

**JIC Assessment, 23 August 2006**

**IRAQ: THE PROBLEM WITH MILITIAS**

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 23 August 2006.*

**Key Judgements**

- I. Violence in Iraq is part of a vicious circle: deteriorating security has led to a proliferation of militias, in turn fuelling further violence. Prime Minister Maliki is [...] unable to confront the militias, fearing a violent backlash that would threaten the break-up of the Shia political coalition (the UIA). Without significant progress on the National Reconciliation Plan and a sustained improvement in the security situation there will continue to be little Iraqi appetite for the MNF plan for the disarmament, de-mobilisation and re-integration of Iraqi militias.
- II. Many militias are sectarian based and are competing with the Iraqi state's security forces to provide security and protection for their own communities. They are undermining government authority. Some elements are engaged in violent attacks against their political and sectarian opponents and Coalition forces. In some cases, the distinction between the armed gangs and the Iraqi security forces (ISF) is blurred.
- III. The Kurdish Peshmerga pose no immediate military threat to Multinational Forces (MNF) or Iraqi internal stability. While some Peshmerga units have been integrated into the Iraqi Army, their primary loyalty is to the Kurdistan Regional Government. Kurdish political leaders will support the inclusion of these units in the national Army as long as they remain engaged in a government of national unity.
- IV. The Shia Badr Organisation has incorporated a number of its units into the Ministries of Interior and Defence security organisations. Their loyalty remains firmly to their former command structures, many of which remain intact, and they continue to pursue their own political agendas. Badr are responsible for the most tightly controlled and targeted campaign of anti-Sunni violence.
- V. Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) is capable of generating widespread violence. Some elements are the driving force behind most of the sectarian violence, but are more indiscriminate than the Badr Organisation. A small minority has also continued a low-level campaign of attacks against MNF and has been involved in periodic clashes with rival Shia militias.

## IRAQ: THE PROBLEM WITH MILITIAS

*This paper was commissioned by the Iraq Senior Officials Group to examine the threat posed by militias in Iraq, the extent to which they have popular and political support and the prospects for disarmament, de-mobilisation and re-integration.*

### Complexity of the problem

1. Violence in Iraq is part of a vicious circle: deteriorating security has led to a proliferation of militias, in turn fuelling further violence. The threat from these armed groups is multi-dimensional. The scale is difficult to judge: Coalition estimates of militia sizes should be treated cautiously; some are capable of galvanising widespread support. Many are sectarian based (see box) and are competing with the Iraqi state's security forces to provide security and protection for their own communities. They are undermining government authority. Some elements are engaged in violent attacks against their political and sectarian opponents and Coalition forces; others are also involved in criminality. Local neighbourhood watch gangs, particularly in vulnerable Sunni areas, are spreading. Weapons are readily available.

#### Main militias

Peshmerga (Kurdish)	80-90,000
Badr (Shia)	10-13,000
Jaysh al-Mahdi (Shia)	10,000
Iraqi Islamic Party (Sunni)	1,900
Iraqi Hizballah (Shia)	1,000
Jaysh al-Dawa (Shia)	1,000
Army of the Guardians (Shia)	500
Thar Allah (Shia)	200

2. Most Iraqi political parties across the sectarian spectrum maintain a militia of some sort. Some, including the Kurdish Peshmerga, pose no immediate military threat to the Multinational Forces (MNF) or Iraqi internal stability. [...] But elements of Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) are driving sectarian violence and attacking the MNF. In some cases, the distinction between the militias and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) is blurred: [...] the police in particular are penetrated by Shia militias. Other official forces are only partially accountable. The 135-150,000 strong Facilities Protection Service (FPS) is currently run largely as a collection of private security forces for various government Ministers. Many within the FPS are also members of party militias; some are engaged in criminal and anti-MNF activity. There are also some 230 private security companies employing around 50,000, mainly Iraqi, staff.

### Kurdish Peshmerga

3. The largest armed group is the Kurdish Peshmerga, divided between the two main Kurdish political parties - the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Well-armed and experienced, Peshmerga forces have provided security in the Kurdish region since 1991. Both the KDP and PUK signed Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Order 91, under which militiamen must join the ISF, receive vocational training or retire with a pension. While the Constitution allows the Kurds to maintain some Peshmerga under the authority of the Kurdistan Regional Government<sup>1</sup>, some units of the Peshmerga have been integrated into the ISF. The scale of integration is uncertain, but MNF assess that half the units within the Iraqi Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions are re-badged Peshmerga. Their primary loyalty is to the Kurdistan

<sup>1</sup> Article 117 of the constitution stipulates that regions can organise internal security forces, such as police and guards of the region.

Regional Government and the Kurdish political elite will continue to consider that they hold a veto over their deployment. Kurdish leaders Talabani and Barzani recently refused to deploy Iraqi Army units primarily comprising Kurds to Baghdad to bolster the Baghdad security plan, concerned that they would be placed between warring Sunni and Shia factions. For as long as they remain engaged in a government of national unity, Kurdish political leaders will support the inclusion of Peshmerga within a national Iraqi Army. But if the political process begins to unravel, integrated Peshmerga forces will revert to being Kurdish assets.

### **Shia militias**

4. The two largest Shia militias are the Badr Organisation and JAM. The Badr Organisation is the military wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and has signed CPA Order 91. Some Badr members have been incorporated into the ranks of the Ministry of Defence; a significant number were incorporated into the Ministry of Interior (MoI) security organisations under the then SCIRI minister Bayan Jabr. [...] We judge that the loyalty of integrated Badr members remains firmly to their former command structures, many of which remain intact, and that they continue to pursue their own political agendas. We recently judged that Badr is responsible for the most tightly controlled and targeted campaign of anti-Sunni violence.

5. After the Shia uprisings in 2004, JAM was ineligible for inclusion under CPA Order 91. It is capable of generating widespread unrest and violence. It remains largely al-Sadr's personal militia, although it is not a monolithic or disciplined organisation. A number of commanders act outside al-Sadr's authority: some exploit the JAM label to run their own armed gangs. We continue to judge that elements of JAM are the driving force behind most of the sectarian violence, but are more indiscriminate than the Badr Organisation. A small minority has also continued a low-level campaign of attacks against MNF and has been involved in periodic clashes with rival Shia militias. [...] We judge al-Sadr is currently committed to the political process because he thinks he can convert his grassroots popularity into power, but he retains his militia to reinforce his political leverage.

### **Prospects for dealing with the militias**

6. Some regulations to deal with militias already exist. CPA Order 91 authorises action against those militias not covered by its provisions, including banning illegal carriage of weapons. Other regulations, including the licensing of weapons for private security contractors, have also been introduced. But little action has been taken by the ISF to enforce these measures, particularly against the volatile JAM. [...] ISF commanders and units are unable, and in some cases unwilling, to take on the militias. This is partially due to penetration by militia elements, but also fear of retribution against them and their families.

7. Iraqi political commitment for more vigorous action - against JAM in particular - is uncertain. [...] We judge Maliki is [...] unable to confront the militias, fearing a violent backlash that would threaten the break-up of the Shia political coalition (the UIA). We continue to judge that any perception among JAM that a widespread assault against them had begun, particularly if fronted by the MNF, would provoke fierce resistance. It would also increase Shia hostility to the Coalition: the inability of the MNF and ISF to protect them against Sunni extremists has meant that many Shia regard JAM as their defenders, particularly in mixed areas.

8. Maliki and other government Ministers have expressed their support for attempts to address better weapons control by implementing existing laws more effectively, reforming the FPS and bringing private security companies under more MoI control. [...] But an MNF plan for the disarmament, de-mobilisation and re-integration (DDR) of Iraqi militias, with the aim to have all components of the process in place by the end of October, has yet to receive Iraqi endorsement and there is little Iraqi appetite for such a strategic approach.

9. We judge Maliki's aspirations are [...] driven by the political imperative of keeping his government in power: this precludes strong action against either sectional Shia or Kurdish interests that risk destabilising his position. Rumours of Baathist coups are reinforcing this reluctance. We judge that there would have to be rapid and significant progress on the National Reconciliation Plan and a sustained improvement in the security situation – neither of which are imminent – before any form of militia disarmament becomes a practical and realistic option attracting either political or popular support. In some areas, militias are the sole providers of security. SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim is actively encouraging the growth of more neighbourhood groups for establishing security in Baghdad. Recent polling indicates that over the past year public confidence in the effectiveness of the Iraqi police has declined by 10% and in the army by almost 25%.

10. Even if the political will emerged, dealing with the scale of the militia problem would be challenging. Up to 300,000 individuals are involved, including the Peshmerga, FPS and private security contractors. In time, the reintegration of Sunni Arab insurgents will also have to be addressed. Failure [...] to solve the problem would damage both the authority and credibility of the government.