

JIC Assessment, 16 May 2007

THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT: ONE YEAR ON

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 16th May 2007.

Key Judgements

- I. [...] Violence continues to rise, distrust is deepening between and within increasingly sectarian communities, and government capacity remains weak. There has been no tangible progress on national reconciliation.
- II. Poor security - particularly in Baghdad and across central Iraq - has deterred political reconciliation and prevented economic reconstruction. Most of the Kurdish north remains quiet and parts of southern Iraq have seen attack levels fall. Sectarian murders have reduced in Baghdad since the US surge and local forces have helped to bring better security in parts of Anbar province. But the national monthly average of recorded attacks is 50% higher now than a year ago. There is a strong possibility that Shia frustrations will lead to increased sectarian violence.
- III. Faction-based, sectarian politics continues to hamper the government's ability to function effectively. The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) remains fragile [...] It is kept together by the influence of Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and a determination to retain Shia dominance against their genuine fears of Baathist resurgence. Opposition groups will be unable to challenge Maliki's government while the UIA hangs together.
- IV. Were Maliki to resign the UIA would eventually find a replacement, although there could be a damaging interregnum. But any successor would face similar challenges, particularly on national reconciliation. Major improvements in government performance are unlikely in the foreseeable future: many departments lack basic bureaucratic and administrative skills and corruption remains endemic.
- V. [...]

Assessment Base:

[...]

THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT: ONE YEAR ON

At the request of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office this paper examines the effectiveness of the Iraqi government, including progress on security and national reconciliation.

Little progress

1. [...] Violence continues to rise (see Annex A), distrust is deepening between and within increasingly sectarian communities, and government capacity remains weak. Poor security – particularly in Baghdad and across central Iraq – has deterred political reconciliation and prevented economic reconstruction. Oil production remains below pre-war levels; demand for electricity continues to outstrip supply, averaging 12 hours a day across Iraq, less in Baghdad. The government has done little to address the social consequences of these problems: the UN assess that around 2.3 million Iraqis (10% of the population) have left Iraq since 2003 and in February an official Iraqi assessment calculated that a further 10% of Iraqis could be internally displaced by the end of the year.

Stumbling political process

2. Faction-based, sectarian politics continues to hamper the government's ability to function effectively. It remains "national" in name only. The Shia coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), remains fragile [...] We judge it is kept together by the influence of Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and a determination to retain Shia dominance against their genuine fears of Baathist resurgence. Government business is characterised by walkouts and quarrels: the Sadrists have withdrawn their participation twice; the Fadilah Party quit the UIA in March; and the Sunni bloc (Tawafuq) are perpetually on the verge of pulling out.

3. [...]

4. Recent diplomatic reporting indicates that there are plans to improve government policy co-ordination, but we judge that major improvements in performance are unlikely in the foreseeable future: many departments lack basic bureaucratic and administrative skills. Corruption remains endemic and is not being tackled effectively. Dishonest ministers and officials continue to use their departments to pursue private and partisan agendas. While there are no accurate figures for the scale of corruption, the head of Iraq's anti-corruption committee recently said that Iraq has lost \$8 billion to corruption since 2003; Iraq was rated the third worst country in the world in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2006.

Security: one step forward, two steps back

5. Most of the Kurdish north remains quiet and parts of southern Iraq have seen reported attack levels fall since Muthanna, Maysan, Dhi Qar and Najaf provinces transferred to Iraqi control (though our confidence in Iraqi-collected statistics is low). But the national average of some 4,500 reported¹ attacks per month is 50% higher now than a year ago (see Annex B).

¹ MNF recorded attacks against the Coalition, Iraqi security forces, civilians and infrastructure.

6. The Baghdad Security Plan (BSP) has yet to bring about a significant improvement. Sectarian murders have reduced since the US surge, from around 1500 in January to around 600 in April, and the government has claimed that displaced Iraqis are returning to their homes in the capital (though we cannot confirm this). But after an initial downturn in February, overall reported attacks in Baghdad have now returned to early January highs of some 300 a week. Violence has also probably been displaced elsewhere, particularly to Diyala province.

7. The Coalition is trying to ensure an even-handed Iraqi approach to implementing the BSP, [...] high-profile attacks by Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) have risen to almost 35 per week since the BSP began. We judge that there is a strong possibility that Shia frustrations will lead to increased sectarian violence. Senior Jaysh al Mahdi commanders who left Baghdad before BSP began [...] are beginning to return.

8. Elsewhere, levels of violence in western Iraq have fallen: attacks against the Multinational Forces (MNF) and Iraqi security forces in Anbar Province are at their lowest level since summer 2005. Since October, MNF – with some Iraqi government support – have been encouraging tribes in Anbar opposed to AQ-I. This is having some effect: AQ-I has come under particular pressure in Ramadi where security is at last improving. Similar tribal initiatives are now also being pursued in other areas. MNF are complementing these efforts through continued talks with some Sunni insurgents. But Sunni demands remain at best unclear and at worst unrealistic; we judge that the prospects for a sustainable cease-fire are still very uncertain. Maliki's government will need to show genuine commitment to reconciliation (including sustained economic reconstruction in Sunni areas) if either tribal initiatives or talks with insurgents are to have more than a temporary and local impact on Sunni violence.

National reconciliation: conferences, speeches and draft laws, with little result

9. There has been no tangible progress on national reconciliation. [...] Antipathy between Shia and Sunnis remains intense: in the face of sustained sectarian violence from AQ-I, there is no sign that the Shia are ready to compromise.

10. A Ministry for "National Dialogue and Reconciliation" was established last summer and a series of conferences has targeted various sections of Iraqi society. Critical legislation is inching forwards under Coalition pressure, but remains deeply divisive. The draft **hydrocarbons law** on the control of oil production and revenue distribution has yet to be cleared by parliament: [...] There has been little substantive progress on **de-Baathification**. The committee reviewing Iraq's **constitution** is expected to make some recommendations to the Iraqi parliament next week but [...] both Kurds and Shia are likely to oppose its findings. And although **provincial elections** are possible this year, the prospect is unattractive to some Shia: increased Sunni political representation would be at their expense. We judge that progress on national reconciliation will remain slow unless there is a major shift in both Shia and Sunni attitudes and expectations, backed by strong and persistent Coalition pressure. At the moment it means different things to different groups.

Relations with Sunni neighbours: increasingly strained

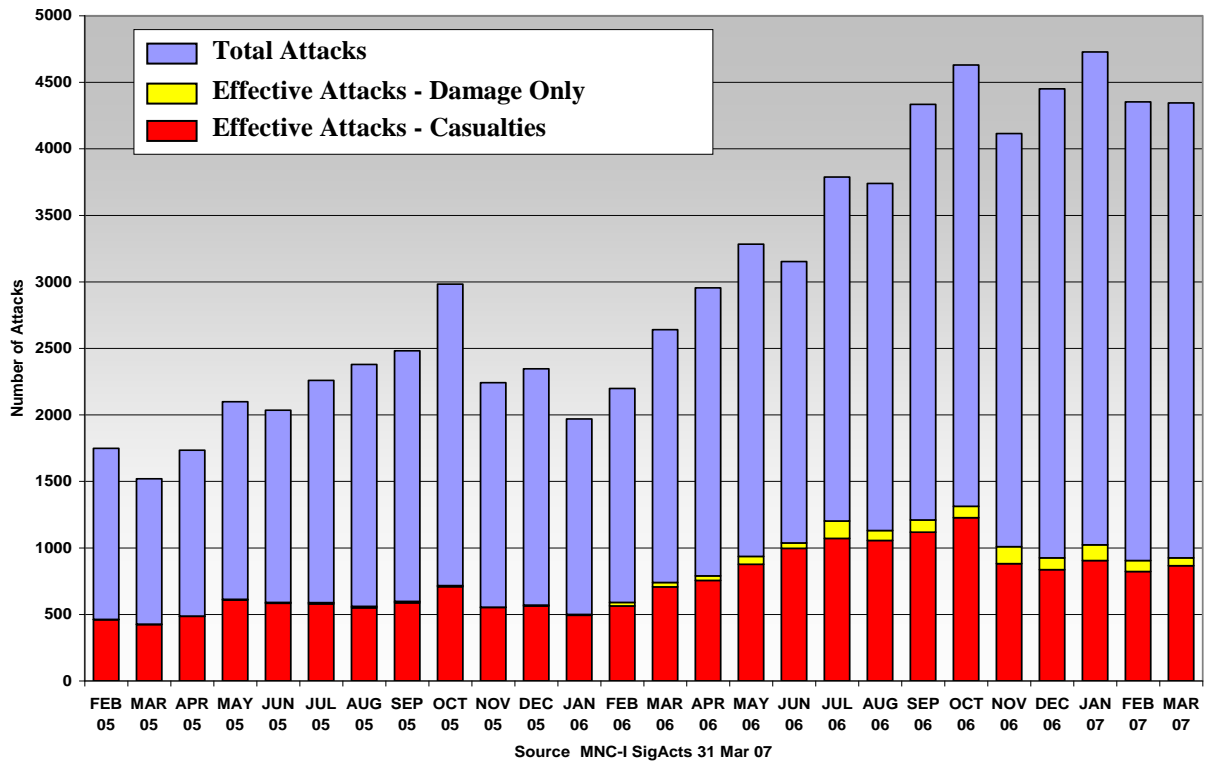
11. Despite public commitments of support for Iraq at the recent Sharm el-Sheikh conference and the launch of the International Compact, we judge the attitude of Iraq's Sunni neighbours will remain frosty. [...] The impact of Iraqi refugees on neighbouring states is adding to the tension. [...]

12. [...]

Prospects for the government

13. [...] diplomatic reporting shows that some Iraqi politicians (including former Prime Minister Allawi) are attempting to create a viable political alternative to Maliki's government. We judge that this opposition will be unable to mount a credible challenge while the UIA hangs together [...] But the Maliki government is fragile and relationships with both SCIRI and the Sadrists are under strain. [...] He has threatened to resign on several occasions. If he did go, we judge that the UIA would [...] eventually find a replacement, although there could be a damaging interregnum. Any successor would face similar challenges, particularly on national reconciliation.

Iraq: Monthly Attack Trends*
February 2005 – March 2007



* MNF recorded attacks against the Coalition, Iraqi security forces, civilians and infrastructure.

Iraq: Attack Trends by Province

Comparison of average monthly attack levels*

Attacks May 2006 / April 2007: shown in blue

Percentage change: shown in red or green



* Figures are based on MNF statistics for all attacks recorded over a 90-day period up to May 2006 and up to April 2007 inclusive. We have concerns over the accuracy of the data, which does not provide a comprehensive picture particularly in provinces which have transferred to Iraqi control. But we judge the figures offer a reliable indication of trends.

* Those provinces showing a decline in average monthly attack levels are, with the exception of Karbala, now under Provincial Iraqi Control.