

## JIC Assessment, 19 July 2006

### IRAQ: INSURGENCY, SECTARIANISM AND VIOLENCE

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 19 July 2006.*

#### Key Judgements

- I. The security situation is growing in complexity. In addition to insurgents, local struggles for political and economic power, sectarian extremists and criminals are all exploiting declining security. Spiralling sectarian violence is the most immediate threat to Iraq's progress. Deteriorating security is outpacing the government's ability to respond: violence is at the highest sustained level since April 2003. Most is still in the Sunni heartlands and Baghdad, but it is also increasing in pockets elsewhere (including Basra).
- II. A virulent Sunni Arab nationalist insurgency continues. The Multinational Forces (MNF) continue to bear the brunt of their attacks. A minority of Sunni insurgents is engaged in talks with the Coalition and the Iraqi government, but the commitment of the majority of insurgents to a violent campaign is largely undiminished. Intensifying sectarian violence is strengthening the unwillingness of many to give up their arms. In many cases distinctions between Sunni Arab nationalists and jihadists are now blurred.
- III. Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) is the largest single insurgent network. The impact of Zarqawi's death has been short-lived; Abu Ayyub al-Masri will pursue Zarqawi's strategy and tactics including his campaign of attacks on the Shia to foment a civil war, which is starting to get results. Attempts to conduct terrorist operations outside Iraq will continue.
- IV. Sectarian violence by Shia extremists is escalating. Only a small minority is directly involved, but wider Shia restraint is declining. The degree to which Shia violence is orchestrated is unclear: much is probably spontaneous. Elements of Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) are the driving force on the streets.
- V. The degree to which al-Sadr himself is behind, or able to control, this violence is unclear. JAM is an increasingly fractured organisation: a number of commanders act outside al-Sadr's authority. He publicly condemns sectarian violence and has made some private efforts to rein it in. But the actions of JAM elements, whether authorised or not, are helping al-Sadr increase his power base and reinforce his popular support.

## IRAQ: INSURGENCY, SECTARIANISM AND VIOLENCE

*This paper was commissioned by the MoD to examine changes in the nature of violence in Iraq and provide updates on the Sunni insurgency, the jihad in Iraq and Shia extremism.*

### The nature of violence: not just an insurgency

1. Violence in Iraq is still increasing, with reported attacks now at the highest sustained level since April 2003 (see Annex). Much of the violence is confined to the Sunni heartlands and Baghdad, but it is also increasing in pockets elsewhere (including Basra)<sup>1</sup>. The Multinational Forces (MNF) continue to bear the brunt of attacks, largely by Sunni Arab insurgents. But the security situation is growing in complexity with local struggles for political and economic power, sectarian extremists and criminals all flourishing and exploiting deteriorating security. Iraqis are the main victims: on average, 86 Iraqi civilians, 26 members of the Iraqi security forces (ISF) and 16 members of the MNF, were casualties on every day in June; (for comparison, in mid-2005 the figures were 40, 19 and 17). The actual scale of civilian casualties is probably much higher.

2. In Baghdad and mixed areas such as Diyala province, some Sunnis and Shia are attacking each other in a vicious cycle of killing. Major attacks by Sunni jihadist groups and Shia militias (aided by complicit elements of the police) are having a catalytic effect, but in mixed local communities the violence is gaining a momentum of its own: [...] In May the UN estimated some 70-90,000 people had been displaced across Iraq by sectarian violence; the figure has now risen to 109,000. Iraqi estimates are much higher.

### Sunni Arab insurgency

3. Little has changed in the nature and intensity of the Sunni Arab insurgency since our last assessment in May. We continue to judge that the strength of the insurgency is in part affected by Sunni participation in the political process. Prime Minister Maliki's government includes Sunnis in Ministerial and executive positions<sup>2</sup>, and some key Sunni demands have been partially met; for example, limited release of detainees. Maliki has announced a National Reconciliation Plan aimed at addressing wider Sunni concerns, but there has been no substantive progress as yet. Some Sunni politicians have voiced their scepticism at Maliki's offer of amnesty (on current proposals most insurgents need not apply), plans to relax de-Ba'athification, and his lack of reference to an MNF withdrawal timetable. Sunni demands for government action against Shia militias have not yet been answered.

4. A minority of Sunni insurgents is engaged in talks with the Coalition and the Iraqi government. Some are feeling the pressure of MNF operations; others increasingly see the Shia militias as the main threat. But the ability of these contacts to affect broader insurgent violence remains unknown. We judge some insurgent leaders will see no contradiction in pursuing a twin-track of political participation and violence. The continued intensity of attacks against the MNF suggests that the commitment of the majority of insurgents to a violent campaign is largely

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<sup>1</sup> Military reporting from Baghdad estimates that sectarian and criminal violence is responsible for 60-70% of total daily casualties. The Baghdad morgue received 1600 bodies in June – 1400 exhibited signs of torture. The number of "execution style murders" recorded in Baghdad in June was unprecedented at 687. MNF judge their own records probably underestimate the problem by 50%.

<sup>2</sup> Sunnis secured 6 out of 37 ministerial posts including defence, in addition to Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister and Speaker of the Council of Representatives.

undiminished. We judge that for many Sunnis the intensifying sectarian violence is strengthening their unwillingness to give up their arms.

### Jihadists – after Zarqawi

5. We judge that most insurgent attacks are still carried out by Iraqi Sunni Arab nationalists. But the jihadist minority continues to have disproportionate impact. They are responsible for the majority of suicide attacks. The label 'jihadist' is becoming increasingly difficult to define: in many cases distinctions between nationalists and jihadists are blurred. They increasingly share common cause being drawn together in the face of Shia sectarian violence.

6. We judge Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) is the largest single insurgent network and although its leadership retains a strong foreign element, a large majority of its fighters are Iraqi. Their motivation is mixed: some are Islamist extremists inspired by the AQ agenda, others are simply hired hands attracted by the money. Some are drawn in by the opportunity to take on Shia militias: the jihadists' media effort stresses their role as defenders of the Sunni.

7. According to MNF reporting, AQ-I has suffered unprecedented losses in recent weeks with the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the death or detention of some 20 mid to senior level leaders. Intelligence shows that some elements are feeling the pressure, but the overall impact has been short-lived. The networks have again proved resilient: suicide bombings have intensified, reaching a level not seen since the constitutional referendum in October 2005.

8. We judge that the new leader of AQ-I, Egyptian-born Abu Ayyub al-Masri, will pursue Zarqawi's strategy and tactics, including his campaign of attacks on the Shia to foment a civil war, which is starting to get results. Abu Ayyub has already set out his stall: last month the Mujihidin Shura Council claimed that he personally beheaded a captured US soldier [...] AQ-I will continue to attempt terrorist operations outside Iraq. Abu Ayyub has extensive international contacts developed over two decades of experience in global jihad: [...]

9. The response of the AQ leadership to Zarqawi's death is not yet clear. We judge they will take the opportunity to increase their influence over AQ-I, but acquiesce to its anti-Shia campaign. Abu Ayyub has already reportedly sworn allegiance to Bin Laden, and he has close links to his deputy, al-Zawahiri. [...]

### Increasing Shia violence

10. Sectarian violence by Shia extremists is escalating. Only a small minority is directly involved, but its intensity is indicative of a wider decline in Shia restraint in the face of a sustained campaign by Sunni extremists. [...] The degree to which the violence is orchestrated and co-ordinated is unclear: much is probably spontaneous. Senior Shia political figures publicly condemn the violence, but seem unable or unwilling to stop it. [...] the most disciplined anti-Sunni campaign is being run by the Badr Organisation, many of whom are employed in the Ministry of Interior (MoI) security forces. [...]

11. But we judge that elements of Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) are the driving force on the streets, engaged in a more indiscriminate campaign of intimidation and murder of Sunnis. Most activity is in Baghdad, but attacks on Sunnis have intensified wherever there are demographic fault lines: sectarian murder has

increased in Basra and [...] Coercion is also being used against any Shia who threaten their grip on local power; Sharia law is being imposed in the areas they control. The absence in some areas of effective ISF is reinforcing local Shia dependency on militias to provide security. The degree to which al-Sadr himself is behind, or able to control, this violence is unclear. Intelligence indicates that JAM is an increasingly fractured organisation with splits between those who want to intensify the violence, both against the MNF and Sunnis, and those who want to restrain it. A number of commanders act outside al-Sadr's authority. Intelligence and diplomatic reporting suggests that al-Sadr is firmly committed to continued participation in government. He publicly condemns sectarian violence and has made some private efforts to rein it in. But the actions of JAM elements in seeking to control Shia parts of Baghdad, whether authorised or not, are helping al-Sadr increase his power base and reinforce his popular support.

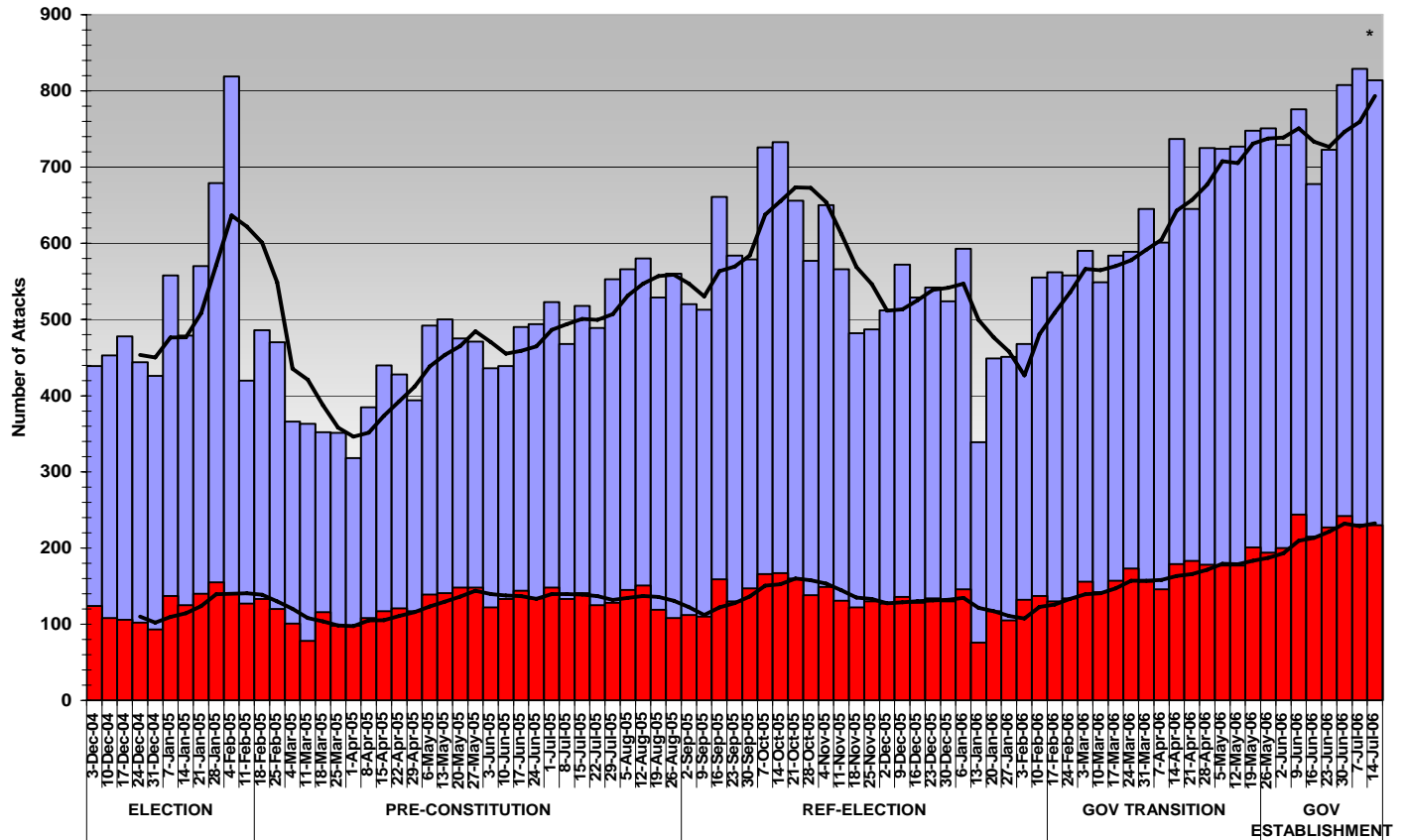
12. Shia extremist violence against the MNF has also been on the increase across southern and central Iraq: April 2006 saw the highest number of anti-MNF incidents in MND (SE) since the Sadrist uprising of August 2004. [...] a far more coherent organisation behind much of this activity than previously assessed. [...] but the weight of evidence indicates that the groups operate outside al-Sadr's authority.

13. Intelligence indicates the Iranians and Lebanese Hizballah continue to support Shia militias, including by providing training and sophisticated bomb-making equipment for use against the MNF. Explosively formed projectile devices have been responsible for the death of 49 Coalition soldiers (nine of them British) in the first six months of this year.

## Prospects

14. We judge the deteriorating security situation is outpacing the government's ability to respond. The virulent Sunni Arab insurgency is undiminished, but it is spiralling sectarian violence by Sunni and Shia extremists (including some elements of the ISF) which is becoming the most immediate threat to Iraq's progress. It has acquired a momentum of its own; Iraqi society is violently polarising along sectarian lines. A resilient AQ-I and increasingly volatile elements of JAM are driving much of the violence and there is no sign of it relenting.

## Annex – Weekly Attack Statistics



Source: MNC-I FusionNet 15 Jul 06



