

JIC Assessment, 6 September 2007

BAGHDAD SECURITY PLAN: IMPACT AND PROGNOSIS

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 5 September 2007.

Key Judgements

- I. Under the current Baghdad Security Plan, intensified Multinational Force (MNF) and Iraqi security force (ISF) operations have improved security for Iraqis in general in Baghdad. Civilian, ISF and MNF casualties have reduced. Attacks on the MNF have fallen off since June, and are now at the lowest level since June 2006.
- II. MNF operations have mainly focussed on combating the threat from Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) and other Sunni Islamist extremists. They have had effect: the number of high profile suicide bomb attacks against Shia targets in Baghdad has fallen. US encouragement of Sunni Arab tribes and nationalist insurgents to fight AQ-I has helped.
- III. Outside Baghdad, overall attack levels have fallen sharply since record highs in June. It is too early to say whether this trend will be sustained. Successes in the provinces of Anbar, Diyala and Baghdad have displaced violence elsewhere: mass casualty attacks in the provinces north of Baghdad have increased.
- IV. The Iraqis have taken no political advantage of the improved security to pursue national reconciliation or reconstruction. [...] There has been little or no progress on key legislation: the divisive issues of the hydrocarbons law, de-Ba'athification and Constitution reform remain unresolved.
- V. [...] If he [Prime Minister Maliki] steps down, the succession process could be a lengthy distraction and any new leader would face similar challenges to Maliki: early significant improvements in government performance would be unlikely.
- VI. Levels of violence in Baghdad and across Iraq may continue to fall, but only as long as the US surge can be maintained: until March 2008 at the latest without overstretching the US army. Once the US effort reduces, Sunni extremists and Shia militias will try to reassert control on the ground. The ISF, even with tribal support, are not capable of maintaining the tempo or effect of current MNF operations.

Assessment Base: [...]

BAGHDAD SECURITY PLAN: IMPACT AND PROGNOSIS

This paper, commissioned by the MoD and FCO, examines the progress of the Baghdad Security Plan to date and future prospects.

Fardh al-Qanun (FAQ)

1. The Baghdad Security Plan, Operation Fardh al-Qanun (FAQ), began in February after previous increased efforts in 2006 failed to stem rising violence. FAQ focuses on reducing extremist activity, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, holding ground and – crucially – creating the conditions for national political reconciliation and economic growth. The planned “surge” in US combat troops was completed in June: an extra 20,000 have been deployed mainly to Baghdad, but also to Anbar province. An additional 10,000 Iraqi security forces (ISF) have been supporting US operations.

Security operations

2. We judge that intensified Multinational Force (MNF) and ISF operations have improved security for Iraqis in general in Baghdad. Civilian, ISF, and MNF casualties have reduced. Though the murder rate has reduced, after months of sectarian violence, many Sunnis have fled and there are fewer mixed areas in the city. Attacks on the MNF have fallen off since June, and are now at the lowest level since June 2006 (see Annexes A and B). But the security picture varies across the city: low-level violence is undiminished in districts where sectarian fault lines still exist, such as in parts of west Baghdad; in these areas the number of sectarian murders is creeping back up. Diplomatic reporting suggests that the Shia Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) have successfully ousted Sunnis from numerous mixed districts in the past year. Polling suggests that in June 70% of Baghdadis felt that FAQ had been unsuccessful in reducing overall levels of violence; only 5% reported seeing any crackdown on crime and militia activity.

3. In the more homogenous Shia areas, MNF are the main target for extremist violence. ISF and MNF are jointly manning a base in Sadr City for the first time in two years, and MNF operations against the JAM in their strongholds have increased. But MNF freedom to operate is still heavily restricted by the threat of JAM violence. Sophisticated roadside bomb attacks against MNF by JAM have been rising steadily since April (see Annex C); MNF assess they are now responsible for 70% of Coalition casualties in the capital. [...]

4. MNF operations have mainly focussed on combating the threat from Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) and other Sunni Islamist extremists. They have had effect; US encouragement of Sunni Arab tribes and nationalist insurgents to fight AQ-I has helped. The number of high profile suicide bomb attacks against Shia targets in Baghdad has fallen (see Annex D); the construction of gated neighbourhoods and secure markets has made the Shia population somewhat less vulnerable. In response, we assess that AQ-I has begun to focus on targeting key infrastructure: two of Baghdad’s main bridges have been destroyed since April. [...] AQ-I is increasingly isolated in Baghdad, maintaining strongholds in fewer neighbourhoods than this time last year.

5. Outside Baghdad, overall attack levels rose to record highs in June, but have fallen sharply since the US surge reached full capacity (see Annex E). It is too early to say whether this trend will be sustained. The total figures mask regional variations. MNF success in Anbar province, assisted by Sunni tribal forces, has resulted in a striking reduction in violence there. But we assess that successes in Anbar, Diyala province and Baghdad have displaced violence elsewhere: mass casualty attacks in the provinces north of Baghdad have increased.

Reconstruction

6. We judge that delivery of major reconstruction projects has not improved significantly in the wake of FAQ, hampered by the Iraqis' lack of basic bureaucratic and administrative skills. The Iraqi government committees established to deal with economic regeneration and communal reconciliation have achieved little of substance. Electricity and fuel shortages remain more acute in Baghdad than elsewhere in Iraq and are the cause of widespread disillusionment, undermining the government's credibility. The average daily electricity supply for the capital is nine hours (some districts receive less than two). The continuing threat of violence prompts many municipal workers to stay at home. Where there have been some successes, such as the renovation of several water treatment plants, they have depended wholly on Coalition effort.

Reconciliation

7. The Iraqis have taken no advantage of the improved security in Baghdad to pursue national reconciliation. [...] The Sadrists withdrew from government in March and since August have been followed by the Sunni political parties and Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National List. Despite sustained Coalition pressure, there has been little or no progress on key legislation: the divisive issues of the hydrocarbons law, de-Baathification and Constitutional reform remain unresolved.

8. [...] Coalition engagement with Sunni tribes and insurgents, while helping to combat AQ-I, has had only lukewarm approval from Maliki: [...] Maliki is pursuing his own reconciliation initiatives; [...]

Iraqi security force performance

9. The initial higher level Iraqi management of and engagement with the complexities of FAQ was encouraging. From the start, Maliki took a 'hands on' approach, chairing FAQ's Executive Steering Committee and co-ordinating security operations through the Office of the Commander in Chief (OCINC). But in recent months his enthusiasm has worn off. Continuing high profile attacks in Baghdad (together with Shia nervousness over programmes to support armed Sunni tribes) have strained Maliki's relations with senior MNF commanders. We judge Iraqi confidence, both among Ministers and more generally, has been damaged by the popular perception that security has not significantly improved.

10. [...] Key Iraqi structures managing FAQ, including the OCINC and the Baghdad Operations Centre are still overwhelmingly Shia. The government has taken some steps to address human rights abuses: sacking 23 senior National Police Commanders and disbanding an entire battalion accused of complicity in sectarian acts. But other individuals accused of sectarian abuses remain in positions of responsibility. For example the senior [...] official [...] who oversaw torture of Sunnis in the notorious 'Jadariyah bunker' in 2005 has since [...] been [...]

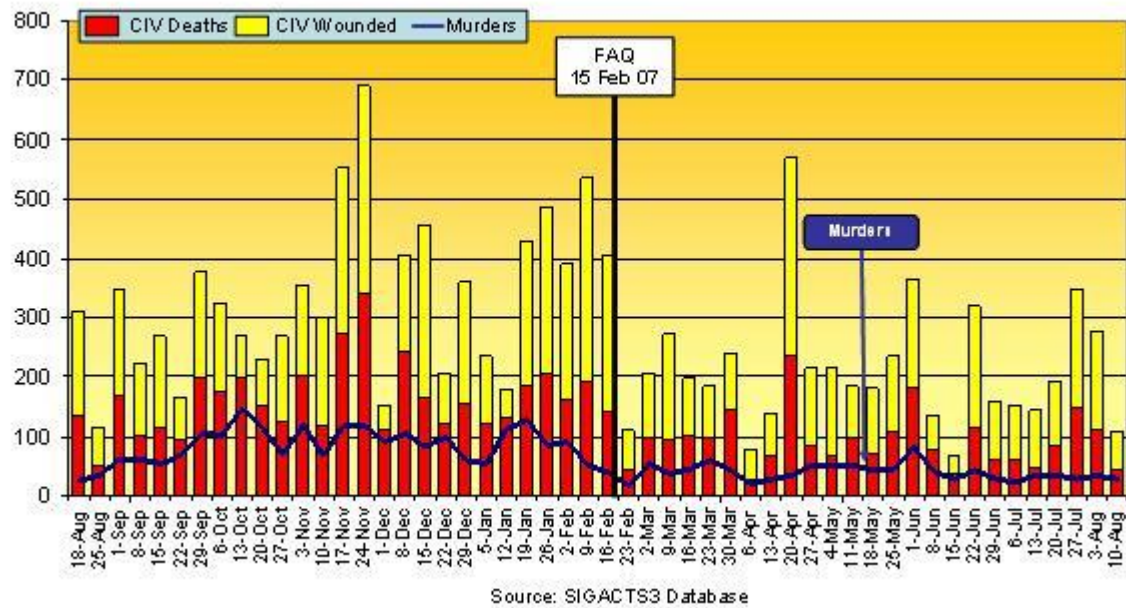
11. We assess ISF performance in Baghdad to remain patchy. MNF identify indications of improved leadership and performance among some Iraqi Army units engaged in joint raids and clearing operations with US forces. The 39 security stations manned jointly by MNF and ISF are helping to deter violence (though we judge that without the MNF presence their effectiveness would be much less). Only a small minority of ISF units are able to fight effectively on their own and all depend completely on MNF logistical support. We judge that many personnel, especially in the police, follow a Shia sectarian agenda: [...] Diplomatic reporting suggests that elements of the police are still involved in attacks against MNF, while corruption and criminality remain widespread (e.g. using checkpoints to extort bribes and sell black market fuel).

Outlook

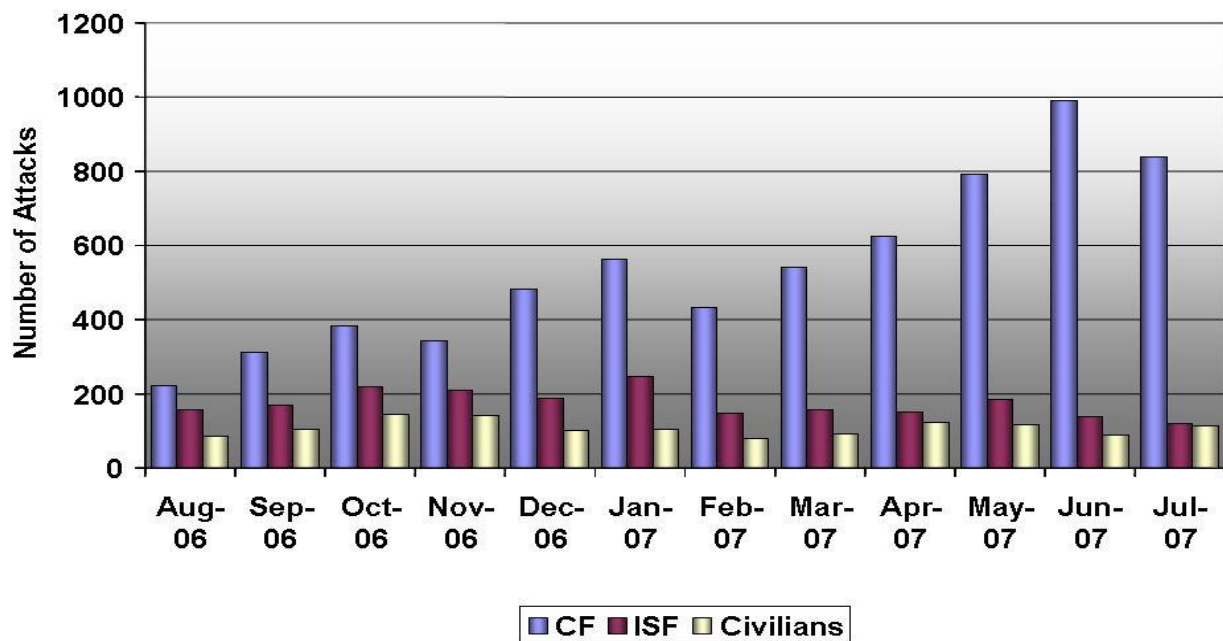
12. Iraqi politics are paralysed. Despite upbeat claims following the recent leadership conference, we see no prospect of Maliki's government making real progress on key legislation. [...] Shia politicians might [...] try and topple him: [...] If Maliki steps down, the succession process could be a lengthy distraction. [...] We continue to judge that any new leader would face similar challenges to Maliki: early significant improvements in government performance would be unlikely.

13. We judge the levels of violence in Baghdad and across Iraq may continue to fall, but only as long as the US troop surge can be sustained: the ISF, even with tribal support, are not capable of maintaining the tempo or effect of current MNF operations. Any progress will continue to be slow. AQ-I's ability to switch the focus of their operations to areas where the MNF threat is less severe suggests that their military capability has not been significantly degraded. Shia extremists are also becoming increasingly active and confident in attacking the MNF; they continue to receive weapons and training from Iran. We doubt the recently announced "freeze" on JAM activity will lead to a sustained reduction in violence. The additional US surge can only be maintained until March 2008 [...] When it reduces, we judge that Sunni extremists and Shia militias will try to reassert control on the ground.

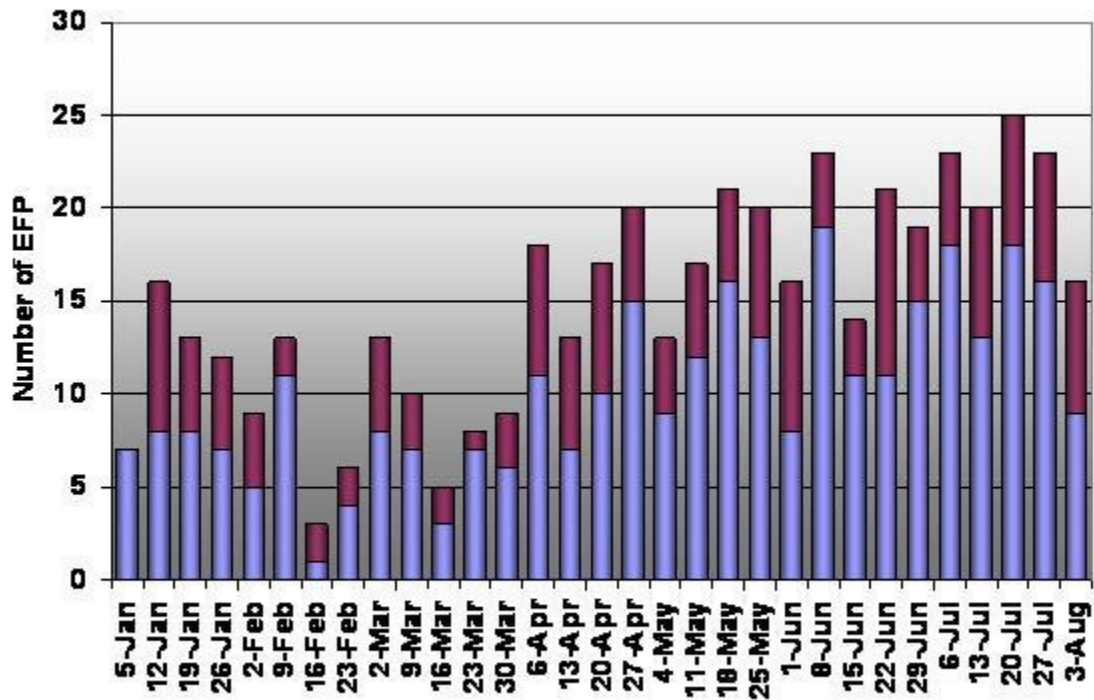
Annex A – Civilian casualties and murders



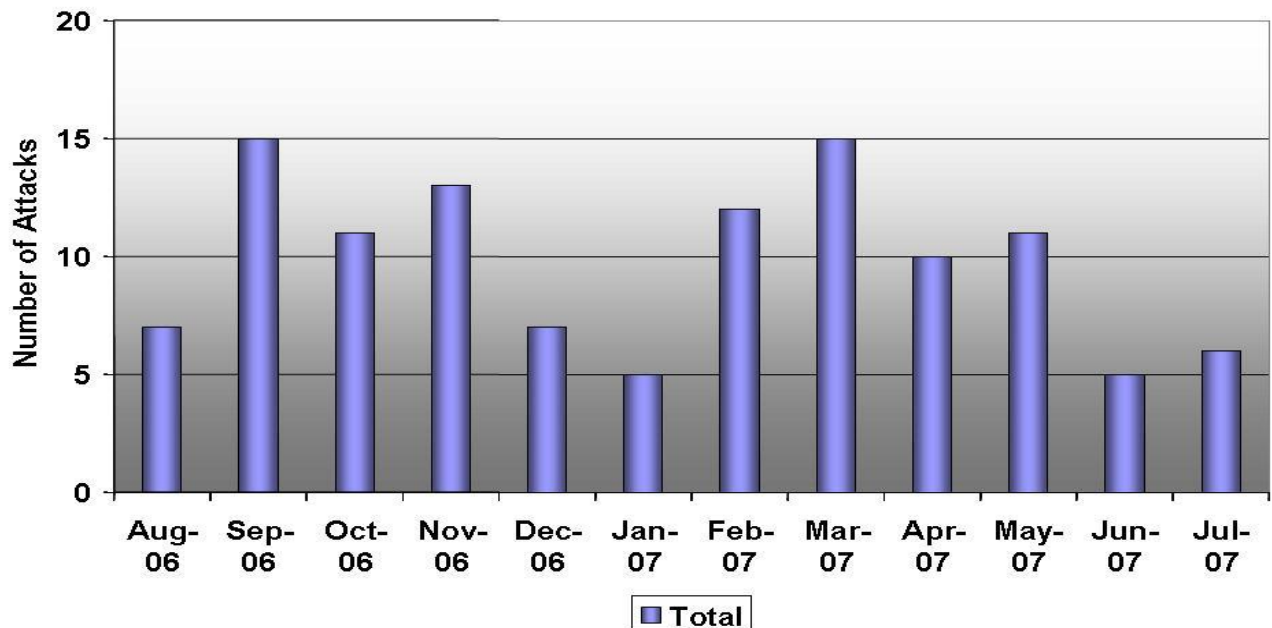
Annex B Attacks in Baghdad and Primary Target



Annex C – EFP Attacks Nationwide (80% of which occur in Baghdad)



Annex D Suicide Attacks in Baghdad



Annex E – Overall Attacks Nationwide

