

## JIC Assessment, 8 July 2009

## IRAQ: POLITICAL &amp; SECURITY TRENDS

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 8 July 2009.*

**Key Judgements**

- I. Maliki is determined to secure a second term as Prime Minister in the 2010 national elections. This influences all of his political decisions and relationships.
- II. The current fluidity of Iraqi politics makes predictions difficult. But Maliki will probably be able to assemble a cross-sectarian nationalist coalition if he can attract a Sunni partner. Given the Iraqi government's continuing commitment to the success of the Sons of Iraq initiative, his best chance probably lies with the Awakening movement, though will retreat towards a Shia alliance if he doubts the stability or popularity of a cross-sectarian nationalist alliance.
- III. The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) will probably seek to join Maliki in any type of coalition; it is less clear whether Maliki will accept an alliance with ISCI, given its reputation as a sectarian party influenced by Iran. The Sadrists are preparing to participate fully in the elections and want to be part of a nationalist alliance, but Maliki and Sadr will not commit to an alliance until polling is complete.
- IV. [...]
- V. Violence across Iraq will probably remain around the current level during 2009 – an average of about 130 attacks per week compared with nearly 1600 attacks per week in mid-2007. The progressive shift from violence to politics will continue, denying terrorist or insurgent groups the opportunity to escalate violence significantly by provoking organized sectarian violence. Recent security gains will not be lost.
- VI. A spike in attacks and especially casualties over the coming months, following withdrawal of Multi-National Forces from the cities, might lead to perceptions that security gains are eroding. But this would not indicate that violent groups are growing, becoming more lethal or posing a greater challenge to Multi-National Forces or Iraqi Security Forces.
- VII. Western military and civilian groups will remain a priority for violent groups.

<b>Assessment Base: [...]</b>
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## IRAQ: POLITICAL AND SECURITY TRENDS

*At the request of the FCO, this report examines likely political and security trends over the next six months.*

**Maliki's manoeuvres**

1. Maliki is determined to secure a second term as Prime Minister in the 2010 national elections. This influences all of his political decisions and relationships. Maliki is popular with the public and incumbency gives him the advantage of a track record, notably on security improvements, although it also exposes his government's poor record on corruption and service delivery to criticism. [...]

2. [...]

**Reaction of other parties**

3. We previously judged that the **Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)**, Da'wa's main Shia rival, was unpopular because of its corruption and poor performance in local government, its closeness to Iran and the Kurds and its support for regional devolution. We also judged it would be unable to recover sufficiently before national elections to maintain its 30 seats in parliament. [...]

4. [...] Muqtada al-Sadr would probably prefer to dominate a list comprising smaller Sunni and Kurdish parties, but in practice the Sadrist are negotiating with all major parties. If the group adopts the Sadr "brand" and avoids association with violent groups then the Sadrist could fulfil their electoral potential. However, with several other parties pursuing variations of a "national front", this is a crowded political field. [...]

5. [...]

6. [...]

7. [...]

**Security trends**

8. We judge that violence across Iraq will probably remain around the current level – an average of about 130 attacks per week<sup>1</sup> – during 2009. This is low in the context of recent years, which saw a peak of nearly 1600 attacks per week in mid-2007 (see Annex). Moreover, Iraq is a violent society in which a high level of attacks has been the norm. Individual weeks and months, particularly July following withdrawal of Multi-National Forces (MNF) from the cities, may record spikes of higher numbers of attacks and especially casualties as opportunities to conduct attacks increase. This will present a stark comparison with the lowest attack levels experienced in November 2008 and might lead to perceptions that security gains are eroding, particularly if mass casualty attacks are favoured, but we judge that this would not indicate that violent groups are growing, becoming more lethal or posing a greater challenge to MNF or Iraqi Security Forces

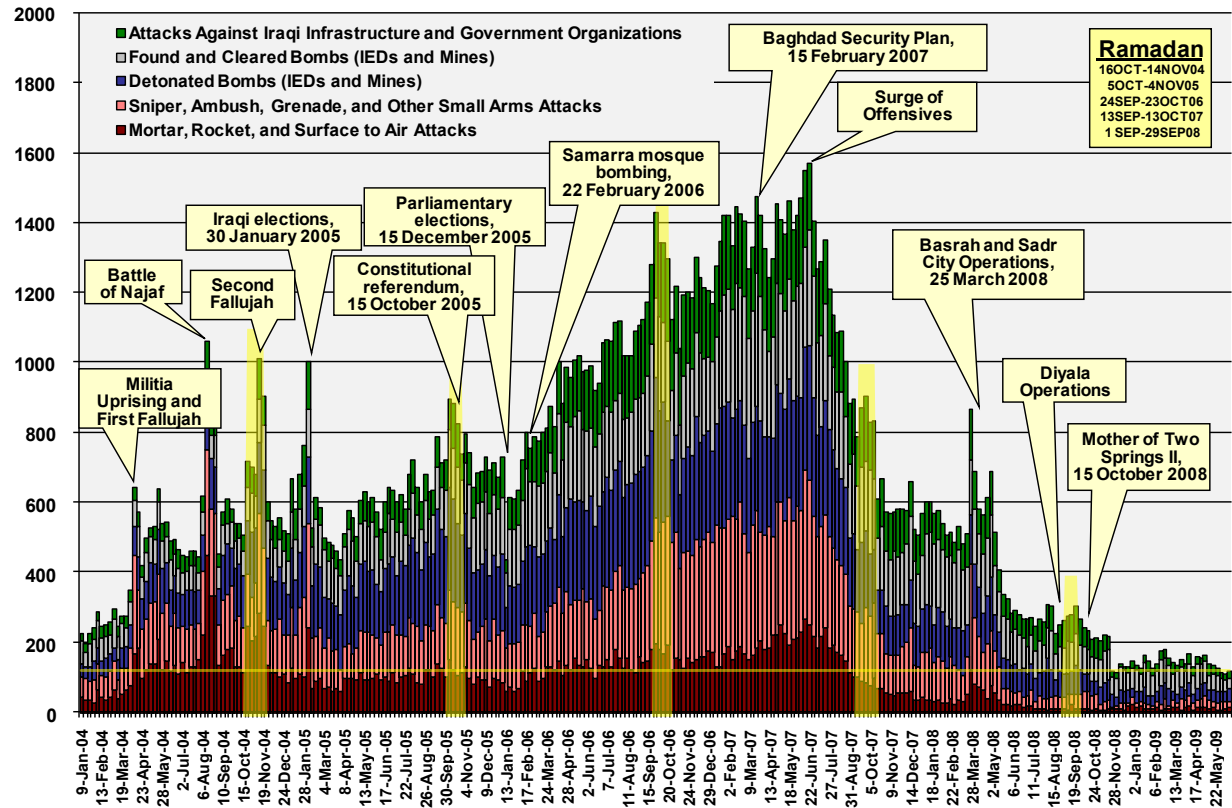
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<sup>1</sup> MNF data (3 July 2009) indicated an average (over the previous 12 weeks) of 132 attacks and 206 casualties per week.

(ISF). The number of foreign fighters moving into Iraq has decreased significantly since 2008 following action by Syria to restrict their movement. We expect most attacks to continue to occur in Baghdad, Mosul and the disputed territories of northern Iraq; southern and western Iraq will remain calmer. Baghdad will remain a focus because it is difficult to defend, symbolically important and guarantees media attention.

9. We judge that any improvement in security during 2009 will be marginal. Terrorist and insurgent groups have sufficient manpower, funding and weaponry to continue to operate at current levels. **Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I)** increased its high-profile attacks on civilians in April and is capable of intermittent short-term spikes for the foreseeable future. **Shia extremist groups**, some trained and equipped by Iran, are likely to continue indirect fire, roadside bomb and assassination attacks against MNF and Iraqi targets. Violent groups have been forced to adapt to a less permissive security environment by becoming smaller and more secretive: they will be harder to suppress, especially now MNF have withdrawn from the cities. [...] In addition, we judge that ISF and the [...] judicial system will be unable to reduce the high background level of violent crime that Iraq has experienced for decades.

10. Equally, we do not expect recent security gains to be lost. Bullish statements about ISF capability from Iraq's leaders betray over-confidence and a desire to extract political capital from ending "occupation", but we judge that ISF are capable of occupying the cities and suppressing armed opposition (though it is less certain to what degree militias will be prevented from exerting influence at a local level). The conspicuous removal of MNF from the cities will reduce some motivation for nationalist resistance, but we continue to judge that Western military and civilian targets will remain a priority for violent groups. Military support will continue: withdrawal from the cities does not mean exiting all urban areas (e.g. Baghdad airport has been defined as "out of the city"), and MNF will target the surrounding areas. We judge it unlikely that the Iraqi government will ask MNF to return to the cities even if attacks and casualties increase over the coming months [...] Iraqi military commanders may blame any spike in attacks on the rustication of MNF to deflect criticism of their performance, while Sunni and Kurdish politicians may cite security concerns to delay the US's overall timetable for withdrawal. But over time the progressive shift from violence to politics will continue, denying terrorist or insurgent groups the opportunity to escalate violence significantly. In this climate, terrorist attacks upon civilians are unlikely to provoke organised sectarian violence. National elections, which may be combined with a referendum on the US-Iraq Security Agreement, could stimulate some attacks but are unlikely to be marred by serious violence due to heavy ISF presence.



Iraq Overall Weekly Security Trends, as of 19 June 2009