

## JIC Assessment, 15 November 2006

### IRAQ: RISK OF DEEPENING SECTARIAN DIVISION

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 15 November 2006.*

#### Key Judgements

- I. Most ordinary Iraqis, other than Kurds, retain a sense of Iraqi nationhood. But their concepts of the future Iraq are increasingly defined in terms of their own sectarian interests, whether Shia or Sunni. It is unclear how long support for a unitary state will last in the face of rising Sunni/Shia violence. All the current trends are heading in the wrong direction.
- II. Violence continues to escalate. The strength of the Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents is undiminished. Their violence is complemented by a resilient jihadist campaign. Attacks on the Coalition by Shia extremists have also increased. But sectarian attacks, mostly in Baghdad, now account for the bulk of the violence and casualties. Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) is in the vanguard, believing their strategy of fomenting civil war is working. Elements of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) are the primary force behind Shia sectarian violence.
- III. The Iraqi government's response to deteriorating security remains ineffective. Many Shia politicians blame all violence on "Ba'athists". There has been no progress on national reconciliation. [...] So long as Sunni alienation is reinforced, Iraqi and Coalition efforts to engage elements of the Sunni insurgency are unlikely to make progress and Sunni participation in government will be fragile.
- IV. Maliki [...] He hopes that Sadr's public statements condemning sectarian violence, and his efforts to punish rogue elements, will convince the Coalition that this is bearing fruit and Coalition plans for tough action against JAM, either in Baghdad or Basra, are unwarranted. Sadr's readiness to deliver significant improvement in security is doubtful.
- V. Maliki, backed by elements of the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), is increasingly assertive in demanding accelerated Iraqi control of security throughout the country, possibly even within six months in some areas. The Iraqi security forces (ISF) are likely to need continued Multinational force (MNF) support. Without it they will be unable to cope in Baghdad and the Sunni heartlands, risking worsening violence and further weakening of government authority. The Kurdish north will remain generally stable, as will the Shia south as long as the UIA holds together.

## IRAQ: RISK OF DEEPENING SECTARIAN DIVISION

*This paper was commissioned by the Iraq Senior Officials Group to examine the scale, scope and nature of violence in Iraq, to assess the will and effectiveness of the Iraqi government to respond and the implications of failure.*

### Escalating violence

1. Violence in Iraq continues to escalate (see Annex A). It is still mainly confined to Baghdad and the Sunni heartlands: the Kurdish north and Shia south remain relatively stable, although anti-Coalition attacks in Basra have risen to record levels. We judge that the spiral of sectarian attacks is deepening and although largely confined to Baghdad, now accounts for the bulk of violence and casualties. The overwhelming majority of casualties from insurgent and sectarian violence are Iraqis: in October, 103 US soldiers were killed compared with 1619 Iraqi civilians and 316 members of the Iraqi security forces (ISF). We continue to have concerns about the statistical data; Multinational forces (MNF) believe the scale of civilian casualties to be much higher. Attacks against MNF also reached record levels last month, partly due to increased MNF activity in Baghdad. With poor security, criminal violence is also rampant and there have been several instances of tribal feuding and intra-Shia clashes – some serious, as in Amarah in October.

### Sectarian conflict

2. Sectarian violence – murder, intimidation and beatings – is widespread across many parts of Baghdad. The city is polarising along sectarian lines either side of the Tigris. Sunni and Shia extremists are fighting to control mixed areas and are forcing many Iraqis to seek sanctuary with their own communities. Sectarian violence is also taking place in towns and cities elsewhere in Iraq, wherever there are mixed populations (See Annex B). We are unable to judge the scale. UN figures show the number of displaced persons is growing. Estimates of 320,000 in mid September rose to 360,000 in mid October.

3. Both Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents and jihadists are carrying out sectarian attacks, but we judge Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) is in the vanguard; the majority of suicide bomb attacks target the Shia, both civilians and those in the ISF. AQ-I believe their longstanding strategy of fomenting civil war is working: there has been no let up in the intensity of mass casualty attacks against Shia civilians. The announcement last month by the Mujahedin Shura Council (an AQ-I front) of the formation of an Islamic state in 8 provinces across central and western Iraq, although largely propaganda, reflects this strategy and is designed to reinforce Sunni support. The actual level of this support is unclear. It is probably stronger in those areas where Sunnis feel threatened by both the “occupation” and Shia extremists: intelligence indicates a number are drawn to AQ-I by the opportunity to take on Shia militias and defend Sunni areas.

4. Sectarian violence by Shia militias is unabated. Elements of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) are still the primary force behind most of the indiscriminate attacks. They dominate much of Shia east Baghdad and are seeking to expand their control to mixed areas of the city. [...] Despite fighting between Badr and JAM in the south (most recently in Amarah) [...] elements of both are co-operating in attacking Sunnis.

## Insurgency and anti-Coalition violence

5. Attacks on the MNF are still more than 40% higher than those against the ISF. But at least half of the 52 mass casualty suicide attacks in October targeted the ISF. The strength of the Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents is undiminished and we continue to judge they are responsible for most attacks on the Coalition and the Iraqi state. Their violence is complemented by a resilient jihadist campaign led by AQ-I. Many Shia politicians blame all violence on "Ba'athists". We continue to judge AQ-I to be the single largest insurgent network, behind a large proportion of mass casualty attacks. Distinctions between nationalists and jihadists remain blurred: AQ-I is predominantly Iraqi, although not all subscribe to a global jihadist ideology. In many areas, AQ-I receive local co-operation in mounting attacks, although in some areas, notably parts of Anbar, violence with tribal groups has flared up.

6. Although not matching the scale of the Sunni campaign, attacks on the Coalition by Shia extremists have increased, particularly in and around Baghdad and in the south: last month indirect fire attacks in Basra reached a record high. A number of Shia groups are responsible, many connected to JAM. [...] we judge the recent withdrawal of some Coalition staff from the Basra Palace will have reinforced this perception. We judge that the Iranians are providing better weapons and more training to many Shia groups: new heavier calibre rockets and mortars have been used against the Coalition in MND (SE) in recent months. [...] the Iranians want to speed up MNF withdrawal from the south, and make life as difficult as possible for the MNF so long as they remain. We judge they are prepared to risk increased instability.

## Government response: remains ineffective

7. We judged last month that the Iraqi government's response to deteriorating security was ineffective. There has been little significant change since then. MNF operations under the Baghdad security plan have had only temporary and local impacts: violence has been displaced and has increased overall. The ISF have been unable to sustain any improvements. Operations have exposed the patchy nature of Iraqi army capability and the ineffectiveness of the Iraqi police. Prime Minister Maliki is attempting to address some of the problems: diplomatic reporting indicates he has ordered a purge of officers within the security ministries involved in sectarian violence. The Mol claims that 3,000 police have been relieved of duty – although most are likely to be re-deployed elsewhere.

8. We judge that Maliki's approach remains governed by his critical need to retain Shia support within the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), particularly from the Sadrists. He understands the importance the Coalition gives to dealing with Shia militias, [...] We judge Maliki hopes that Sadr's public statements condemning sectarian violence, and his efforts to punish rogue elements, will convince the Coalition that this deal is bearing fruit and that MNF plans for tough action against JAM, either in Baghdad or Basra, are unwarranted. Sadr's readiness to deliver significant improvement in security is doubtful. We judge the majority of JAM retains a personal loyalty to him and recent intelligence strongly suggests he is fully aware of JAM elements attacking MNF. But his organisation is not monolithic; intelligence indicates that it is becoming increasingly ill-disciplined and a number of senior Sadrists and local JAM commanders continue to act outside his authority. We judge Sadr will be wary of driving more away by reining in the militants too strongly. He does not want any further loosening of his control over the most visible expression of his political power.

9. There has been no progress on the national reconciliation. [...] Sunni alienation has been reinforced by the lack of effective action against Shia militias, tangible progress on de-Ba'athification and the release of Sunni detainees (still more than 95% of the total detainee population). The Council of Representatives (CoR) has passed a bill making federalism, deeply unpopular with Sunnis, more likely and most recently Saddam has been sentenced to hang. In this climate, Iraqi and Coalition efforts to engage elements of the Sunni insurgency are unlikely to make progress and existing Sunni participation in government will be fragile. We judge Tawafuq and Hiwar will continue to threaten withdrawal from the CoR in an effort to secure concessions. If there is no progress we judge these threats are likely to be made good. Some Sunni politicians are looking to form new political groupings, [...] Such rumours are reinforcing mutual distrust between Shia and Sunni.

### Prospects

10. We judged last month that security could remain the greatest challenge for the Iraqi government. The current security situation continues to outpace its ability to respond. The Iraqi police are heavily implicated in sectarian attacks. In general the army remains a national institution engaged in countering violence by both Sunni and Shia. [...]

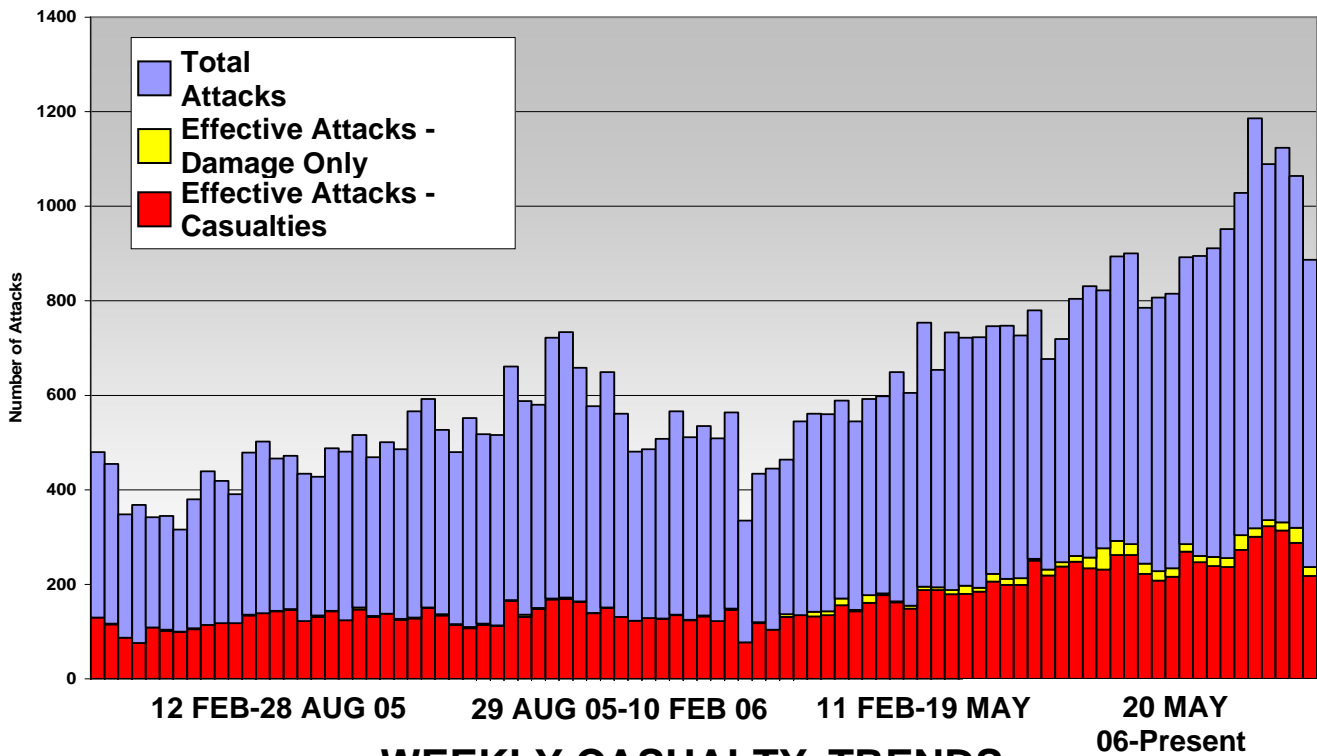
11. Although the MNF are subject to sustained attack by Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents and jihadists, and increasingly by Shia extremists, we judge their presence in the more volatile areas is preventing even worse violence. [...] But Maliki's relationship with the MNF is increasingly strained. He, backed by the Shia UIA, is increasingly assertive in demanding accelerated Iraqi control of security throughout the country, possibly even within six months in some areas. In addition to figures such as Sadr and SCIRI's al-Hakim, who seek to protect the militias as key components of their political authority, many Shia genuinely believe that the MNF focus too much on Shia militias rather than "Ba'athists" and jihadists. Polling suggests that popular support for MNF withdrawal is growing (77%).

12. We judge the south will remain generally stable as long as the UIA holds together and able to constrain their affiliated militias, although intra – Shia violence will continue to flare up as rival groups seek local economic and political power. The Kurdish north is also likely to remain relatively quiet. The ISF are likely to need continued MNF support. Without it they will be unable to cope in Baghdad and the Sunni heartlands, risking worsening violence and further weakening of government authority.

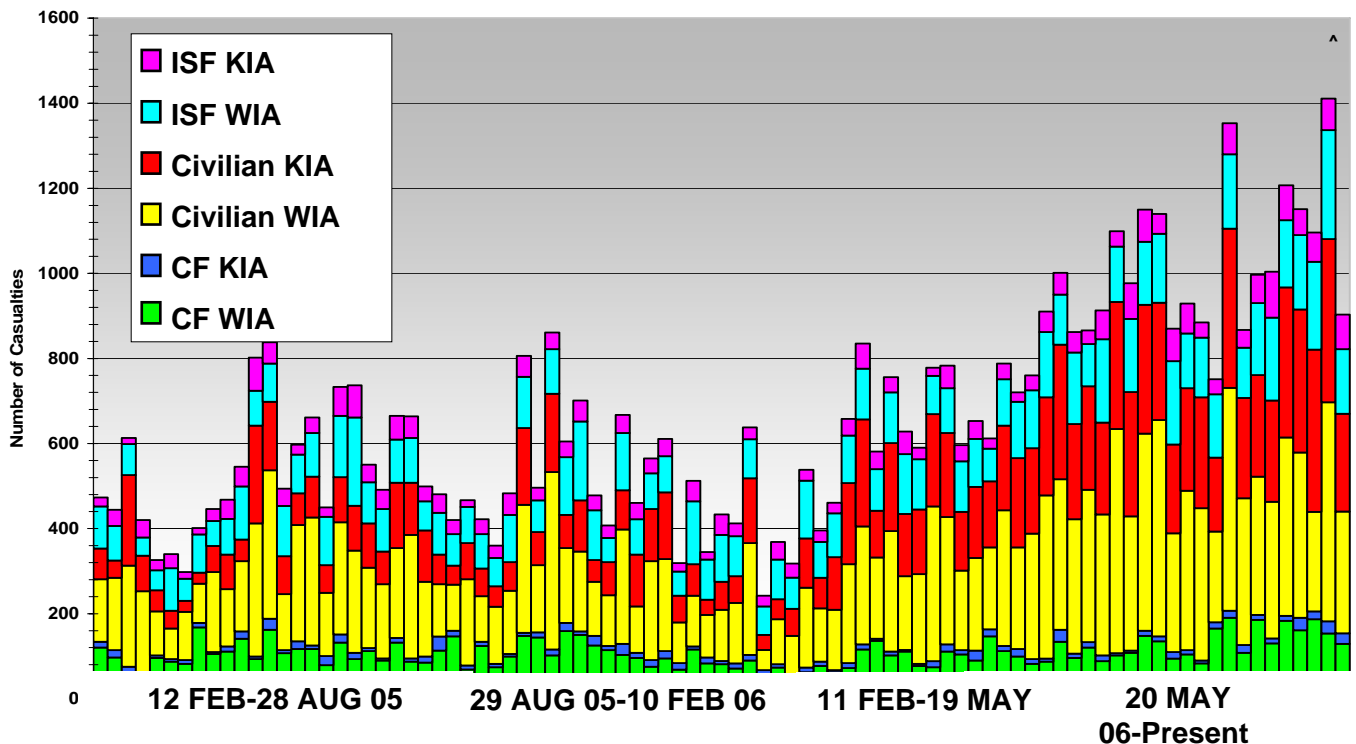
13. We judge that most ordinary Iraqis, other than Kurds, retain a sense of Iraqi nationhood. But their concepts of the future Iraq are increasingly defined in terms of their own sectarian interests, whether Shia or Sunni. It is unclear how long support for a unitary state will last in the face of rising Sunni/Shia violence. All the current trends are heading in the wrong direction.

Annex A

## WEEKLY ATTACK TRENDS 12 FEB 05 – 27 OCT 06



## WEEKLY CASUALTY TRENDS 12 FEB 05 – 27 OCT 06



## Annex B – National ethno-sectarian breakdown

