts.¹⁴⁹

The Pentagon contended in November that despite the bleak Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction October quarterly report and the fact that a quarter of the \$37 billion in UN secured oil money was untraceable, progress on reconstruction in Iraq was significant. Dean Popps, Principal Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology, told the *Washington Times* that the state of infrastructure in Iraq when the Army Corp of Engineers arrived was far worse than they had originally expected. Popps said that three sewage treatments plants in greater Baghdad did not work, only a few towns had a central supply of clean water, the electrical grid was insufficient, and there were few primary health care facilities. Popps cited several successes of the Pentagon’s reconstruction projects in Iraq:¹⁵⁰

- Six new primary care facilities, with 66 more under construction; 11 hospitals renovated; more than 800 schools fixed up, more than 300 police stations and facilities and 248 border control forts.
- Added 407,000 cubic meters per day of water treatment; a new sewage-treatment system for Basra; work on Baghdad’s three plants continues; oil production exceeds the 2002 level of 2 million barrels a day by 500,000.
- The Ministry of Electricity now sends power to Baghdad for four to eight hours a day, and ten to twelve for the rest of the country.

MNF-I spokesman Gen. Caldwell also said that in 2006 146 water and sewage projects, 140 educational projects, 57 medical and public health projects, and 37 agricultural projects began.¹⁵¹

The October quarterly update for the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRRF) highlighted a number of the projects completed in the quarter, but also acknowledged continued challenges. Key progress included the following:¹⁵²

- Completed nine Gas-Oil Separation Plant rehabilitation projects in the south.
- Completed hot gas path inspections of two Siemens V94.2 generators and combustion inspections on two other V94.2 generators at the Baiji Power Station... The increased capacity will provide electrical power to an additional 27,000 homes.
- Significant progress was made in improving the supply of clean potable water and reducing waste discharge.
- Completed construction of Special Police Regiment Facilities in Taji.
- Completed construction of military facilities in Samara, Hammal Al Ali, Taji, and Diwaniya, supporting a total of 2,000 Iraqi soldiers.
- Completed construction of the Ministry of Electricity's Regional Wireless Communication Network, which provides an internal communications system using microwave and UHF, as well as integrating data and voice communications.
- Completed a series of improvements at the Baghdad International Airport.

The report also said that in the fall of 2006 USAID started a "longer-term, self-sustaining, national capacity development program that focuses on strengthening and expanding Iraq's existing civil service training institutes in Baghdad and the provinces."

The report acknowledged the challenges facing reconstruction and development in Iraq, including the security situation and poor oversight by contractors. One of the principal objectives in the next quarter would be completing the Basra Children's Hospital – which had run well over budget. The report confirmed that work on the Baghdad Police College – found in the early fall to have severe structural deficiencies – was complete.¹⁵³

However, in an interview with *The Guardian*, Stuart Bowen of SIGIR said that Iraq was in danger of being brought down by a "second insurgency." Bowen defined the "second insurgency" as smuggling of oil and widespread corruption. The "virtual pandemic" of corruption cost Iraq roughly \$4billion a year.¹⁵⁴

The level of corruption in Iraq at the end of 2006 was illustrated by the black market for weapons. The October SIGIR report stated that roughly 4% - about 14,000 weapons – were lost in the process of being transferred to Iraqi security forces, none of which the us military had records of. A *New York Times* report, however, offered an even bleaker assessment of the ultimate destination of American weapons.

The 4% reported by SIGIR did not include weapons sold by Iraqi security forces on the black market. The weapons, mostly pistols, often brought more money than several months pay for ISF. Deserters from the police and army sold their weapons on the black market for an increasingly larger price as Sunnis and Shi'a across Iraq armed themselves for widespread civil conflict. ISF also sometimes reported that their weapons were "stolen."

In either case, US issues weapons were easy to find in black market stores around the country. The demand for weapons resulted in rising prices – pistol prices tripled since 2003 – which in turn offered greater incentive for ISF to sell their weapons on the black market. Rising prices also led to increased raids on US and Iraqi army weapon warehouses. A black market dealer said, “Almost all of the weapons come from the Iraqi police and army. They are our best suppliers.” He added, “In the south, if the Americans give the Iraqis weapons, the next day you can buy them here. The Iraqi army, the Iraqi police – they all sell them right away.”

The weapons black market underscored the problems of US reconstruction and development in Iraq. The rapidly distributed weapons were expected to accelerate the training of ISF, but most pistols ended up in the hands of those fighting US and Iraqi forces, according to the *Times* article. The US military said that it began tracking serial numbers on weapons sent to Iraq, but it appeared that a large number of the 138,000 Glock pistols and 165,000 Kalashnikov rifles were already in other hands.¹⁵⁵

The level of corruption in Iraqi ministries was also visible in failure to spend billions of dollars of oil revenues set aside for reconstruction. The failure to spend the money was due to “rapid personnel turnover in government, security woes, endemic corruption and a lack of technocrats skilled at jobs like writing contracts and managing complex projects,” according to the *New York Times*.

The oil minister said that the Finance Ministry taking too long to authorize payments caused part of the problem. American officials, however, said that the strict measures put on Iraqi ministries to stop corruption may have scared many government employees away from putting their own name on a contract.

According to the Oil Ministry, about half of the revenue was intended for repair of oil infrastructure, but little of it was ever spent. Overall, Iraqi ministries spend at little at 15% of their 2006 capital budgets for reconstruction. Iraqi-run reconstruction efforts were thus hampered by as many problems as US-led programs.¹⁵⁶

The Iraq Study Group report agreed that corruption was rampant in Iraq's government. An Iraqi official told the Group that corruption cost Iraq between \$5-7billion a year. The Report did acknowledge several promising steps: Iraq created a functioning audit board with inspectors general in the ministries, and leaders spoke out against corruption.¹⁵⁷

In December the Pentagon also announced plans to reinvigorate Iraq's economy by creating jobs in many of the country's violence torn cities. The Pentagon team hoped to reestablish nearly 200 state owned factories that had closed down after the departure of the Coalition Provisional Authority. The businesses could potentially employ 11,000 Iraqis by the new year. The task force was also searching for US businesses to invest in the Iraqi businesses.

Lt. Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli said, “We need to put the angry young men to work. One of the key hindrances to us establishing stability in Iraq is the failure to get the economy going. A relatively small decrease in unemployment would have a very serious effect on the level of sectarian killing going on.” The task force hoped that reopening the factories after three years of desertion would bring young men off the streets and help reduce violence.¹⁵⁸

The Iraq Study Group pointed to some encouraging economic indicators. Currency reserves hit \$12 million and consumer imports increased dramatically. Wheat yields increased 40% in Kurdistan, but agriculture suffered in the rest of the country. The government did meet

benchmarks set by the International Monetary Fund. However, the report concluded that negative economic factors outweighed the positive and Iraqis saw no improvement in their economic situation.¹⁵⁹

The emphasis on reconstruction and development in Iraq came about two years late and despite progress in the fall and early winter of 2006, high levels of corruption and the more pressing need for security overshadowed the successes. Moreover, almost all of the funds appropriated to the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund were committed and the trend line for future economic assistance from the US sloped downward. And of the \$13.5 billion pledged by international donors for reconstruction, only \$4 billion was delivered. As the need for reconstruction projects in Iraq increased, it appeared that economic support faltered.¹⁶⁰

The Problem of Education

The September – October UN Assistance Mission to Iraq Human Rights report cited the grave situation facing education in Iraq. As of the end of October, schools in remote areas of Baghdad still had not opened for the 2006 school year. And according to statistics by the Ministry of Education, over 300 teachers and employees in the Ministry were killed and 1,158 wounded in 2006 alone. The highest rate of assassinations of Iraq academics – 44% - occurred in Baghdad; Anbar, Mosul, and Basra each accounted for 10% of the total number of assassinations.

UNAMI reported that schools in Ramadi were particularly affected. Almost no Ramadi schools opened for the 2006 school year due to threats from al-Qa'ida. In Diyala Province, the Governorate Council said that 90% of the schools were closed due to the security situation.¹⁶¹

Education in Iraq took another hit in November with the mass kidnapping of 150 employees and visitors at the Ministry of Higher Education in Baghdad. Reports varied on how many victims were released or killed, but the Minister of Higher Education, Abed Dhiab al-Ujaili, said that dozens remained missing weeks after the kidnapping. He also said that teaching at universities in Baghdad was suspended until the kidnappers were identified and captured. An anonymous administrator at a Baghdad university told the Inter Press Service, "Iraqi universities have turned into militia and death squad headquarters... Pictures of clerics and sectarian flags all over are not the only problem, but there is the interference of clerics and their followers in everything." The employee added that clerics had control over what students studied and which teachers remained at the universities and which became targets of sectarian violence. The mass kidnapping had its intended effect of keeping professors and students at home out of fear for their lives.

According to an article in *Asia Times*, UNESCO reported that before the 1991 Gulf War, enrollment in Iraqi primary schools was close to 100%. The Ba'ath Party mandated that children had to attend at least primary school, but the Party also had control over subject material and educators. Thus, the "de-Ba'athification" plan instituted by the Coalition Provisional Authority resulted in the firing of many teachers and administrators. According to the article, a chief education supervisor in Baghdad said that most new teachers were "selected for being members of Islamic parties in power or those who paid bribes in order to get a job."

An education manager, Abdel Aziz, told the Inter Press Service that many schools across Iraq remained inadequate because reconstruction projects lacked sufficient funding and subcontractors failed to meet standards. School officials also said that in Baghdad and southern Iraq, militias and death squads took over many school buildings.

The Ministry of Education's statistics confirmed the crisis of Iraq's education system. In October 2006 only 30% of Iraq's 3.5 million students attended classes; attendance for the school year starting in September was a record low. According to the study group Brussels Tribunal, at least 270 academics had been killed since the US-led invasion in 2003.¹⁶² A brain drain of Iraq's educated elite could prove disastrous to efforts to revive a middle class - particularly in Baghdad. Continued sectarian violence in the streets will create a generation of children with incomplete education up through the high school level, making it difficult to find jobs and opening the door for recruitment into militias. Further, unemployment in Iraqi remained between 30-45% in the fall of 2006.

The Problem of Healthcare

In mid November the *Los Angeles Times* reported on Iraq's deteriorating health care system. The security crisis in the fall of 2006 caused a dire shortage of medical equipment and qualified doctors. According to the Iraqi government, the child mortality rate increased since the US led invasion in 2003 from 125 deaths per 1000 births in 2002 to 130 deaths per 1000 births in 2006. Sunni religious leaders additionally accused the Shi'ite run Health Ministry of withholding supplies from Sunni civilians.

In response to accusations that the Health Ministry had sectarian ties, the US military raided the ministry and arrested employees suspected of kidnapping patients at the Medical City Hospital in Baghdad. In response, the ministry severed ties with the US military and initially refused to open a new hospital built by the US Army Corp of Engineers in a Sunni neighborhood.¹⁶³

Sunnis said that they were too afraid to visit relatives in hospitals because they feared being kidnapped and tortured by Mahdi Army members. Omar al-Jubouri, a member of the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party, said that he had to send Iraqi Army units with Sunnis who went to pick up relatives from the Health Ministry controlled Baghdad morgue.¹⁶⁴

The experience of a Sunni doctor in Baghdad verified Sunni apprehensions about the Health Ministry. The doctor said that the Mahdi Army infiltrated the support staff at the hospitals and thus had close access to patients. A Mahdi Army member and a porter at the hospital offered him \$300 for every patient that he identified as a Sunni. He also said that Sunnis were being murdered in their hospitals beds by overdoses of a drug that caused cardiac arrest.

The doctor said that Sunni patients who were ready to be discharged would mysteriously disappear or be found dead in their rooms. He also believed that medical records were altered or removed to hide the evidence. In a letter to the *Sunday Times*, the doctor cited numerous instances in which patients disappeared or were killed by people he believed to be members of the Mahdi Army. When he questioned the support staff, he was told to keep quiet and not ask questions or he would lose his own life. Mahdi Army members also coerced paramedics into giving Sunnis overdoses of lethal drugs, according to the *Times* article.¹⁶⁵

In addition to dealing with militia infiltration, doctors in Baghdad hospitals – where dozens of injured victims arrived everyday – lacked the supplies and equipment to treat patients with ailments not related to the sectarian war. Doctors said that they lacked the means to treat heart attacks, cancer, and many even lacked x-ray machines. A pharmacist in Taji said he was running out of “medicine, blood bags, oxygen, anesthetics, vaccines, and IV fluids.”

Since 2003, the US spent \$493 million on healthcare in Iraq. Further, the \$50 million children's hospital in Basra had yet to open and had cost an additional \$40 million. A plan to create 150 primary healthcare centers in Iraq was scaled back to 142, but as of November 2006, only six had opened – five of which were in Shi'ite neighborhoods in Baghdad. According to the *LA Times* article, the Iraqi Health Ministry spent \$1.1 billion in 2006 compared with \$22 million in 2005. The ministry spent 55% of the budget on medication and medical supplies and 33% on salaries.

In the Sunni town of Tikrit, there were no functioning MRI machines and patients had to travel 200 miles to Mosul. Doctors in the town felt they were being punished by the Shi'ite Health Ministry because they worked in the town that Saddam Hussein was from. A Sunni doctor in Baquba also thought he was denied medical supplies because of his sect. The ministry denied the allegations, saying that supplies had to be picked up in Baghdad. However, the security situation made it too dangerous for Shi'ite workers to bring supplies to Sunni regions and for Sunni doctors to travel to Shi'ite areas in Baghdad to pick up medical supplies.

Both Sunni and Shi'ite doctors were targets since the start of the war – 455 medical workers were killed since 2003. The problem was exacerbated however, by the fact that 7,000 workers fled the country in that same time frame. Only in the Kurdish north and Muthanna province in the south were mortality rates not increasing. Similar to the case of education professionals, the attacks on doctors threatened to leave the country in a humanitarian crisis with insufficient medical supplies and healthcare professionals.¹⁶⁶

The Problem of Oil

Oil sales at the end of 2006 accounted for 70% of Iraq's GDP and 95% of government revenues.¹⁶⁷ However, Stuart Bowen of SIGIR said in an interview with *The Guardian* that oil smuggling was threatening to bring down the Iraqi government. He stated that it was the "number one problem" because insurgents attacked northern oil lines and trucks had to transport the oil, making it susceptible to smuggling.¹⁶⁸

According to Iraq's oil minister, Hussein al-Shahristani, Iraq produced an average of 2.3 million bpd in October and exported between 1.6 and 1.7 million bpd. He stated that produced was expected to reach 3 million bpd by the end of 2006 and 4.5 million bpd by 2010.¹⁶⁹ Shahristani's expectations were unlikely to be met, however, as November saw a drop in production to 2.04 million bpd with 1.47 million bpd exported. The official goal set by the Iraqi government was 2.5mil bpd – a shortfall of 47% in November, 43% in October, and 33% in September. Oil only produced revenue of \$1.26 billion in November - and if Bowen's assessment was correct - a good portion of that money was eaten away by corruption.¹⁷⁰

The *Iraq Study Group Report* stated several problems inhibiting the production of oil:¹⁷¹

There is no metering system for the oil. There is poor maintenance at pumping stations, pipelines, and port facilities, as well as inadequate investment in modern technology. Iraq had a cadre of experts in the oil sector, but intimidation and an extended migration of experts to other countries have eroded technical capacity. Foreign companies have been reluctant to invest, and Iraq's Ministry of Oil has been unable to spend more than 15% of its capital budget.

Experts estimate that 150,000 to 200,000 – and perhaps as many as 500,000 – barrels of oil per day are being stolen. Controlled prices for refined products result in shortages within Iraq, which drive consumers to the thriving black market.

In early December the *New York Times* reported that Iraq was near a deal on a national oil law. A committee to debate an oil law was established in June 2006, but efforts to reach a compromise accelerated at the end of the year. The draft of the law – which needed final approval – would give the central government control over current and future oil revenues. The government would distribute revenues to provinces based on their population.

In previous months Kurdish officials sought to ensure the rights of distribution for regional governments, but those demands were dropped at the end of 2006 in favor of central control. A Kurdish official said, “Revenue sharing is an accepted principle by all the constituent elements of the Iraqi government, including the Kurds, and that is the unifying element that we’re all hoping for in the oil law.” Officials involved said that the Kurds accepted that a national oil law would most likely draw more international investment and development in oil rich Kurdistan than a law of an autonomous region.

The remaining issue at debate concerned contracts for developing future oil fields. The Kurds conceded that a national oil law would benefit the region more, but were unwilling to forfeit control of the development of future fields. If implemented, that draft of the oil law would resurrect that Iraq National Oil Company, originally established in 1964 and shutdown in 1987. Officials said that the company would be a separate business from the oil ministry, eliminated ties to corruption.¹⁷²

The Problem of Electricity

From July – October 2006 electrical capacity was above pre-war levels and was following an upward trend. However, Iraqis in Baghdad suffered from severe power loss in mid-October from attacks on lines. For several days, Baghdadis received only 2 hours of electricity per day. The average in Baghdad was 4.7 hours of electricity per day. Outside the capital, however, electricity averaged 11.3 hours.¹⁷³ In November the average in the country was 11 hours per day and 6.8 in Baghdad.¹⁷⁴

Iraqis in Baghdad also continued to rely heavily on generators, causing inflation in fuel prices. Baghdad was isolated from the national power grid because of attacks against electrical lines into the capital. Repair crews routinely received death threats and were killed by snipers.

Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Funds (IRRF) divided allocation into three sectors: Generation facilities that produce power; transmission networks that carry the power across Iraq; and distribution networks that deliver power to local areas. All but two generational facilities were completed by the fall of 2006, but half of the distribution projects had yet to begin. Further, 74% of IRRF were expended and an extra \$20 billion was deemed necessary for completion.¹⁷⁵

The Dominant Role of Shi'ite Militias

In September, CENTCOM labeled the militias as the “largest contributors to sectarian violence in Iraq.”¹⁷⁶ By October, the US military stated that killings by the Mahdi army far outstripped killings by the Badr Brigades. Militia activity in the fall of 2006 was characterized by the Mahdi Army growing rogue components outside of Moqtada al-Sadr’s control. Officials estimated that 23 militias operated in Baghdad in the early fall and that most of them were Shi’ite. In mid-October Iraqi and US officials said that the number of militias in Baghdad was increasing and that they were “splintering into smaller, more radicalized cells.” In some parts of the capital,

Just two days after Maliki met with al-Sadr to discuss political answers to the militia problem, the Mahdi Army seized control of Amara, the capital of Maysan province. The incident also stressed the tensions between the Mahdi Army and SCIRI's Badr Brigade. On October 19, a roadside bomb – attributed to the Mahdi Army - killed the head of police intelligence and member of the Badr Brigade. The officer's family then kidnapped the brother of a local Mahdi Army leader in retaliation. In response, about 800 Mahdi militiamen seized control of police stations in Amara - exploding three of them - installed checkpoints around the city, and patrolled the streets, ordering residents to stay inside. 15 Iraqis – including four civilians - were killed and at least 60 wounded in the fighting.

The British army left Amara in August to patrol the Iraq – Iran border. Residents in the town reported that since the British left, the militias came back and influenced the police forces and local government. However, witnesses said that Iraqi police forces fought the militias in fierce street battles in attempt to regain their police stations. The fighting was eventually controlled when roughly 230 British Troops returned to Amara. In addition, Prime Minister Maliki sent an emergency security delegation of top officials to make sure the situation did not escalate further.¹⁷⁸ Al-Sadr also sent a delegation to the city, which broadcast messages from the cleric telling militiamen to lay down arms, but witnesses said the call for calm was unheeded.¹⁷⁹

The incident underscored the size and power of the Mahdi Army in southern Iraq, as well as Sadr's inability to control his militia. The exact size of the Mahdi Army remained unknown in the early fall, but simultaneous fighting in Baghdad, Balad, and Amara left little doubt about the militia's role in propagating the civil war. The smaller Badr Brigade had taken a backseat in the fighting by the fall of 2006, but the reprisal attack against the Mahdi Army showed that the military wing of SCIRI was not about to cede power to rogue Mahdi militiamen. Sunni tribes talking of fighting Al-Qa'ida insurgents in Anbar and revenge killings between the Mahdi Army and the Badr Brigade brought about the possibility of intra-sect wars within the larger civil war.

In the fall of 2006 Shi'ite militias remained non-hierarchical and largely disorganized with vast rogue components. SCIRI remained the most powerful Shi'ite political actor, but al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and its various factions controlled the streets. On November 15, Gen. Michael Hayden, Director of the CIA, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that approximately 20,000 to 30,000 active Shi'a militiamen were hindering progress in Iraq, but many more tacitly supported militias.¹⁸⁰

Gen. Chiarelli, commander of MNF-I, said that he hoped there would be some kind of reintegration plan for militias in Baghdad. He attributed much of the violence in Baghdad to the fact that young Iraqis had no opportunity for employment, so they turned to militias to help them feed their families. He said, "I hope to see some kind of reintegration plan kick off that's got some money behind it, that allows us, through vocational training and also to work with much of the infrastructure work that needs to be done in this city and other cities throughout Iraq, being to employ people."¹⁸¹

Sadr and the Mahdi Army

US intelligence reports confirmed that Sadr had begun to lose control of factions within his Mahdi army, which was estimated to be greater than 200,000, but the exact number was largely unknown. A senior intelligence official said in late September that portions of the Mahdi army splintered off into freelance death squads and were not heeding Sadr's calls for restraint. The officials believed that six major leaders had ventured beyond the control of Sadr, although most still said to be part of the Mahdi army. These rogue elements saw Sadr as "accommodating to the US" and "bound by politics." Abu Dera, one of the uncontrolled leaders and a fighter in Sadr City, had a reputation of killing Sunnis, but when al-Sadr told him to stop he ignored the call; people began calling him "Shi'ite Zarqawi" and most Shi'ites in Sadr City supported him.¹⁸²

At the end of September Sadr ordered his followers to temporarily put down their weapons and cease attacks. Some analysts saw this as an effort to distance himself from former followers who were no longer loyal. Others argued it was merely an attempt to buy time in the face of increasing pressure from Iraqi and Coalition Forces. In either case, he issued four directives to his commanders, all of which seemed aimed at gaining a firmer control on his forces:¹⁸³

- Reduce the size of units to 75 fighters from as many as 400 to make the units more manageable.
- Issue new identification cards to Mahdi Army members to replace IDs that had been forged.
- Send every member to an orientation course that would outline the group's mission.
- And lay down weapons temporarily.

Again in October Sadr said that he would denounce any members of the Mahdi Army who killed Iraqis. He stated, "There are rumors that there are groups or persons from the Mahdi Army are attacking the Iraqi people with no right to do so. It is not proved so far but, if proved, I will declare their names and will renounce them with no fear or hesitation." He encouraged his militiamen to use Ramadan as a period to repent, rather than a month of increased sectarian attacks.¹⁸⁴ He also urged the Mahdi Army to help return displaced Iraqis, both Sunnis and Shi'ites, to their homes, using "peaceful and diplomatic methods."¹⁸⁵

The Mahdi Army's role in perpetuating the civil conflict was seemingly related to al-Sadr's lack of direct control over the military wing. Moqtada al-Sadr, whose father once professed unity of all Islam, found himself increasingly drawn into the sectarian conflict. The breakup of the Mahdi Army into rogue elements, however, gave reason to doubt Sadr's ability to maintain his political base. Prime Minister Maliki said of the Mahdi Army, "We don't know what the Mahdi Army means anymore. Some Sunnis now operate in the name of the Mahdi Army and dress in black as well. Ba'athists also, and foreign intelligence."¹⁸⁶ Al-Maliki emphasized that he would continue to work with al-Sadr to find a political solution to the violence. But Sadr's inability to control rogue militias and the blurred distinction between Mahdi militiamen would make the political dialogue futile.

The principal rogue member of the Mahdi Army in the fall appeared to be Abu Dera, a man some referred to as the "Shi'ite Zarqawi." His real name was Ismael Hafidh, according to a *Newsweek* article.¹⁸⁷ In an interview with Reuters, however, Abu Dera – which literally means "father shield" – said that he was simply misunderstood and that he was still loyal to Sadr. He said, "Sunnis are as much my brothers as Shi'ites. My only enemies are the occupiers." He added in response to allegations of torture, "I would never mutilate a human being because Islam

prohibits mutilation.” He blamed the violence in Iraq on the US-led “occupying” forces, adding that al-Maliki was not to blame for sanctioning his attempted capture in mid-October.¹⁸⁸

However, in a written interview with *Time* Abu Dera presented slightly different responses. He said that he was “honored” to be called the Shi’ite Zarqawi and said that his fight was against *takfiris* – a reference to Sunni insurgents – as well as the occupation. He said that his motivation was “a sense of holy duty toward my faith against any hostile enemy of my faith.” The *Time* article stated that sources did not concur on whether Dera remained a part of the Mahdi Army, but as long as he maintained some ties to al-Sadr, Prime Minister Maliki was unlikely to sanction more raids against him.¹⁸⁹

A *New York Times* article about al-Sadr said that the cleric made efforts in 2006 to look the “political part.” In the past, Sadr was described as capricious and image-obsessed, but by the end of 2006 he adopted a more “sophisticated image.” He made several visits abroad to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Iran. A Sadr aide also said that he met regularly with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani’s son to learn “the arts of negotiation and compromise.” However, as Sadr worked on his communication skills, his control of the Madhi Army continued to slip away. At then of 2006 his picture was still visible in the homes of many poor Shi’ites, but his calls for calm went largely unheeded. The aide said that Sadr grew concerned about his waning control and the sectarian violence consuming the capital.¹⁹⁰

In a November 15 address to the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Michael Maples, confirmed that clandestine Mahdi elements operated outside of Sadr’s control. He also said, “Sadr continues to refuse any discussion of disbanding his militia.”¹⁹¹

Following the November 23 bombing attack in Sadr City that killed upwards of 200 people, the Mahdi Army took control of the streets and blamed the US and Iraqi governments for the sectarian violence. Al-Sadr also called on the Sunni Sheikh Hareth al-Dhari, head of the Association of Muslim Scholars, to issue fatwas condemning sectarian killings. He said that one fatwa should “prohibit the killing of all Shi’ite Muslims because this will save the blood of Muslims in Iraq,” and another should prohibit Sunnis from joining forces with al-Qa’ida in Iraq.¹⁹²

Residents in Sadr City reported that the Mahdi Army garnered significant political support in their handling of the aftermath of the bombings. Residents said that the Mahdi Army moved the wounded and killed, setup checkpoints, and provided food, clothing, medical supplies, and cash to families of the deceased and wounded. Shi’ites stated that they saw no evidence of US or Iraqi soldiers helping and most said they would pledge support for the Mahdi Army in the future because they did all the things that the Iraqi government could not do. A Mahdi militiaman interviewed in the *Washington Post* article said that he thought the militia would be impossible to dismantled because it the was the only source of support for many poor Shi’ites and could be trusted.¹⁹³

The Mahdi Army preformed a military like ceremony on November 28 in a show of force, according to the *Washington Times*.¹⁹⁴ A ceremonial gathering, however, did not mean that the Mahdi Army had reunited its rogue components. Militia factions were still very much out of Sadr’s control at the end of 2006 and it unlikely that militiamen would restrain themselves in reprisal attacks for the Sadr City bombing.

The *Washington Post* reported that a senior US intelligence official estimated that the Mahdi Army had grown eightfold in 2006 and maintained 40,000 to 60,000 militiamen at the end of the year.¹⁹⁵ Other reports estimated that there were 10,000 fighters in 2005 and close to 60,000 in 2006.¹⁹⁶ And *USA Today* said that the militia had 6,000 to 10,000 fighters in Baghdad. Reporting on the number of militia fighters in the Mahdi Army and other death squads varied greatly and it remained unclear at the end of 2006 how many fighters were involved in the daily sectarian violence. What was clear, however, was that violence spread from Baghdad to surrounding provinces – primarily Salahaddin, Diyala, Maysan, and Basra – in October and November, involving more Iraqis in reprisal attacks and forcing civilians to turn to militias and neighborhood gangs for protection.

Militia Tactics

Militia tactics shifted in the fall of 2006, but focused on the same trends that had been used since the February Samarra mosque bombing. In October, the US military and Iraqi morgue officials said that 90% of the sectarian killings were done in execution style, after the victim was kidnapped and tortured. Most of the bodies were left on the streets during the night and found by police or civilians in the morning.

The *New York Times* reported that Mahdi militiamen were offering their “services” to Shi’ite families who had recently lost loved ones. The article recounts how militiamen arrived at funeral of a Shi’ite man killed in a Sunni area with car trunks full of Sunnis from the area. The Mahdi members then asked the Shi’ite family if they would like the Sunnis to be killed for revenge. If a family declines the offer, the Mahdi Army would offer them a monetary compensation for their loss.¹⁹⁷ Both methods were geared at soliciting widespread support from Shi’ites and at the end of 2006 it appeared to be working.

Relationship with External Forces

Throughout the life of the war in Iraq, the US accused al-Sadr and the Mahdi Army of collaborating with Iran and receiving weapons and financing from their fellow Shi’ite neighbor. American officials also said that Iranian Revolutionary Guard and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security actively trained Shi’ite militiamen in Iraq. US intelligence officials also believed that Mahdi Army fighters had been trained by Hezbollah in Lebanon – widely believed to be Al-Sadr’s model for his militia.

In late November the *New York Times* reported that according to an American intelligence official 1,000 to 2,000 Hezbollah fighters trained various Shi’ite militias in Lebanon, although there was no evidence that Iraqis fought alongside their Lebanese counterparts in the July war against Israel. The official also said, “[Iran] has been a link to Lebanese Hezbollah and have helped facilitate Hezbollah training inside of Iraq, but more importantly Jaish al-Mahdi member going to Lebanon.”¹⁹⁸

However, a Sadr aid responded to the article, saying that the Madhi Army did not receive training from Hezbollah. “We confirm that the only relationship we have with Hezbollah is a religious one,” he said. “We emphasize that we didn't send anyone from the militia to Lebanon and no one from Hezbollah came here to train the Mahdi Army.”¹⁹⁹

Changes in the Nature of the Sunni Insurgency

In the fall of 2006 the Sunni insurgency used the same tactics it had throughout the war. Sunni residents in Baghdad, fearful of Shi'ite militias, relied on neighborhood gangs, insurgent groups, and the US military for protection.

In a November 15, 2006 report to Congress, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency said, "The Sunni Arab-based insurgency has gained strength and capacity despite political progress and security force developments. Nationwide, insurgents still conduct most attacks against the Coalition and ISF and retain the resources, capabilities, and support to sustain high levels of violence."²⁰⁰

The *Washington Post* reported that Sunnis formed neighborhood militias to protect themselves from Shi'ite reprisal attacks following the large-scale bombing in Sadr City on November 23, 2006. Clerics from the Ghazaliya, Amiriyah and Adhamiya neighborhoods made joint announcements to Sunnis: "Open fire toward any gunmen who enters the city, such as the Mahdi Army, except the Americans, because they come to protect the people from the death squads and guard the neighborhood." The 25 volunteers to organize the neighborhood gangs were given AK-47 rifles.²⁰¹ Sunnis were clearly preparing for reprisal attacks similar to those that occurred following the bombing of the Shi'ite Samarra mosque in February.

The announcement from the Sunni Imams showed the change in Sunni perception of the US military that occurred in 2006. After the Samarra mosque bombing US forces tried to protect Sunnis from Shi'ite revenge killings, and Sunnis gradually found that the US military was not collaborating the Shi'ite death squads. Since February 2006, Sunnis in Baghdad increasingly relied on the US military and loosely coordinated neighborhood death squads for protection. Sunnis in Baghdad had little or no faith in the Shi'ite led government and security forces, and many believed that they would be either killed or forced to relocate to Anbar Province if US forces withdrew.

The *Los Angeles Times* also reported on the growth of Sunni neighborhood gangs to counteract Shi'ite militias in the capital. None of the Sunni groups were as large or powerful as the Mahdi Army and they were far more loosely organized, but nonetheless there were a variety of options for Sunnis looking to take up arms.

In the neighborhood of Dora, a Sunni man decided to join former Ba'athists for protection and revenge. He summed up the sentiments of many Sunnis in Baghdad when he said, "We have zero trust in the Iraqi army and minus-zero trust in the police." He said that the Ba'athists has organized after the reprisal attacks in the wake of the bombing of the Shi'ite shrine in Samarra. He estimated that in Dora there were between 400 and 500 organized fighters patrolling the streets and setting up checkpoints, but the total force loosely organized under the former Ba'athists included between 2,000 and 2,500 fighters organized in 50 man companies.

Neighborhood Sunni gangs had previously not worried US military officials because they were seen as taking primarily defensive measures and lacked the strength and political clout of the Shi'ite Mahdi Army and Badr Brigade. However, in the wake of the mass bombing attack in Sadr City on November 23, it appeared that some Sunni groups were coordinating with more powerful insurgents to prevent and revenge Shi'ite reprisal attacks.

A Sunni man in a western Baghdad neighborhood said that his neighborhood watch had formed in September and had fought the Mahdi Army the day after the Sadr City bombings. He said that his 100-man force included former Ba'athists and intelligence officials and guarded about 500 Sunni homes. However, he added, "The mujahedin are helping us. Today two cars with gunmen came from Abu Ghraib to help us defend our mosques and our area from militia attacks."²⁰² More closely organized and coordinated Sunni death squads would clearly mean more volatile and larger scale encounters with Shi'ite militias and full-scale civil war.

The *Washington Times* reported that Sunni fighters from various groups were trying to form alliances in an attempt to counteract the power of the Shi'ite Mahdi Army. However, Sunni insurgents and neighborhood gangs were so diverse and numerous it seemed unlikely that any cohesive alliance could form.²⁰³ The *Iraq Study Group Report* also said, "The insurgency has no single leadership but is a network of networks."²⁰⁴

Evolving Tactics

Insurgents continued to use tactics that they had worked well throughout the war: mass kidnappings, mass bombings, kidnappings of Iraqi professionals/government workers, targeting Iraqi security forces, and body dumps. In the fall of 2006, insurgents adapted their tactics to stay one step ahead of US-led forces. The urban warfare of Baghdad was a haven for snipers and hidden IEDs. Trash collectors found bombs on a regular basis hidden beneath the mounds of trash in the capital. In another attack seven bicycles, with detonators hidden under the seats, exploded in a Shi'ite market, killing seventeen.²⁰⁵ It was these shifting tactics that US and Iraqi forces found so difficult to anticipate and prevent.

The day after Saddam Hussein received the verdict condemning him to death, the former Ba'ath party threatened to attack the Green Zone if the sentence was carried out. An internet statement by the group said that the party would "use all possible means to destroy embassies, as well as the headquarters of intelligence and treacherous organizations."²⁰⁶

Another internet video posted in mid-November and attributed to al-Masri reaffirmed al-Qa'ida in Iraq's perseverance against US military "occupation." The video mocked President Bush's strategy in Iraq after republicans suffered heavily in mid-term congressional elections. Al-Masri challenged the US to keep troops in Iraq and said that he had 12,000 fighters under his control. He also called on all Sunnis to support a Sunni autonomous region in Western Iraq under Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. He added that the al-Qa'ida would not stop fighting until the White House was destroyed, leaving little doubt at the end of 2006 that the insurgency in Iraq was going to concede defeat in the near future.²⁰⁷

A Sunni TV station that the government shut down following controversial programming of Saddam Hussein's sentencing opened up a rogue studio and began broadcasting anti-Shi'ite messages. The station backed attacks against Shi'ites and urged Sunnis to "kill them before they kill you." The station was once seen as inflammatory and Ba'athist, but increasingly attracted more Sunni watchers in the violence torn capital.²⁰⁸

In his speech to the Senate Armed Services Committee on November 15, Lt. Gen. Michael Maples, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said, "Al-Qa'ida in Iraq's targeting strategies have not changed significantly in the wake of al-Zarqawi's death on 7 June, and attacks against Iraqi government targets and Coalition forces continue apace." He also said that

al-Qa'ida in Iraq tried to "sow sectarian tension and undermine confidence in democracy..." The DIA concluded that al-Qa'ida in Iraq still "operates with relative freedom in Iraq's Sunni-dominated territories."²⁰⁹

The *New York Times* reported that Sunni insurgents with ties to Al-Qa'ida started attacking coalition forces using more conventional tactics. In mid-November US forces fought insurgents in the town of Turki, in Diyala Province. US commanders said that the Sunni insurgents deployed a platoon sized unit and stood and fought in "perfect military formation" and "were disciplined and well trained, with well-aimed shots."

The insurgents built trenches and had stored caches, including antiaircraft missiles. After two days of pitched battles, US forces called in airstrikes. At least 72 insurgents were killed as were two American officers, but the conventional military battle surprised US forces who were accustomed to hunting down single insurgents after a sniper attack or a carbomb explosion. The US military said they suspected that several training grounds for insurgents existed in rural Diyala Province – where coalition forces had little oversight.²¹⁰

MNF-Iraq announced in late November that since 2004, coalition forces captured over 7,000 al-Qa'ida in Iraq operatives, and 30 senior level al-Qa'ida were caught since July 2006. Gen. Caldwell said that the debriefings of al-Qa'ida members led the US military to conclude that al-Qa'ida in Iraq had three main goals:²¹¹

- The first goal, as they have stated to us in the briefings, is controlling the Sunni population. Al-Qa'ida in Iraq is looking to dominate Baghdad. They hope to convince the Sunni people that resistance to unity is a realistic goal and that al-Qa'ida in Iraq is the best avenues for sectarian-based resistance. Part of this strategy, they told us, is that murder and intimidation of Sunnis who are brave and foresighted enough to work towards reconciliation.
- Their second goal is to weaken the Iraqi government. A strong and unified and representative Iraqi government that is the only legitimate authority to terrorism, they want to weaken. So al-Qa'ida in Iraq consistently looks to destroy faith in the democratically elected representatives of the Iraqi people. It seeks to achieve this through constant attacks against public servants and those who may serve with them. Al-Qa'ida in Iraq aims to make Sunnis fear cooperative with their own government. They want to convince people that hope is misplaced, that the government cannot offer security or stability.
- The third goal they stated in these debriefings is to attack Shi'a civilians. Al-Qa'ida seeks to divide. They do this by targeting Shi'a, by seeking to create distrust and fear in order to incite retribution. We know that al-Qa'ida in Iraq has issued orders to attack the Shi'a population. The attacks in Sadr City last week were a vivid reminder of al-Qa'ida in Iraq's strategy of executing high-visibility, high-casualty producing attacks against civilian targets in order to sow division among Iraqis along sectarian lines.

The Role of Foreign Volunteers

US and Iraqi joint raids continued to find foreign fighters. The Iraqi Army arrested 34 people in Baquba on November 8 for violent acts, including five Egyptians and five Sudanese.²¹² In a November 19 Press Briefing, Gen. Caldwell said that on average 50-70 foreign fighters were crossing the Syrian border a month. He also said that Iraqi security forces and coalition forces had killed about 425 fighters in 2006 and captured 670 – through November 10. Roughly 20% of the foreign fighters came from Syria, 20% came from Egypt, 12% came from Saudi Arabia, and 13% came from Sudan.²¹³

General Abizaid, Commander of USCENTCOM, maintained that the most foreign fighters flowed to Iraq and Iraq remained the hotbed for al-Qa'ida activity.²¹⁴ Gen. Michael Hayden,

Director of the CIA, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that only a “small fraction” of those killed in Iraq were foreign fighters. He estimated that the figure was slightly greater than 3% and that Iraqis themselves were perpetrating the rest of the violence in Iraq. Gen. Hayden stated that the overall number of foreign fighters in Iraq was 1,300,²¹⁵ which the *Iraq Study Group Report* agreed with.²¹⁶

Financing the Insurgency

In late November, the *New York Times* reported that the Sunni insurgency in Iraq had enough funds to sustain itself. The majority of the funding came from oil smuggling, kidnappings, counterfeiting, and corrupt charities. A classified US government report obtained by the *Times* said the insurgency raised between \$70 million to \$200 million a year from illegal activities, up to half of which came from oil smuggling and “corrupt and complicit” oil officials. Another \$36 million a year came from ransoms paid for kidnapped victims, including by foreign governments.

The report said, “Sources of terrorist and insurgent finance within Iraq – independent and foreign sources – are currently sufficient to sustain the groups’ existence and operation... If recent revenue and expense estimates are correct, terrorist and insurgent groups in Iraq may have enough surplus funds with which to support other terrorist organizations outside of Iraq.”

The report indicated that the insurgency was no longer reliant on funds secured by former Ba’athists during the US led invasion. Islamic charities, however, may be contributing to the insurgency as well. According to intelligence cited in the report, only ten to fifteen of the 4,000 nongovernmental groups supported insurgents. The report did acknowledge that investigators met several obstructions in trying to find the insurgency’s money trail, which explained the wide margin. Yet the ability of the Iraqi insurgency to sustain itself meant that attacks in Iraq would not decrease in the near future for the lack of funds.²¹⁷

Looking at the Numbers: Overall Attack Patterns and Levels of Violence

The growth of Shi’ite militias in 2006 and their hostile interactions with Sunnis was a fundamental change in the nature of the security situation.

Overall attacks in October averaged 180 a week, according to Gen. Maples, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.²¹⁸ The weeks following the end of Ramadan saw a 41% decline in sectarian killings, according to Maj. Gen. William Caldwell, MNF-I spokesman.²¹⁹

General Abizaid, commander of CENTCOM, said in November that 80% of sectarian killings took place within 35 miles of Baghdad.²²⁰ Daily reprisal killings, mortar attacks, abduction, IEDs, and suicide bombers continued to wreak havoc in the capital at the end of 2006. Although attacks decreased at the end of Ramadan, several large scale attacks against Shi’ites started the flow of violence again.

Bombings

Bombings continued to be a source of large scale attacks in Baghdad. Suicide bombers, IEDs, and car bombs all took a heavy toll on Iraqi civilians and US forces in the fall and early winter of

2006. The following bombing attacks show the scale of violence throughout Iraq, but particularly in Baghdad:

- November 2, 2006: A motorcycle bomb killed seven people and wounded 45 others in Sadr City. A roadside bomb in a market killed a man and wounded 22 others in the eastern New Baghdad district of the capital.
- November 4, 2006: A bicycle bomb exploded in Suwayra, wounding 11. A car bomb exploded in the town of Mahmudiya, killing one civilian and wounding three others. A car bomb exploded in al-Talbiya in eastern Baghdad near Sadr City, killing two people and wounding five.
- November 5, 2006: A bomb exploded near a police patrol in Hawija, wounding five people, including two policemen.
- November 7, 2006: A roadside bomb targeting a US military patrol killed three civilians, including a student, and wounded eight others in Falluja. A roadside bomb near a house killed two people in Iskandariya.
- November 8, 2006: A car bomb targeted police commandos, wounding four of them in the eastern Baladiyat district of Baghdad. A car bomb killed a man and wounded six others in northern Baghdad. A car bomb in a busy market wounded 22 people in the town of Mahmudiya. Baghdad police found 29 bodies. A car bomb killed three people and wounded three in the southwestern Amil district of Baghdad.
- November 9, 2006: A roadside bomb wounded three people in southern Baghdad. A car bomb targeting an Iraqi army patrol killed a soldier and wounded four civilians in Palestine Street in northeastern Baghdad. In the eastern Zayouna district of the capital a car bomb blew up and wounded two policemen who were trying to dismantle it. A roadside bomb wounded four in New Baghdad district. A car bomb targeting an Iraqi army patrol killed two people and wounded four others, both soldiers and civilians, near the college of Fine Arts in north central Baghdad. A car bomb killed seven people and wounded 27 others in Qahira district in northern Baghdad. A roadside bomb in Tal Afar killed four and wounded eight.
- November 10, 2006: A roadside bomb exploded near an Iraqi army patrol, wounding two soldiers in Kirkuk. A suicide car bomber hit an army checkpoint, killing a colonel and four soldiers, and wounding 17 people including 10 soldiers in Tal Afar.
- November 11, 2006: A roadside bomb exploded near a police patrol, seriously wounding four policemen in Kirkuk. Another roadside bomb in Kirkuk wounded three policemen. A suicide car bomber attacked a police station, killing two people, including one woman, in Zaghinya. A roadside bomb in eastern Baghdad killed one civilian. A roadside bomb killed one motorist and wounded five others in eastern Baghdad. Two car bombs killed eight people and wounded at least 38 others when they exploded in succession in central Baghdad's Shorja market.
- November 12, 2006: A roadside bomb wounded five people in southwestern Um al-Maalif district of Baghdad. A roadside bomb killed two people and wounded 13 in the southwestern Radhwaniya district of Baghdad. A car bomb killed two people and wounded seven in the central Karada district of the capital. A car bomb near a primary school killed three people and wounded 15, including students, in Yusufiya. A roadside bomb wounded police colonel Abbas al-Dulaimi, head of the US-Iraqi Joint Coordination Centre in Tikrit. A car bomb followed by a roadside bomb killed three people and wounded seven others in central Baghdad. A suicide bomber walked into a police-recruiting centre in Baghdad and blew himself up, killing 35 people and wounding 58. A roadside bomb exploded in front of the home of a man who worked in an office Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, killing two of his children and seriously wounding a third, according to Sistani's office in Najaf.
- November 14, 2006: A car bomb wounded three people in the northwestern Hurriya district of Baghdad. A car bomb on Rasheed Street in Baghdad killed ten and wounded 25. A car bomb in Tikrit wounded ten, including three policemen.
- November 15, 2006: A suicide car bomb exploded near a funeral in south Baghdad on Wednesday, killing at least three people and wounding 15.
- November 16, 2006: A roadside bomb targeted police commandos, killing one and wounding another near the national stadium of al-Shaab in eastern Baghdad. A bicycle rigged with explosives near a petrol station killed a man and wounded another in the southwestern al-Amil district of Baghdad. A car bomb near a court killed two people and wounded five in northeastern Palestine Street in Baghdad. A car bomb killed one person and wounded four in the northern al-Qahira district of Baghdad. A roadside bomb killed one person and wounded three others in al-Shorja area in central Baghdad.

- November 17, 2006: A car bomb wounded 20 people near a restaurant in the town of Tikrit.
- November 18, 2006: A suicide car bomb at a police checkpoint in Haditha, west of Baghdad, killed one policeman and wounded another. A suicide car bomber wounded seven Iraqi soldiers when he attacked an army checkpoint on the northern outskirts of Mosul. A roadside bomb exploded near a police patrol, killing one civilian and wounding two policemen near the town of Latifiya. A roadside bomb exploded in the town of Nassiriya in southern Iraq, killing one child.
- November 19, 2006: A roadside bomb wounded six people in Baghdad's southern Saidiya district. A roadside bomb targeting a police patrol killed three civilians and wounded three policemen in eastern Baghdad. Three near simultaneous explosions, at least two of them car bombs, killed at least six people and wounded 30 at a bus station in the eastern Mashtal district of Baghdad. At least 22 people were killed and 49 wounded when a suicide bomber blew up his vehicle among day laborers waiting to be hired in Hilla. A suicide car bomb near a funeral procession killed three people and wounded 22 in Kirkuk.
- November 21, 2006: A roadside bomb targeting a police patrol wounded nine people, including two policemen, in the eastern Camp Sara district of Baghdad. A US soldier was killed by a roadside bomb in Sallahadin Province. A roadside bomb planted near members of the Facility Protection Services killed seven and wounded another in Iskandariya.
- November 22, 2006: A roadside bomb targeting policemen wounded three in Mosul. A car bomb near an Iraqi army checkpoint and an attack by gunmen killed four people -- a university professor, a traffic police officer and two soldiers -- and wounded three civilians, near the town of Muqdadiya.
- November 23, 2006: Up to six car bombs killed 133 people in a Shi'ite militia stronghold in Baghdad and a further 201 people were wounded, police said.. The death toll rose to 202 after around 40 of the wounded died overnight, police said. Another 250 were wounded and Baghdad was under a curfew. A roadside bomb wounded four police commandos in the southwestern Bayaa district of Baghdad. A roadside bomb targeting a police patrol wounded two policemen and two civilians in Palestine Street in northeast Baghdad.
- November 24, 2006: A double suicide bombing attack killed 22 people and wounded 45 at a market in a Shi'ite district in the northern city of Tal Afar.
- November 26, 2006: A car bomb killed five people and wounded 23 in a crowded market in Haswa.
- November 28, 2006: A man wearing an explosive vest blew himself up next to the convoy of the governor of the northern Iraqi province of Kirkuk, killing a passerby and wounding 12 people. Two car bombs close to west Baghdad's main Yarmouk hospital killed four people and wounded 40, a source at Baghdad police headquarters said.
- November 29, 2006: A suicide car bomber targeting a police station killed one civilian and wounded 23 in Mosul. A roadside bomb targeting a police patrol wounded three people in Ouqba Bin Nafie square in central Baghdad. A suicide car bomber exploded near a police patrol, killing a policeman and wounding five civilians in al-Nidhal Street in central Baghdad. A suicide car bomber targeting a police patrol killed a policeman and wounded seven people, including three policemen, in southwestern Baghdad.
- December 1, 2006: At least three people were killed and 22 wounded when a car bomb blasted a crowded pet market in central Baghdad. A roadside bomb exploded near a minibus, killing one person and wounding four in Latifiya. A suicide car bomber targeted a US patrol, killing two civilians and wounding four in the northern city of Kirkuk. A car bomb exploded in the Hussainiya area of northern Baghdad, killing two people and wounding 13.
- December 2, 2006: Car bombs ripped through a market in a Shi'ite area of central Baghdad, killing 60 people.
- December 3, 2006: A suicide bomber blew up a car near the convoy of a senior police officer, killing three of his guards and wounding two others near Kirkuk, police said. A roadside bomb wounded six people near al-Shaab Stadium in east-central Baghdad. A suicide car bomb exploded near a police patrol in Mosul, killing two and wounding four. Three people were killed and two wounded when a car was shot at by a passing vehicle near Latifiya. A car bomb exploded at an intersection near a bakery in the northern Baghdad district of Qahira, killing three people and wounding 10.
- December 5, 2006: Three car bombs near a fuel station killed 16 people and wounded 25 in the southwestern Bayaa district of Baghdad. A car bomb in a market killed two people and wounded nine in Amil district in southwestern Baghdad.

- December 6, 2006: A bomb inside a shop killed its owner and three others and wounded 12 in the town of Iskandariya. A suicide bomber blew himself up inside a minibus in Sadr City, killing three people and wounding 16.
- December 8, 2006: A car bomb targeting an Iraqi army checkpoint in Tal Afar killed three civilians and wounded 15 people.
- December 9, 2006: Three people were killed and three wounded in a car bomb explosion in Mosul. A suicide car bomber killed seven people and wounded 44 in a crowded market in the holy Shi'ite city of Karbala, hospital sources said. Police put the death toll at six, with 44 hurt.
- December 10, 2006: A roadside bomb targeting a US military patrol killed a soldier and wounded another west of Baghdad. Three US soldiers were killed and two wounded by a roadside bomb in Baghdad. A roadside bomb targeting an Iraqi army patrol wounded three people in Yarmouk district in western Baghdad.
- December 11, 2006: A suicide car bomber blew himself up near a house used as a base by police commandos, killing a policeman and wounding five others in Dora district in southern Baghdad. A roadside bomb went off in Palestine Street in western Baghdad, killing one person and wounding six. A car bomb exploded in a parking lot of Mahmoud University in Baghdad, killing one person and wounding four others, including two policemen.
- December 13, 2006: A roadside bomb killed one person and wounded three others when it exploded near the city council of Jurf al-Sakhar. A car bomb wounded two people when it exploded near al-Yarmouk hospital in western Baghdad. A car bomb exploded in a crowded area of Kamaliya in eastern Baghdad, killing 10 people and wounding 25. Two car bombs exploded simultaneously in eastern Baghdad's religiously mixed New Baghdad district, killing five people and wounding 10.

Mortar Attacks

Mortar and rocket attacks increased in the first week of November. Exchanges of fire between Sunni and Shi'ite neighborhoods in Baghdad lit up the night, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Mortar fire between Kadhimiya and Adhamiya left several dead and dozens injured. Mortar rounds also fell on a soccer field in Sadr City, killing eight. Mortar rounds struck the downtown Shorja wholesale market, killing two people and injuring eight. A mortar round also struck near the Health Ministry, killing three and injuring six. The government downplayed the sectarian violence between neighborhoods, and blamed the mortar attacks on Sunni insurgents in Taji.²²¹

AP reported in mid November that mortar rounds became almost a daily occurrence between neighborhoods in Baghdad. Sectarian violence in the capital drove most Sunnis and Shi'a to relocate to sectarian enclaves, and mortar attacks became the new deadly tactic when entering neighborhoods of the opposite sect was too dangerous. Mortar rounds caused significant civilian casualties in November, and gave another example of the move towards widespread civil conflict.²²²

Insurgents also coordinated mortar attacks with car bombs in the attack on Sadr City on November 23 and the attack on Shi'ite markets in central Baghdad on December 2. On December 5, two mortar rounds landed on a market, killing two people and wounding five in northern Baghdad and mortar rounds hit a market killing two people and wounding 10 others in Qahira district in northern Baghdad. The following day mortar rounds fell on a busy commercial district of central Baghdad, killing 10 people and wounding 54.

“Body Dumps”

Another comparison shows the growth of “body dumps” in the capital during the fall. During the week that ended on October 14, 176 Iraqis were found on the streets of Baghdad and the following week 143 were recovered. When Operation Together Forward II commenced the first week of August, 52 bodies were found.²²³ In October, November, and December, the following mass “body dumps” provided a bleak picture of daily life in and around Baghdad; smaller numbers were found on a daily basis:

- October 2, 2006: In Baghdad, police recovered the tortured bodies of 40 victims of sectarian violence.
- October 9-10, 2006: Police found the bodies of 60 victims of sectarian violence in the capital.
- October 13, 2006: The bodies of 14 workers, their throats slit and their hands and legs bound were found in an orchard near Dhuluiya. The laborers were from the mostly Shi'ite town of Balad, north of Baghdad.
- October 15, 2006: About 80 bodies were found in 24 hours in the neighboring cities of Balal and Duluiyah.
- October 19, 2006: Police found 31 bodies in Baghdad.
- October 22, 2006: The interior ministry found 50 bodies in 24 hours in Baghdad and three bodies were found in Mosul.
- November 3, 2006: 56 bodies were found in Baghdad in 24 hours.
- November 12, 2006: 22 bodies were found in Baghdad and 12 in Mosul.
- November 14, 2006: Police found 12 bodies bound and shot in Latifiya.
- November 19, 2006: Police found 45 bodies in Baghdad.
- November 20, 2006: Police found 60 bodies in Baghdad.
- November 22, 2006: Police found 52 bodies in Baghdad.
- December 2, 2006: Police found 44 bodies in Baghdad.
- December 3, 2006: Police found six bodies in Mosul and 55 in Baghdad.
- December 4, 2006: Police found six bodies in Mosul.
- December 5, 2006: Police found 60 bodies in Baghdad.
- December 7, 2006: Police found three bodies, with gunshot wounds and signs of torture, in Iskandariya and 52 bodies in Baghdad.
- December 8, 2006: Police found 35 bodies in Baghdad.
- December 10, 2006: Police found 40 bodies in Baghdad.

The Growing Threat of Snipers

Within Baghdad, the growing threat from both Sunni and Shi'ite snipers prompted a US response. An al-Qa'ida video in October 2006 showed two US soldiers being shot by snipers. The footage was blurry, but the accuracy was obvious. The video was posted on a website used by the Mujahedeen Shura Council, according to the *Associated Press*.²²⁴ The US military would not release data on sniper attacks at the time, but it was clear from news reports that there was an increased threat of snipers in Baghdad, and they were becoming more accurate. For example, a US airman was killed on October 14 by a sniper in the capital. The soldier was trying to keep civilians away from a possible bombsite when the sniper shot him in the back of head from behind a building, proving the increased accuracy.²²⁵

The US military also declared the Shi'ite dominated area east of the Tigris a haven for sniper militiamen. A sniper shot a soldier as he traveled door-to-door talking with Iraqi civilians, trying to instill confidence in American forces. An intelligence officer operating next to Sadr City said, “It’s on my mind when I leave the wire. Snipers create fear. That’s the whole point of snipers.

It's about stopping us from talking to the people." As a result of the increased sniper threat in the early fall, US units began patrolling in Bradley vehicles rather than more vulnerable humvees. Soldiers also learned to run through open areas and scan rooftops to avoid the more accurate gunmen.²²⁶

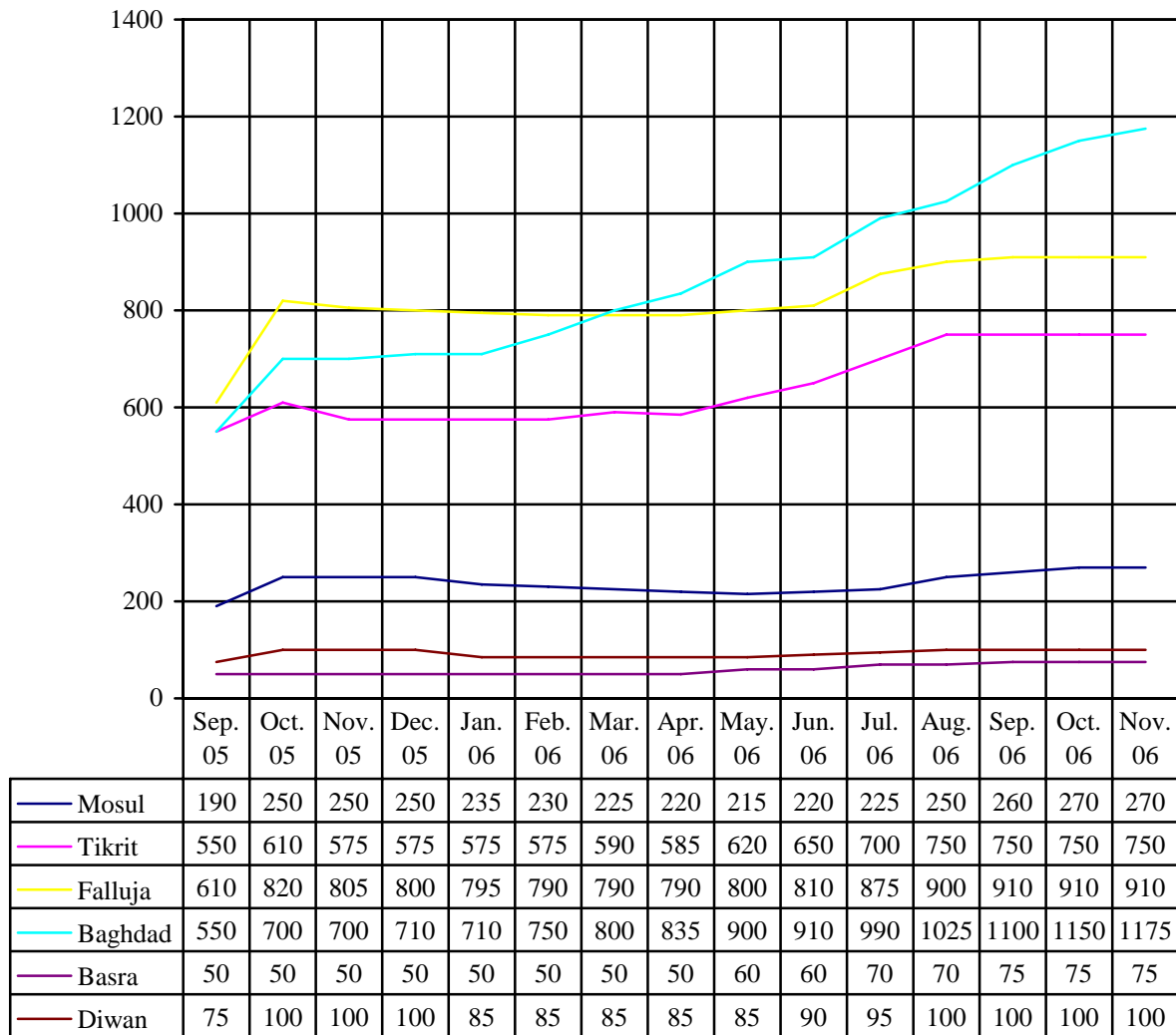
The US military caught a sniper during an operation in late October. The man had a high-powered scope, a video camera, and a hole in the trunk of his car so he could target US troops without being seen. To combat the sniper problem, the US military deployed counter sniper teams to search for snipers in neighborhoods that the troops knew well.²²⁷

In early November, the *New York Times* reported that the US military had held an internal conference about the sniper problem, but there seemed to be no easy tactical answer. US marines in Anbar province were struck by the sudden increased accuracy and frequency of sniper attacks. Marines noted that they rarely saw the elusive snipers and that most attacks seem to come when the marines are not engaged in active combat and from up to 300 away.

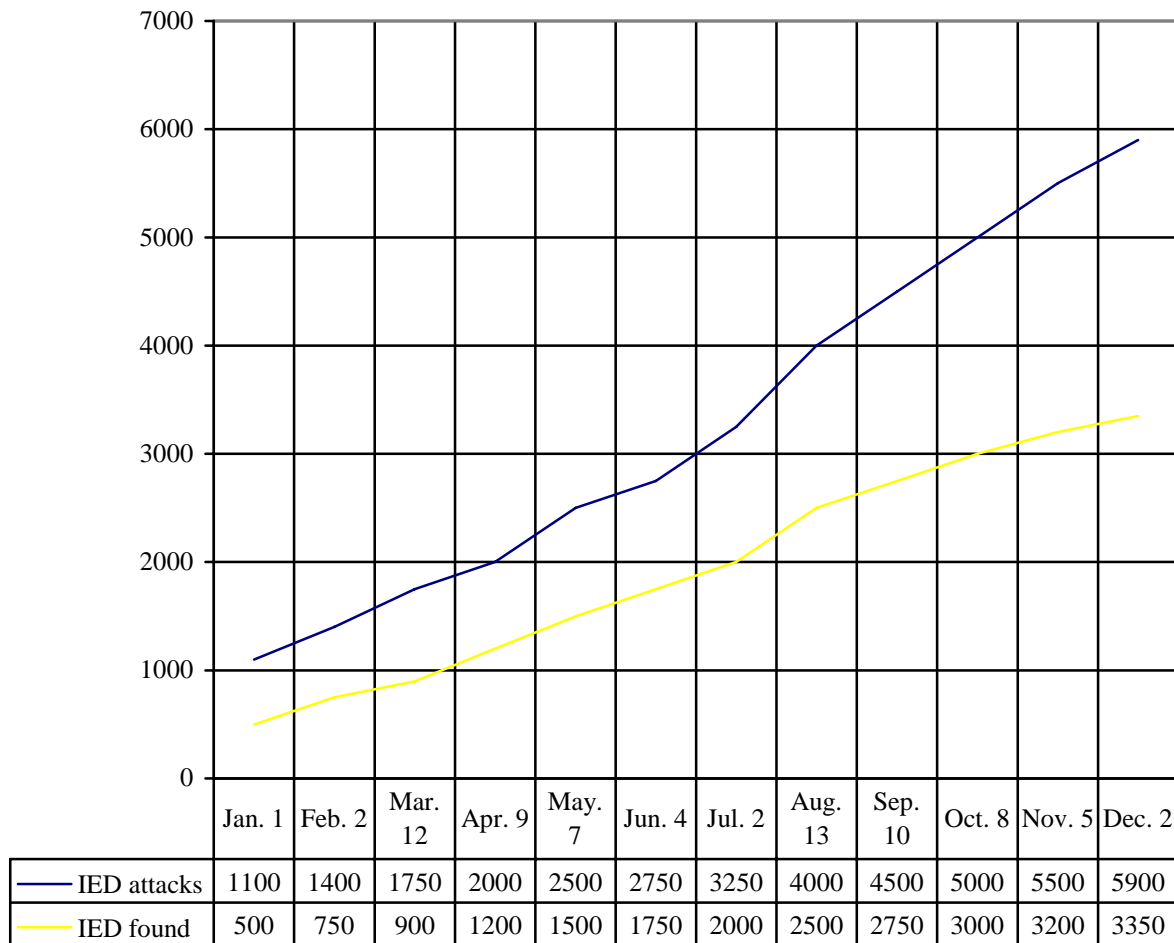
The *Times* article said that snipers often used long barreled Dragunov rifles and hit on platforms, rooftops, and within cars. A general in Anbar said that insurgents began creating sniper training camps in the fall of 2006. He said, "We heard from some of our sources that the insurgents were going around with loudspeakers, saying that if you want to be a sniper we will pay you three times what your salary is now." He also explained, "the sniper teams have a network of spotters, and that each time the marines leave their outpost, spotters hidden among the Iraqi population call the snipers and tell them where the marines are and what they are doing."

Most of the time snipers only took one shot, which allowed them to get away quickly. They also tended to target marine radiomen. To combat the sniper problem, marine units began limited foot patrols during the day, and if they did leave their vehicles, they tried to quickly step inside homes and buildings to talk with residents rather than standing on the street. Soldiers also walked in zigzag lines and moved their heads up and down. Troops continued to patrol streets on foot at night because sniper technology had not achieved precision in the dark.²²⁸

Figure 2: Average Significant Attacks in Major Iraqi Cities September 2005-November 2006



Source: Material adapted from information provided in personal correspondence of the author, December 13, 2006.

Figure 3: Cumulative Summary of IED attacks and IEDs found in Baghdad, 2006

Source: Material adapted from information provided in personal correspondence of the author, December 13, 2006.

Attacks on the Media

Attacks on the media increased in the fall of 2006 as international watch groups expressed serious concern. The majority of media victims were Iraqi as insurgents attacked anyone who appeared to support the Shi'ite led government. Shi'ite militias also reportedly attacked Sunni-led media stations.

On November 15, gunmen killed journalist Fadia Johammed al-Taie in Mosul. She worked for the independent weekly newspaper al-Massar. The same day in Baquba, gunmen killed Luma al-Karkhi, who worked for the independent weekly al-Dustor. According to an AP count, 91 journalists had been killed since the US led invasion in 2003.²²⁹ Only two days later Fadiya Muhammad Abid – who also worked for al-Massar – was killed by gunmen in east Mosul.²³⁰

According to the New York based Committee to Protect Journalists, 26 journalists were killed in Iraq in 2006 – the highest number in any year of the war. Of the 91 killed, 64 were Iraqi. There were also seven journalists kidnapped in 2006 and 43 since the war began.²³¹

On November 20, gunmen killed much-loved Iraqi comedian Waleed Hassan on his way to work. Hassan produced a television show that comedied the crisis in Iraq and allowed Iraqis to laugh at their situation – if only for a half hour every evening.²³² On November 22, gunmen killed Ra'ad Jafar Hamadi, a journalist working for the al-Sabah newspaper.²³³ On December 3, Gunmen shot dead Iraqi journalist Nabil al Dulaimi working for a local radio station.

The UN Assistance Mission to Iraq Human Rights Report for September – October stated that the most media workers had been killed in the conflict in Iraq since WWII. The report said that six journalists were killed in September and twelve in October and two media houses were attacked in October – Al-Shaabiya satellite TV on October 11 and Al-Iraqiya satellite TV on October 29. UNAMI also reported that journalists were being prosecuted for alleged defamation of state officials. Many media workers fled Iraq in 2006 while others chose to maintain a low profile.²³⁴

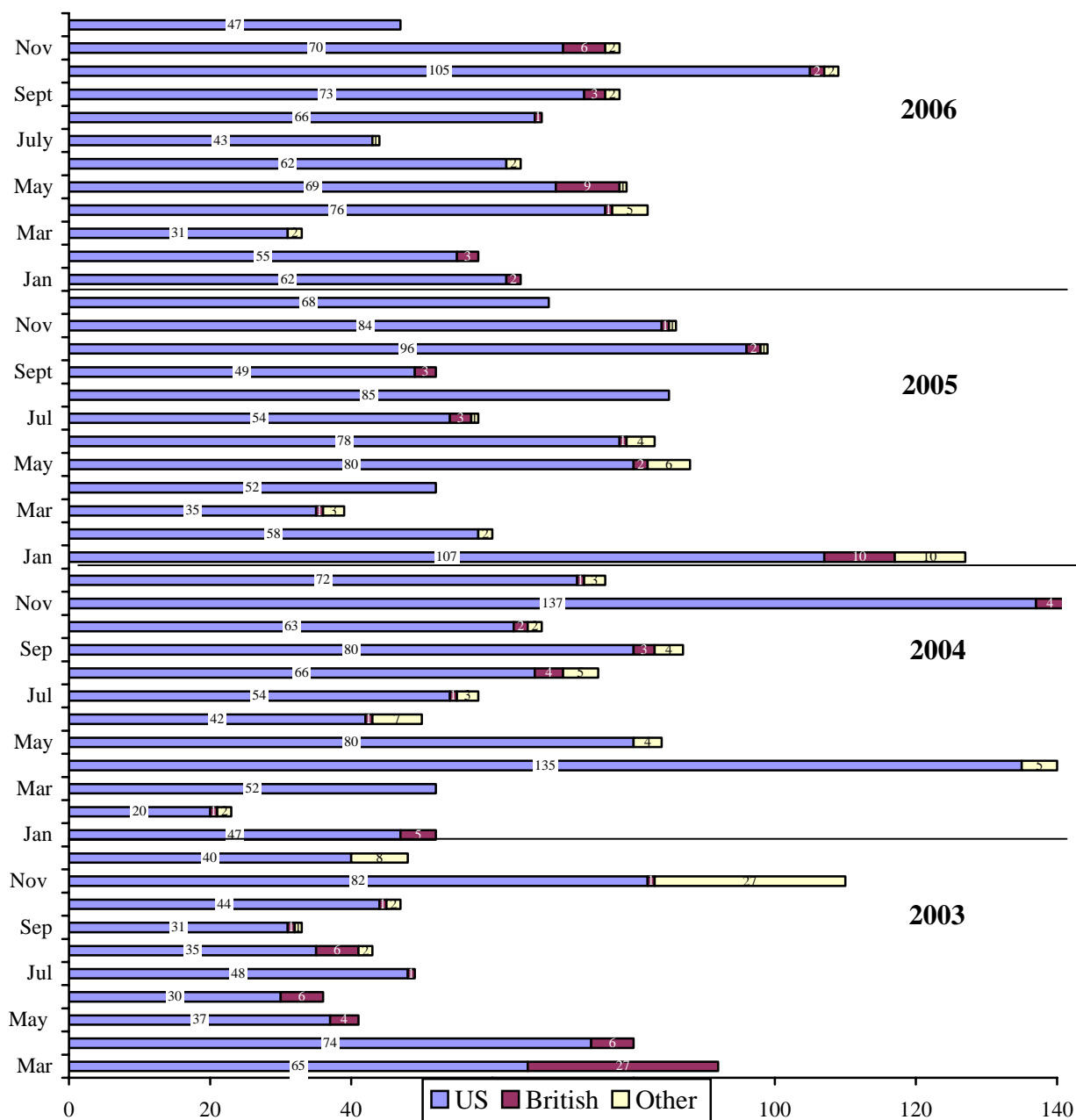
US Casualties

US forces experienced a steady increase in casualties over the summer 2006 both because of more intense attacks in the west and Operation Together Forward in Baghdad. In August al-Qa'ida in Iraq issued a statement calling on insurgents to increase attacks against US soldiers and 74 US soldiers died during September. The first weekend of October proved particularly deadly – 17 US soldiers were killed in four days. Another five US soldiers died on October 14 and ten were killed on October 17. October was the deadliest month in 2006 with a total of 105 killed. At least one-third of the attacks in October occurred in Baghdad, according to the US military.²³⁵ A news article stated that of the 105 killed, 58 were killed by mines and makeshift bombs, eight were killed by snipers, and 30 died from low intensity fighting. An additional six soldiers died in non-hostile incidents. Furthermore, almost one-third of those killed were on extended or multiple tours.²³⁶

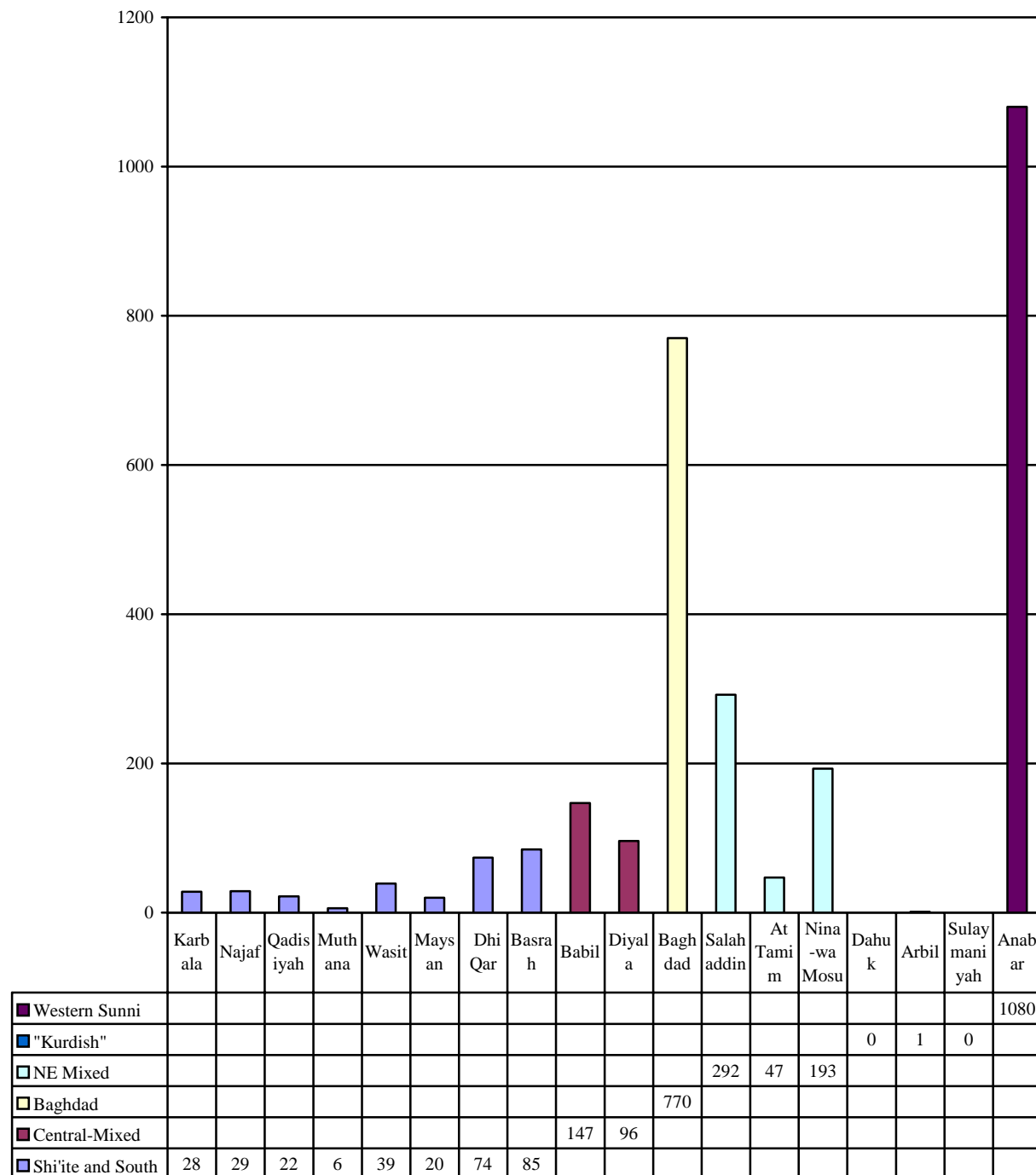
Attacks against US soldiers decreased in November to 70 deaths – 38 by IEDs. Once again, the majority of deaths were in Anbar Province. The first week in December was particularly devastating to US troops with at least 31 soldiers killed. On December 5, eleven US troops were

killed – making it one of the two deadliest days in 2006. Six of the deaths took place in Anbar due to enemy fire, and five soldiers were killed when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb in Kirkuk.²³⁷ In 2006, an average of 40% of US casualties occurred in Anbar.²³⁸

There is a more important message in Figure 5, however, that is often ignored in both military analysis and the media. Figure 5 shows that intense combat produces much sharper swings in the number of wounded than in killed. As a result, the number of both killed and wounded is both a much better measure of combat activity and of the sacrifice that military forces make in combat. The failure to report on wounded is incompetent analysis and incompetent reporting.

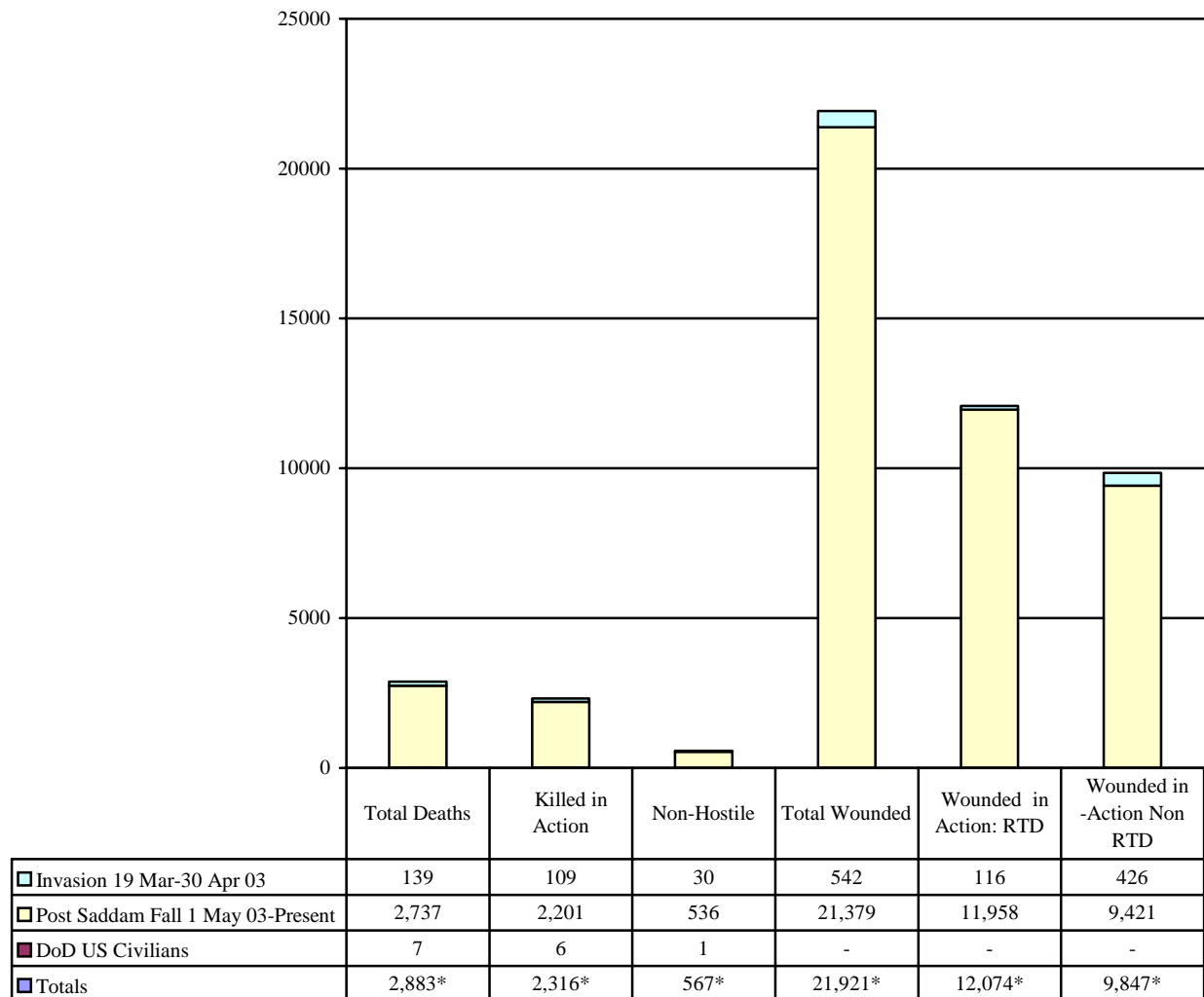
Figure 4: Coalition Deaths By Month and Nationality: March 2003 to December 2006

Source: Adapted from material provided by Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, data as of December 12, 2006, available at: <http://icasualties.org/oif/>

Figure 5: Coalition Casualties by Iraqi Governorate or Province

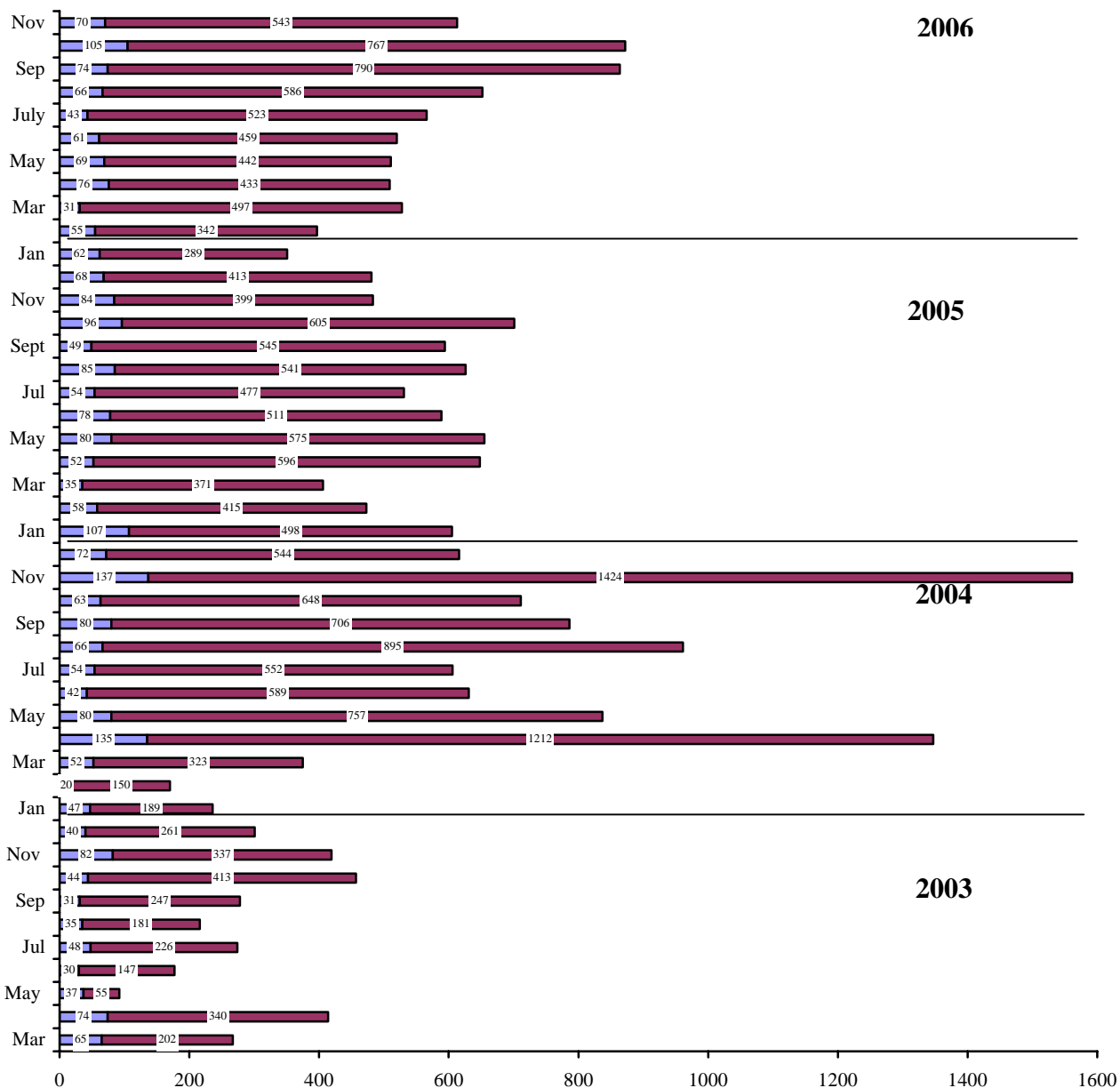
Source: Adapted from material provided by Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, data as of December 12, 2006, available at: <http://icasualties.org/oif/Province.aspx>.

Figure 6: US Casualties in the Iraq War: Total Killed vs. Wounded, March 2003-November 2006

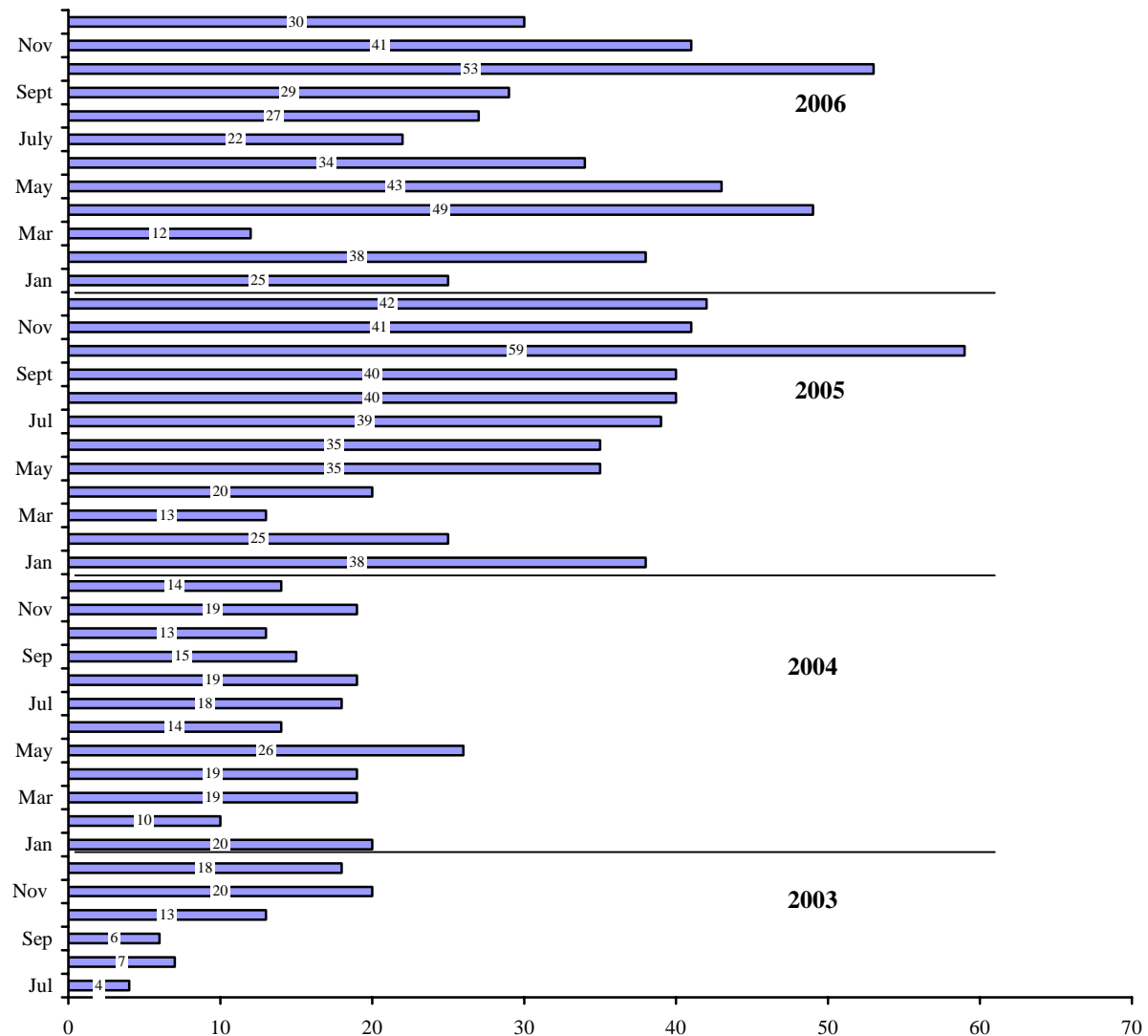


Source: Adapted from material provided by Department of Defense, November 30, 2006, available at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/casualty.pdf>

* Note: Does not include casualties in enforcing no fly zones before March 19, 2003. Wounded-RTD = equals lighter wounded where personnel were returned to duty within 72 hours. Wounded-Non-RTD= more serious wounds where soldier could not be returned to duty within 72 hours.

Figure 7: US Casualties in the Iraq War: Killed vs. Wounded, March 2003-November 2006

Source: Adapted from material provided by Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, data as of November 30, 2006, available at: http://icasualties.org/oif/US_Chart.aspx and <http://icasualties.org/oif/woundedindex.aspx>

Figure 8: US IED Deaths July 2003- December 2006

Source: Adapted from material provided by Iraq Coalition Casualties, data as of December 12, 2006, available at: <http://icasualties.org/oif/IED.aspx>.

Iraqi Casualties

US/MNF-IRAQ/NON-IRAQI SOURCES

Iraqi security forces deaths decreased in September to 150 – the lowest number since June.²³⁹ The decline may have been due to both Operation Together Forward and moving US and Iraqi forces to Baghdad at the cost of the coverage of other areas, which led insurgents to target US troops instead of Iraqis. Since the formation of ISF in 2004, the US military reported on October 6, 2006 that about 4,000 policemen had been killed and 8,000 wounded.²⁴⁰ ISF deaths rose significantly during the month of Ramadan, according to the US military officials. General George Casey announced that the Iraqi Army alone lost 300 men during the Muslim holy month.²⁴¹

In mid-October US military officials announced that in recent weeks there had been significant spikes in violence. The military said that the numbers of killings and bombing had been initially reduced in August. But in October, “The levels of violence over the last few weeks are as high as they have ever been,” said General George Casey.²⁴² US military statistics showed that death squads killed 1,450 people in September, up from 450 in February. And in the first ten days of October, death squads had already killed 770 Iraqis – an average of 77 a day. In previous months, the highest average was 47 daily deaths due to sectarian killings, according to US military data. The averages did not even include deaths due to car bombing or suicide bombing attacks, only assassinations and reprisal killings.²⁴³

In October, General Casey remained optimistic that Operation Together Forward would eventually reduce violence in the capital. He said that spikes in violence were expected, but that the numbers would soon fall again.²⁴⁴

The Defense Intelligence Agency said that daily attacks on Iraqi civilians rose from 10 in January to about 40 in October.²⁴⁵ According to the Associated Press count, 1,923 Iraqi civilians were killed in November.

MNF-Iraq spokesman Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV said that attacks decreased against Iraqi civilian and security forces after the end of Ramadan to the lowest levels since May 2006. Security force casualties decreased 21% in the four weeks following the holy month and in Baghdad casualties related to sectarian violence and executions fell 22%.²⁴⁶ General Abizaid, commander of USCENTCOM, said that 80% of sectarian killings took place within 35 miles of Baghdad.²⁴⁷

The *Iraq Study Group Report* brought to the surface contradictions in the way US agencies recorded threats and violence in Iraq. The report said that one day in July there were 93 attacks reported, but in reality there were 1,100. The issue was that attacks against Iraqis were not necessarily added to the count – only attacks against coalition forces were. The failure to accurately account for attacks against Iraqi civilians and security forces was misleading at best.²⁴⁸

Although numbers of killed reported by US/MNF-I/non-Iraqi sources varied somewhat, the vast majority most likely underrepresented the actual number. As the violence spread out from

Baghdad, the number of Iraqi civilians killed in rural towns and smaller urban areas increased, but often went unreported.

IRAQI GOVERNMENT SOURCES

The Iraqi Health Ministry reported that 2,667 Iraqi civilians were killed violently in September – an increase of 400 from the August statistics. The figure was comprised of the numbers given by the Baghdad morgue and numbers reported from hospitals. In September, the morgue reported 1,471 bodies of people who died from violence and hospitals reported 1,196 victims.²⁴⁹ Morgue officials said that at least 90% of the killings were carried out in execution style – with shots to the head and body after the victim had been tortured.²⁵⁰

Statistics issued by the Interior Ministry for Iraqis killed in “political violence” put civilian deaths in October at 1,289, nearly 42 a day and up 18 percent from the 1,089 seen in September.²⁵¹ The MOI explained that the number was composed of deaths resulting from “political, sectarian, or ethnic killings, as opposed to criminal murder.” MOI also said 139 Iraqi soldiers and police were killed in October – which is far fewer than the 300 announced by US Gen. George Casey.²⁵²

On November 9, the Iraqi Health Minister announced that 150,000 Iraqis had been killed by insurgents since 2003. He also said that for every person killed, about three had been wounded, putting the wounded figure at roughly 450,000.²⁵³

Around 1,600 bodies were taken to Baghdad's morgue in October, an official said – 10% more than in September.²⁵⁴

The September 1 – October 31, 2006 UN Aid Mission to Iraq Human Rights (UNAMI) report published the following numbers from the Iraqi Ministry of Health:²⁵⁵

- 3,345 civilians were killed violently across Iraq in September and the number of wounded was 3,481.
- 3,709 civilians were killed violently across Iraq in October and the number of wounded was 3,944.
- In Baghdad the total number of civilians killed violently was 2,262 in September and 2,722 in October.
- The number of unidentified bodies in Baghdad was 1,471 in September and 1,782 in October.

Data from Interior Ministry officials showed a 44% increase in civilian casualties in November compared with October to 1,850 deaths.²⁵⁶

NGO ESTIMATES

By the end of November 2006, Iraq Body Count estimated that between 49,021 and 54,397 Iraqis had been killed since the US-led invasion in 2003.

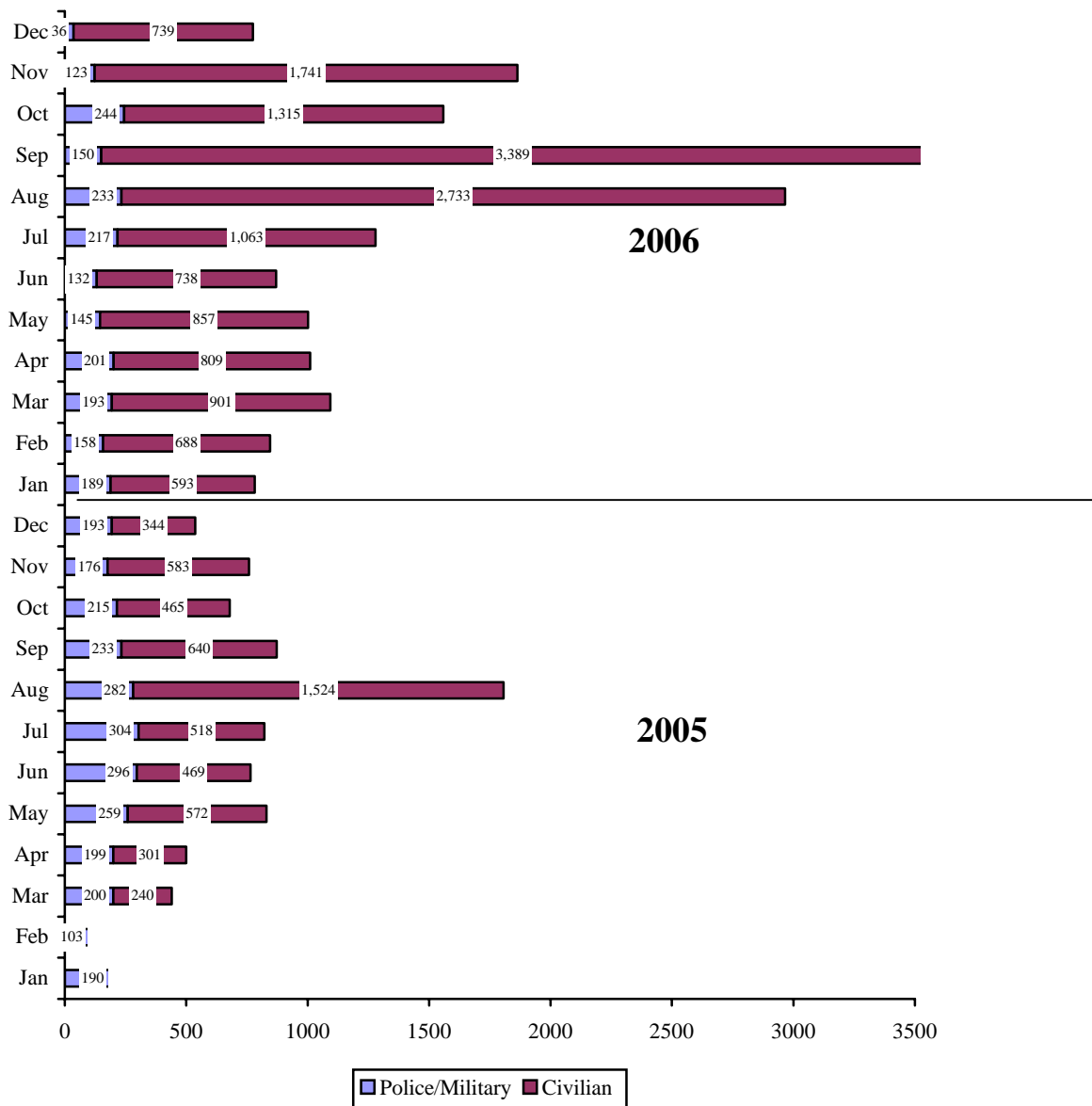
Iraq Coalition Casualties reported 3,539 Iraqi civilian deaths in September, 1,315 in October, and 1,740 in November. ICC also reported 150 security force casualties in September, 244 in October, and 123 in November. Figure 7 shows that according to ICC, September took the heaviest toll on civilians in 2005 and 2006. This figure is higher than the 2,667 deaths reported by the Iraqi Health Ministry, but both numbers are well above average.

The September – October UNAMI report made the following observations about Iraqi deaths during the reporting period:²⁵⁷

Terrorist activities and murders and extra-judicial executions, carried out by death squads linked to militias, often in collusion with or the support of Iraqi police, as well as indiscriminate killings of civilians as a

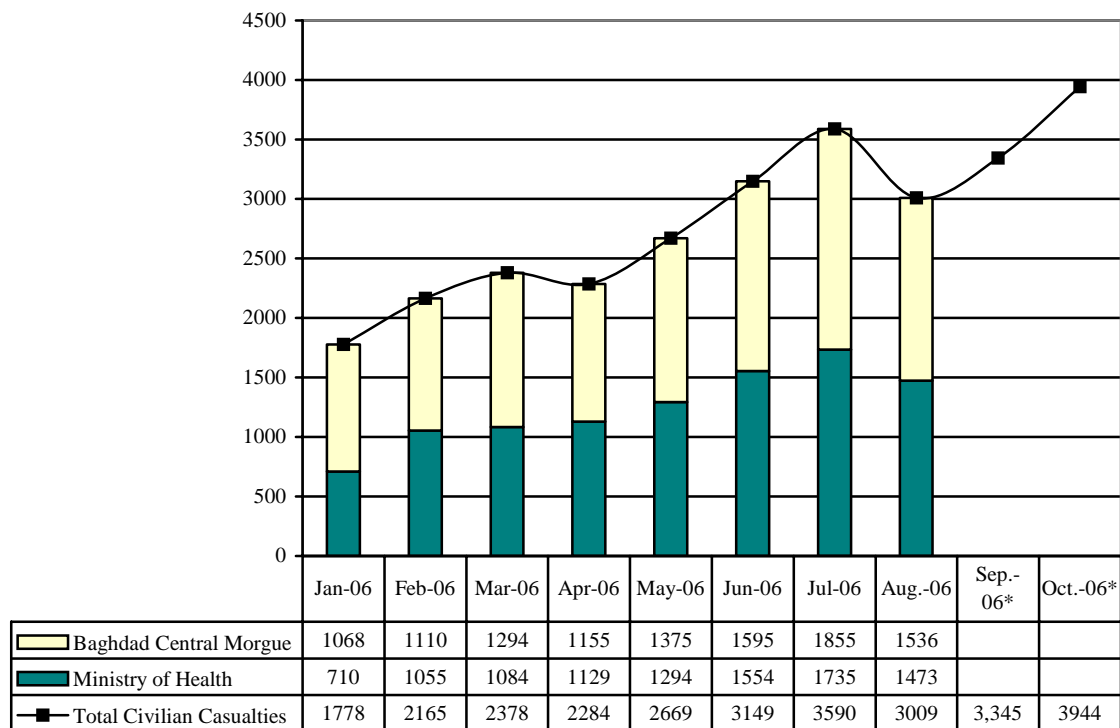
result of suicide bombings and mortar or rocket attacks, are the main cause of Iraqi deaths. Hundreds of civilians continued to be kidnapped and their bodies subsequently scattered in different parts of Baghdad, handcuffed, blindfolded and bearing signs of torture and execution style killing.

Figure 9: Total Iraqi Security Force and Civilian Casualties by Month: January 2005-December 2006



Source: Adapted from material provided by Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, December 12, 2006, available at: <http://icasualties.org/oif/IraqiDeaths.aspx>

Figure 10: Civilian Casualties Reported by Baghdad Central Morgue and Iraqi Ministry of Health: January – October 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.

*note: In September and October, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq Human Rights Report did not separate out deaths reported by the Ministry of Health and deaths reported by the Baghdad Morgue.

The Kurdish Dimension: Dangerously Overlooked

The Kurds played an increasingly important role in the future of Iraq in 2006. In the fall, the key issues for the Kurds were separating the country into autonomous regions, control over oil resources, the issue of Kirkuk, and relations with Turkey. The Kurds continued to remind Iraq's national government that they were cooperating and participating in the reconciliation dialogue on a voluntary basis only.

With the passing of the segregation bill in Parliament in early October, the Kurds scored a huge success. Greater autonomy would principally grant the Kurds a monopoly on oil in the northern region, which was expected to have untapped reserves. Greater Kurdish autonomy, however, was monitored closely by neighboring Turkey. Turkey reiterated the need to curtail the rebel activities of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and pledged protection to the minority Turkoman population in Iraq, especially Kirkuk.

Throughout 2006, the PUK discussed reform, but the principle issue was future leadership. Three power grouping emerged in support of leading figures – Nawshirwan Mustafa, Kosrat Rasoul, and Talibani. The political debate over future leadership was so intense by the end of 2006 that it seemed capable of divided the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was also fighting internally, with severe accusations of corruption of the Barzani family. In 2006 the PUK and KDP continued to compete within the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), but few reforms were made for the benefit of Kurdistan.²⁵⁸

As the sectarian violence spread from Baghdad to surrounding regions, the Kurdish position on the civil war was unclear. Some Kurdish politicians said they expected Kurdistan to separate itself from the rest of Iraq if the fighting reached far enough north, but the issues of resources and Kirkuk could force the KGR to become military involved. Kurdish leaders vehemently disapproved of a recommendation in the *Iraq Study Group Report* that called for central control over all oil resources.²⁵⁹

Tensions between Kurds and Other Iraqis

The issue of Kirkuk continued to top both Kurdish and Arab agendas in the fall of 2006. The few US troops stationed in Kirkuk could wander the streets with ease and were accepted by Kurdish residents and people roamed the streets until late at night. However, the peace was unlikely to last much longer, the *Chicago Tribune* reported.

The three step plan for Kirkuk outlined in the Iraqi Constitution set up a timeline for addressing the issue; by March 29, 2007 Kurdish towns and camps that had been administratively excluded from Kirkuk during Saddam Hussein's reign would be re-included; by July 15, 2007 a census of the area would be complete; and by the end of 2007 residents of Kirkuk would hold a referendum to decide if they would join the region of Kurdistan.

Kurdish leaders, however, increasingly indicated that the decision on Kirkuk would not necessarily be reached through the process setup by the Constitution. Sadi Ahmed Pire, leader of the PUK, said, "Kirkuk can be solved two ways: We can discuss it with the neighboring countries and Iraqi communities and solve the situation politically or we can solve it militarily. We hope to solve it peacefully, but this is an issue that cannot wait. It will be resolved."

If the civil conflict between Sunnis and Shi'ites spread as far north as Kirkuk, Kurdish politicians said they expected the KRG would "separate" Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq. And it was clear that the Kurds included Kirkuk with the rest of Kurdistan – for historical and economic reasons.²⁶⁰ The KRG's position on the civil conflict between Sunnis and Shi'ites, however, was still unclear. Kurdistan repeatedly reminded the Iraqi government that their national participation was voluntary, yet if the question of Kirkuk came to military blows, the Kurds could find themselves tied to the greater civil war.

The "Other Iraq"?

As 2006 drew to a close, Kurdistan launched an advertisement and propaganda initiative to distance itself from the rest of violence torn Iraq. Ads on TV, radio, magazines, and the internet from Kurdistan were all focused on wooing western investors. The ads portrayed Kurds working together to improve their communities and were loaded with images of modernity and prosperity. A young girl says in the TV commercial, "See the promise, share the dream." A website calls Kurdistan "a place where the universities, markets, cafes, and fair grounds buzz with progress and prosperity." The chairman of the ad campaign said that the initiative is aimed at distancing Kurdistan from the crisis in the rest of Iraq, and the region as a whole.

The KRG also passed a law allowing foreign investors to have the same rights as Iraqi investors, such as full ownership of projects and free money transfers. The law also gave investors exemption from noncustoms taxes and duties for a decade. Kurdistan also sought to increase its appeal as a tourist destination, refurbishing museums, castles and mosques.

Several large Arab companies had already begun investing in the region, but US companies were slower to take the bait. Ford, GM, Cummins, Motorola, FedEx, and DaimlerChrysler all visited the region but did not make any long investment decisions. US oil companies were also reluctant to invest because of the security threat to pipeline and workers in Iraq. Despite Kurdistan's ad campaign's assurances of perfect security, foreign investors seemed to favor reality. The chairman said, "The Kurdistan region is secure. It doesn't mean we're immune from terrorist attacks but in terms of all-out civil war, there's no insurgency, there's no terrorism."²⁶¹

Yet to foreign investors, the KRG's history of corruption remained a deterring factor, not to mention PKK rebel activity and potentially serious infighting between the PUK and KDP. It appeared at the end of 2006 that Kurdistan could not disassociate itself in the minds of foreigners with the rest of Iraq and that the region would have to address internal security and legitimacy issues before it could realize its aspirations of modernity.

The Turkish Question

In mid November Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul again condemned the idea of dividing Iraq into three parts. He said, "God forbid, if Iraq breaks up, an unbelievably dark new period will begin. In such an event, Iraq's neighbors will not have the same attitude as today, of course. The world should know this." He also urged Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen in Kirkuk to reach an agreement on oil reserves and political representation to quell Turkish fears that Kirkuk was intended as a capital for the Kurdish north.²⁶² Gul made the statement a week after congressional elections in the US gave democrats the majority in the Senate and House, most likely making separation advocate Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE) chairman of the foreign relations committee.

Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan spoke with al-Maliki in November and pledged Turkey's support of Iraq. Erdogan even offered to help train Iraqi police and army forces. The offer of support underscored Turkey's concerns that the civil conflict in Iraq could spill over into the rest of region.²⁶³

In the fall of 2006 Turkey continued to remind the US and Iraq that it would take quick military action if the Turkoman minority in Iraq was threatened. Turkish officials also closely monitored PKK activity in the Kurdish territories. Turkey's Deputy Chief of General Staff General Ergin Saygun said about Turkey's fight with the PKK, "Our opinion is clear. We will maintain the fight until we ensure that there is not even a single terrorist in the mountains. We cannot accept any other option about the PKK."²⁶⁴

The *Iraq Study Group Report* agreed that the PKK was a top concern for Turkey and that the neighboring country could take action against the PKK themselves, but the report did not offer any recommendations on how the US could solve the PKK problem and ease tensions with Turkey. The report urged the US to consider talks with regional countries – including Turkey – but Ankara's willingness to help stabilize Iraq was directly tied to its concerns over the PKK.

According to a Turkish poll, PKK terrorism ranked top among the public's concerns. The lack of action by both the PUK and KDP in Iraqi Kurdistan against the PKK was interpreted by Turkey as implicit sanctioning of rebel activity. Similarly, the lack of US action against the PKK and calling Kurdistan the most stable region in Iraq offers little incentive for Turkey to help stabilize the warring Shi'ite and Sunni factions. A Washington Institute report hinted that the repercussions of US non-action against the PKK could hurt bilateral relations with Turkey for years to come.²⁶⁵

The Role of Outside States: Accusations Abound

Iraqi leaders made it clear that they did not appreciate interference by outside states in internal affairs. In November, Prime Minister Maliki maintained that neighboring countries were interfering in Iraq affairs. He said, "The issue of security is one that is worrying us. We must say 'stop' to foreign intervention if we are to protect Iraq... We want to live in peace with our neighbors."²⁶⁶

On November 21, Iraqi and Kuwaiti officials announced that the two countries had signed a deal allowing Kuwait to complete construction of a border fence. The deal officially demarcated the border in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 833 issued in 1993. In order to build the fence, Kuwait would have to compensate Iraqi farmers living on the border. The deal also created a "no man's zone" on either side of the fence in which people would be banned and no activity allowed. Officials said that the two countries also began discussing the demarcation of maritime borders and the distribution of oil from border oilfields.²⁶⁷

In addition, Kofi Annan proposed an international conference outside of Iraq that would include key regional players and would aimed at reconciling Iraq's political parties.²⁶⁸ However, top Iraqi leaders rejected the proposition, saying that Iraq did not need outside help to solve political differences.

Prime Minister Maliki stated, "His call for an international conference on Iraq is a denial of will of the Iraqi people."²⁶⁹ President Talibani said, "We are an independent and a sovereign nation, and it we who decide the fate of the nation." Foreign Minister Zebari said, "It is to take the

political process back to square one and review all that is done in the past three years? If this is the aim, then we reject.”²⁷⁰ Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, leader of SCIRI, also rejected the proposal; “We reject any attempts to have a regional or international role in solving the Iraqi issue. We cannot bypass the political process.”²⁷¹

However, the following week al-Maliki announced his plans to send envoys to neighboring countries to schedule a conference on Iraq. Maliki said that the conference would take place in Iraq and he would seek support – not interference – from outside states. He added, “After settling the political climate, we will call for a convening of only those countries that want to ensure the security and stability of Iraq.”²⁷²

The discord within the Iraqi government over the involvement of outside states underscored the inability of leaders to present a coherent strategy to ending the violence – leaving Iraqis very skeptical that the government would be capable of preventing full-scale civil war.

The Iraq Study Group supported forming an international support group involving regional countries to discuss ways to quell violence in Iraq. The report said, “Left to their own devices, these governments will tend to reinforce ethnic, sectarian, and political divisions within Iraqi society.”²⁷³ The report recommended intense dialogue with both Syria and Iran and offered the following incentives to both countries:²⁷⁴

- An Iraq that does not disintegrate and destabilize its neighbors and the region.
- The continuing role of the United States in preventing the Taliban from destabilizing Afghanistan.
- Accession to international organizations, including the World Trade Organization.
- Prospects for enhanced diplomatic relations with the United States.
- The prospect of a US policy that emphasizes political and economic reforms instead of (as Iran now perceives it) advocating regime change.
- Prospects for a real, complete, and secure peace to be negotiated between Israel and Syria, with US involvement as part of a broader initiative on Arab-Israeli peace.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia remained concerned about the spread of sectarian war across the greater Middle East. Enhanced border patrol plans were well underway as the Kingdom sought to inhibit the flow of refugees and fighters from Iraq.

Saudi government officials denied that the Kingdom was financially supporting Sunni insurgents in Iraq. However, the AP found that significant private funds were channeled from Saudi Arabia to Iraq. Iraqi officials said that insurgents used the money for expensive weapons, particularly anti-aircraft missiles. One Iraqi official said that \$25million went to a Sunni cleric in Iraq.

Truck drivers interviewed by the AP said that they were asked to carry boxes of cash from Saudi to Iraq on a regular basis. They added that Saudis often used large-scale religious events – such as the hajj – to transfer the money to Iraqi hands.

A spokesman from the Saudi Interior Ministry stated, “There isn’t any organized terror finance, and we will not permit any such unorganized acts.” But intelligence showed that the money came from private donations to Islamic charities outside of governmental control.²⁷⁵

The *Iraq Study Group Report* called Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States “disengaged.” The report agreed that funding for Sunni insurgents came from private individuals inside the Kingdom, not from the government. The government had provided no debt relief and little economic assistance.²⁷⁶

In mid December, more than 30 Islamic clerics from Saudi Arabia called on Sunni Muslims around the Middle East to support Sunni insurgents in Iraq. They said jihad, “is one of the most important tenets of religion, and what has been taken by force can only be regained by force.” Their statement warned that Shiite Muslims were taking control of Iraq in a conspiracy with the coalition forces in an attempt to marginalize Sunnis. They called on Sunnis to “stand directly with our Sunni brothers in Iraq, using all appropriate and considered forms of support” and urged clerics to “educate the public about the Shiite threat.”²⁷⁷

The *New York Times* reported that according to American and Arab diplomats, Saudi Arabia told the US government that the Kingdom would provide financial backing to Iraqi Sunnis if full scale civil war broke out with Shi'ites, if the US pulls its troops out of Iraq. A diplomat involved said, “If things get so bad in Iraq, like an ethnic cleansing, [Saudi Arabia] will feel we are pulled into the war.”²⁷⁸ The administration later disavowed the report.

Syria

At the end of 2006, the US continued to back away from direct talks with Syria. David Satterfield, State Department coordinator for Iraq, said in a November 15 hearing at the Senate Armed Service Committee, “We believe the Syrian government is well aware of our concerns and the steps required to address those concerns. But Syria had made a series of choices. And the last, the most significant and negative choice, was during the Lebanon war, when Syria cast its lot, as it remains today, with Iran, with Hezbollah, with forces of violence and extremism. When that changes, we will, of course, respond.”²⁷⁹

On November 19, Syrian Foreign Minister Waleed al-Muallem traveled to Baghdad to assure Iraq of Syria's support. He said, “Syria's intentions toward Iraq are good in all times, and on that principle we are looking forward to a good relationship between Iraq and Syria that takes history and common interests into consideration.”²⁸⁰ He also called for a timeline for US troop withdrawal.²⁸¹ The following day, Syria and Iraq officially announced the restoration of diplomatic ties between the two countries after a twenty-year hiatus.²⁸²

The *Iraq Study Group Report* made the following recommendations for a negotiated peace with Syria:²⁸³

- Syria's full adherence to the UN Security Council Resolution 1701 of August 2001, which provides the framework for Lebanon to regain sovereign control over its territory.
- Syria's full cooperation with all investigations into political assassinations in Lebanon, especially those of Rafik Hariri and Pierre Gemayel.
- A verifiable cessation of Syrian aid to Hezbollah and the use of Syrian territory for transshipment of Iranian weapons and aid to Hezbollah.
- Syria's use of its influence with Hamas and Hezbollah for the release of the captured Israeli Defense Force soldiers.
- A verifiable cessation of Syrian efforts to undermine the democratically elected government of Lebanon.

- A verifiable cessation of arms shipments from or transiting through Syria for Hamas and other radical Palestinian groups.
- A Syrian commitment to help obtain from Hamas an acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist.
- Greater Syrian efforts to seal its border with Iraq.

Iran

The US continued to accuse Iran of propagating violence in Iraq. Gen. Michael Hayden, Director of the CIA, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on November 15 that "The Iranian hand is stoking violence and supporting, even competing, Shi'a factions."²⁸⁴ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in November, "There's no lack of opportunity to talk to the Iranians. The Question is: Is there anything about Iranian behavior that suggests that they are prepared to contribute to stability in Iraq? And I have to say that at this point I don't see it." The US remained adamant that Iran would have to stem their nuclear ambitions before talks could take place.²⁸⁵

On November 26 Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmdadinejad said that Iran would help the US in Iraq if President Bush stopped "bullying" his country. He said, "You went to Iraq to topple Saddam and find weapons of mass destruction, but it was clear to us that you came in order to dominate the region and its oil. You have been trapped in a quagmire and locked in your place with nowhere to go. The Iranian nation is ready to help you get out of the quagmire – on condition that you resume behaving in a just manner and avoid bullying and invading." It seemed unlikely at the end of 2006 that the US would accept blame for the "quagmire" in Iraq and thus Iranian cooperation would be minimal at best. Iraqi President Jalal Talibani was scheduled to travel to Tehran that same weekend, but his trip was postponed by the closing of Baghdad's airport after mass bombings in Sadr City.²⁸⁶

When Talibani did travel to Iran the following week, Ahmdadinejad pledged his support to Iraq in helping to stabilize the country.²⁸⁷ Ayatollah Khomeini also told Talibani that it was Iran's religious and human duty to help Iraq restore security. He added that US policies were to blame for the crisis and that the coalition had no hope of succeeding in Iraq.²⁸⁸

In response to the Iraqi Study Group recommendation that the US pursue a dialogue with Iran, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said that Iran would only help stabilize Iraq if the US agreed to several conditions. Iran called for the US to withdraw its troops, accept some of the blame for Iraq's violence, and stop campaigning against Iran's nuclear program.²⁸⁹

The *Iraq Study Group Report* called for Iran to take several important steps to help quell violence in Iraq:²⁹⁰

- Iran should stem the flow of equipment, technology, and training to any group resorting to violence in Iraq.
- Iran should make clear its support for the territorial integrity of Iraq as a unified state, as well as its respect for the sovereignty of Iraq and its government.
- Iran can use its influence, especially over Shia groups in Iraq, to encourage national reconciliation.
- Iran can also, in the right circumstance, help in the economic reconstruction of Iraq.

Views from the Iraqi Public

Views on the Iraqi Government

A Sunni resident in Baghdad interviewed by the *New York Times* said they he would like a see a strongman - possibly former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi - lead a military coup to take over the government. He said that democracy was not working to control Iraqis and that only a strongman could prevent full-scale civil war. Another Sunni disagree however, saying that the militias would turn and take on the coup forces. An English educated Sunni said that trying to prevent the escalation of violence was futile because, he said, Iraqis were destined to fight after years of abuse.

A Shi'ite sheik shared the perspective that democracy was not working. He said that the only solution would be to ban political parties and declare martial law. He also favored imminent American withdrawal. A Shi'ite student in Sadr city agreed; he said that it was already civil war so the US led forces might as well leave and Iraqi could declare civil war, but at least "one confesses what he is really doing."²⁹¹

According the MNF-Iraq spokesman General Caldwell – in a poll conducted in October – 89% of Iraqis said that their first loyalty was to the their country, rather than a sect, ethnic group, or tribe. A smaller 70% said that they supported the current government in Iraq and 25% said they thought the country would be better off if it were partitioned along sectarian lines. Caldwell did warn against relying heavily on poll results, but he said, "They do indicate that the violence is not representative of the desires of the Iraqi people."²⁹² The reality on the ground however, indicated that Iraqis were defining "loyalty to country" and an abstract concept of nationalism differently than the traditional American definition.

The US Role in Iraq and Lessons of Warfare

The US was under international pressure in the fall of 2006 to stop a full-scale civil war from spreading throughout the country, and more importantly, throughout the region. Regional players, such as Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, voiced their concern about the threat of a regional war between Sunnis and Shi'a.

The political benchmarks that the US had hoped would put Iraq on the path to democracy seemed insignificant as the civil war intensified. The US was learning the lesson that democracy as an end-goal was overshadowed by the need for economic development and overall security. The US military's provincial reconstruction teams were beginning to make some progress in providing basic services in vital areas, but time and money were running short to stop the civil war from engulfing the country.

In his final press conference on December 12, MNF-I Commander Gen. Chiarelli stressed the need for a well-rounded strategy in Iraq. He emphasized the need to provide meaningful employment to Iraqis to eliminate the need to rely on militias for payment. He also emphasized the need for the US military to stress language and cultural training for troops. He said, "This conflict is so complicated that now we have to start talking about things like cultural awareness and language training. Now, do we say that because we just want to come over and kind of cast away the stereotype of an American that doesn't care about somebody else's culture? Not at all. We do that because it means force protection."²⁹³

The November congressional elections that brought Democrats to power in both the House and Senate and the resignation of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld heightened talk of a new US strategy in Iraq. President Bush spoke of working with democrats to find a new strategy in the war. Rumsfeld's resignation came only a day after the elections, and just the previous week President Bush had announced that Rumsfeld would stay on the end of his term. President Bush said that he was making the change because he wanted to "bring a fresh perspective as to how to achieve something that I think most Americans want, which is victory." He added that Rumsfeld "understands that Iraq is not working well enough fast enough." The President's nomination to succeed Rumsfeld was Robert Gates, a former CIA director and advisor to his father.²⁹⁴

After the congressional elections, some Sunni Iraqis expressed concern that the US would pull out troops too quickly. A Sunni employee at the housing ministry said that he would have preferred the republicans to stay in power because Iraqi security forces were not strong enough to provide security for Sunnis. A Sunni police captain agreed, "If the democrats took control of US policy, they would the US army out of Iraq and this is not in the interests of Iraqis in generals, and especially not the Sunnis." Shi'ites, however, said they hoped the democrats would pull US forces out of Iraq and that Iraq was ready to govern itself.²⁹⁵

However, both Sunnis and Shi'a welcomed the departure of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. The front page of a Sunni newspaper in Baghdad read, "The departure of Rumsfeld is not to be regretted and is a small consolation to the injured Iraqi people who have suffered so much from his policies and those of his aides."²⁹⁶ Hamid la-Mutlaq, a senior leader of the Sunni National Dialogue Front with 11 Parliamentary seats, added strongly, "Yesterday, the curse of Iraq and the sin of the blood of its innocent people has fallen upon Rumsfeld, the enemy of humanity and the killer of Iraqis." Shi'ite also approved the resignation, saying Rumsfeld was responsible for the outbreak of sectarian violence in Iraq, according to an AP article.²⁹⁷ Yet several reports confirmed that despite Iraqi approval of the replacement, Sunnis and Shi'ite alike expected little change in policy from Washington.

Several weeks after the announcement of Rumsfeld's resignation, AP acquired a memo written by Rumsfeld two days before he resigned. Rumsfeld wrote, "In my view it is time for a major adjustment. Clearly, what US forces are currently doing in Iraq is not working well enough or fast enough." He recommended redeploying some US troops to force Iraqis to step up, established benchmarks for Iraqi political progress, and conducting a reverse embedding program for Iraqi troops.²⁹⁸

In the wake of Rumsfeld's departure and the elections, General Pace organized a military team to examine strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan. General Pace said the goal was to bring new ideas to the table that he could present to the incoming Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates. The military committee had no affiliation with the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group, but Pace said that the military was weighing diplomatic and economic components as well as military tactics.²⁹⁹

In addition, in a report to the Senate Armed Services Committee, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Michael Maples, said, "DIA judges that continued Coalition presence as the primary counter to a breakdown in central authority." At the same briefing, General Abizaid said that US commanders in Iraq agreed that more US troops would not increase the US's ability to achieve success in Iraq because the long run goal was the hand over control to Iraqi forces. The report to Congress was one of many reviews taking place at the end of 2006 to address the security crisis in Iraq and the US's future role.³⁰⁰

On November 19, defense officials said that the Pentagon team had outlined three possible options for Iraq: “Send in more troops, shrink the force but stay longer, or pull out.” Officials familiar with the group said that the first and third options had been all but dismissed. The second option would include boosting force numbers temporarily, then drawing troop levels down, but staying for a longer period of time.³⁰¹

The top US commander in the Middle East, General John Abizaid, spoke with the Senate Armed Services Committee on November 15, 2006. The discussion was the first meeting between the leader of CENTCOM and the newly elected democrats. Abizaid said that the most important change in Iraq was that more US forces needed to imbed with Iraqi Security Forces, both army and police, to advise on the planning and execution of missions. Abizaid also said that the 141,000 US forces in Iraq in mid-November would be maintained, but force strength could be altered in the following months. He said that he had hoped that US force strength about be at 10-12 brigades by the end of 2006, but it remained at 15. General Abizaid was also adamantly opposed to a timetable for withdrawal and any plans to partition Iraq along sectarian lines. Finally, he stated that the security situation in Iraq was still bad, but it had improved significantly since August 2006.³⁰²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff presented their review of the situation in Iraq to the President on December 13, 2006. Several of the key proposals included building up troops in the short run for a possible confrontation with the Mahdi Army and a renewed offensive in Anbar, an economic proposal to lessen Iraqi unemployment, and a plan for a long term increase in the size of the military.³⁰³

In a November 8 memo from national security adviser Stephen Hadley to President Bush – obtained by the *New York Times* – Hadley outlined several ways that the US could support and encourage the Iraqi government:³⁰⁴

- Continue to target al Qaeda and insurgent strongholds in Baghdad to demonstrate the Shia do not need the Jaish al Mahdi to protect their families – and that we are reliable partners
- Encourage Ambassador Khalilzad to move into the background and let Maliki take more credit for positive developments (We want Maliki to exert his authority – and demonstrate to Iraqis that he is a strong leader – by taking action against extremists, not by pushing back on the US and coalition)
- Continue our diplomatic efforts to keep the Sunnis in the political process by pushing for the negotiation of a national compact and by talking up provincial council elections next spring/summer as a mechanism for Sunni empowerment
- Support [Maliki's] announcement to expand the Iraqi Army and reform the MOI more aggressively
- Seek ways to strengthen Maliki immediately by giving him additional control over Iraqi forces, although we must recognize that in the immediate time frame, we would likely be able to give him more authority over existing forces, not more forces
- Continue to pressure Iran and Syria to end their interference in Iraq, in part by hitting back at Iranian proxies in Iraqi and by Secretary Rice holding an Iraq-plus-neighbors meeting in the region in early December
- Step up our efforts to get Saudi Arabia to take a leadership role in supporting Iraq by using its influence to move Sunni populations in Iraq out of violence and into politics, to cut off any public or private funding provided to the insurgents or death squads from the region and to lean on Syria to terminate its support for Baathists and insurgent leaders

Hadley also recommended filling the “four brigade gap in Baghdad with coalition forces if reliable Iraqi forces cannot be identified.” He encouraged President Bush, General Casey, and the Secretary of Defense to maintain a dialogue with Maliki on his needs and a dialogue with other actors to support the Iraqi government.

The State Department put forth a proposal in the dialogue on changes to Iraqi policy based on a belief that constructive negotiations with Sunni insurgents failed. State Department officials advocating the proposal said that US efforts to include Sunni insurgents and ex-Ba’athists in the political process were futile and were harming US relations with the majority Shi’ite population – leaving America with no allies among the population. Advocates said the reality of the situation in Iraq was that the US could not please all parties or “bridge the deep divide in Iraq between the two branches of Islam.” The proposal, however, met opposition from Ambassador Khalilzad and military commanders in Iraq.³⁰⁵

Speculations about the Iraq Study Group abounded in the fall, but on December 6, 2006 the ten-person group of experts presented their recommendations to the President. Both Secretary Baker and Congressman Hamilton said that the report offered no silver bullets for Iraq. The report began with an assessment of Iraq as “grave and deteriorating.” The executive summary stated, “Our most important recommendations call for new and enhanced diplomatic and political efforts in Iraq and the region, and a change in the primary mission of US forces in Iraq that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly.” The executive summary accepted the dangerous consequences of full-scale civil war in Iraq to Iraqis, the region, and the US and outlined the following broad approaches – which were discussed in more detail in the full report:³⁰⁶

- The United States should immediately launch a diplomatic offensive to build an international consensus for stability in Iraq and the region. This diplomatic effort should include every country that has an interest in avoiding a chaotic Iraq, including all of Iraq’s neighbors and key states in and outside the region should form a support group to reinforce security and national reconciliation within Iraq, neither of which Iraq can achieve on its own...
- Given the ability of Iran and Syria to influence events within Iraq and their interest in avoiding chaos in Iraq, the United States should try to engage them constructively...
- The United States cannot achieve its goals in the Middle East unless it deals with the Arab-Israeli conflict and regional instability...
- The Iraqi government should accelerate assuming responsibility for Iraqi security by increasing the number and quality of Iraqi Army brigades. While this process is underway, and to facilitate it, the United States should significantly increase the number of US military personnel, including combat troops, imbedded in and supporting Iraqi Army units...
- By the first quarter of 2008, subject to unexpected developments in the security situation on the ground, all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq...
- The United States should work closely with Iraq’s leaders to support the achievement of specific objectives – or milestones – on national reconciliation, security, and governance...
- If the Iraqi government demonstrates political will and makes substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security, and governance, the United States should make clear its willingness to continue training, assistance, and support for Iraq’s security forces and to continue political, military, and economic support. If the Iraqi government does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security, and governance, the United States should reduce its political, military, or economic support for the Iraqi government...

The options presented by the Iraq Study Group were thus similar to those that were being discussed in numerous governmental and military circles throughout the fall. The difficulty of implementing some of the options and the constantly deteriorating security and political crisis' in Iraq shed little hope that the situation would get better before it got worse.

The novel recommendation of the study group – that of offering incentives and disincentives to the Iraqi government – failed to recognize the fact that US failures in Iraq had caused a portion of the political stalemate and security crisis and seemed unlikely to foster compromise. Other key recommendations were:³⁰⁷ The President should state that the US does not seek permanent military bases in Iraq; the President should restate that the US does not seek to control Iraq's oil; the US should engage all parties in Iraq - with the exception of al-Qa'ida – and work to reintegrate militia members into civilian society.

The initial reaction to the report in Iraq was mixed. Prime Minister Maliki said that he supported the majority of the report because it called for handing over increased control of Iraqi security forces to the government. Sunnis, however, were disappointed that the report did not take a stance against Shi'ite militias. Sunnis said that if coalition forces left Iraq by 2008, Shi'ite security forces would lead a campaign against them. Dhafir al-Ani, a Sunni member of Parliament, said, "These recommendations might be a solution for the American crisis in Iraq, but a solution for the Iraqi crisis."³⁰⁸ The almost 150 page report outlined a variety of recommendations that would most likely draw discussion well into 2007, but it remained to be seen if President Bush would choose to implement the proposals and what impact they could have on stemming the civil war in Iraq. Spokesmen for President Bush said they suspected a new strategy for Iraq in early 2007.³⁰⁹

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