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Patterns of Violence in Iraq

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**Note: This draft is being circulated for comments and suggestions. Please
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Executive Summary

"Americans planted a tree in Iraq. They watered that tree, pruned it, and cared for it. Ask your American friends why they're leaving now before the tree bears fruit."

--Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.¹

Iraq is in an ongoing struggle to establish a new national identity, and one that can bridge across the deep sectarian divisions between its Shi'ites and Sunnis as well as the ethnic divisions between its Arabs and its Kurds and other minorities. At the same time, Iraq's leaders must try to build a new structure of governance, economics, and social order after a mix of dictatorship, war, sanctions, occupation, and civil conflict that began in the 1970s and have continued ever since.

It is unclear that Iraq can meet this challenge. Current events in Iraq aggravate tensions between the central government in Baghdad and factional groups that feel disenfranchised from Iraq's political and economic system. Tensions are mounting between Shi'ite and Sunni, and among all of Iraq's ethnic and political factions, with Sunnis and Kurds threatening to withdraw support from and sever ties with Baghdad's central government.

Other tensions strain relations between Iraq's main ethnic groups and political parties over issues like autonomy, authority, and control of Iraq's petroleum revenues and natural resources as each side views the others with growing suspicion in this high-stakes competition. The stalled implementation of the 2010 Erbil power-sharing agreements has been followed by power struggles that have now escalated to the point where Iraq's Vice President faces the death penalty and some Sunnis say Iraq's Prime Minister is seeking to become a dictator. Internal violence from extremist groups is rising again, and the NCTC reports that peace in Iraq is close to the casualty levels of "war" in Afghanistan. Pressures from Iran and the power struggle for the future of Syria add new tensions on Iran's borders.

Iraq's domestic challenges interact with the broader patterns of instability in the region. Iraq is caught up in the political struggles between the US, Arab states, and Iran. It is a key focus of the competition between the US and Iran, but also between Iran and the Southern Gulf states. It is caught up in the civil conflict in Syria, and the broader struggles between Sunni and Shi'ite that now affect much of the Islamic world.

Iraq's Critical Political Challenges

The full scale of these did not become clear until the end of 2011. The presence of US troops in Iraq until the end of 2011 partially suppressed the severity of Iraq's internal political, military, and economic challenges. In the months since the US withdrawal, however, increased tensions have begun to fray a fragile coalition government, and have underscored Iraq's significant political, military, and economic challenges.

While many had hoped that 2012 – and US withdrawal – would mark an era in which Iraqi leaders would focus on solving the numerous problems their country faced, such hopes were quickly dashed by increased political instability and the threat of more violence.

The severity of Iraq's deep political divisions, and the coming intensity of Prime Minister's struggle for power with his rivals became apparent just days after President Obama praised Iraqi democracy progress in a December 2011 White House press conference with Prime Minister Maliki. With the withdrawal of US troops, it became clear that US-Iranian competition in Iraq was to play out in an increasingly uncertain and unstable environment. By late January 2012, New York Times was already reporting that "finally confronting the social, economic, and religious divisions that were papered over by the presence of American troops" posed a far greater challenge than previously anticipated.²

The ethnic and sectarian tensions that have driven these recent divisions have been apparent ever since Iraq's founding as a state, but the current crisis has its direct origins in Iraq's March 2010 parliamentary elections. A range of rival political and sectarian factions sought power. Two factions – Ayad Allawi's Iraqiyya bloc and Maliki's State of Law coalition – emerged as the leading factions with only a small majority favoring Allawi. The end result was a post-election power struggle for control over the government, and for control over Iraq's political system, security forces, and oil wealth.

This political struggle continues and has become more violent and divisive. If left unresolved, it could lead to the collapse of Iraq's fledgling democracy and serious civil conflict. The struggles at the top are being compounded by a broader growing Shi'ite split with the Kurds and Sunnis. There is no way to predict how sectarian and ethnic internal violence will emerge out of the power struggles now going on in Iraq. However, the current levels of violence are high. Data from the US National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) show that Iraq had a consistently higher level of violence than Afghanistan during 2009-2011, with no consistent reduction in violence since mid-2009.

Iraq's Military and Security Challenges

Iraq's security forces have become increasingly more political and corrupt since the departure of most of their US and foreign advisors during 2011. The Prime Minister's office consolidated de facto control over the Ministry of Defense, the military command structure, and the intelligence service during later 2011 and early to mid-2012 – often using temporary promotions to take control of senior appointments, bypassing officers who were not regarded as loyal, and dismissing others.

Special Forces and the Counterinsurgency force became the tools of the Prime Minister's office – often being used in missions that suited his needs and priorities. The Chief of Staff's office also became an extension of Maliki's office, and the Prime Minister's office exerted further control through its ability to control the budget of both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior.

The regular military remained a significant force, but some key problems that had long affected Iraqi forces quickly reasserted themselves. Position and promotions quickly became market prices, and favoritism, nepotism, and factionalism quickly became far more serious problems. The transfer of bases and equipment often led to corruption in selling equipment and neglect of maintenance. The US and Western emphasis on giving junior officers and all NCOs more status and independence faded.

The faltering alliance between Sunni tribal leaders in Sunni dominated areas – particularly in Anbar and Ninewa – that had already weakened because of the government's failure to integrate the Sons of Iraq led to growing Shi'ite and Sunni tensions and the growing tensions between the Prime Minister and the Kurds – and particularly between Maliki and Barzani – increased the divisions between Arab and Kurdish units and largely halted efforts to integrate them.

Many elements of the regular police and security forces rapidly reverted to local control, taking bribes, selling positions and promotions, and supporting the dominant local authority. Local forces came under Sunni Arab control where Sunnis were dominant and under KRG control where Kurds were dominant.

The national elements of the police and security forces have increasingly come under the control of the Prime Minister's office – and Maliki also serves as de facto Minister of the Interior. More broadly, the police and security forces are notably more corrupt and less effective than military forces. The severe tensions between the police and military forces that were kept under partial control as long as US advisors mediated become more serious. At the same time, efforts to replace private security forces where governmental security forces have become yet another source of corruption and the politicization of the ISF – presenting growing problems in securing infrastructure and petroleum facilities.

These actions have polarized the Kurds and pushed them to maintain their own security forces, also well as maintain military and police control of Kurdish dominated areas in the North and along the borders with the areas under the control of the central government. The resulting tensions are particularly severe in the Mosul and Ninewa areas, and have sometimes come close to open fighting between the two sets of forces.

As for the Sunnis, the Tribal leaders who turned on the extreme Sunni groups like Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia and formed the Son of Iraq in Anbar and other Sunni-dominated areas in the West, have increasingly distanced themselves from a government they see as Shi'ite. There are no signs as yet that Sunnis are turning back towards active civil war on any broad level, but many remain armed and Sunni extremist groups are growing in strength and becoming an increase element in the fighting in Syria where they – and outside volunteers – both play a significant role and benefit from the flow of arms and money through Iraq to Syria.

Iraq's stability is also affected by the continuing presence of the Iranian Al Quds force. The Charge of the Knights campaign against the Shi'ite militias in the South in March-April 2008 sharply weakened such militias, especially the Sadrist forces, but scarcely eliminated them. It also did nothing to reduce the role of the Iranian Al Quds force – which had become a serious problem by 2004.³

Iran's intervention was led by the head of the Al Quds Force, Qassem Suleimani. During 2005-2010, Iran pursued "divide and influence" tactics by simultaneously working with Shi'ite leaders like Maliki and Hakim, supporting the Hakim faction's Bader Corps militia, and supporting Sadrist militias like the Mahdi Army (Jaydsh al Mahdi). It provided training, money, and key military technology to anti-US militias like advantage triggering devices for IEDs, and special components like Explosively Formed Projectiles to defeat US armor.

Prime Minister Maliki blocked most US efforts to actively attack the Al Quds force and hostile Iranian agents between 2007 and early 2008. He did take some action against the Al Quds Force during the Charge of the Knights campaign, but this only limited the role of the Al Quds force in Iraq until the end of 2009. Maliki never attempted to force Iran to remove the Iraqi-deployed elements of the Al Quds Forces during the period before the departure of US forces in 2011, and the US never attempted to take consistent action against Iran's role in dealing with the militias and acting as an advisor to the Maliki government.⁴

As a result, Iran still has a significant Al Quds presence and it plays a role in influencing Iraqi military and security decisions that both encourages future violence and counterbalances the remaining US advisory role. Iran has also used overflights of Iraq, and the flow of personnel through Iraq to support the pro-Assad forces in Syria, and succeed in pushing Maliki into supporting Assad. This has help to divided Sunni and Shi'ite in Iraq – each supporting different sides in Syria. It presents the risk on one hand that a surviving Assad regime would create a much stronger axis of Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon. On the other hand, it presents the risk that if Syria should come under Sunni Arab control and reject Iran, Iran would respond by trying to exert far stronger influence in Iraq to compensate. Both alternatives would problem raise the level of violence in Iraq.

If Iraq does become increasingly violent and the Shi'ite dominated Iraqi government looks for outside aid, this may push it towards dependence on Iran. Moreover, Iran is already pressuring Iraq to support Iranian goals in keeping Assad's regime alive in Syria, and may come to treat Iraq as a kind of hostage to any US intervention against Iran in the Gulf. These actions could present major problems for both Iraq and the US because the level of continued US security assistance is now uncertain, and because Iraq lost virtually all of its military capabilities to defend against Iran as a result of the 2003 invasion.

Iraq's Demographic, Economic, and Social Challenges

There are deep structural problems in Iraq's demographics and economy that also encourage violence in Iraq. Factors compounding these risks include high population growth, serious problems in employment and the agriculture sector, and a per capita income that only ranks 162nd in the world in spite of record oil revenue.⁵ So do abuses of human rights. The Department of State Annual Report on Human Rights Practices for 2011 states that Iraq faced significant human rights problems over the course of the past year:⁶

“During the year the most significant human rights developments were continuing abuses by sectarian and ethnic armed groups and violations by government-affiliated forces. Divisions between Shia and Sunni and between Arab and Kurd empowered sectarian militant organizations. These militants, purporting to defend one group through acts of intimidation and revenge against another, influenced political outcomes. Terrorist attacks designed to weaken the government and deepen societal divisions occurred during the year.

The three most important human rights problems in the country were governmental and societal violence reflecting a precarious security situation, a fractionalized population mirroring deep divisions exacerbated by Saddam Hussein's legacy, and rampant corruption at all levels of government and society.”

Iraq's political and economic challenges now dominate both its internal politics and relations with the US, Iran, and Iraq's other neighbors. Iraq needs trade and cross-border support from Iran, just as it needs aid, diplomatic, and military support from the US. Iraq's much-reduced military capabilities make it dependent on aid, military sales, and training from the United States, and Iraq still lacks the resources and cohesion to resist against Iranian coercion and to defend against Iranian aggression.

Moreover, Iraq's economy remains crippled by a lack of local security in many areas, and it is important to understand just how serious its other problems are. Iraq has a level of corruption that Transparency International ranked 175th out of 183 countries in 2011 – making it the eighth most corrupt country in the world.⁷ In spite of more than half a decade of faltering legislative efforts, Iraq has failed to pass effective investment, tax, and property laws to secure both domestic and foreign investment as well as to create effective security forces to protect its infrastructure and businesses.

Governance and a failure to properly encourage development remains a major problem. A budget crisis that lasted from 2008 to 2010, and a political crisis that began long before the March 2010 election that produced a de facto stalemate in many aspects of governance, have added to these economic problems as well as sharply delayed critical qualitative improvements in every branch of Iraq's national security forces. Iraq has not been able to absorb and support many of the aid projects funded during the US occupation, and its problems in national governance have been compounded by corruption, political infighting, and sectarian and ethnic struggles at the provincial and local levels.

Iraq's Petroleum Challenges

Moreover, virtually all of Iraq's disposable wealth comes from its petroleum sector, and related services, which the CIA describes as follows:⁸

“Iraq's largely state-run economy is dominated by the oil sector, which provides more than 90% of government revenue and 80% of foreign exchange earnings. Since mid-2009, oil export earnings have returned to levels seen before Operation Iraqi Freedom. As global oil prices remained high for much of 2011, government revenues increased accordingly. For 2012, Iraq's draft budget forecasts oil exports of 2.6 million barrels per day (bbl/day), a significant increase from Iraq's average of 2.2 million bbl/day in 2011. Iraq's contracts with major oil companies have the potential to further expand oil revenues, but Iraq will need to make significant upgrades to its oil processing, pipeline, and export infrastructure to enable these deals to reach their economic potential.”

Iraq faces massive development challenges and is vulnerable to exploitation by local, regional, and international actors angling for a share of Iraq's resources. Although the Energy Information Administration describes Iraq as “one of the few places left where vast reserves, proven and unknown, have barely been exploited”, development of Iraq's energy sector is limited by war, ethnic conflict, and political crises.⁹

Iraq is seeking to reach an output of 10 million barrels a day by 2017, and to increase production from around 2.9 million barrels in the spring of 2012 to 3.3 million in 2013.¹⁰ However, the country's petroleum sector faces many challenges that have limited its ability to produce, export, and deliver this valuable natural resource. Iraq's oil resources are critical to Iraq's future and are an indirect area of competition between the US and Iran.

There is no doubt about Iraq's potential, but there is great uncertainty as to how quickly it can develop its resources, about its ability to offer realistic and consistent incentives to investors in its energy sector, about its ability to resolve its ethnic and sectarian differences over how to develop its resources, and about the impact that violence could have on its output. A 2012 study by the International Energy Agency illustrates how critical these uncertainties are. While the study focused on the "high" and "central" cases for various political reasons, the "delayed" cases warns that continued political divisions and violence could limited Iraq's developed to a fraction of the growth the government now projects.¹¹

The battles over Iraq's natural resources are also having a significant impact on its domestic politics and divisions. Iraq faces political fallout between the central government and the Kurdish regional government (KRG) over energy contracts and the right to invite and award lucrative contracts to international companies. In April 2012, the KRG halted its supply of oil for export through Iraq's national pipeline, claiming that the central government owed over \$1.5 billion in operating costs to companies in the Kurdish region.¹² For its part, the government in Baghdad has threatened to simply deduct that lost oil revenue from what the KRG's portion of the Iraqi budget. At the same time, Iraq's oil-rich Shi'ite provinces want a larger share of the country's export earnings while other Arab Shi'ite and Sunni provinces want the distribution of these shares based on need of their portion of Iraq's total population.

At best, Iraq will find it difficult to meet these competing demands and to fund both jobs and development. Iraq is unlikely to meet its ambitious goal of producing 10-12 million barrels a day by 2017, according to many familiar with Iraq's energy sector.¹³ Disputes between the central government and regional authorities, as well as resources committed to rebuilding Iraq's war-torn infrastructure factor into what many believe will be reduced oil production targets.

Moreover, Iraqi domestic demand for petroleum product has been sharply increased by subsidies that have increased demand. UNDP estimates that petroleum subsidies already reduce the price by more than 50% and cost Iraq some \$11.3 billion a year, and the end result is that Iraqis consume over 750 million barrels a day of Iraq's oil production.¹⁴

The Iraqi Oil Ministry reported June of 2012 that the country's crude exports dropped 2.2 percent from April to May of 2012 due to increased demand.¹⁵ Ministry spokesman Assem Jihad stated that oil exports decreased from an average of 2.508 million barrels a day in April to an average of 2.452 million barrels a day in May. Further, even if these subsidies were now removed and Iraq built enough refineries to meet growing domestic demand, its export capability will still be steadily reduced by increased in domestic use of its output.

Internal disputes between the central government and Iraq's oil rich regions, as well as poor infrastructure, political uncertainty, sabotage, and internal demand will further limit Iraq's ability to produce and export oil. Few analysts believe that Iraq will meet its goal of increasing oil output fivefold by 2017. Herman Franssen of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a former chief economist at the International Energy Agency asserts that, "There's hardly anybody who believes that target. What people do believe in is that they could reach half of it by 2017. That would still be very ambitious, but at least more realistic".¹⁶ Production levels as low as 6 million barrels may be more likely.¹⁷

The Broader Iranian Role in Iraq

While Iraq faces problems in its relations with all of its neighbors, including the other Arab states and Turkey, Iraq's primary challenge comes from Iran. At a minimum, Iran wants Iraq to become a de facto strategic partner and a bridge that extends Iranian influence across the Middle East through Syria and Lebanon. Iran seeks to ensure that Iraq does not serve as a base for the US, serve US interests, or reemerge as a threat to Iran. Iran shares a long and porous border with Iraq, and seeks to create a stable but reliant ally, not a regional competitor. It seeks to rid the country of American influence – particularly of American military personnel – to the greatest extent possible. Iran has aggressively used its networks, patronage, economic ties, religious ties, aid money, and military support to various factions in Iraq to achieve these goals.

Moreover, Iran now sees Iraq as playing a critical role in its efforts to keep the Assad regime in power in Syria, preserve its alliance with Syria and its influence in Lebanon, and find ways to avoid the political upheaval in the Arab world from undermining Iran's strategic interests and ambitions. The near civil war in Syria threatens to deprive Iran of its only important ally in the Arab world.

As a result, Iran is pressuring the Maliki government to support Assad in spite of his use of violence against his own population, and seeks to limit Sunni arms transfers through Iraq to Sunni opposition movements in Syria. These have become significant Iranian objectives – and ones which, if fully successful, would raise the specter of a real “Shi'ite crescent” that includes Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

Iran has deep religious, political, and cultural ties to the ruling Shi'ite parties and factions in a country with which it once fought a fierce and bloody eight-year war. Iran plays an active role in mediating between Iraqi political leaders, it has ties to the Sadrists that are now one of the largest parties in Iraq's ruling coalition, and the IRGC has significant influence over elements within the Iraqi security forces.

Iran has also deployed a large mix of cultural, military, and economic resources available to influence Iraq since Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003. Iran uses its influence in Iraq to subvert US goals, pursue its own interests, and maintain tabs on dissident groups across its border. Iran will leverage its considerable sway in Iraq in attempts to keep the pro-Iranian, Shia Prime Minister Maliki in power, maintaining stability along its western border, while also ensuring that Iraq does not rise to contest for regional power. Yet Iran's role in Iraq is complex, and it will be no simple task to mold Iraq into the ally Iran wishes it to be.

Nevertheless, important differences exist between Iran's Persian religious establishment, and many of Iraq's Arab Shiite clergy and much population. The memory of the Iran-Iraq War – which lasted from 1980-1988 – still makes many Iraqi Shi'ite leery of Iran. Most Iraqi Shiites are “quietist” and many do not support Iran's concepts of an Islamic revolution or a Religious Supreme Leader. Sunnis and Kurds do not welcome Iranian influence in Iraq for obvious reasons, and polls show that both Sunni and Shi'ite Iraqi Arabs see themselves as having a very different cultural and national identity from Iranian Persians. Moreover, many of Iran's actions and economic activities since 2003 have led to tensions with various factions in Iraq.

Iraq and the Arab World

The struggle between Sunni and Shi'ite has also affected Iraq's relations with the Arab world, and its "Arab identity" at a time of growing tension between Sunni and Shi'ite in much of the rest of the Islamic world. Iraq has reached to the Arab world with limited success – but Arab states still have great reservation about Iraq's relations with Iran and shift from a Sunni-dominated to Shi'ite dominated political structure.

Iraq hosted a meeting of the Arab League's foreign ministers in Baghdad in a meeting on May 28th, 2012 – a meeting that highlighted the fact that Iraq must find a balance between relations with Iran and the Arab world, as well as deal with competition between Iran and the US. Iraq has however, played a mixed role in dealing with Syria – sometimes claiming to limit the flow of Iranian arms to the Assad regime in Syria and sometimes permitting them, while Sunni extremist factions have increasingly aid the other side. Iran has not actively supported Iran in its political confrontation with Israel, has avoided taking sides in the power struggles over Iran's nuclear programs and its confrontation with the Southern Gulf states over Iran's threats to "close the Gulf."

In short, it is far from clear whether the US and Arab states, or Iran, will become the dominant competitors in Iraq. It seems more likely that Iraq will remain caught up in the tensions between each side while its internal political struggles will do more to shape its near and mid-term future. Iraqi political instability, its sectarian and ethnic divisions, its political power struggles at the top, and its growing security problems on the ground – and the risk of a new round of civil fighting – will all contribute to the uncertainties affecting its alignments with either Iran or the Arab Gulf states and the US.

Coming to Grips with Real World Impact of US Withdrawals from Iraq

US policy must be based on both the fact that Iraq plays critical role in the future stability of the Gulf and the flow of world oil exports, and the reality that past US plans for a strategic partnership have faltered. This is particularly important because of the rising risk of a military confrontation in the Gulf and/or preventive strikes against Iran – raising the risk Iraq might become involved in such conflicts

The best US option is to create the strongest possible country team in Iraq it can, backed by ongoing efforts in Washington. The Administration and the Congress also need to recognize that aid funds will be a major issue even though the US has not maintained a troop presence and is cutting back on many of its previous goals for creating a strategic relationship with Iraq. As the previous analysis has shown, resources are already a problem.

Much will depend on the US country team's political, economic, and military efforts to bolster Iraq's capacities and to counter Iranian influence, and the efforts of the US military become partners in giving Iran the mix of counterinsurgency and conventional forces it needs. Aid in governance and economic policies that encourage outside and domestic investment may be as critical as security aid. Many of the broader initiatives that encourage measures that stem corruption and enforce rule-of-law are long overdue and might prove as important as military and police training

At the same time, the US must make a fundamental shift in its wartime goals for Iraq. Iraq will not be a “strategic partner” if this means confronting Iran or tying its interest and internal politics to US interests. Iraq will only exercise its Strategic Framework Agreement with the US to the extent Iraq’s leader’s feel this serves Iraq’s interests or is necessary to aid in Iraq’s defense. As a result, the US goal in Iraq needs to change to one that does everything possible to ensure Iraq emerges as a strong, stable independent state that can resist outside pressure from Iran and any other state in the region.

The US goal in Iraq should now be to aid Iraq in developing effective political unity, creating better and less corrupt governance, and using its own resources to sever the interests of its people. US security policy should focus on helping Iraq put an end to its violent extremist elements and creating strong enough military forces to deter and defend against Iraq and other outside states without threatening its neighbors.

This goal is challenging – although it does require far less US military and civil aid than the US still planned to provide at the end of 2011. The Obama Administration carried out extensive planning for a new approach to shaping the US force posture in the region in late 2011. It then advanced a new strategy in January 2012 that made the Gulf and Middle East equal to Asia as one of the two critical priorities for US strategy. The Department of Defense also carried out contingency planning and war games that examined the threat Iran post to Iraq developed specific force plans and plans for improved cooperation with other Gulf states.

The fact remains, however, that the Administration, Congress, and Governor Romney have recently left US policy towards Iraq in something approaching a bipartisan intellectual vacuum. The US is drifting from a period of invasion and occupation towards one approaching strategic neglect, ignoring the reality that Iraq plays a critical role in the stability of the Gulf, world petroleum exports, the global economy, and the containment of Iran.

Even with the best US policies, there will only be so much the US can do. Iraq’s future will ultimately depend on whether Iraqis can find a real solution to their internal political divisions, and can avoid a new round of civil conflicts. A strong, independent Iraq with political leadership that focuses on Iraq’s national interests and serves all of its people would find it far easier to balance US and Iranian competition, and possibly take advantage of them. It would be a critical buffer between Iran and its Arab neighbors as well as help contain the pressure on Syria and Lebanon, and tensions between Israel and Iran.

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INTRODUCTION

The political crisis that has unfolded since the US troop pullout suggests that Iraq's security situation will continue to get worse before it gets better. Cleavages between divergent ethnic groups have exacerbated existing tensions as groups struggle to assert their own interests in the space created by the withdrawal of US troops. In addition to dealing with internal Iraqi disputes, American challenges have been compounded by Iranian intervention on a number of levels.

The average level of violence does not seem to be getting strikingly worse if measured in terms of number of incidents and any counts of casualties and acts of violence are highly uncertain. Ethnic and sectarian tension, however, are clearly growing and the rhetoric of Sunni and Shiite Arab factions and Kurdish groups has become more extreme. The security forces are more divided and corrupt – particularly the police – and various Sunni extremist factions – some associated with Al Qaeda – have become more active. The civil war in Syria has further polarized Iraqis along sectarian lines, raised new issues about Iraqi ties to Iran, and led to a new flow of outside Salafist extremists into and through Iraq.

Pro-Iranian forces have pursued a multi-pronged approach aimed at minimizing America's presence and influence in Iraq, while strengthening their own economic, political, religious, and military ties to their Iraqi neighbor. Tehran's aims of maintaining a Shi'a-led government in neighboring Iraq is driven by their desire to project influence throughout the region, subvert Western interests, and benefit commercially through trade.

While Tehran seeks to avoid instability along its western border, it has little interest in creating a strong or unified military, culturally, or economically robust "Arab" neighbor that could contest it for regional power in the future. Among the shifting landscape of the Iraqi terrain is the new face of the US mission in Iraq.

IRAQ'S CONTINUING LEVELS OF INTERNAL VIOLENCE

The patterns of violence that threaten to divide Iraq are far more serious than the US anticipated as it left the country, although US commanders warned that this might happen. In late-November, 2011, the US Commander in Iraq, General Lloyd Austin, summarized the probable trends as follows:

“As we leave, we can expect to see some turbulence in security initially, and that’s because you’ll see various elements try to increase their freedom of movement and freedom of action,” despite better conditions than at any other point, “there will probably be unfinished business for many, many years to come...Al Qa’ida will continue to do what it’s done in the past, and we expect that it’s possible they could even increase their capability...If the Iraqi security forces and the government of Iraq are able to counter that, it will be a good thing.

...If they can’t, they’ll continue to grow in capacity.” In addition, he warned against militias, such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Promised Day Brigade, which could threaten the remaining US civilian presence. He stated, “These are elements that are really focused on creating a Lebanese Hezbollah kind of organization in this country

...As we leave, if those elements are left unchecked, they will eventually turn on the government, and they should be concerned about that.” He did conclude that “there’s likely to be setbacks, some tough times in the days ahead...But I’m very hopeful we’ll stay on course...This is clearly not an endpoint...We really intend to remain engaged with Iraq, and we look forward to having Iraq as a great strategic partner in the future.”¹⁸

While overall levels of violence have decreased since 2007, large-scale coordinated attacks such as those carried out on July 23, 2012 mark the worst violence in years, and could lead to a return to significant ethnic and sectarian violence in the aftermath of the US troop withdrawal, ongoing Shia-Sunni tensions, and hostility among opposing political factions.

The International Energy Agency’s October 2012 *Iraq Energy Outlook* draws upon UN data to report that while the overall number of security incidents has declined in recent years, “the risk of violence remains an important concern for companies working in the energy sector, necessitating close attention and considerable expense”.¹⁹ According to UN estimates, the number of attacks in Iraq increased by 36 % between March and June 2012.²⁰ In particular, Sunni insurgent groups have stepped up activity, targeting Iraq’s Shia communities or large Shia gatherings. **Figure 1** below illustrates these trends.

The data on trends in attacks and casualties are inconsistent and must be interpreted in terms of the larger context of violence in Iraq, but most sources show that recent levels of violence in Iraq continue to show alarming trends. For example, SIGIR reported in July 2012 that “the number of monthly attacks declined from 3,303 in August 2007 to 239 in March 2012,” they go on to report that “attackers killed at least 1,053 Iraqis from April 1 to June 30 (2012),” and that the coordinated July 23, 2012 attacks “resulted in the largest one-day death toll in more than two years”.²¹

Many media outlets reported that July 23, 2012 marked the worst single day of sectarian violence in Iraq since 2010, when dozens of coordinated attacks killed over 115 people and injured more than 250.²² On July 23, Al Qaeda in Iraq launched an offensive against Shiites, using car bombs, checkpoint ambushes, and assaults on military bases and personnel, which the New York Times

characterized as “without precedent over the last few years, at least in the sheer number of attacks, spread over so many locations in a third of Iraq’s 18 provinces, from north to south”.²³

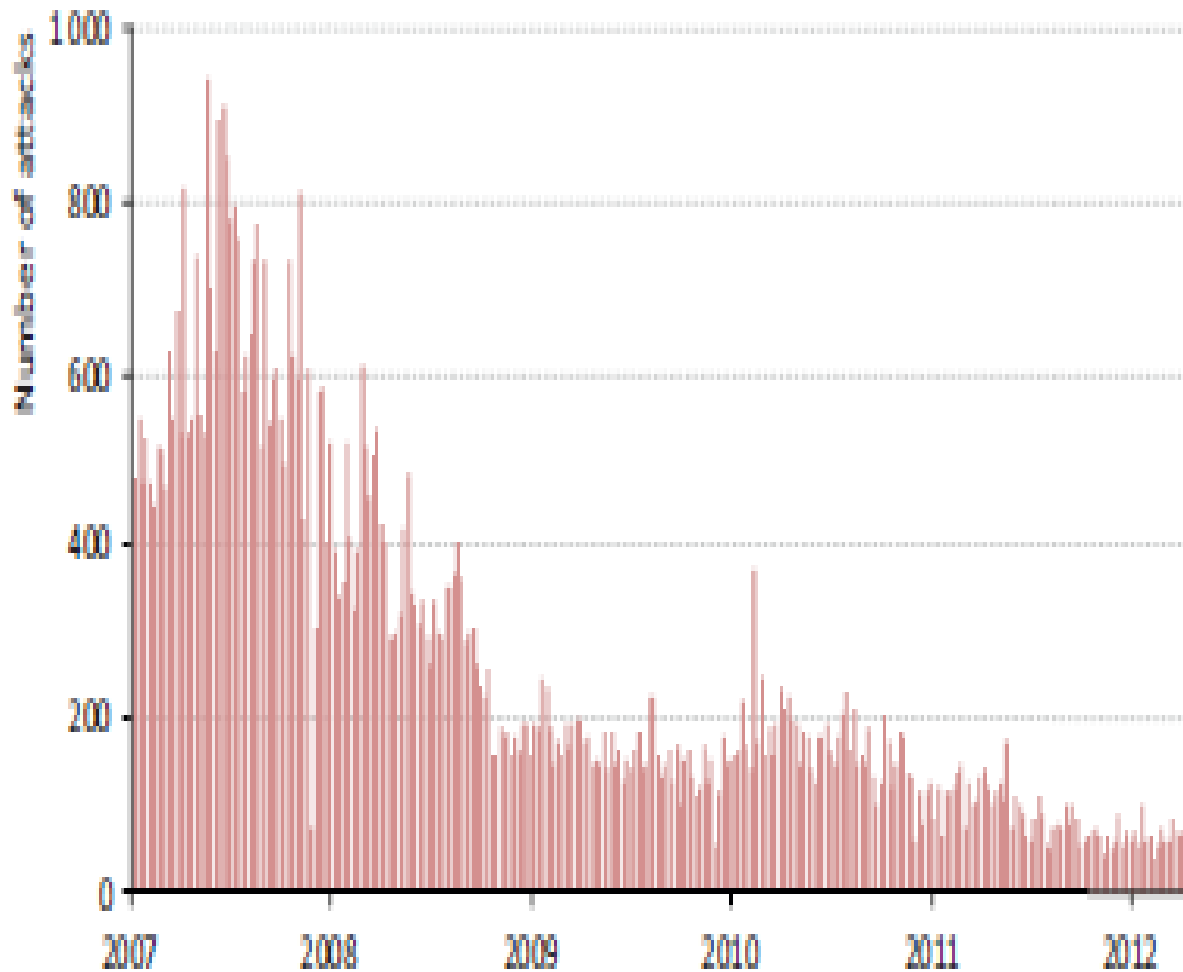
In March of 2012 the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) released its “2012 Report on Terrorism.” This report also highlights the disturbing levels of violence in Iraq. Using statistical data collected through its Worldwide Incident Tracking System (WITS) database, the NCTC reported that Iraq experienced the second highest number of both attacks (2,265) and resulting deaths (3,063).²⁴ See **Figure 2** below. (For a more detailed analysis of the NCTC data on Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, see the September 2012 Burke Chair Report titled “Back to the Body Count”.²⁵)

Multi-year trends in Iraq show that while Iraq suffered the second highest numbers of both terrorist-related attacks and deaths in 2011, both figures are at their lowest levels since 2007, when Iraq was victim to 6,210 attacks that resulted in over 13,000 deaths. **Figure 3** below illustrates these numbers.

Figure 3 also shows that the NCTC estimates that the Iraq War produced far more attacks and deaths at its peak than Afghanistan – with roughly six times as many in Iraq 2007 as Afghanistan had in 2011. As noted earlier, however, “peace” in Iraq in 2011 was close to being as violent as war in Afghanistan in both total numbers and relative to total population.

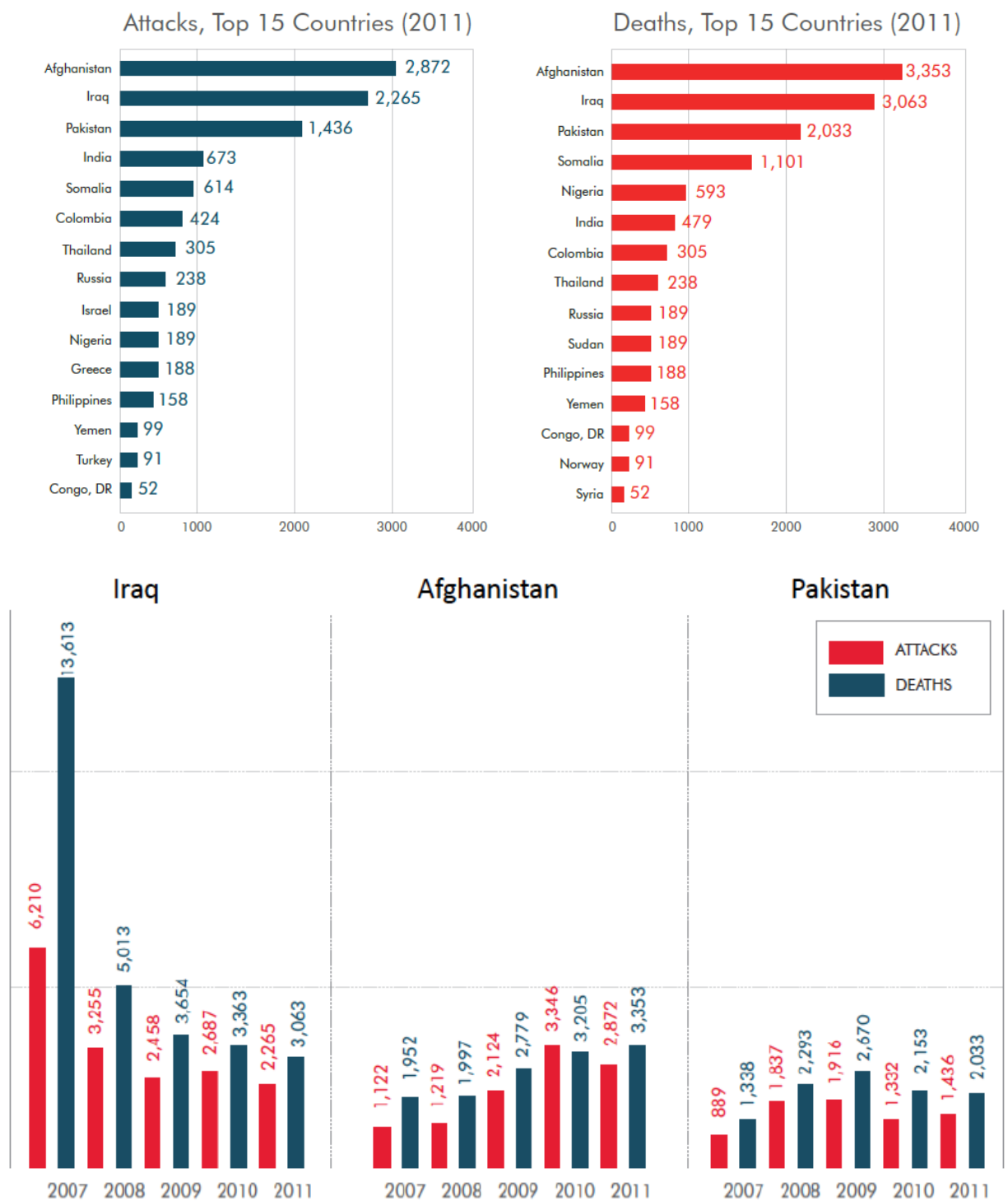
Other NCTC estimates of terrorist violence indicate that Afghanistan ranked highest in terms of global terrorism in 2011 in both the number of attacks (2,872) and deaths (3,353), followed by Iraq and Pakistan.²⁶ It should be noted, however, that the Afghan totals for attacks and deaths in 2011 – the peak year so far in the Afghan war – were only marginally smaller than the totals for Iraq (2,265 attacks and 3,063 dead) – a nation where the war is supposed to have been won. Pakistan ranked third with about half the number of attacks (1,436) and roughly than two-third of the deaths (2,033) that took place in Afghanistan and Iraq.²⁷

The NCTC estimates of the patterns in kidnappings followed very different patterns from the patterns in attacks and deaths. Somalia led with 2,527. Afghanistan was next with 902, about one-third of the Somalia total. Pakistan had 430, and Iraq had 111.²⁸ This illustrates that casualties alone do not provide a meaningful metric of the violence, particularly in political wars like insurgencies.

Figure 1: Total Number of Attacks in Iraq (Weekly)

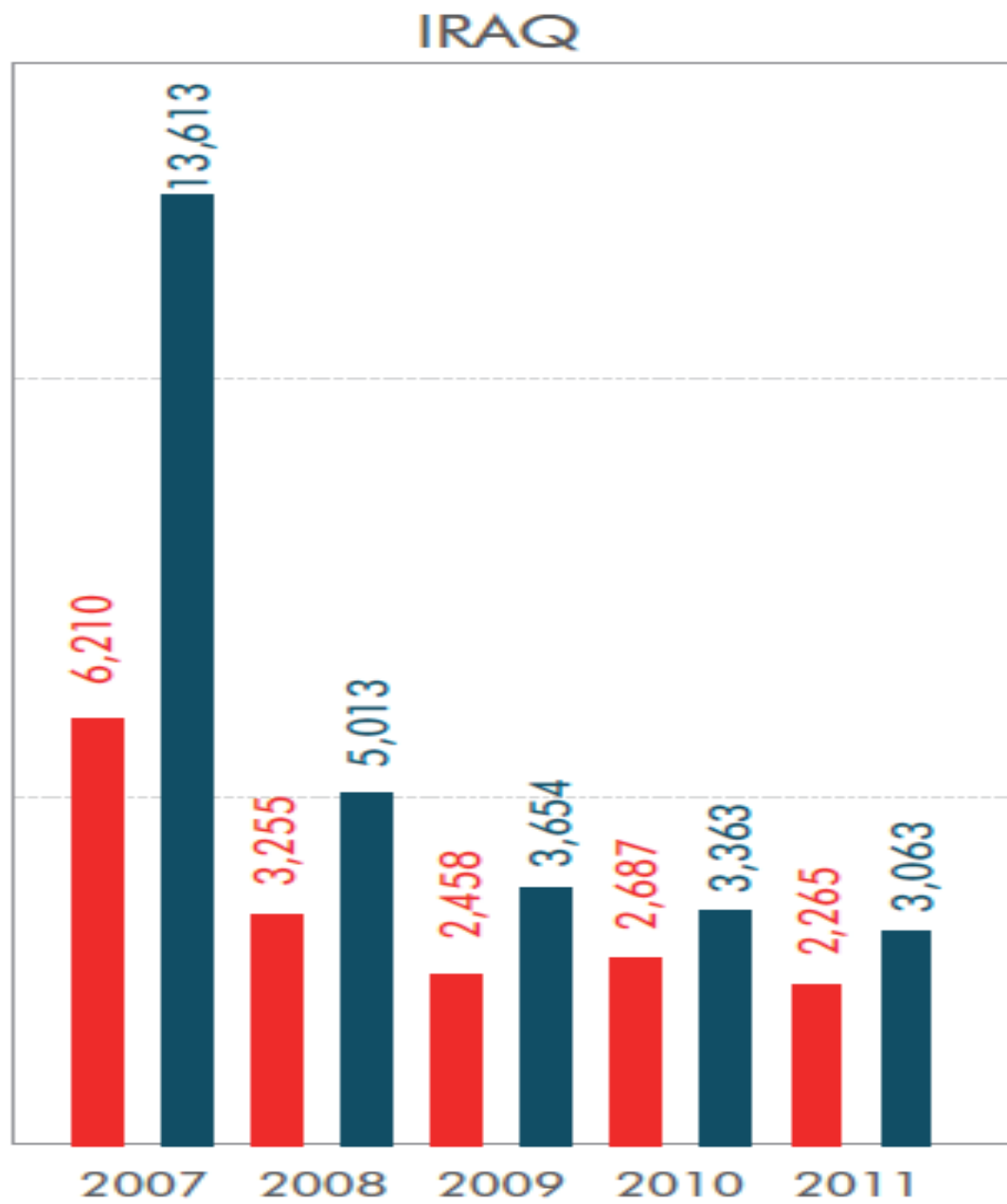
Source: UN Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit.

Source: International Energy Agency, "Iraq Energy Outlook", October 2012, p. 42.

Figure 2: NCTC data on Attacks and Deaths in 2011

Trend analysis for Afghanistan includes inconsistent source reporting between 15 November and 31 December 2011.

Source: National Counterterrorism Center, Report on Terrorism 2011, March 2012, pp. 9-10.

Figure 3: Trends in Iraq: Attacks and Deaths, 2007-2011

Source: NCTC 2011 Report on Terrorism, page 10.

SIGIR has reported that the “number of Iraqi refugees registered with the UNHCR in neighboring countries continued its steady downward trend during the first five months of 2012, falling by about 11% from 168,765 on January 1 to 149,897 on May 31”.²⁹ **Figure 4** shows the US estimates that nearly half of Iraq’s minorities have been driven out of Iraq since 2003.

As **Figure 5** demonstrates, refugees and IDPs are registering as returnees at a quicker pace in 2012 than 2011.³⁰ This is partly driven, however, by instability in Jordan and the crisis in Syria. The return of large numbers of refugees and IDPs often leads to local increases in sectarian and ethnic tension, and increases the need for housing, and raises the issue of substandard living conditions for many Iraqi citizens. SIGIR reported in July that almost half a million Iraqis live in squatter settlements throughout Iraq, with over 200,000 of them residing in Baghdad.³¹ These conditions contribute to economic hardship and general instability for far too many Iraqis affected either directly or indirectly by the legacy of war.

Some shifts also affect groups that have been responsible for violence in the past. The Iraqi Government, in conjunction with the UN and the US Department of State, relocated the last of thousands of Iranian Mujaheddin e-Khalq (MEK) members from Camp Ashraf to Camp Hurriya (formerly Camp Liberty), near Baghdad.³² Poor living conditions in Camp Hurriya, including “an insufficient number of functional air-conditioning units, generators, and sewage-removal systems capable of supplying a fully populated camp” increase tensions between the residents of these refugee camps and the Iraqi government.³³

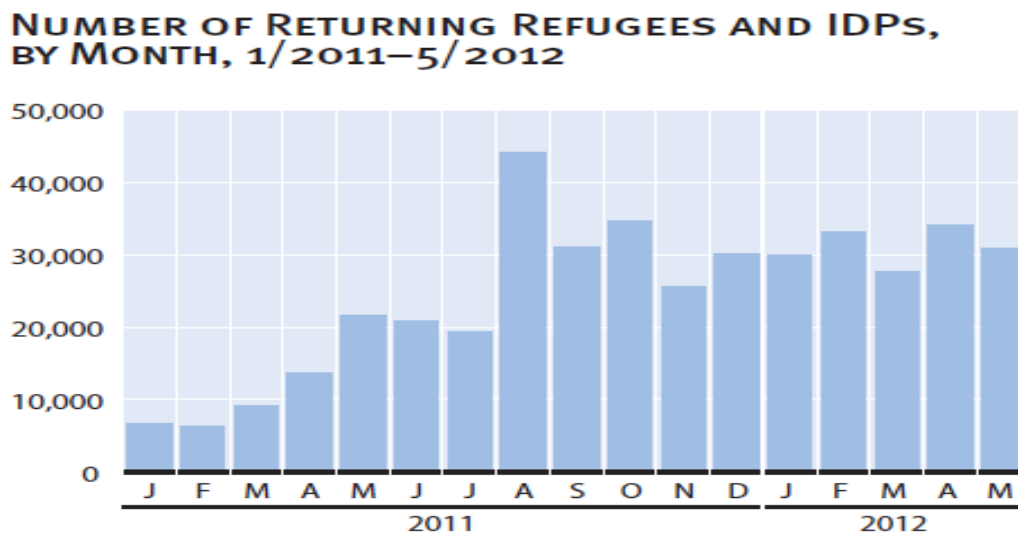
Figure 4: The Impact of Internal Conflict on Smaller Minority Groups 2003-2011
POPULATION ESTIMATES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN IRAQ, 2003 AND 2011

		2003	2011
Christians	Predominantly Assyrian, Chaldean, Armenian, and Syriac; most live in or around the Kurdistan Region; a small number of Armenians live in Basrah.	1.4 million	400,000 to 600,000
Turkmen	Descendants of Ottoman Empire-era soldiers and traders, about 60% of Turkmen are Sunni Muslim and the rest are Shia.	800,000	200,000
Sabaeans	Gnostics who follow John the Baptist, Sabaeans do not accept converts and must live near a river to observe religious rites; concentrated in southern Iraq.	60,000 to 70,000	5,000 to 10,000
Yazidis	Ancient group with religious traditions drawn from Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism; Yazidis do not accept converts or marry outside the faith; concentrated around Sinjar Mountain west of Mosul.	600,000 to 700,000	Less than 500,000
Shabaks	Most identify as Shia and the rest as Sunni, but do not observe all pillars of Islam and draw religious traditions from Yazidis and Sufism. Shabaks have lived along the Ninewa Plains since 1502.	400,000 to 500,000	200,000 to 500,000
Feyli Kurds	Ethnically Kurdish Shia, the Feyli live mainly in Diyala province along the Iranian border, in Baghdad, and in Iran. Under Saddam Hussein’s regime, they were stripped of Iraqi citizenship.	1 million to 1.5 million	100,000 to 120,000
Kaka’is	Kurds who speak their own dialect, Kaka’is draw religious traditions from Yazidis, Zoroastrianism, and Shia Islam. They live primarily in Kirkuk and Mosul.	200,000	60,000 to 70,000

Note: Some population estimates were obtained from community leaders who met with the Minority Rights Group International; others were taken from SIGIR interviews with community leaders and U.S. government reports.

Sources: DRL, *International Religious Freedom Reports, 2006 and 2010*, www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/2010/148821.htm, accessed 6/5/2011; SIGIR Interviews with members of Sabaeen community, 6/29/2011; Minority Rights Group International Report, “Still Targeted: Continued Persecution of Iraq’s Minorities,” 2010; Minority Rights Group International, Information provided to SIGIR, 10/18/2011.

Source: SIGIR, *Quarterly Report*, October 30, 2011

Figure 5: Numbers of Returning Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, 1/2011-5/2012

Source: UN, IAU, "Monthly Statistical Update on Return," 5/2012, p. 11, www.iauiraq.org/documents/1743/Return%20Update%20IRAQ%20MAY%202012.pdf, accessed 7/15/2012.

Source: UN, IAU, "Monthly Statistical Update on Return," 5/2012.

The Underlying Causes of Violence

The level and types of violence shown in **Figure 1 to Figure 5**, and that have continued and risen since the US withdrawal can be partially explained as the inevitable result of the initial turbulence that had to follow the departure of US forces. Current events in Iraq aggravate tensions between the central government in Baghdad and factional groups that feel disenfranchised from Iraq's political and economic system.

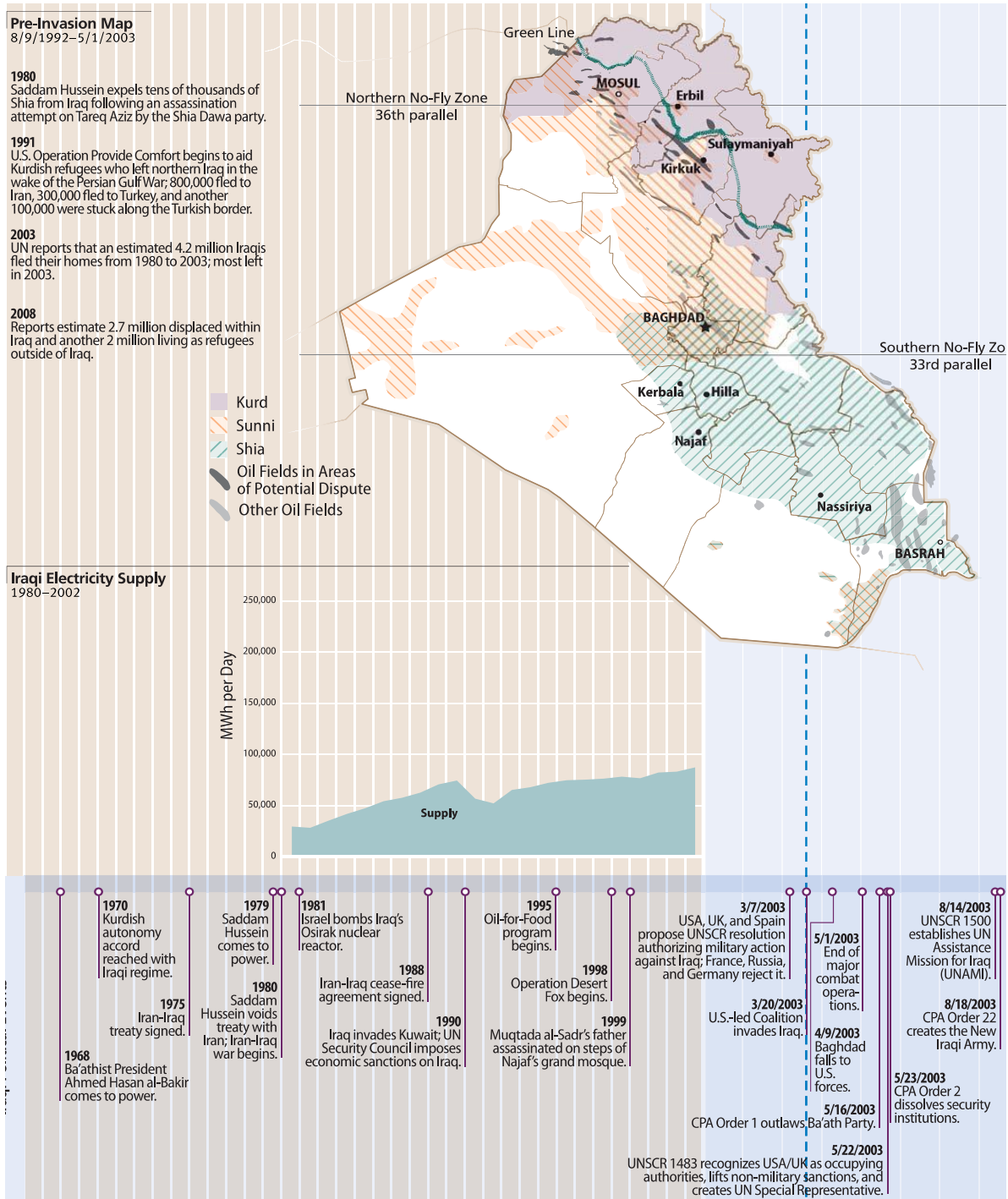
Tensions are mounting between Shi'ite and Sunni, and among all of Iraq's ethnic and political factions, with Sunnis and Kurds threatening to withdraw support from and sever ties with Baghdad's central government. The scale of these divisions is indicated by the CIA's latest estimate of the ethnic and sectarian population groups in Iraq. The agency estimates that the main ethnic divisions are: Arab 75%-80%, Kurdish 15%-20%, Turkoman, Assyrian, or other 5%, the sectarian divisions are: Muslim (official) 97% (Shia 60%-65%, Sunni 32%-37%), Christian or other 3%.³⁴

At the same time, the tensions that now strain relations between Iraq's main ethnic and sectarian over issues like autonomy, authority, and control of Iraq's petroleum revenues and natural resources are scarcely new. They long precede the founding of modern Iraq. They were the source of a violent Kurdish separatist effort in the 1960s and early 1970s, new conflicts between the Kurds and Central government after the beginning of the Iraq-Iraq War in 1980. They led to serious tensions between Arab Sunni and Arab Shi'ite from 1980 through 2003.

The overall mix of ethnic, sectarian, and tribal tensions causes a civil war from 2005 to 2008, and has remained a source of violence ever since. **Figures 6 and 7** illustrate the level of ethnic and sectarian divisions that help shape Iraq's violence. The stalled implementation of the 2010

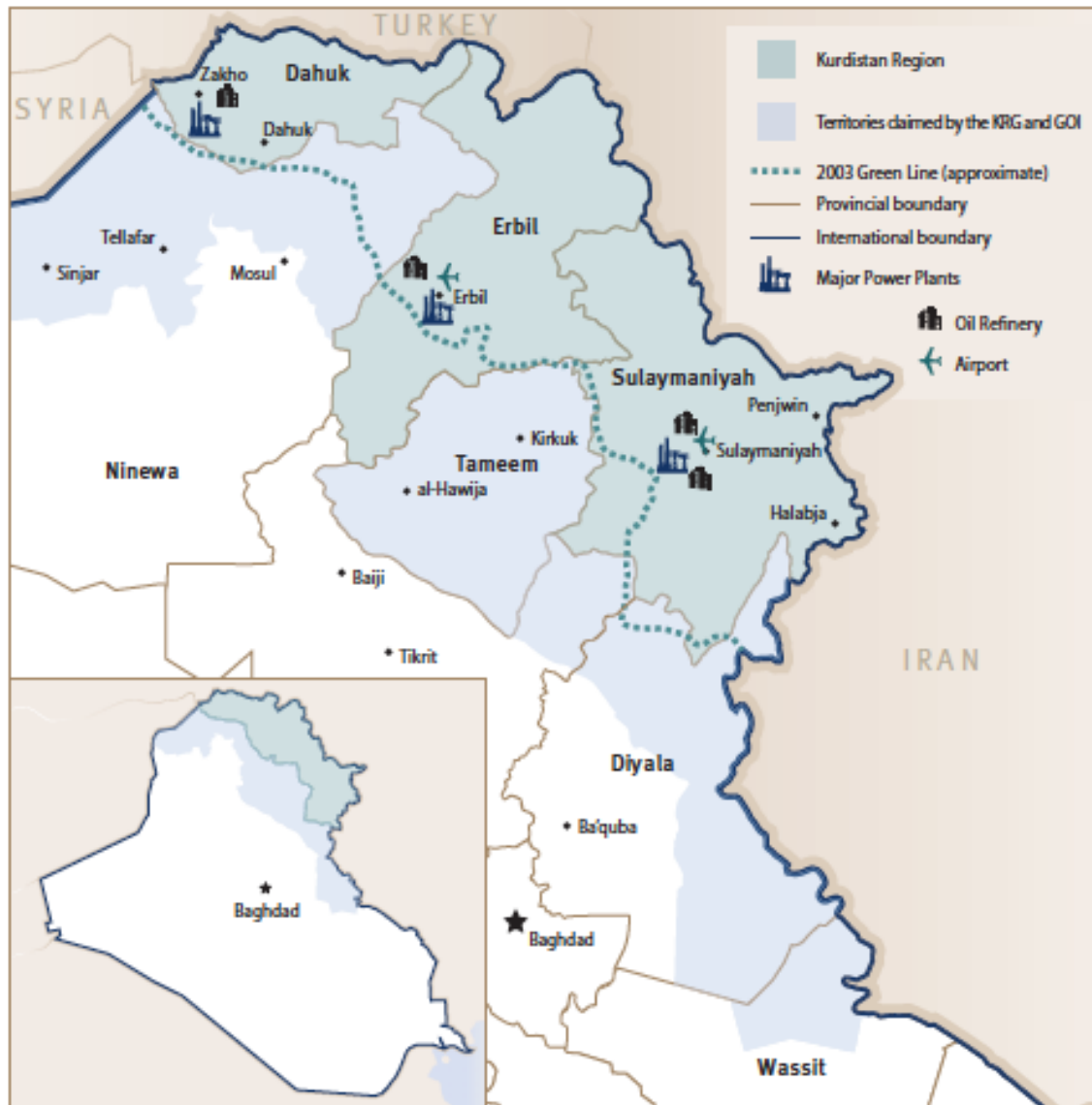
Erbil power-sharing agreements is just the latest in a series of power struggles that have now escalated to the point where Iraq's Vice President faces the death penalty and some Sunnis say Iraq's Prime Minister is seeking to become a dictator. Internal violence from extremist groups is rising again, and the NCTC reports that peace in Iraq is close to the casualty levels of "war" in Afghanistan. Pressures from Iran and the power struggle for the future of Syria add new tensions on Iran's borders.

Iraq's structural domestic divisions also interact with the broader patterns of instability in the region. Iraq is caught up in the political struggles between the US, Arab states, and Iran. It is a key focus of the competition between the US and Iran, but also between Iran and the Southern Gulf states. It is caught up in the civil conflict in Syria, and the broader struggles between Sunni and Shi'ite that now affect much of the Islamic world.

Figure 6: Iraq Ethnic and Sectarian Divisions Before and During the US Invasion

Source: SIGIR, April 2010

Figure 7: Divisions Over Control of the North

KURDISTAN REGION AND THE DISPUTED TERRITORIES

Note: All locations approximate and do not imply endorsement or acceptance.

Sources: SIGIR, Quarterly Report, October 30, 2011, p 89

Iraq's Demographic, Economic, and Social Challenges

Ethnic, sectarian, and tribal divisions, however, are only a few of the underlying causes of Iraqi violence. Iraq faces massive structural challenges in overcoming the divisions that shape its current patterns of violence and its instability since 1979. These include massive demographic pressures. The US Census Bureau estimates Iraq experienced a surge in population from 5.1 million in 1950 to 6.8 million in 1960, 9.4 million in 1970, 13.2 million in 1980, 18.1 million in 1990, and 22.7 million in 2000. The rate of growth has declined sharply under economic and demographic pressure, but the US Census Bureau still estimates that Iraq will reach million in 38.9 2020, 43.8 million in 2030, 50.5 million in 2040, and 56.3 million in 2050.³⁵

Roughly 25% of Iraq's current population of 31.1 million lives below a poverty line defined as less than \$1.25 of income a day.³⁶ Iraqi direct unemployment is at least 15% and its real direct and indirect unemployment probably is at least 25% -- heavily weighted toward youth unemployment in a nation experiencing massive demographic pressure and with nearly 40% of its population 14 years of age or younger.³⁷

These demographic pressures interact with failed overall development Iraq still is not on anything approaching a stable path to development. Corruption and a weak rule of law present major problems, and the CIA estimates that Iraq's per capita income ranks only 161st in the world, compared with 2nd for Qatar, 20th for Kuwait, 99th for Iran, and 55th for Saudi Arabia.³⁸

Iraq's industrial sector -- particularly its State-owned enterprises have been crippled in many cases by long periods of state mismanagement, and its agricultural sector is in crisis. The agricultural sector accounts for some 22% of its labor force, but only accounts for 9.7% of Iraq's GDP even when it is measured in PPP terms. Iraq's farmers are so under-capitalized, limited by transport and food processing facilities and the resulting costs, and by growing problems in water that they cannot compete with Turkish and Iranian food imports. More broadly, Iraq as a whole faces growing water problems caused by climate change and increased Syrian and Turkish damming and use of the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates.

Moreover, Iraq's economy remains crippled by a lack of local security in many areas, and it is important to understand just how serious its other problems are. Iraq has a level of corruption that Transparency International ranked 175th out of 183 countries in 2011 -- making it the eighth most corrupt country in the world.³⁹ In spite of more than half a decade of faltering legislative efforts, Iraq has failed to pass effective investment, tax, and property laws to secure both domestic and foreign investment as well as to create effective security forces to protect its infrastructure and businesses.

These same tensions add to abuses of human rights that are another underlying cause of violence. The Department of State Annual Report on Human Rights Practices for 2011 states that Iraq faced significant human rights problems over the course of the past year:⁴⁰

“During the year the most significant human rights developments were continuing abuses by sectarian and ethnic armed groups and violations by government-affiliated forces. Divisions between Shia and Sunni and between Arab and Kurd empowered sectarian militant organizations. These militants, purporting to defend one group through acts of intimidation and revenge against another, influenced political outcomes. Terrorist attacks designed to weaken the government and deepen societal divisions occurred during the year.

The three most important human rights problems in the country were governmental and societal violence reflecting a precarious security situation, a fractionalized population mirroring deep divisions exacerbated by Saddam Hussein's legacy, and rampant corruption at all levels of government and society."

Poor governance and the government's failure to properly encourage development remain major problems and underlying causes of violence. The budget crisis that lasted from 2008 to 2010, and the political crisis that began long before the March 2010 election and has since produced a de facto stalemate in many aspects of governance, have added to these economic problems as well as sharply delayed critical qualitative improvements in every branch of Iraq's national security forces. Iraq has not been able to absorb and support many of the aid projects funded during the US occupation, and its problems in national governance have been compounded by corruption, political infighting, and sectarian and ethnic struggles at the provincial and local levels.

Iraq's Petroleum Challenges

The Energy Information Administration describes Iraq as "one of the few places left where vast reserves, proven and unknown, have barely been exploited," but development of Iraq's energy sector is limited by war, ethnic conflict, and political crises.⁴¹ Iraq faces massive security, legal, tax, bureaucratic, and political challenges in developing its petroleum sector, and its efforts vulnerable to exploitation by the local, regional, and international actors angling for a share of Iraq's resources.

The CIA describes the problems involved as follows:⁴²

Iraq's largely state-run economy is dominated by the oil sector, which provides more than 90% of government revenue and 80% of foreign exchange earnings. Since mid-2009, oil export earnings have returned to levels seen before Operation Iraqi Freedom. As global oil prices remained high for much of 2011, government revenues increased accordingly. For 2012, Iraq's draft budget forecasts oil exports of 2.6 million barrels per day (bbl/day), a significant increase from Iraq's average of 2.2 million bbl/day in 2011. Iraq's contracts with major oil companies have the potential to further expand oil revenues, but Iraq will need to make significant upgrades to its oil processing, pipeline, and export infrastructure to enable these deals to reach their economic potential. Iraq is making slow progress enacting laws and developing the institutions needed to implement economic policy, and political reforms are still needed to assuage investors' concerns regarding the uncertain business climate. The government of Iraq is eager to attract additional foreign direct investment, but it faces a number of obstacles including a tenuous political system and concerns about security and societal stability. Rampant corruption, outdated infrastructure, insufficient essential services, and antiquated commercial laws stifle investment and continue to constrain growth of private, nonoil sectors. In 2010, Baghdad signed agreements with both the IMF and World Bank for conditional aid programs designed to help strengthen Iraq's economic institutions. Iraq is considering a package of laws to establish a modern legal framework for the oil sector and a mechanism to equitably divide oil revenues within the nation, although these reforms are still under contentious and sporadic negotiation. Political and economic tensions between Baghdad and local governments have led some provincial councils to use their budgets to independently promote and facilitate investment at the local level.

Iraq's acute dependence on petroleum income encourages corruption and had led to major problems in income distribution, and ethnic and sectarian struggles over the nation's resources. Iraq's Shi'ites dominate many of the areas with existing oil and gas production and virtually all of the proven petroleum resources in Iraq's south. Kurd and Arab compete for control of the resources in the North. Iraq's Kurds are feuding with the central government over how to develop the resources controlled by the KRG, and Sunnis want broad sharing of the nation's

petroleum income as well as development of the potential resources in the areas where they dominate. Petroleum also presents the problem that it produces massive revenues with minimal job creation, encourages top-down control and use of the nation's oil income as a form of politics, is a key source of corruption, and also a key source of violence.

Iraq is now seeking to reach an output of 10 million barrels a day by 2017, and to increase production from around 2.9 million barrels in the spring of 2012 to 3.3 million in 2013.⁴³ However, the country's petroleum sector faces many challenges that have limited its ability to produce, export, and deliver this valuable natural resource. Iraq's oil resources are critical to Iraq's future and are an indirect area of competition between the US and Iran.

There is no doubt about Iraq's potential, but there is great uncertainty as to how quickly it can develop its resources, about its ability to offer realistic and consistent incentives to investors in its energy sector, about its ability to resolve its ethnic and sectarian differences over how to develop its resources, and about the impact that violence could have on its output.

A 2012 study by the International Energy Agency illustrates how critical these uncertainties are. While the study focused on the "high" and "central" cases for various political reasons, the "delayed" case warns that continued political divisions and violence could limit Iraq's development to a fraction of the growth the government now projects.⁴⁴ These trends are shown in **Figure Eight**.

The battles over Iraq's natural resources are also having a significant impact on its domestic politics and divisions. Iraq faces political fallout between the central government and the Kurdish regional government (KRG) over energy contracts and the right to invite and award lucrative contracts to international companies. In April 2012, the KRG halted its supply of oil for export through Iraq's national pipeline, claiming that the central government owed over \$1.5 billion in operating costs to companies in the Kurdish region.⁴⁵ For its part, the government in Baghdad has threatened to simply deduct that lost oil revenue from what the KRG's portion of the Iraqi budget. At the same time, Iraq's oil-rich Shi'ite provinces want a larger share of the country's export earnings while other Arab Shi'ite and Sunni provinces want the distribution of these shares based on need of their portion of Iraq's total population.

At best, Iraq will find it difficult to meet these competing demands and to fund both jobs and development. Iraq is unlikely to meet its ambitious goal of producing 10-12 million barrels a day by 2017, according to many familiar with Iraq's energy sector.⁴⁶ Disputes between the central government and regional authorities, as well as resources committed to rebuilding Iraq's war-torn infrastructure factor into what many believe will be reduced oil production targets.

Moreover, Iraqi domestic demand for petroleum product has been sharply increased by subsidies that have increased demand. UNDP estimates that petroleum subsidies already reduce the price by more than 50% and cost Iraq some \$11.3 billion a year, and the end result is that Iraqis consume over 750 million barrels a day of Iraq's oil production.⁴⁷

The Iraqi Oil Ministry reported June of 2012 that the country's crude exports dropped 2.2 percent from April to May of 2012 due to increased demand.⁴⁸ Ministry spokesman Assem Jihad stated that oil exports decreased from an average of 2.508 million barrels a day in April to an average of 2.452 million barrels a day in May. Further, even if these subsidies were now

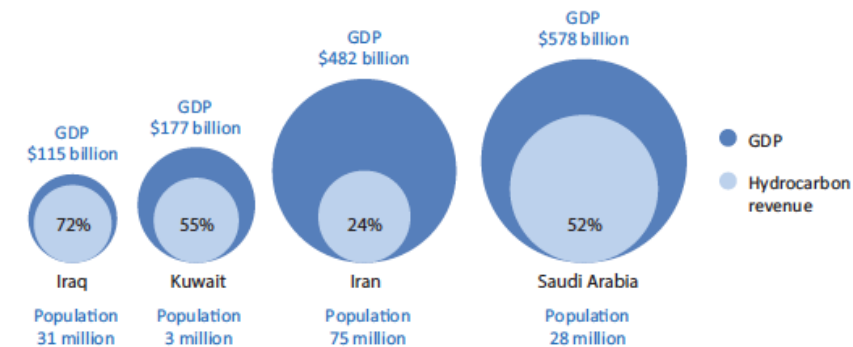
removed and Iraq built enough refineries to meet growing domestic demand, its export capability will still be steadily reduced by increased in domestic use of its output.

Internal disputes between the central government and Iraq's oil rich regions, as well as poor infrastructure, political uncertainty, sabotage, and internal demand will further limit Iraq's ability to produce and export oil. Few analysts believe that Iraq will meet its goal of increasing oil output fivefold by 2017, and many believe that Iraq will be limited to an output somewhere between the IEA's delay and central case.

Herman Franssen of the Center for Strategic and International Studies -- and a former chief economist at the International Energy Agency -- asserts that, "There's hardly anybody who believes that target. What people do believe in is that they could reach half of it by 2017. That would still be very ambitious, but at least more realistic".⁴⁹ Production levels as low as 6 million barrels may be more likely.⁵⁰

Figure Eight: Iraq's Uncertain Petro-Future

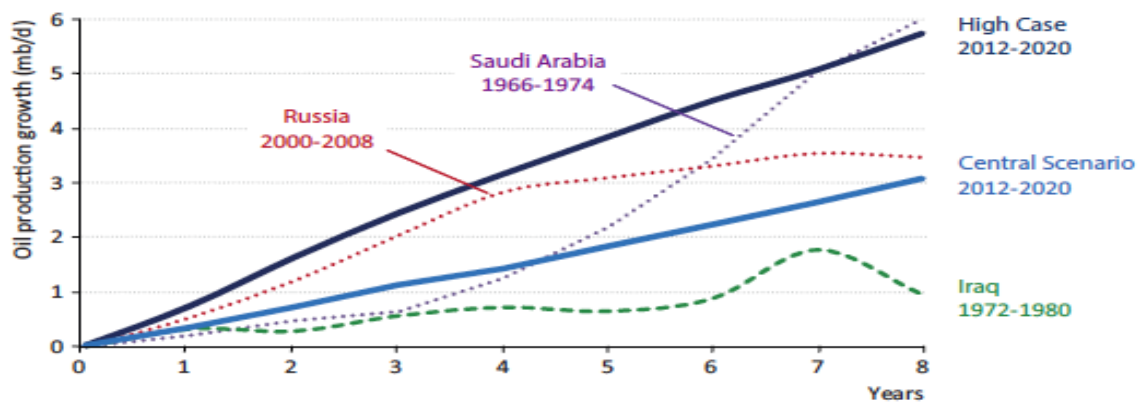
Iraq's Currently Limited Hydrocarbon Income



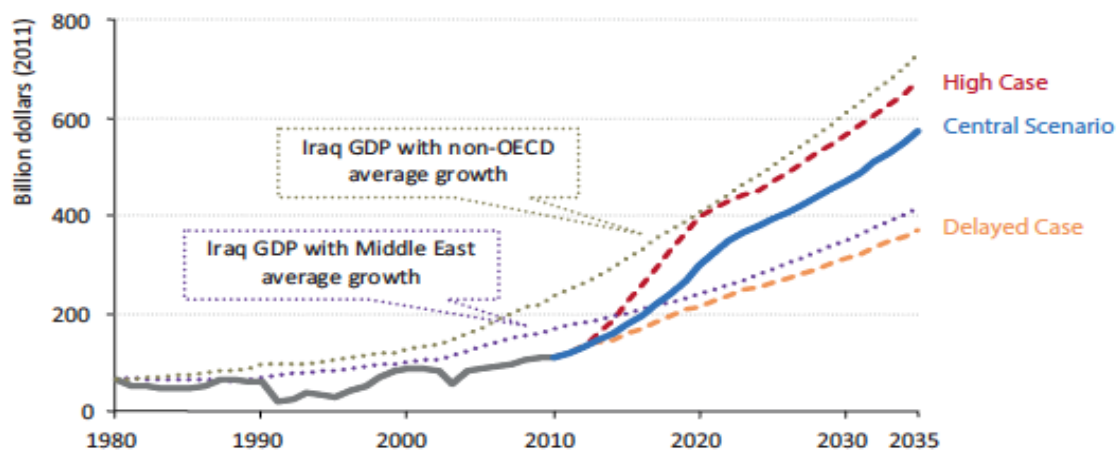
Note: GDP is measured at market exchange rates (MER) in year-2011 dollars.

Sources: IMF, UNPD, World Bank and national government databases; IEA analysis.

Wide Variations in Oil Production and Global Status Even if the Delayed Case that Could Come from Continue Violence is Ignored



Very Different Levels of Economic Growth and Stability Even Under Favorable Assumptions



Source: International Energy Agency, *Iraq Energy Outlook*, IEA, Paris, 9 October 2012. See pages 45, 57, 80

Iraq's Military and Security Challenges

The current patterns in violence also are driven by the forces shaped Iraq's security forces after the disbanding of the Iraqi military shortly after the US invasion in 2003. Iraq did rebuild significant forces between 2005 and 2010, although these forces suffered from a rush to get Iraqi forces into combat, an emphasis on numbers over quality, over-dependence on outside advisors, and Iraq's deep political divisions.

For reasons discussed in more depth later in this study, Iraq's security forces have become increasing more political and corrupt since the departure of most of their US and foreign advisors during 2011. The Prime Minister's office consolidated de facto control over the Ministry of Defense, the military command structure, and the intelligence service during later 2011 and early to mid-2012 – often using temporary promotions to take control of senior appointments, bypassing officers who were not regarded as loyal, and dismissing others. Special Forces and the Counterinsurgency force became the tools of the Prime Minister's office – often being used in missions that suited his needs and priorities. The Chief of Staff's office also became an extension of Maliki's office, and the Prime Minister's office exerted further control through its ability to control the budget of both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior.

The regular military remained a significant force, but some key problems that had long affected Iraqi forces quickly reasserted themselves. Position and promotions quickly became market prices, and favoritism, nepotism, and factionalism quickly became far more serious problems. The transfer of bases and equipment often led to corruption in selling equipment and neglect of maintenance. The US and Western emphasis on giving junior officers and all NCOs more status and independence faded.

The faltering alliance between Sunni tribal leaders in Sunni dominated areas – particularly in Anbar and Ninewa – that had already weakened because of the government's failure to integrate the Sons of Iraq led to growing Shi'ite and Sunni tensions and the growing tensions between the Prime Minister and the Kurds – and particularly between Maliki and Barzani – increased the divisions between Arab and Kurdish units and largely halted efforts to integrate them.

Many elements of the regular police and security forces rapidly reverted to local control, taking bribes, selling positions and promotions, and supporting the dominant local authority. Local forces came under Sunni Arab control where Sunnis were dominant and under KRG control where Kurds were dominant.

The national elements of the police and security forces have increasingly come under the control of the Prime Minister's office – and Maliki also serves as de facto Minister of the Interior. More broadly, the police and security forces are notably more corrupt and less effective than military forces. The severe tensions between the police and military forces that were kept under partial control as long as US advisors mediated become more serious. At the same time, efforts to replace private security forces where governmental security forces have become yet another source of corruption and the politicization of the ISF – presenting growing problems in securing infrastructure and petroleum facilities.

These actions have polarized the Kurds and pushed them to maintain their own security forces, also well as maintain military and police control of Kurdish dominated areas in the North and

along the borders with the areas under the control of the central government. The resulting tensions are particularly severe in the Mosul and Ninewa areas, and have sometimes come close to open fighting between the two sets of forces.

As for the Sunnis, the Tribal leaders who turned on the extreme Sunni groups like Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia and formed the Son of Iraq in Anbar and other Sunni-dominated areas in the West, have increasingly distanced themselves from a government they see as Shi'ite. There are no signs as yet that Sunnis are turning back towards active civil war on any broad level, but many remain armed and Sunni extremist groups are growing in strength and becoming an increase element in the fighting in Syria where they – and outside volunteers – both play a significant role and benefit from the flow of arms and money through Iraq to Syria.

Iraq's stability is also affected by the continuing presence of the Iranian Al Quds force. The Charge of the Knights campaign against the Shi'ite militias in the South in March-April 2008 sharply weakened such militias, especially the Sadrist forces, but scarcely eliminated them. It also did nothing to reduce the role of the Iranian Al Quds force – which had become a serious problem by 2004.⁵¹

Iran's intervention was led by the head of the Al Quds Force, Qassem Suleimani. During 2005-2010, Iran pursued divided and influence tactics by simultaneously working with Shi'ite leaders like Maliki and Hakim, supporting the Hakim faction's Bader Corps militia, and supporting Sadrist militias like the Mahdi Army (Jaydsh al Mahdi). It provided training, money, and key military technology to anti-US militias like advantage triggering devices for IEDs, and special components like Explosively Formed Projectiles to defeat US armor.

Prime Minister Maliki blocked most US efforts to actively attack the Al Quds force and hostile Iranian agents between 2007 and early 2008. He did take some action against the Al Quds Force during the Charge of the Knights campaign, but this only limited the role of the Al Quds force in Iraq until the end of 2009. Maliki never attempted to force Iran to remove the Iraqi-deployed elements of the Al Quds Forces during the period before the departure of US forces in 2011, and the US never attempted to take consistent action against Iran's role in dealing with the militias and acting as an advisor to the Maliki government.⁵²

As a result, Iran still has a significant Al Quds presence and it plays a role in influencing Iraqi military and security decisions that both encourages future violence and counterbalances the remaining US advisory role. Iran has also used overflights of Iraq, and the flow of personnel through Iraq to support the pro-Assad forces in Syria, and succeed in pushing Maliki into supporting Assad. This has help to divided Sunni and Shi'ite in Iraq – each supporting different sides in Syria. It presents the risk on one hand that a surviving Assad regime would create a much stronger axis of Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon. On the other hand, it presents the risk that if Syria should come under Sunni Arab control and reject Iran, Iran would respond by trying to exert far stronger influence in Iraq to compensate. Both alternatives would problem raise the level of violence in Iraq.

If Iraq does become increasingly violent and the Shi'ite dominated Iraqi government looks for outside aid, this may push it towards dependence on Iran. Moreover, Iran is already pressuring Iraq to support Iranian goals in keeping Assad's regime alive in Syria, and may come to treat Iraq as a kind of hostage to any US intervention against Iran in the Gulf. These actions could

present major problems for both Iraq and the US because the level of continued US security assistance is now uncertain, and because Iraq lost virtually all of its military capabilities to defend against Iran as a result of the 2003 invasion.

Current Patterns in Violence

At the same time, no one can ignore the recent drift towards violence driven by internal and external political factors. As noted above, trends in Iraqi violence tend to fluctuate from month to month, and figures of attacks and deaths must be placed in a broader context. While overall levels of violence have decreased since 2007, large-scale coordinated attacks such as those carried out on July 23, 2012 mark the worse violence in years and may indicate a return to significant ethnic and sectarian violence in the aftermath of the US troop withdrawal, ongoing Shia-Sunni tensions, and hostility among opposing political factions.

In July of 2012, Jane's Defense reported that "In recent years, Iraq's Sunni jihadists have carried out surges in spectacular attacks every few months to prove they are still relevant, but our figures suggest the latest uptick reflects a more general increase in lower-level violence".⁵³ Following the July 23 attacks, mainly targeting against Iraq's Shiite community, the new leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq issued a statement claiming that the militant group was returning to areas it was driven from before America's withdrawal, and announced an offensive aimed at freeing Sunni prisoners and assassinating Iraqi court officials.

In his first public statement as the new leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, proclaimed in July, 2012, "We are starting a new phase in our struggle...and we remind you of your priority to free the Muslim prisoners," adding that Sunni insurgents should also "chase and liquidate the judges, investigators, and guards".⁵⁴

Comparing Different Metrics

While the level of violence did decline during part of 2011, and through the first part of 2012, it remained high early in 2012. Preliminary data on the trends in June 2012 seemed to warn that the political tensions described in the next section could drive Iraq back towards higher levels of sectarian and ethnic violence. These patterns are partially illustrated in the following metrics:

- The broad patterns in violence are shown in **Figure 9**, and **Figure 10**;
- **Figure 11** shows recent patterns of arrests by region;
- **Figure 12** shows selected acts of terrorism from 1/2012-4/2012;
- **Figure 13** shows the locality of key acts of terrorism from 1/2012-7/2012;
- **Figure 14** provides weekly breakdown of attacks by province from 1/2012-5/2012;
- **Figure 15** uses data to track violent deaths in Iraq from 3/2011-3/2012;
- **Figure 16** presents attempted and successful assassinations of Iraqi officials from 8/2010-6/2012;
- **Figure 17** shows estimated landmine and unexploded ordinance sites;

- **Figure 18** illustrates the levels of terrorist attacks on Iraqi troops and police.

Different Sources, Common Pattern

While different sources used different metric and counting methods, and their raw data have serious uncertainties, they agree on the broad patterns involved. Government of Iraq (GOI) data show that 2,645 Iraqis were killed in 2011 alone, including 1,578 civilians, 609 police personnel, and 458 soldiers.⁵⁵ Over 4,400 Iraqis were wounded in violence. And while December 2011 marked one of lowest monthly death tolls (155 killed) in Iraq since 2003, December 22, 2011 was the bloodiest day in Iraq in since 2009. That one day saw 31 incidents, including 21 IED attacks killing over 60 Iraqis, and a suicide attack against a government building in Baghdad that left 32 people dead.⁵⁶

On February 16, 2012, Michael Knights of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's wrote in the *National Interest* that, "There has been a rapid and widespread deterioration of security in Iraq since the mid-December end of the U.S. military mission there".⁵⁷ According to Knights, Iraq had also suffered 36 confirmed attempted mass-casualty attacks just in January 2012 alone. Officially reported deaths in Iraq also continued to rise, with 340 civilian deaths in Iraq in January 2012, compared to 155 in December 2011.

Reporting by the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction (SIGIR) for the first quarter of 2012 made it clear that in spite of some claims that the violence is ending, there was still a significant level of violence inside Iraq, and it is clear from later parts of this analysis that show extremist groups will continue to threaten Iraq in the future.⁵⁸

In an interview published March 5, Prime Minister al-Maliki commented on the state of Iraq's ethnosectarian divide in the period since Saddam Hussein was deposed, saying that Iraq had "reached and entered into a civil war... the ugliest and most dangerous of wars to the stability of countries." But, in effect he declared that war " finished:

We have adopted the principle of national reconciliation... Today we do not fear civil war. Yes, we may have disagreements: the central government may disagree with the provinces or at times the central government with KRG, but naturally we refer to the Constitution.

The GOI reported that violence in March reached its lowest level since 2003. To safeguard the Arab League summit, held at the end of the month, the GOI took extraordinary measures: nearly 100,000 Iraqi Army (IA) and police personnel were deployed to Baghdad to provide security, and the MOI ordered government employees not to report to work during March 20–29

Yet mass-casualty events continue, as do assassination attempts directed at government security forces, state officials, and unsuspecting citizens whose ethnosectarian profile appears to motivate violence. At the same time, tensions arising in the course of governance have spilled over into arrest warrants being issued for senior government officials who, in turn, have fled the jurisdiction of the national courts. Large-scale arrests and recent increases in court-sanctioned executions have raised human rights concerns.

Notwithstanding the challenges that persist, the MOI announced that Iraq's armed forces would relinquish their role in internal security and shift to protecting the borders of the country by July 2012. The GOI reported that 413 Iraqis were killed in terrorist attacks this quarter—a 15% decrease from the number of fatalities reported by United States Forces-Iraq for the same period in 2011. The casualty total in March 2012 reportedly fell to 112, the lowest monthly level since the 2003 Coalition invasion.³³⁶

According to data compiled by the UN, however, 1,048 Iraqis died this quarter, more than 150% higher than the total attributed to the MOI.³³⁷ The Washington Institute for Near East Policy also has reported higher casualty numbers, emphasizing the "rapid and widespread deterioration of security in Iraq since the

mid-December end of the U.S. military mission there.”³³⁸ Analysis by the International Institute for Strategic Studies notes that violence in specific areas is on the rise:

The latest bombings—in Kirkuk, Kerbala, Samarra, Baghdad and other cities—are part of an upsurge in violence following the withdrawal of U.S. troops.... In the first three months since troops left... there were 204 bombings—a 70% increase on the same period last year. With no more real U.S. military targets in the country, the spike necessarily means that Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence has increased, and illustrates the need for a strengthened local security force.

Although violence around the Arab League summit was low, the ISF faced a wave of co-ordinated mass-casualty attacks earlier in the quarter. On January 19, a suicide car bombing at the Baghdad Police College killed 15 people. On February 23, more than 21 bombings around Iraq killed at least 42 Iraqis and wounded approximately 285. Other mass-casualty and coordinated attacks this quarter included:

- January 24—A car bomb killed 11 people in Sadr City; multiple vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks killed 12 and wounded 80 in predominately Shia areas of Baghdad.
- January 27—A suicide car bomb killed 12 in Baghdad.
- February 19—A suicide car bomb killed at least 14 police and recruits in Baghdad.
- February 29—A VBIED killed 3 and wounded 11 in Baghdad.
- March 5—Coordinated attacks targeting ISF members killed 26 officers and wounded 3 in and around Haditha.

Attacks continue against members of the Sons of Iraq (SOI) and their families, but reports indicate that they sustained lower total casualties this quarter than last. The largest MOI force, the Iraqi Police, and the largest Ministry of Defense (MOD) force, the IA, sustained higher wounded totals this quarter, but the number killed in action reportedly dropped.

Apparent targeted political violence against civilian and military officials continued this quarter. During January 11–April 10, 2012, at least 73 government officials (including some SOI commanders and their families) were assassinated...As a result of assassinations and attempted assassinations over the past year, the CoR budgeted for the purchase of armored sedans and sport-utility vehicles for senior government officials, drawing sharp criticism from cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

UNAMI Commentary on Violence and Human rights

The United Nations Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) was even more critical in its annual report on human rights in May 2012, and its report provides the best – if little read – overall assessment of the trends in Iraqi security. It reported that,⁵⁹

Levels of violence in Iraq (outside of the Kurdistan Region) remain high, and the number of civilians killed or injured in conflict-related incidents has only slightly decreased compared with figures for 2010. UNAMI figures show that during 2011 some 2,771 civilians were killed¹ and some 7,961 civilians were wounded². Most of the violence was concentrated in and around Baghdad, Ninawa and Kirkuk. Violent incidents also occurred in Anbar and Diyala, while the south around Basra saw very few such incidents. Despite a decline in the overall number of incidents compared with 2010, those that did occur were often more deadly, with a few such attacks claiming scores of victims. As in 2010, attacks specifically targeting political leaders, government officials and security personnel, as well as of community and religious leaders, and legal, medical and education professionals continued. A destabilizing factor in relation to security was the steady withdrawal of remaining United States forces (USF-I) – a process completed by 18 December 2011.³ Shifting relationships between various political blocs, parties and factions, compounded by tribal, ethnic,

and religious differences also contributed to a deterioration in the human rights environment.

Civilians continued to suffer from attacks based on their ethnic, religious and other affiliations. There were several large-scale attacks on Shi'a pilgrims and on places of worship. Members of the Christian community were also targeted— as were members of the Turkoman community (particularly around Kirkuk) and members of other religious and ethnic minorities, such as Yezidi, Shabaks, Sabian Mandeans, and Manicheans. Members of sexual minorities also suffered from killings and widespread social and State sanctioned discrimination – with Iraqi security forces and other State institutions failing to protect them.

The administration of justice and the rule of law remained weak. Iraqi citizens continued to suffer from arbitrary arrest and detention. A large number of arrests took place from the end of November and continued until the end of 2011 involving persons accused of being former members of the Ba'ath Party and allegedly linked to terrorist activities. UNAMI received credible reports that many of these detainees have been held without access to lawyers or family members. It is alleged that many have been detained because of political, ethnic or sectarian affiliations, and that some have been subjected to threats, abuse and mistreatment in order to force them into signing confessions.

Conditions in some prisons and detention facilities remain of serious concern, with many falling below accepted international standards in terms of overcrowding, lack of hygiene and lack of prisoner rehabilitation programmes. In many detention centres convicted prisoners were not adequately separated from those awaiting trial – and alternatives to detention for prisoners on remand remained under-utilized. UNAMI continued to receive reports from detainees and their relatives that many face abuse and mistreatment, and on occasion, torture. State prosecutors were often under resourced, contributing to a lack of due diligence in investigation of accused persons and in bringing such persons to trial in a timely manner. While in some instances trials were conducted professionally, the judicial system continued to be plagued by under-resourcing – and there continued to be an over-reliance on confessions to found convictions, even when there is information or evidence suggesting that such confessions were obtained through coercion. There is on-going deep concern at implementation of the death penalty in Iraq.

... UNAMI documented indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, attacks targeting Iraqi security forces that resulted in civilian deaths and injuries - including the deliberate targeting of public officials, judges, religious figures, education professionals and members of diverse ethnic groups and minorities.

Ascertaining precise numbers of civilians killed and wounded as a result of violent conflict is difficult in Iraq. Figures from UNAMI's direct monitoring indicate that a minimum of 2,771 Iraqi civilians were killed and 7,961 were injured in armed conflict and violence during 2011.⁶ This represents a slight decrease compared to 2010, when UNAMI recorded 2,953 civilian deaths. According to the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) during 2011 around 2,781 civilians were killed in conflict related circumstances, including 184 women and 96 children. A further 10,386 civilians were injured, including 833 women and 382 children. The Iraq Body Count (IBC) ⁷ recorded 4,087 civilian deaths from violence in Iraq during the year under review, slightly higher than the 4,045 civilian deaths recorded in 2010.

Irrespective of the precise figures, Iraq has one of the highest numbers of conflict-related civilian casualties per capita. Identifying trends is extremely challenging, although most sources are in agreement that the rate of decline in civilian casualties has considerably slowed since 2009, compared with the significant reduction in civilian casualties seen from the height of the violence in 2007, when almost 18,000 people were reportedly killed, and in 2008, when under 7,000 died.

The frequency of violent incidents, particularly the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) by insurgent and terrorist groups, suggests a pattern of sustained, *ad hoc* violence which has the potential to continue for the foreseeable future. On an average day during 2011, UNAMI data shows that there were some 21 violent incidents in Iraq, the most common being IEDs and small arms fire resulting in 7.5 civilian deaths.... UNAMI data indicates that violence continued to be concentrated in Baghdad and the surrounding regions, and in the Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) areas, notably Mosul and Kirkuk. There were also attacks, but of lesser frequency, in Anbar Governorate. The south of the country, around Basra, saw the fewest numbers of violent attacks and

resulting civilian casualties. Baghdad and the North-central region suffered 865 and 739 recorded civilian deaths and 3,024 and 2,002 injuries respectively. South-central region recorded 433 civilian deaths and 1,165 injuries; the north region had 293 deaths and 692 injuries; the Western region had 212 deaths and 400 injuries; while the south region had 111 civilian deaths and 293 injuries. January witnessed a peak of violence, with 307 civilians reportedly killed, although in December the number of civilians killed rose significantly – being the highest for that month recorded since 2008. The second half of 2011 was more violent than the first half: 1,515 civilians were reportedly killed from July to December, compared with 1,256 from January to June 2011.

Examples of attacks carried out by armed insurgents that resulted in the death and injuries to civilians, include the suicide bomber in Tikrit on 18 January, consequently 64 people were killed and at least 150 injured as they queued in a line at a police recruitment center. On 27 January, between 48 and 64 people were killed in what may have been a sectarian motivated attack when a car bomb exploded, destroying a funeral tent in the Shula area of Baghdad. On 24 February, up to 14 people were killed and 15 were reportedly wounded when a suicide bomber attacked a cultural center in Ramadi. On 6 March up to 12 people were killed – including women and children – when a roadside bomb struck a passing bus in the Al-Maqil area of central Basra, although the intended target may have been a USF-I convoy. On 29 March, up to 71 people, mainly members of the Iraqi police force were killed and over 100 were wounded in a complex attack of suicide bombers and hand grenades outside the city council building in Tikrit. The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) claimed responsibility for this attack.

On 11 April, 10 members of a Shi'ite farming family were killed by bombs in their fields. On 3 May, up to 16 civilians were killed when a car bomb exploded outside a cafe in Abu Dsheer, Baghdad. On 3 June, in Tikrit, up to 18 worshippers were killed and more than 20 were injured (including children) in a mosque when attacked by a suicide bomber. On 11 June, at least fifteen people were killed and fifty-two others were injured in two VBIED attacks targeting an army patrol in Al-Dwoasa in Mosul. On 20 June in Mosul, two boys were killed and three other civilians injured in a roadside bomb explosion. On 23 June, at least 34 people were killed in the Al-Shurta Al-Rabaa area of Baghdad, when three bombs went off in quick succession - one targeted a Shi'ite mosque, while two targeted a market where people were shopping. On 26 June, 27 people, mostly civilians, were killed in Diwania when a suicide car bomb exploded outside the house of the governor.

On 28 July, at least 12 people were killed and 28 injured in a twin bombing in Tikrit: the first bomb exploded outside a State-run bank, followed by a suicide bomber seemingly timed in order to target emergency workers who had arrived at the scene. On 15 August, one of the most violent days of the year, more than 70 people were killed and hundreds injured in a wave of attacks in cities across Iraq. In the day's worst incident, 37 people were killed when two bombs exploded in a busy market in the city center of Kut. In total, some 40 attacks were reported for which the Government blamed the Islamic State of Iraq.¹¹ On 13 October at least 16 people were killed in the Sadr City area of Baghdad when two roadside bombs were detonated - although some sources indicated to UNAMI that up to 61 people were killed by the twin blasts. On 27 October, in Baghdad's Ur district 18 civilians were killed in two explosions: the first bomb was detonated outside a music store, and then a second was detonated as people rushed to assist the victims.

In another series of attacks, on 22 December, at least 69 people were killed and around 200 injured in a coordinated series of nine car bombs and six roadside bombs targeting civilian infrastructure including markets, grocery stores, cafes and government buildings in a dozen mostly Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad. According to media reports, the Al-Qa'ida affiliated group, the Islamic State of Iraq, claimed responsibility.

As noted, armed opposition groups continued to deliberately target civilians. Many attacks targeting Iraqi security forces also employed asymmetric and indiscriminate tactics, such as the use of IEDs or VBIEDs on roadsides or near police checkpoints, government buildings and installations. Such attacks were often carried out in crowded public areas such as markets, cafes or mosques and churches, revealing an intent to kill and injure a maximum number of civilians, or with indifference to the number and type of casualties.

The motives for such attacks were diverse. Some appear to have been sectarian, targeting members of particular religious communities, their residential areas, and places of worship, including mosques and churches. A large number of such attacks were perpetrated against the Shi'a community, but there were also a sustained level of attacks against Christians and other minority religious groups, including Yezidis, Manicheans, and Sabian Mandaean. Many attacks were directed at particular ethnic groups, such as members of the Turkoman community in Kirkuk. Reported tensions between members of ethnic groups may have led to violence, particularly between Christians and Yezidis in Ninawa. Attacks on Iraqi security forces, in particular on the police, frequently had political motives, aimed at undermining public confidence in the capacity of the Government and its institutions to maintain security. However, many such attacks also might have had underlying sectarian or other motivations. In the DIBs areas, violence appears to have been largely sectarian or ethnic in nature. There were a number of incidents, including killings and kidnappings, which although superficially motivated by criminal gain, may also have had sectarian, political or other motivations.

All such attacks constitute serious violations of Iraqi criminal law and of applicable international humanitarian law and international human rights law. While UNAMI recognizes the enormous difficulties facing the Iraqi government in its efforts to restore and maintain law and order, the Government of Iraq is required to do all it can, within the limits of the law and in compliance with its international legal obligations, to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice and take all legal and appropriate measures to curb the violence and to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure from the effects of conflict.

... The Kurdistan Region continued to be relatively free of armed conflict and violence.¹⁵ There, UNAMI recorded 12 civilian deaths and injuries during the year. This figure is lower than in 2010 when 22 deaths were recorded. In relation to this, there were concerns about the impact on civilians of military operations conducted along the Kurdistan Region's borders with Turkey and Iran by foreign military forces, which resulted in the deaths of at least ten civilians and injuries to at least 20 others, and the displacement of families.

...The frequency of targeted killings remains of concern, constituting serious violations of IHL and international human rights law. Many such attacks were carried out with IEDs placed on roadsides or in vehicles, or shootings by small firearms equipped with silencers. According to UNAMI during 2011 there were 296 such killings and attempted killings, resulting in 73 deaths and injuring 41, significantly higher than in 2010.

Those most frequently targeted were members of the Iraqi Police, including retired officers and family members of serving police personnel. Other victims included government officials, members of governorate councils, civil servants, journalists, education and medical professionals, judges, traditional leaders, members of ethnic and religious minorities and persons engaged in religious events and activities.

In some incidents, bombs detonated in public areas often killed and injured civilians, then, as police arrived at the scene, further bombs were detonated, with the intention of killing members of the security forces. Bombs detonated outside police stations or government buildings often harmed civilian bystanders. Incidents of such killings frequently left family members of the intended victim dead or injured.

Across Iraq, incidents of killings targeting Government officials increased compared to 2010. Based on UNAMI figures, the most affected cities were Baghdad, Kirkuk, Mosul and Tikrit. Among such incidents¹⁶ on 20 March in Baghdad, an official from the Oil Ministry was killed in a drive by shooting. On 19 April, an employee of the Education Ministry was killed by a magnetic car bomb in Doura, Baghdad. On 30 April, an employee of the Ministry of Industry and his daughter were killed in their home in a targeted shooting. On 26 May, the Chair of the Accountability and Justice Commission, Ali Faisal Al-Lami, was killed in a drive-by shooting in Baghdad. On 30 May, the Deputy Governor of Ninawa Province survived an assassination attempt when his convoy was targeted by an IED whilst en route to Tampa, west of Sharqat in Mosul. On 1 June in Baghdad, there was an attempted assassination of the Deputy Minister for Human Rights, Abdul-Karim Abdullah. On 3 June, following an earlier attack on a mosque, a suicide bomber blew himself up inside Salahadin Teaching Hospital killing two Iraqi Police personnel and leaving four injured, including a physician. The suicide bomber was targeting Al Iraqiya Parliament Member, Mr.

Mutashar Husain Elewy, who was visiting people injured during the earlier attack. On 7 June, the son of a Defence Ministry official was shot dead in a drive by shooting in Jamiaa, Baghdad. On 25 September gunmen using silenced weapons killed a Foreign Ministry employee in Jamiaa, west Baghdad. On 25 September, a sticky bomb attached to the car of Mr Saad Fetealah, the head of the international relations department within the Ministry of Human Rights killed Mr Fetealah's driver. In a rare attack inside Baghdad's "Green Zone", on 28 November a bomb exploded outside of the parliament building. Reports indicated that the bomb may have targeted the Speaker of Parliament, or the Iraqi Prime Minister himself. The Islamic State in Iraq claimed responsibility for this attack. The Islamic State in Iraq¹⁷ also claimed it was responsible for the December 26 attack on the Interior Ministry, in which 7 people were killed. Also on 28 November, the house of a member of Kirkuk Provincial Council, a Turkma Shi'a was targeted by four bombs, which killed two civilians and injured.

...In further violence aimed at disrupting the functioning of government institutions and undermining the rule of law, attacks on judicial and legal professionals continued. Among the cases recorded by UNAMI¹⁹ on 2 January, the nephew of a judge in Al-Rufai'at was killed by a bomb inside the judge's residence. On the same day a lawyer working for an association defending Iraqi prisoners was shot dead in eastern Baghdad. On 4 January, a female lawyer was killed in a drive-by shooting on the airport road in Baghdad. On 18 March, a prominent lawyer in Kirkuk was shot dead near his home. On 19 April, a teacher, a lawyer and one other were killed by gunmen in their family home in Kirkuk. On 30 April, a judge was shot and killed by gunmen in his residence in Baghdad. A number of other people also reportedly died in the attack. On 9 June, a judge was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting in Baghdad. On October 19, a judge and his driver were shot dead in a western area of Mosul. On 13 December, gunmen attacked a vehicle carrying judges in Fallujah. Three people were killed, and five others wounded, including three judges. On 21 December, a judge and his guard were killed when a bomb attached to his vehicle exploded in Kirkuk. The judge's daughter and two pedestrians were reportedly injured. A second bomb was later detonated under a vehicle belonging to one of the judge's guards, which had been used to transport the injured to hospital, injuring a further five civilians.

...UNAMI recorded at least 35 attacks targeting educational and medical professionals during the reporting period.²⁰ Motives for such attacks were not uniform and were often unclear. It is possible that some could have been targeted for personal or criminal motives, but in some cases there might have been political, ethnic or sectarian motivations.²¹ On 17 February, a university professor was shot dead in his home in Al-Khadhra, west Baghdad. On 26 February, a teacher at a technical university was shot dead in Saydiya, Baghdad. On 8 March, a faculty member of the Department of Basic Education, University of Mosul was shot dead by unidentified armed men in Barid, east Mosul. On 26 March, a professor specializing in cancer research was assassinated in al-Nisour Square, Baghdad. On 29 March, in Mansour, Baghdad, the Dean of Dentistry at Mustansiriyah University was killed by a magnetic bomb attached to his car. On 4 April, up to six people were killed in an attack on the family home of a college professor. On 5 April, a teacher was reportedly shot dead in his home in Tarmiyah. On 9 April, a teacher was killed by a „sticky bomb“ attached to his car in Falluja. On 1 May, a teacher was reportedly killed by a „sticky bomb“ attached to his car in west Baquba. On 11 June, in Al-Dour a teacher and four members of his family were shot dead in their home.

On 21 June unidentified armed men kidnapped a doctor while he was heading out from his clinic in Kirkuk. The kidnappers contacted the doctor's family demanding USD\$300,000 to release the victim. A ransom was later paid and the doctor released. On 25 June, unknown armed men kidnapped the nine year old son of a dentist in Kirkuk city. He was released on 28 June. It is unknown whether a ransom was paid to secure his release. On 22 of July a doctor was shot dead in Kirkuk when he resisted a kidnap attempt. On 24 July a nurse was shot dead in a clinic in the village near the town of Garma north west of Baghdad. On 26 July gunmen broke into a medical clinic in al Tahrir neighborhood, east Mosul and shot dead Dr. Haifa Jum'aa. On 23 August, a professor from Baghdad University was shot dead outside his home in the Adil district of Baghdad. The professor's son was injured in the attack. On 5 September neurologist Yeldrim Abbass was reportedly killed along with his brother by gunmen in Kirkuk. Also in Kirkuk, on 11 September, armed men in two vehicles kidnapped a Turkoman nurse. On 22 October a teacher and his daughter were reportedly killed in a drive by shooting in Tikrit. On 5 November, unidentified armed men

dressed in uniform kidnapped the head of Kirkuk University and another professor, both Turkmen Shi'a. The two professors were released one month later on payment of a ransom. On 15 November a doctor was killed when gunmen opened fire in his clinic in a village near Qaiyara, north of Baghdad. On 27 December, the head of the Red Crescent in Kirkuk was targeted by a magnetic bomb on his vehicle, severely injuring him.

...Sectarian violence, in particular large scale attacks targeting religious events, continued to claim large numbers of civilian casualties. For instance, presumed Sunni militias attacked the Shi'a religious festival at Karbala in January. Such attacks on crowded areas routinely resulted in massive casualties. On 20 January, up to 56 Shi'a pilgrims were killed when two car bombs were detonated on roads used by thousands of pilgrims converging on Karbala for the Arba'een commemorations. Four days later, more than 33 pilgrims were killed by two car bombs which were detonated a few hours apart, the first targeted a bus terminal, while the second targeted the Da'oum area in the center of the city, where pilgrims were organising processions. In possibly retaliatory attacks, Sunni imams were reportedly targeted in Falluja. According to Iraq Body Count, two Imams were killed in drive-by shootings on 24 January and 31 January.²² In February, at least 46 Shi'a pilgrims were killed by two suicide bomb attacks targeting a religious ceremony in Samarra. In the first attack on 8 February, eight people were killed and around 30 wounded when a suicide car bomber attacked a group of Shi'a pilgrims heading to the city, where a religious commemoration for the death of an Imam was taking place. On 12 February, another suicide bomber blew himself up near a crowd of Shi'a pilgrims at a bus depot. According to media reports, 38 people were killed and 74 wounded in this second attack.²³

On July 15 and 16, four car bombs in Karbala, targeting Shi'ite pilgrims during a religious festival, killed 15 and injured 84. On 28 August, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the main area of the Umm al-Qura mosque during prayers in the western Baghdad neighbourhood of al-Jamiaah: Iraqi police and hospital officials reported that 29 worshippers were killed and at least a further 30 injured. On 12 September, 22 Shi'ite pilgrims were shot dead when unidentified gunmen boarded the bus and killed all those on board as they were travelling through al-Anbar governorate on their way to a holy shrine in Syria. On 30 September, 25 people were killed and 27 wounded when a car bomb was detonated among mourners at a Shi'ite funeral in the city of Hilla. At least 32 people were killed during different sectarian attacks during the Shi'ite Ashura festival. On 5 December, 15 people including women and children were killed by a car bomb targeting a religious procession in Hilla. A second attack, also in Hilla on the same day, killed at least six more people. A number of other attacks targeting individual clerics were recorded by UNAMI.²⁴ On 17 February, a leading Sadrist cleric was shot dead in a drive by shooting in west Karbala. On 18 February, a religious leader, Sheikh Ali Fakhri was reportedly shot dead by unidentified armed men in front of his home in Al Rashidiya, north Mosul. On 19 April, three members of the family of a Sunni imam were shot in their home in Baquba. On 19 May, a Shi'a cleric was killed by a "sticky bomb" attached to his car in the Bab al-Miyadham area of Baghdad. On 31 May, unknown armed men kidnapped a prominent Imam, a member of Iraqi Scholars Council – Kirkuk Branch. The imam was also an active member of Iraqi Islamic Party in Kirkuk. On 13 August, Adil Jaijan, an imam, was killed in a drive by shooting in eastern Baghdad. On 9 September, an imam was shot dead near his mosque in Baghdad's Zaafaraniya district. On 25 October, near the town of Hilla a bomb was detonated at the house of Sheikh Safa Jasim, killing his wife and son, and injuring him and three other sons.

There were also attacks perpetrated against members of other religious minorities, including Christians, Shabaks and Yezidi.

Attacks against members of the ISF were frequent in 2011. According to UNAMI figures, some 1,052 members of the ISF were killed and 2,596 injured. Such attacks were carried out by various insurgent groups, apparently aimed at undermining public confidence in the Government's ability to maintain security.

Large-scale assaults on Iraqi police and police stations often result in the arbitrary loss of life and injury of civilians. Attacks targeted against individual police officers frequently led to loss of life of family members and innocent bystanders.

The majority of such attacks took place in the cities of Mosul, Kirkuk and Baghdad. In Mosul alone, UNAMI recorded 118 attacks against the Iraqi police during the first six months of the year. At least 82 security personnel were killed along with 78 civilians in these attacks.

UNAMI received reports of civilian deaths resulting from criminal acts, such as robberies of banks and jewelry stores. While such acts are criminal in nature, there are reports that armed groups carried out such robberies in order to obtain financing and to purchase weapons.

In Kirkuk, UNAMI received over twelve reports of kidnappings for ransom. For example, kidnappers demanded a ransom for the release of three Turkish citizens seized on 15 February. The three businessmen were released following an operation led by USF-I on 25 April. No details were available on whether a ransom was paid. On 18 July, a prominent businessman was kidnapped in Kirkuk. The man was released after five days following the payment of a ransom.

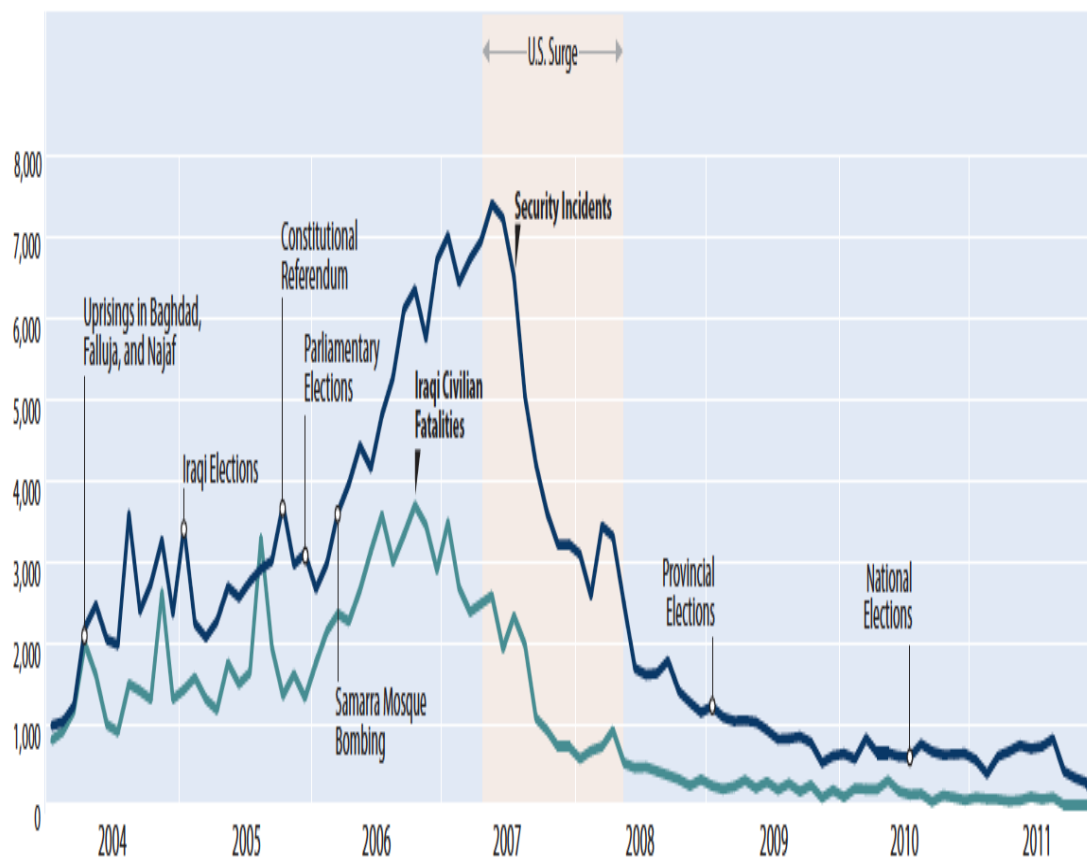
During the first six months of 2011, the draw-down of remaining USF-I forces continued, pursuant to the agreement between Iraq and the United States. The process was completed by 18 December 2011.

Nonetheless, there were a total of three incidents alleging civilian casualties caused by military operations of USF-I reported by the media, but only one was confirmed by UNAMI.²⁵ On 15 June one Iraqi civilian was killed and three injured in a rare USF-I raid, reportedly including air support. USF-I claimed that the victims were insurgents and that equipment for firing rockets was found at the scene of the raid. The raid was in response to an indirect fire attack on the US military base in Basra earlier the same day.

On 25 April one civilian was killed and five injured during clashes between Iraqi army soldiers and Kurdish *Asayesh* in a street in central Kirkuk.

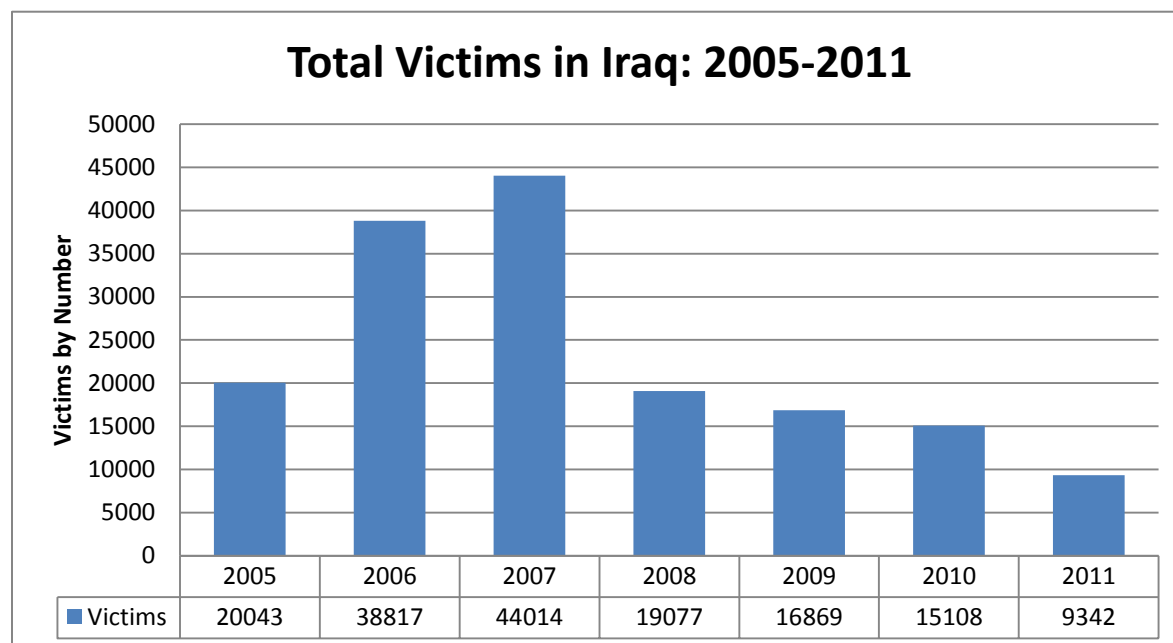
...From mid-June, there were occasional aerial bombardments and mortar attacks on border areas in the Kurdistan Region by foreign forces, aimed at dislodging PKK and PJAK rebel groups allegedly active there. By mid-July, 176 families were displaced from the villages of Aliarash, Suney, Sarkhan, Pirdabardin and Barquislan to the town of Gojar. On 21 August, UNAMI confirmed that aerial bombardments killed seven civilians in the Pishdar area of Sulaymaniyah governorate. The victims were members of the same family travelling in a vehicle which was hit during the raid.

...Among the victims were four children aged 6 months, 4 years, 10 years and 11 years. According to UN agencies, an additional 120 families were displaced from the villages of Zargali, Bokriskan and Prdasha as a result of the attacks. In early October, shelling reportedly caused damage to villages in border areas of eastern Erbil and north-eastern Sulaymaniyah provinces, although no civilian casualties were reported. Shelling continued to affect border areas around Sidakan and Zap during the week of 16 October. Kurdistan Region security sources stated that one civilian was slightly injured on 19 October in the Zap area as a result of the shelling. On 21 November, one civilian was reportedly killed near Sidakan as a result of aerial bombings.

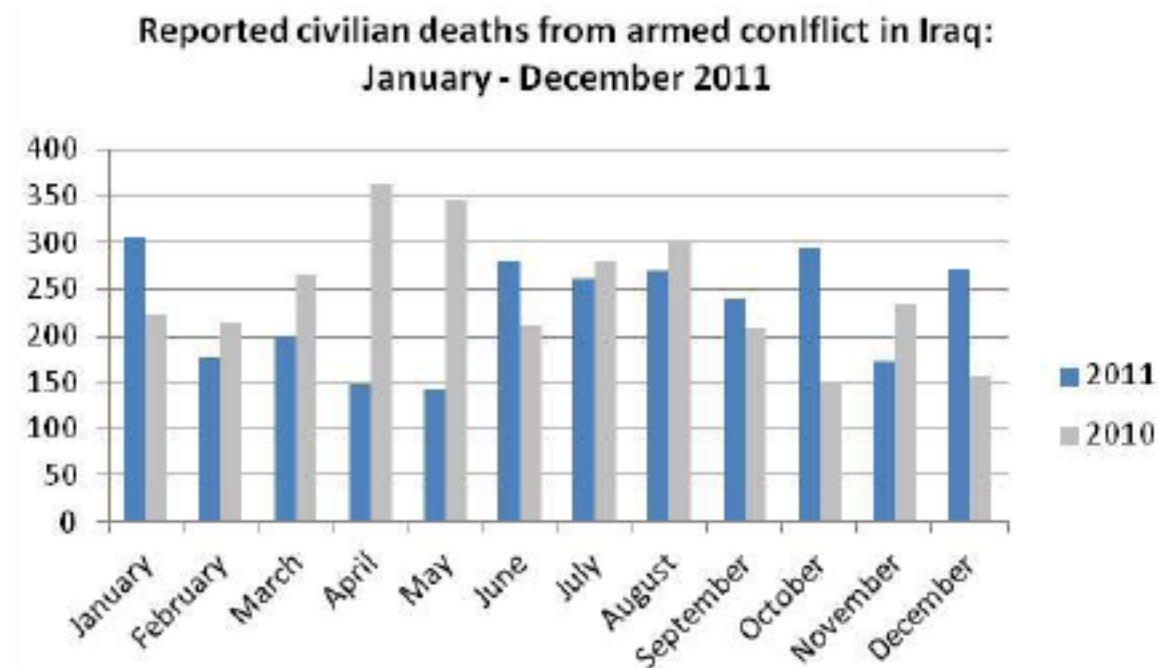
Figure 9: The Continuing Pattern of Violence in Iraq**MONTHLY SECURITY INCIDENTS AND CIVILIAN FATALITIES, 1/2004–12/2011**

Sources: SIGIR, Quarterly Report, January 30, 2012, p 65

Figure 10: NCTC and UNAMI data on Total Victims In Iraq and recent Trends in Civilian Victims, 2005-2011



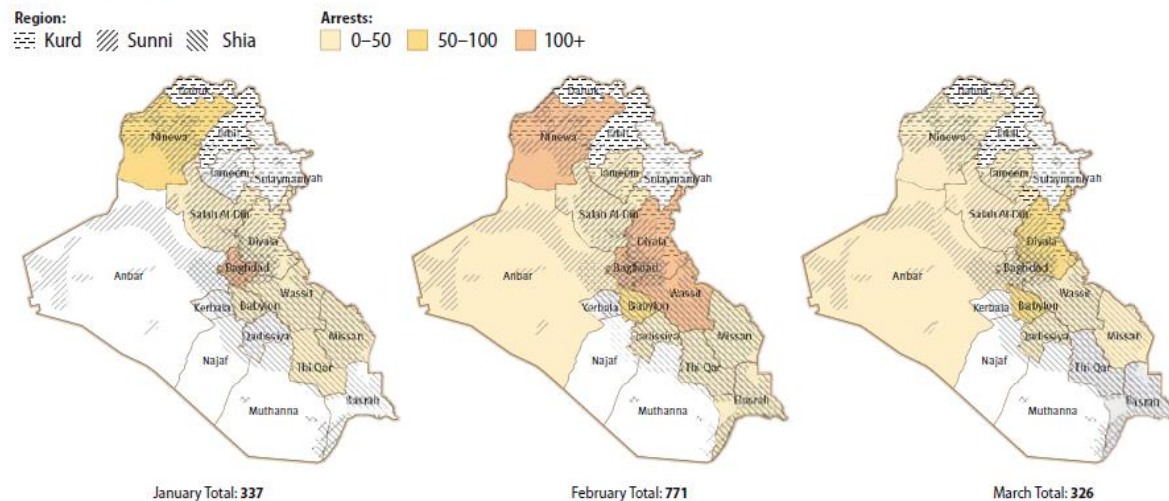
Source: National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Worldwide Incident Tracking System (WITS) data.⁶⁰



Source: UNAMI Human Rights Office/OHCHR, *Report on Human Rights in Iraq: 2011, May 2012, Baghdad, p. 6.*

Figure 11: Arrests on Terrorism Charges (1/14/2012-4/10/2012)

SELECTED ARRESTS ON TERRORISM CHARGES,
1/14/2012-4/10/2012



Note: This table provides examples of arrests this quarter. It does not purport to be all-inclusive, nor presume to imply the guilt or innocence of those arrested. Analysis of incidents based on best available information, as of 4/10/2012.

Source: SIGIR analysis of open-source documents in Arabic and English, 1/2012-4/2012.

Source: SIGIR Quarterly Report, April 2012, page 81.

Figure 12: Selected Acts of Apparent Targeted Violence, 1/11/2012–4/10/2012

TABLE 4.2

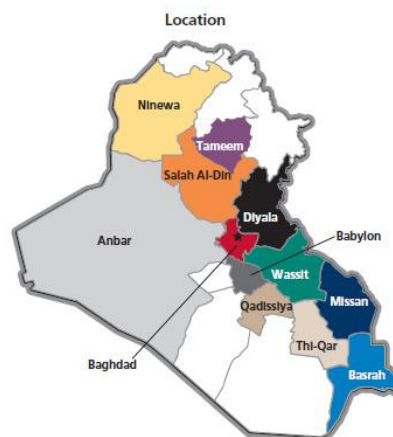
SELECTED ACTS OF APPARENT TARGETED VIOLENCE, 1/11/2012–4/10/2012
Non-security Officials and Other Prominent Civilians

TARGETS/VICTIMS	LOCATION	DATE	CIRCUMSTANCES	RESULT
MOF official	●	1/29	Gunman attack	Killed
Deputy of al-Bayda' party	●	1/31	IED and VBIED attack on home	Unharmd; many others injured
Correctional deputy	●	2/7	Gunman attack	Killed
Baghdad Investment Commission Chairman	●	2/11	Gunman attack (silencers used)	Unharmd; guard injured
Tribal sheik	●	2/11	Gunman attack on family	Killed; wife, child, and brother killed
Tribal sheik	●	2/18	Gunman attack on home	Killed; son wounded
Criminal judge	●	2/18	Gunman attack on home	Killed
College professor	●	2/25	Gunman attack on home	Unharmd; 2 sons injured
Criminal judge	●	2/25	IED attack on home	Unharmd
Deputies to Ayatollah al-Sistani	●	2/27	Hand grenade attack on home	3 unharmd
Tribal sheik	●	2/28	Gunman attack on convoy	Killed; wife and 2 children injured
Lawyer	●	3/2	Gunman attack	Killed
Deputy to Ayatollah al-Sistani	●	3/3	IED	Unharmd
Assistant director of Civilian Affairs	●	3/4	SVBIED attack on car	Unharmd; daughter unharmd
Investigative judge	●	3/6	IED attack on office	IED disarmed
Doctor	●	3/7	Gunman attack on home	Unharmd; 2 family members injured
Al-Iraqiya deputy/MP	●	3/11	IED attack on convoy	Unharmd

Security Officials

TARGETS/VICTIMS	LOCATION	DATE	CIRCUMSTANCES	RESULT
SOI commander	●	1/18	Gunman attack on home	Killed; 4 children killed
SOI member	●	1/19	Gunman attack on home	Killed; wife and mother killed
MOI intelligence officer	●	1/24	IED attack on home	Killed; 10 family members killed
Iraqi Police officer	●	1/24	Gunman attack on home	Killed; 4 family members wounded
Police officials	●	1/25	Gunman attack on home	2 killed
Iraqi Army officer	●	1/29	SVBIED attack	Injured; 2 students injured
Iraqi Army officer	●	1/31	SVBIED attack	Injured
SOI commander	●	1/31	IED attack on home	Injured
SOI member	●	2/1	Gunman attack	Killed
Iraqi Army officer	●	2/7	Gunman attack on home	Unharmd; wife killed; child injured
MOI official	●	2/11	Gunman attack on car	Killed
Iraqi Army officer	●	2/13	Gunman attack	Killed; 2 assistants killed
Iraqi Police officers	●	2/13	Gunman/grenade attack on home	Killed; wife and sons killed
Iraqi Army brigadier general	●	2/14	Gunman attack (silencers used)	Killed
Iraqi Army brigadier general	●	2/18	Gunman attack on car	Injured
MOD brigadier general	●	2/18	Gunman attack on car (silencers used)	Several injured

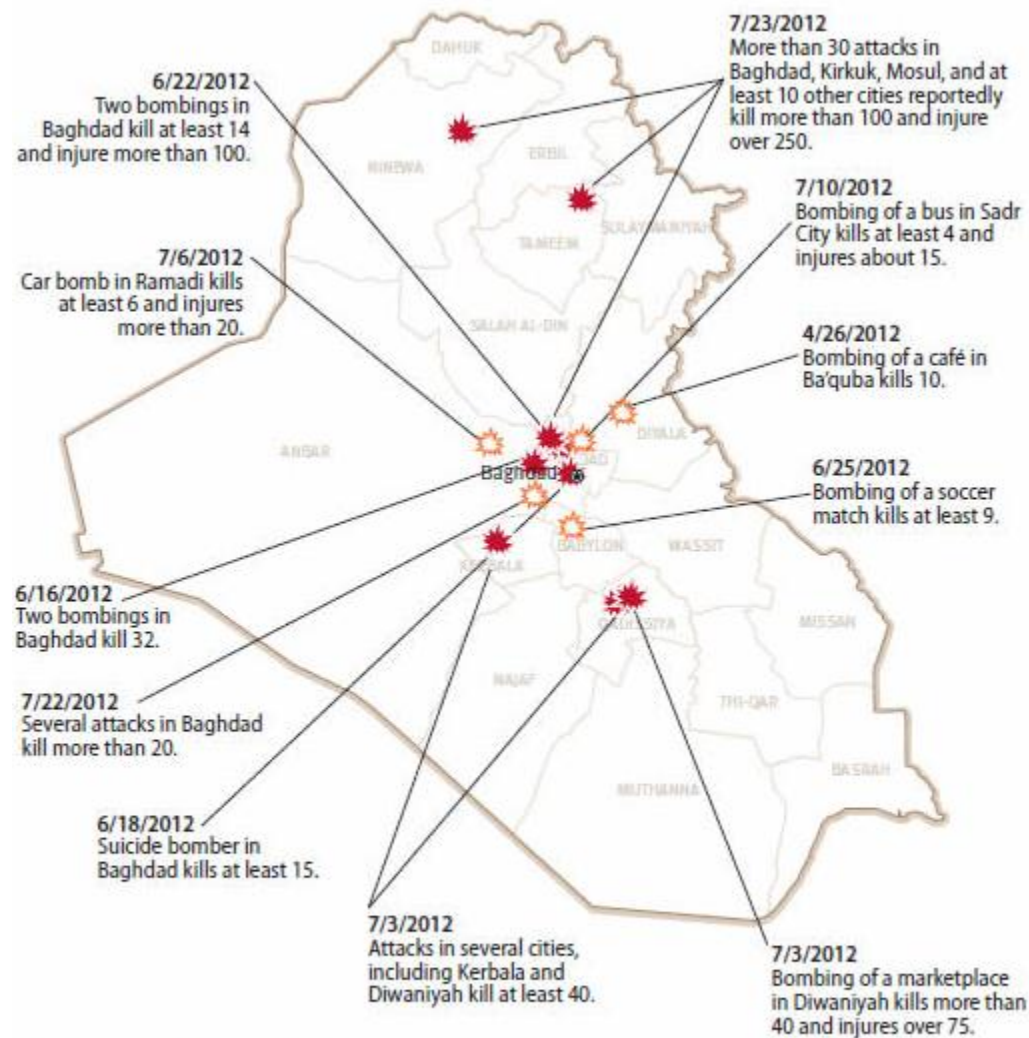
Continued in next column



TARGETS/VICTIMS	LOCATION	DATE	CIRCUMSTANCES	RESULT
Police officials	●	2/19	Gunman attack on SOI Checkpoint	2 SOI killed; 1 Iraqi Police officer killed
Police colonel	●	2/20	SVBIED attack	Killed
Iraqi Army officer	●	2/26	Gunman attack on checkpoint	Killed
SOI commander	●	2/26	IED attack on SOI convoy	Killed; 1 soldier injured
Witness protection official	●	2/27	Gunman attack on Criminal Court	Killed
Iraqi Army officers	●	2/27	IED attack on convoy	2 injured
Correctional security officer	●	2/29	Explosives attack on convoy	Killed; 3 others injured
MOI officer	●	3/1	Gunman attack on home/car	Killed
MOD officer	●	3/4	IED attack	Injured
Iraqi Police officers	●	3/5	Gunman attack on checkpoint	3 killed; 3 injured
Iraqi Police officers	●	3/6	Suicide bomb	4 injured
Iraqi Police officers	●	3/7	IED attack on convoy	1 killed; 2 injured
Iraqi Police investigator	●	3/8	SVBIED attack on car	Killed
Iraqi Police officer	●	3/10	IED attack on home	Unharmd; 1 other killed, 4 injured
SOI member	●	3/10	Gunman attack	Killed
Iraqi Police officers	●	3/12	Gunman attack	5 killed; 2 wounded
Iraqi Police officers	●	3/14	Gunman attack	2 killed; 3 wounded
SOI member	●	3/15	IED attack on home	Killed
SOI member	●	3/18	IED attack	3 killed
SOI member	●	3/19	Gunman attack on home	Killed; 4 family members killed
Iraqi Police officers	●	3/20	Explosives attack on convoy	1 killed; 2 wounded
Iraqi Army officer	●	3/27	IED attack on Army patrol	1 killed; 1 injured
Iraqi Army colonel	●	3/28	IED attack on home	Unharmd
SOI member	●	3/31	Gunman attack on home	Killed; wife and son killed

Note: This table provides examples of assassinations, attempted assassinations, and other small-scale acts of violence that appear to have been aimed at specific persons or groups this quarter. It does not purport to be all-inclusive, nor presume to imply the attackers' respective motives.

Source: SIGIR Quarterly Report, April 2012, page 78.

Figure 13-1: Patterns of Violence by Quarter, Security Incidents 4/2012-7/2012**SELECTED MAJOR SECURITY INCIDENTS, 4/20/2012–7/23/2012**

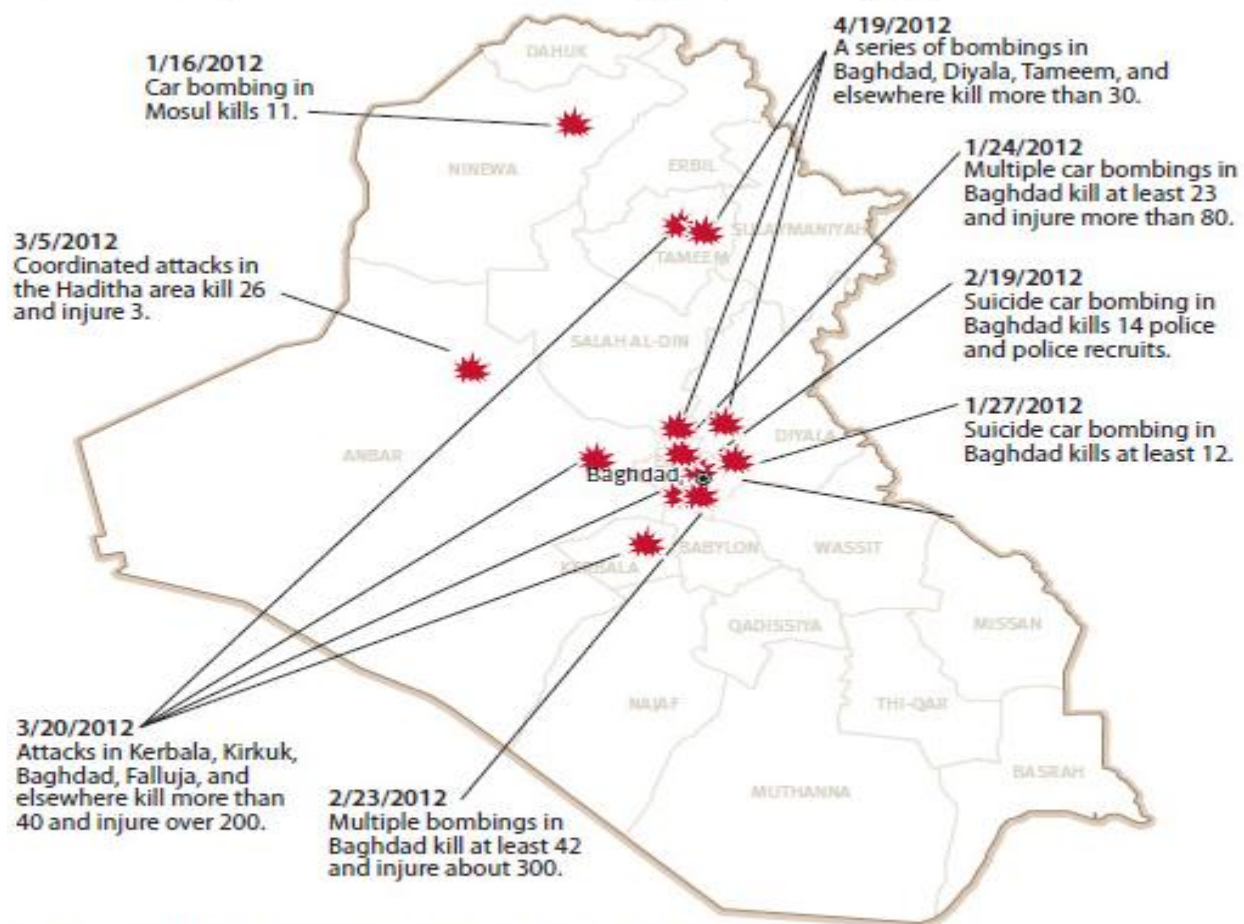
Note: All casualty figures are based on best available information.

Source: SIGIR analysis of GOI and U.S. government documents and open-source information in Arabic and English, 4/20/2012–7/23/2012.

Source: SIGIR Quarterly Report, July 30, 2012, p. 8.

Figure 13-2: Patterns of Violence by Quarter, Security Incidents 1/2012-4/2012

SELECTED MAJOR SECURITY INCIDENTS, 1/16/2012–4/19/2012



Note: All casualty figures are based on best available information.

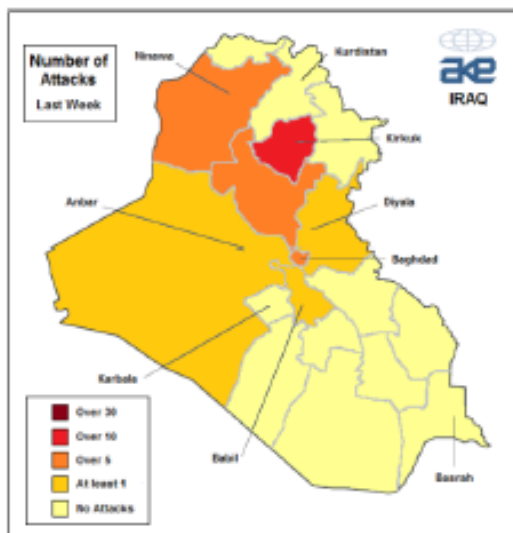
Source: SIGIR analysis of GOI and U.S. government documents and open-source information in Arabic and English, 1/16/2012–4/19/2012.

Source: SIGIR Quarterly Report, April 30, 2012, p. 6.

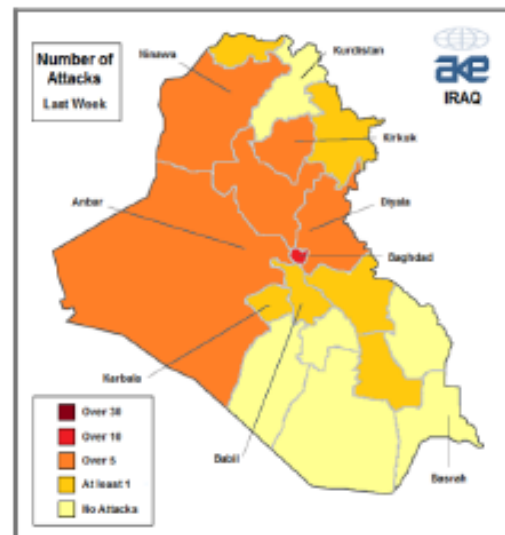
Figure 14.1: Significant Security Incidents by Month: January 2012

Below is a weekly reporting by [AKE](#) of attacks occurring within Iraq. The map is organized by province. An attack constitutes a bombing, shooting, rocket/mortar attack, kidnap or stabbing.

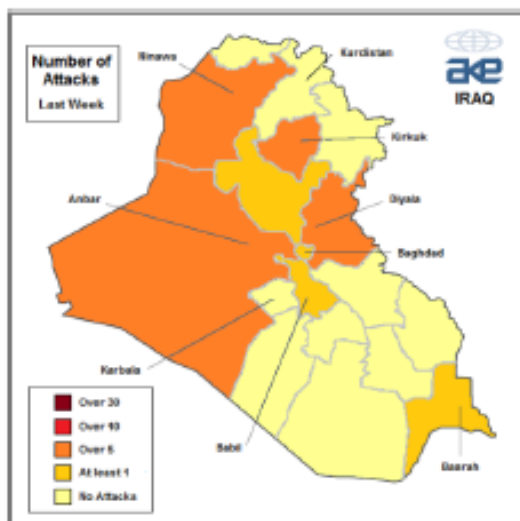
Weekly Security Update 04 January



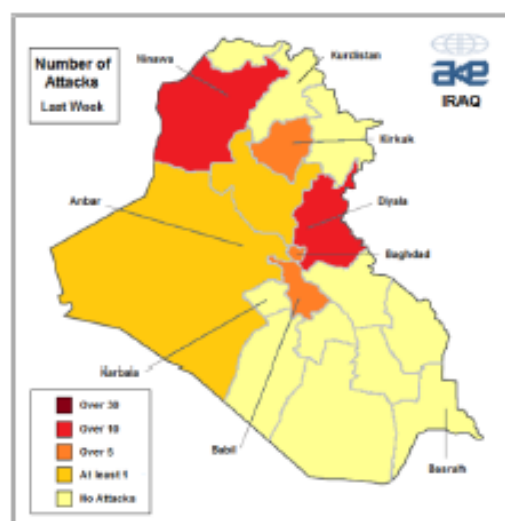
Weekly Security Update 13 January



Weekly Security Update 18 January



Weekly Security Update 26 January



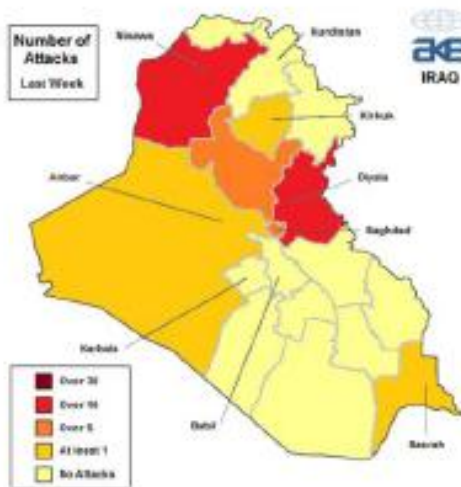
Source: [Iraq Business News](#)

Source: Civil-Military Fusion Center, Iraq: A Month in Review, January 2012, p. 1

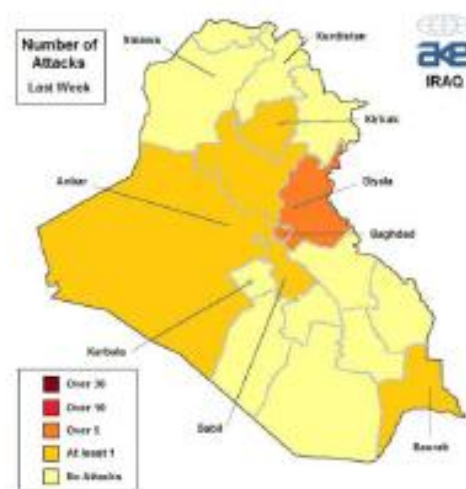
Figure 14.2: Significant Security Incidents by Month: February 2012

Below is a weekly reporting by [AKE](#) of attacks occurring within Iraq by province. AKE considers an attack a bombing, shooting, rocket/mortar attack, kidnap or stabbing.

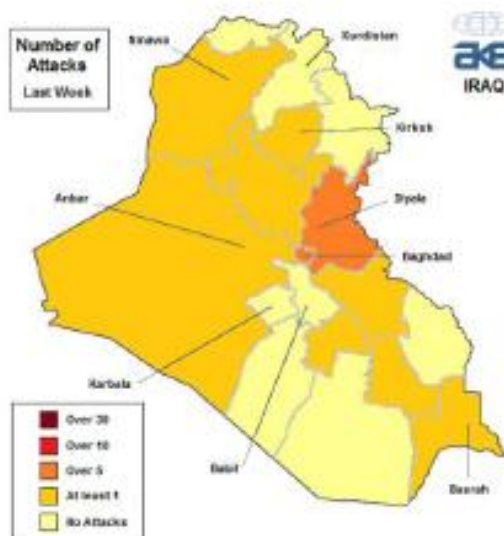
Weekly Security Update 09 Feb



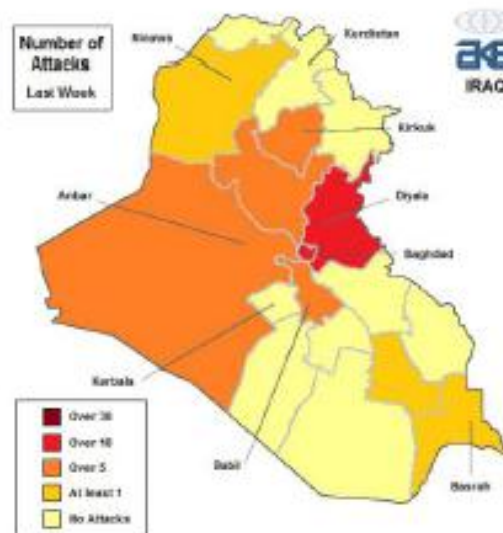
Weekly Security Update 15 Feb



Weekly Security Update 22 Feb

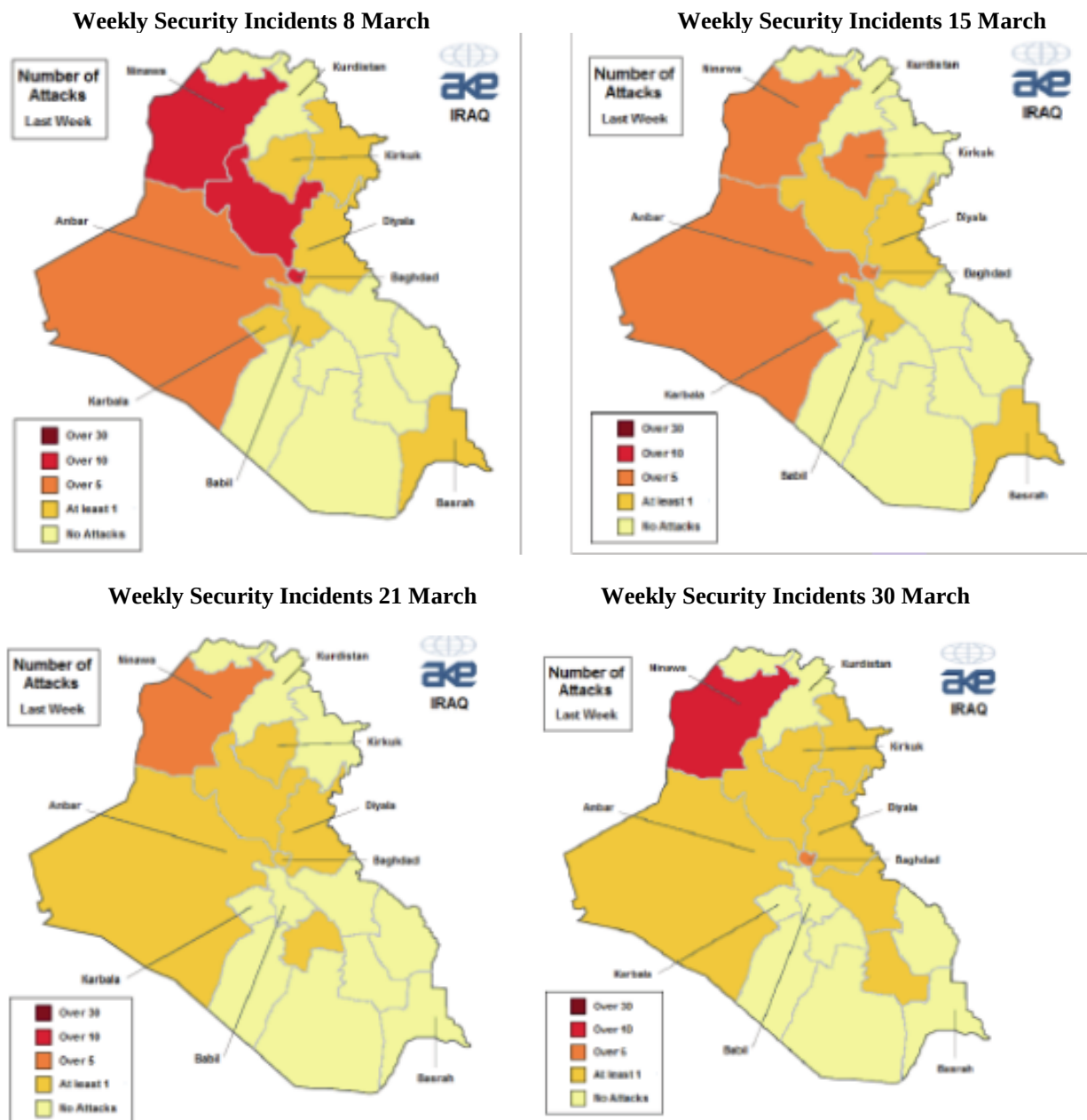


Weekly Security Update 01 Mar



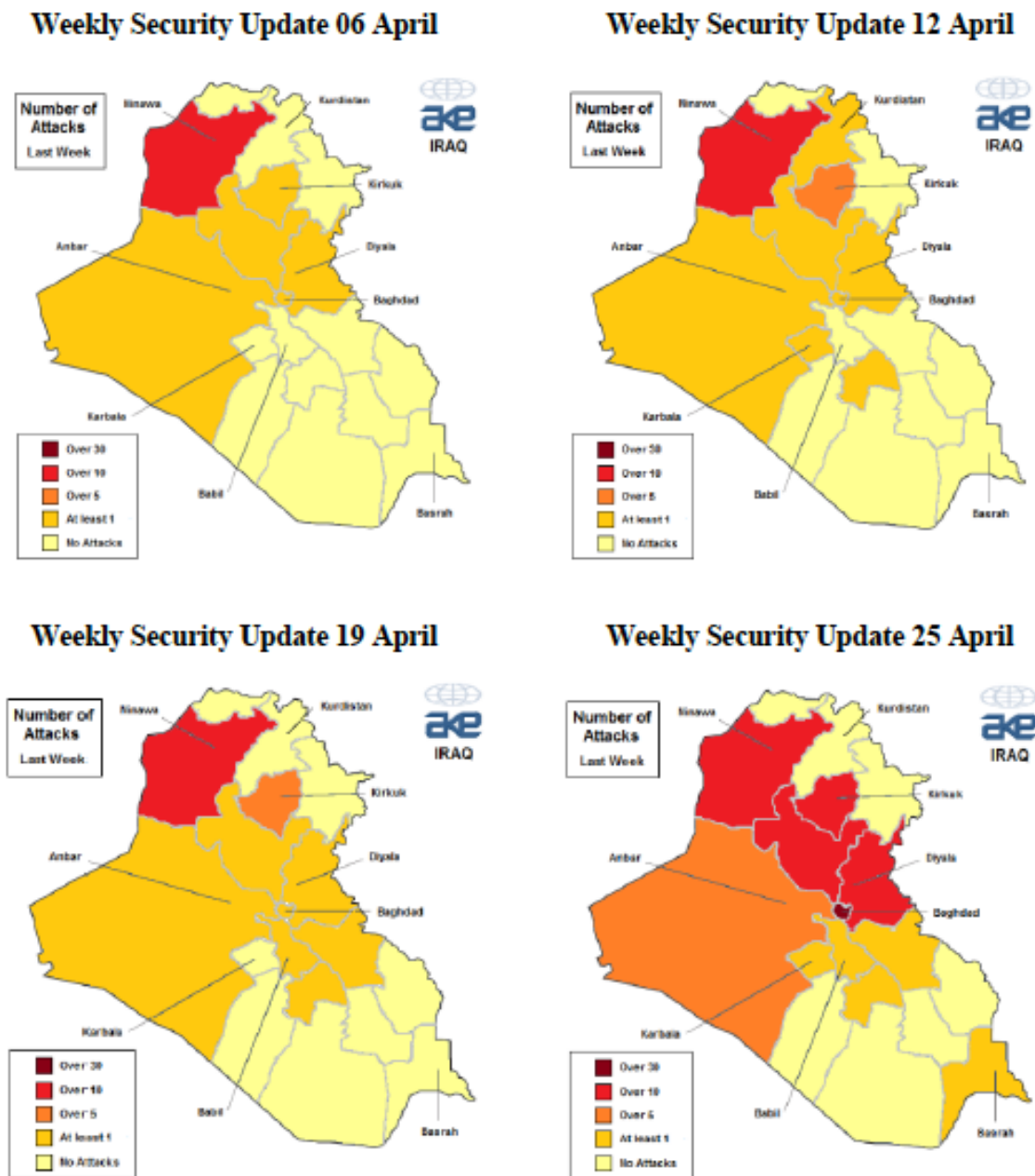
Source: Civil-Military Fusion Center, Iraq: A Month in Review, February 2012, p. 1

Figure 14.3: Significant Security Incidents by Month: March 2012



Source: Civil-Military Fusion Center, *Iraq: A Month in Review*, March 2012, p. 1

Figure 14.4: Significant Security Incidents by Month: April 2012

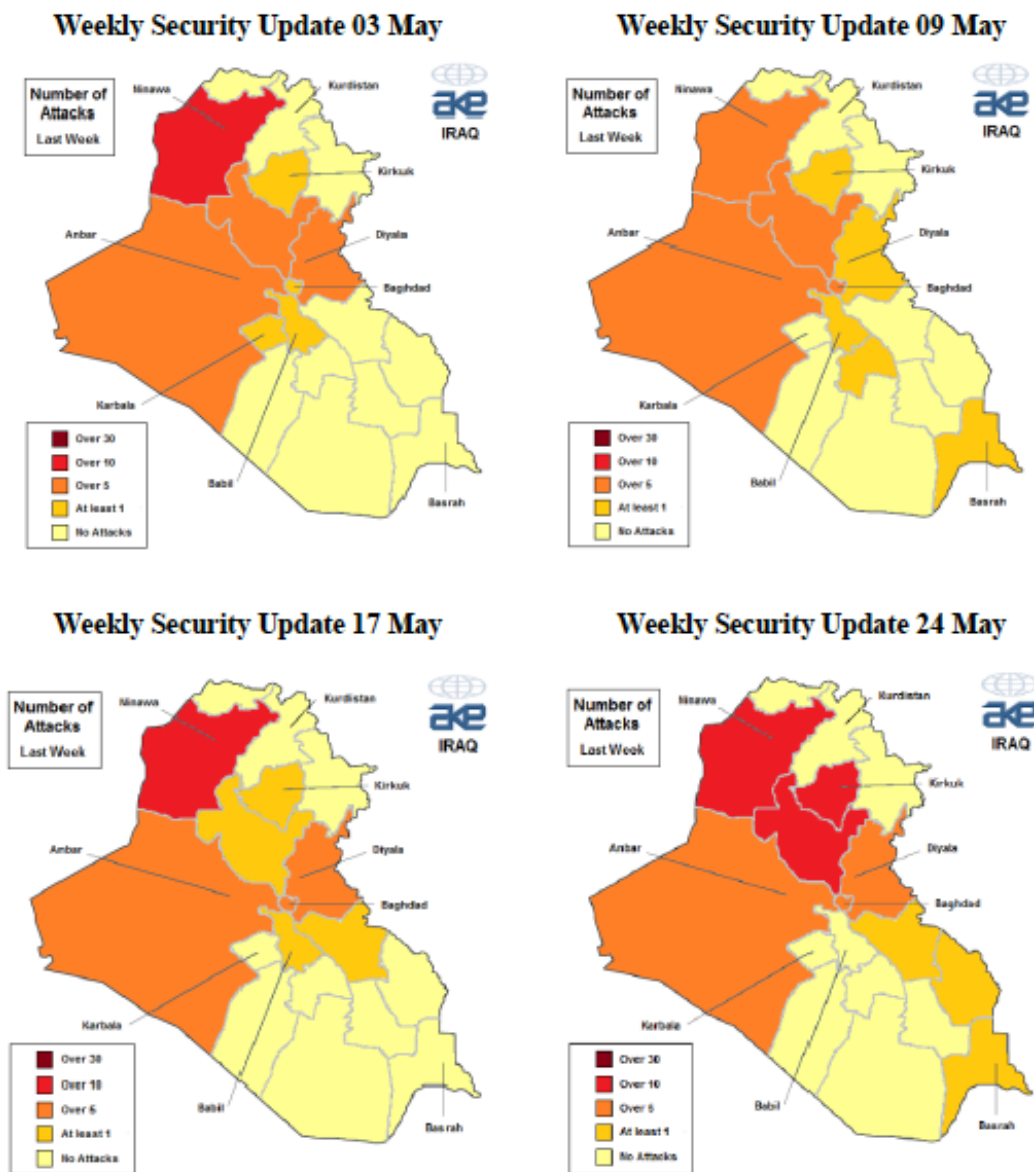


Source: [Iraq Business News](#)

The above, is a weekly reporting by [AKE](#) of attacks occurring within Iraq. The map is organized by province. An attack constitutes a bombing, shooting, rocket/mortar attack, kidnap or stabbing.

Source: Civil-Military Fusion Center, *Iraq: A Month in Review*, April 2012, p. 1

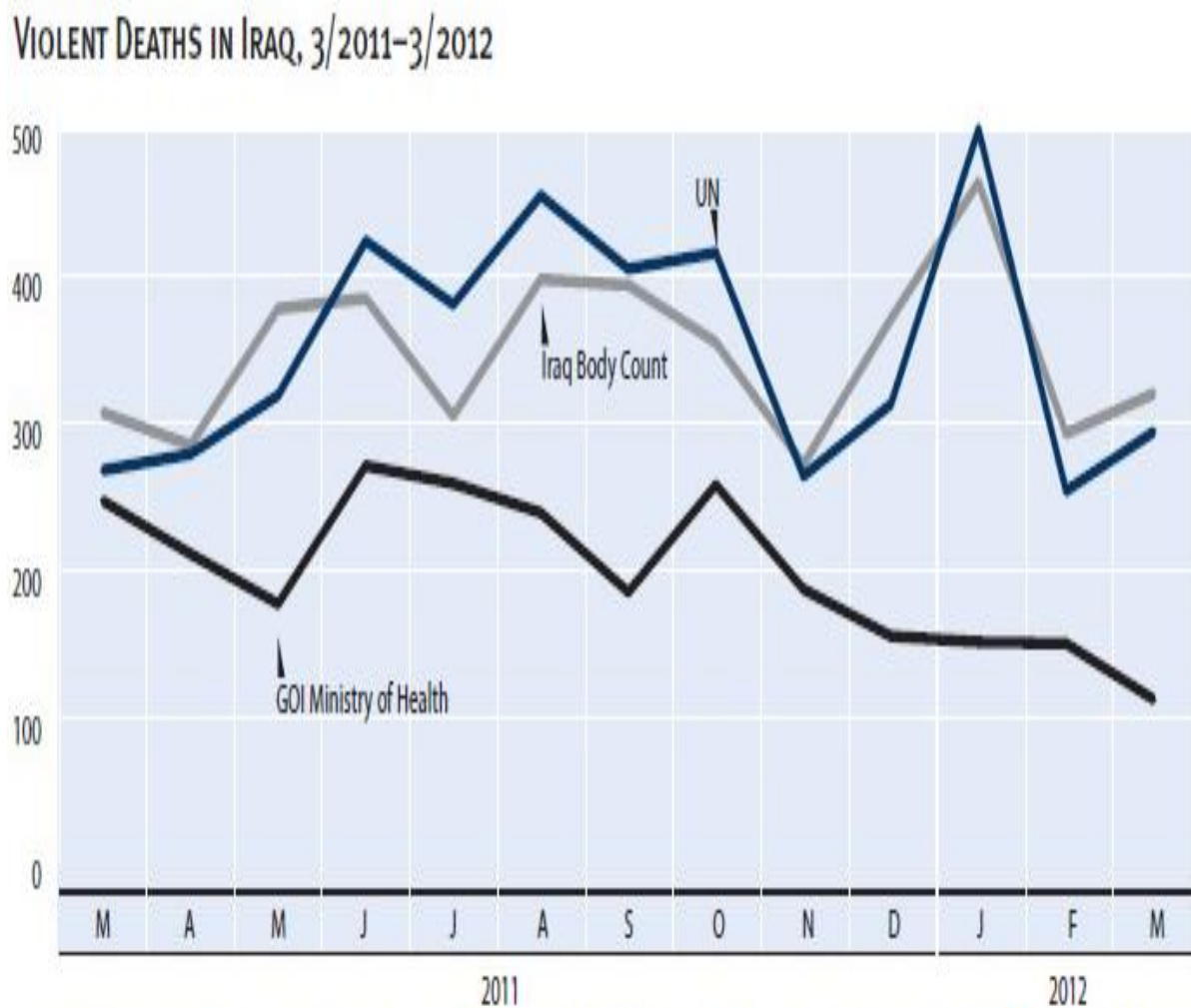
Figure 14.5: Significant Security Incidents by Month: May 2012



Source: [Iraq Business News](#)

The above, is a weekly reporting by [AKE](#) of attacks occurring within Iraq. The map is organized by province. An attack constitutes a bombing, shooting, rocket/mortar attack, kidnap or stabbing.

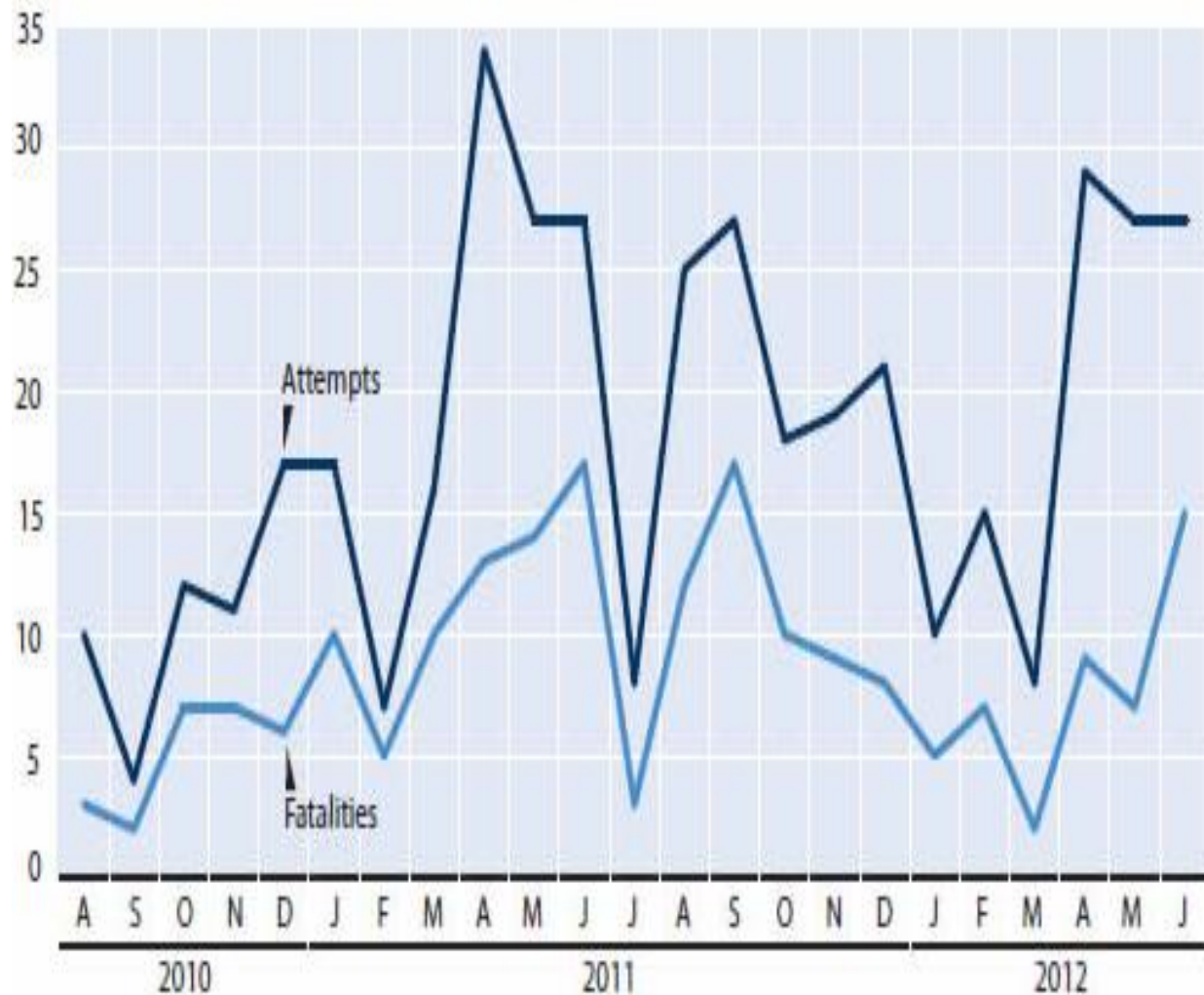
Source: Civil-Military Fusion Center, *Iraq: A Month in Review*, May 2012, p. 1

Figure 15: Tracking Violent Deaths in Iraq, 3/2011-3/2012

Note: The MOH collects data from the MOI and MOD on ISF casualties and adds it to its own tally of Iraqi civilian deaths. The IAU figures are "collated from various sources around the country." The UN does not guarantee the accuracy of the information. Iraq Body Count states that its data is drawn from media reports, official GOI reports, NGO data, and reviews of Iraqi hospital and morgue figures. As of April 17, Iraq Body Count was still finalizing its March death toll of 320.

Sources: GOI, MOH, Information provided to SIGIR, 4/2012; UN, IAU, "Security in Iraq," <http://incidents.iauiraq.org/>, accessed 4/10/2012; Iraq Body Count, www.iraqbodycount.org/, accessed 4/10/2012.

Source: SIGIR Quarterly Report, April 30, 2012, p. 6.

Figure 16: Tracking Assassinations of Senior Iraqi Officials, 8/2010-6/2012**ASSASSINATIONS OF SENIOR IRAQI OFFICIALS,
ATTEMPTS VS. FATALITIES, 8/2010-6/2012**

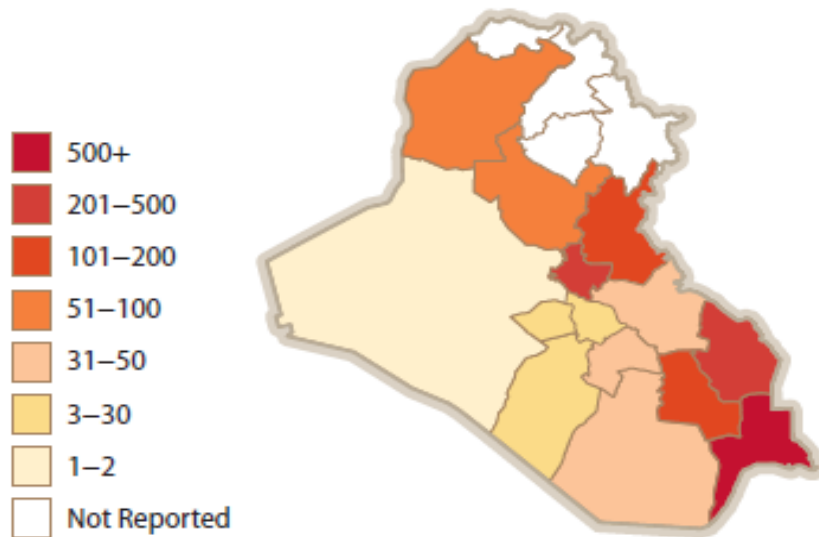
Note: May not capture all attempted assassinations and fatalities during the specified time period.

Source: SIGIR analysis of open-source documents in Arabic and English, 8/2010-6/2012.

Source: SIGIR Quarterly Report, July 30, 2012, p. 10.

Figure 17: Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Sites, By Province, 2011

**LANDMINE AND UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE SITES,
BY PROVINCE, 2011**

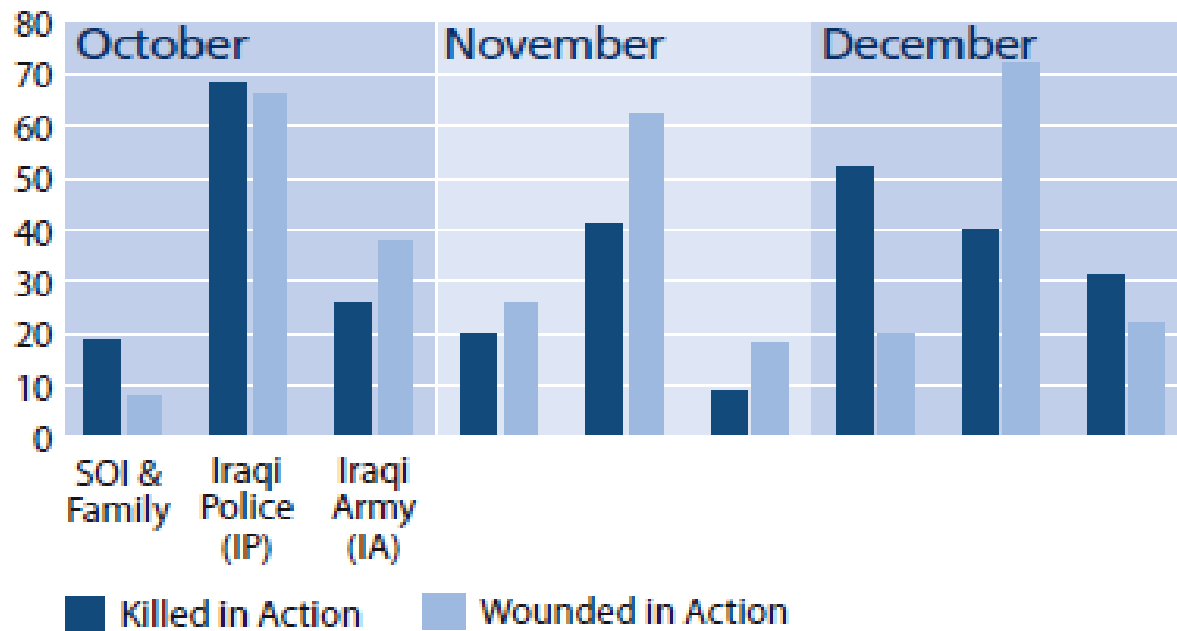


Source: GOI, MOH, “WHO Injury Surveillance Results,” 2011.

Source: SIGIR Quarterly Report, July 30, 2012, p. 83

Figure 18: Attacks on Iraqi Security Forces and Sons of Iraq

SOI & FAMILY, IRAQI POLICE, AND IRAQI ARMY CASUALTIES, 10/2011–12/2011



Source: GOI, MOI, information provided to SIGIR, 1/22/2012.

Sources: SIGIR, Quarterly Report, January 30, 2012, p. 68

Polls Show Growing Popular Fears and Dissatisfaction

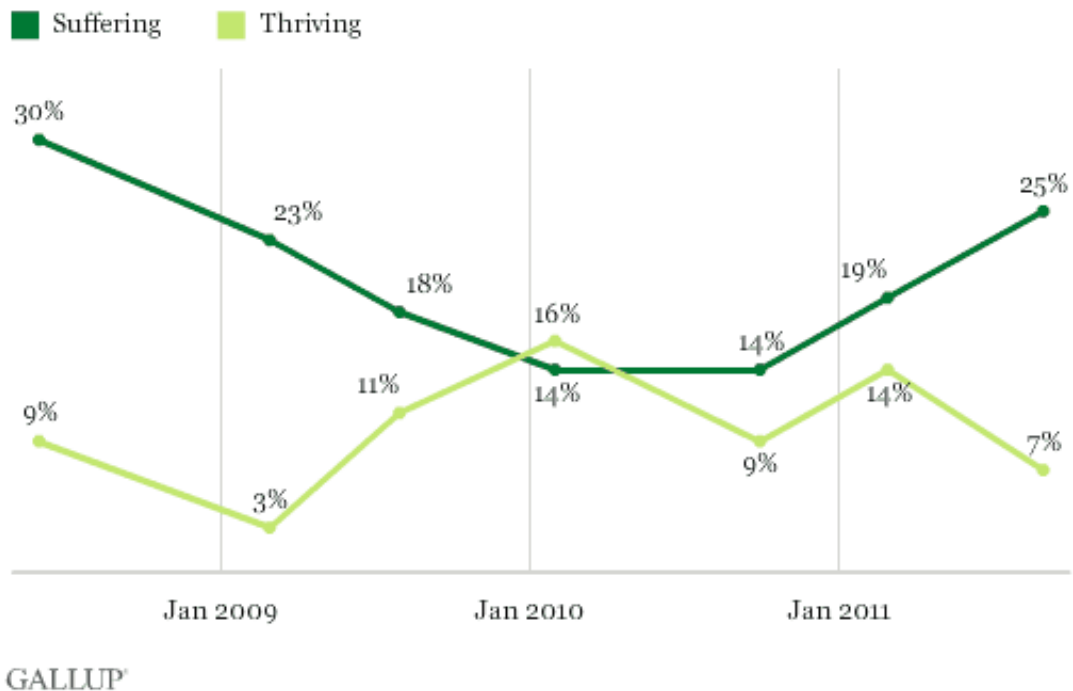
This violence affects the cohesion of the state at the popular level. There are strong indications that the continuing level of violence has led Iraqis have less faith in their security and the future. The January 2012 Quarterly report of the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction notes that,

The results of two surveys, both taken in 2011 before the final drawdown of U.S. troops, portray a relatively high level of discontent among the people of Iraq. One survey found that 25% of the 1,000 Iraqis interviewed in September considered themselves to be “suffering” (as opposed to “thriving” or “struggling”), up from 14% less than a year earlier. According to Gallup, the percentage of Iraqis who rate their lives this poorly is among the highest in the Middle East and North Africa region. The percentage that said they were “thriving”—just 7%—is among the lowest in the region. The number of Iraqis who reported experiencing stress during much of the day preceding their survey doubled between June 2008 and September 2011, rising from 34% to 70%. The percentage experiencing anger increased from 38% to 60% over the same period.²

Earlier in the year, a more comprehensive survey of the 28,875 Iraqi households provided additional details on specific areas of concern. The Iraq Knowledge Network (IKN) survey is part of a socioeconomic monitoring system being developed by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation (MoPDC). Its aim is to provide reliable data for planning and improving government services. Partial results of the survey were released in December and included the following:

- Almost 8 out of 10 households rated electricity service as “bad” or “very bad,” and 6 out of 10 rated their sanitation facilities in one of those categories.
- 57% of adults (age 15 and older) said they were neither working nor looking for work.
- More than half felt that corruption had become more prevalent in the previous two years. A different type of survey, this one conducted in 2011 by New York-based consulting firm Mercer, rated the quality of living and personal safety in 221 cities around the world. Baghdad ranked last in both categories. The survey weighed the political, social, and economic environment along with housing, schools, public services, health care, and climate in determining its calculation, describing the Iraqi capital as “the world’s least safe city.”

These polling trends involved are illustrated below in **Figure 19**.

Figure 19: Percentages of Iraqis Who Say They Are “Suffering” or “Thriving”*Percentages “Suffering” and “Thriving” in Iraq**Among Iraqi adults aged 15 and older*

Note: Survey was taken of Iraqi adults (age 15 and older).

Source: Stafford Nichols, Gallup, “‘Suffering’ in Iraq Highest Since 2008,” 1/9/2012, www.gallup.com/poll/151940/Suffering-Iraq-Highest-2008.aspx, accessed 1/12/2011

The Impact of Political, Ethnic, and Sectarian Divisions

This continuing level of violence is driven by both the range of political crises at the national to the local level, and by sectarian and ethnic divisions. In January 2012, for example, a Shiite governor threatened to blockade a strategic commercial route from Baghdad to northern Kurdish region if Kurdish officials did not hand over the indicted VP Hashemi who they were harboring.⁶¹

At the same time, Some Sunni political leaders began to talk about seeking some form of “federalism” or more independent status even in mixed provinces like Diyala, and Kurdish leaders are reassign the need to keep Kurdish security forces strong and independent from the rest of the Iraqi security forces.

All of these issues interact with the fact that Al Qaida in Mesopotamia and a range of other Sunni and Shi’ite violent extremist groups still threaten security, and

The Continuing Role of Violent Extremist Groups

Despite limited signs that a few insurgent groups may be ready to lay down their arms in exchange for becoming legitimate participants in the political process, the circumstances on the ground demonstrate that most groups remain committed to using violence to achieve their goals. The Department of State’s Annual Human Rights Report -- released May 2012 -- highlights the impact of terrorist attacks carried out by groups such as al-Qaida in Iraq and others. The report states that:⁶²

“Terrorist groups such as al-Qaida in Iraq committed attacks against a wide swath of society, including Sunnis, Shia, and members of other sects or ethnicities, security forces, places of worship, religious pilgrims, economic infrastructure, and government officials. Their means were suicide bombings, attacks with improvised explosive devices, drive-by shootings, and other acts of violence aimed at weakening the government and deepening ethnosectarian divisions. Certain militant organizations, such as those influenced by Iran, also committed numerous terrorist attacks, primarily against foreign embassies and foreign military forces.” – US Department of State, Iraq Country Report on Human Rights Practice An analysis by SIGIR, which has been partially updated using other sources, shows that the attackers include the following rival ethnic and sectarian factions that account for most of Iraq’s devastating violence.⁶³

- **Al Qa’ida in Iraq:** Since 2010, terrorist attacks have primarily targeted Iraqi security forces and government officials, but they have also been aimed at stirring ethnic tensions. AQI has been operating primarily in regions with majority Sunni Arab populations, particularly focusing its efforts in and around Baghdad and Ninewa, but appears unable to command territory or population centers. AQI’s propensity for brutal, high-profile attacks and their determination to control the insurgency resulted in public backlash against their tactics and strategy⁶⁴. The degradation of AQI’s capacities is expected to continue under the pressure of an ISF now more capable of targeting, capturing, and detaining terrorists and disrupting their networks. However, according to DoS, AQI has adapted to the changing security conditions and remains capable of coordinated mass-casualty attacks and assassinations. AQI will likely attempt to exploit widening political rifts that occur along sectarian lines.

In April 2010 a joint US-Iraqi raid near Tikrit killed Abu Ayyub al Masri, who led AQI since al-Zarqawi’s death in 2006. In October 2012, the Associated Press reported that Al Qa’ida in Iraq was “making a comeback”, capitalizing on general government instability by setting up training camps in western Iraq and increasing the number of attacks it carried out.⁶⁵ Officials believe many of the fighters responsible the

uptick in violence are former prisoners who either escaped from prison during an Al Qaeda orchestrated jailbreak, or were released by Iraqi authorities after the US military withdrawal in 2011.⁶⁶ Throughout 2012 Al Qaeda in Iraq has taken responsibility for multiple attacks against security forces and government officials that have killed dozens of Iraqis in what it calls “revenge for the elimination and torture campaigns” of Maliki’s Shia-led government.⁶⁷

- **Ansar al-Islam**, is a Sunni terrorist group with both Kurd and Arab membership, operates in northern Iraq. The group was formed by Abu Abdullah al Shafi in 2001 when Shafi’s Sunni insurgents joined with a splinter Islamic group in Kurdistan.⁶⁸ The fundamentalist group seeks the establishment of a Sunni-led government in Iraq guided by a strict interpretation of the sharia law. Ansar al-Islam is reported to have received funds from Al Qaeda in exchange for providing sanctuaries in Iraqi Kurdistan for Sunni-linked Al Qaeda militants.⁶⁹

The group has claimed responsibility for the second-largest number of Sunni terrorist attacks in Iraq (behind only AQI). Ansar al-Islam is opposed to all foreign activities in Iraq, and has attacked Iraq’s current government for what it sees as cooperating with both US and Iranian military and intelligence.⁷⁰ In response, Iraqi security forces have cracked down on Ansar al-Islam. In 2010, Iraqi forces supported by US advisors captured the group’s military leader, Abu Abdullah al Shafi.⁷¹

- **Jayish Rijal al Tariq al-Naqshabandi** is another Sunni terrorist group operating in northern and central Iraq, which emphasizes what it claims to be the religious justifications for its attacks. Shi’a extremist groups – backed by Iranian funding, training, and weapons – also present a threat to Iraqi and US military forces. DoS reported that attacks by these groups have decreased this year, but their Iranian-supported networks continued to operate throughout Iraq’s southern provinces.
- **Jayish al-Mahdi (JAM) and its successor, the Promised Day Brigade (PDB)**, are Shi’a militias that form militant arm of the Sadrist movement led by cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. The Sadrist popularity among Iraq’s urban poor translated into significant political power. After it’s reemergence in 2003, JAM and its Sadrist political counterparts “effectively replaced the Iraqi state” in Iraq’s most heavily Shi’a-concentrated areas, including parts of Baghdad and Basra.⁷² Since 2003, JAM has engaged in countless attacks on US forces, Iraqi forces, and Sunni civilians. From 2004-2007 JAM received training and material support from Iran’s Quds Force, allowing Iran to “dial up violence in Iraq as it saw necessary.”⁷³

The group was responsible for some of the most gruesome sectarian violence in Iraq. During the US military surge in Iraq, JAM was unable to match US and Iraqi military strength, and the group suffered heavy losses.⁷⁴ As a result, al-Sadr ordered his followers to stand down, and shortly thereafter, he left for Iran. Following the military campaign in Basra, Sadr City, and al Amarah in the spring of 2008, al-Sadr disbanded his militia. Several months later, he announced the transition of his movement into a non-violent organization called the Munahidoon, but he maintained a small group of Iranian-supported militants called the Promised Day Brigade (PDB).

- **Assaib Ahl al Haq (AAH, or League of the Righteous)**: Having emerged in 2006, AAH is led by Qais Khazali, who broke with al-Sadr and was officially named the leader of the Iranian backed AAH. Khazali’s fighters traveled to Iran for special training by the Revolutionary Guards and members of the Lebanese Hezbollah. They received four to six weeks of training in the camps in the use of mortars, rockets, sniper tactics, intelligence gathering, kidnapping operations, and explosively formed penetrators. AAH conducted attacks on Coalition forces from as early as the summer of 2006 and continues intermittently, also engaging in kidnappings and sectarian attacks. In early 2012, Maliki allowed AAH into the political arena, stating they had renounced violence and were therefore welcome. AAH also serves as a potential counter weight to a loss in confidence of Maliki across the political spectrum. In October 2012, Foreign Policy’s Thomas Ricks reported that “Iranian proxies, such as Assaib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH) and Kitaib Hezbollah are being carefully reconciled with Baghdad while retaining arms to threaten those that stand in opposition.”⁷⁵
- **Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH, or the Hezbollah Brigades)** KNH has been active in Iraq since 2007. KH operates mainly in Shi’a areas of Baghdad, such as Sadr City, and throughout southern Iraq. Like AAH and

the Promise Day Brigade, it is supported by Iran. KH is independent from Muqtada al-Sadr and has operated separately since its inception, albeit with some cooperation and operational overlap. Since 2007, KH members have conducted multiple attacks against US forces using rocket-propelled grenades and improvised rocket-assisted mortars. Since the beginning of 2011, the majority of Iranian-backed attacks have occurred in southern Iraq, with sporadic incidents taking place in northern provinces and in Baghdad. Toward the end of the quarter, Iran-sponsored attacks in northern provinces appeared to be subsiding, although USF-I officials reported that these networks still possess the capacity to conduct operations

- **The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)** is a Sunni umbrella organization of a number Iraqi insurgency groups established on October 15 2006. The group is composed of and supported by a variety of insurgency groups, including its predecessor, the Mujahideen Shura Council, Al-Qaeda, Jeish al-Fatiheen, Jund al-Sahaba, Katbiyan Ansar Al-Tawhid wal Sunnah, Jeish al-Taiifa al-Mansoura, and other Sunni groups. It aims to establish a caliphate in the Sunni dominated regions of Iraq. It claims a presence in the governorates of Baghdad, Al Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah ad Din, Ninawa, and parts of Babil and Wasit, etc. It initially claimed Baqubah as its capita.⁷⁶ On October 13, 2012 the Islamic State of Iraq issued a public statement of condolence for two Salafi leaders killed by Israel in Gaza.⁷⁷ ISI has remained active, and was implicated in a string of attacks on Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad in October 2012.⁷⁸

The Special Role of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK)

There is another group that is something of an anomaly in Iraq's patterns of violence. Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK), or the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI), is a 5,000-10,000-member organization formerly located in Camp Ashraf, Iraq. While it has now been relocated to an area near Baghdad, it still claims to be actively seeking to topple the Iranian regime.⁷⁹ It is not responsible for violence in Iraq, but its existence is a source of tension with Iran, and it is seen as a symbol of US support for violent regime change in Iran, inevitably leading to an Iranian reaction in Iraq.

The group is a strange mix of a radical cult centered around its leaders – the Rajavis -- and violent opposition to the Iranian regime. Under the Shah, it killed US and Iranian officers and officials, including the murder of Colonel Lewis Hawkins in front of his family.⁸⁰ After the Shah's fall, it carried out terrorist attacks against Iranian targets inside Iran. When it lost its power struggle with Khomeini in the early 1980s, it moved to Iraq and got funding, arms, and training from Saddam Hussein.

Iran has put increasing pressure on Iraq to deal with the MEK while attacking the US for its continued existence. In May of 2011, Iranian state media reported that the US was actively training the MEK at Tajil military base in Iraq. The report states that the US is training the MEK in bombing and other terrorist operations, and characterized the MEK as wishing to "break away" the oil-rich Iranian province of Khuzestan.⁸¹

During the Iran-Iraq War, the MEK was forced from their bases near the Iranian border and its leaders relocated to Paris in 1981. In 1986, the MEK relocated to Iraq with the support of the Iraqi government. Both Shi'a and Kurdish groups believe the MEK was used by Saddam to quell uprisings in 1991.⁸²

After the US invasion in 2003, 3,400 members of the MEK were disarmed, isolated in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, and given protected status under the Geneva Convention.⁸³ This led to an ongoing

confrontation with Iran which pressed for the group to be forced to leave the Camp near the border and be disbanded.

In September 2011, ISCI leader Ammar al-Hakim stated that the MEK must leave Iraq for past terrorist acts and for betraying the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁸⁴ In late-December 2011, a deal was announced where MEK members would leave Camp Ashraf and move to a former American military base near Baghdad's international airport, with the UN eventually relocating the residents to other countries. However, the group did not agree to the deal. Maliki gave the group a six-month extension in late December to come up with a solution.⁸⁵ The last elements of the MEK only left Camp Ashraf in late September 2012.⁸⁶

This departure only came after the US ceased to designate the MEK as a terrorist group. The State Department had designated the MEK as a terrorist organization in 1997, but this move and the decision to disarm and protect the MEK did not satisfy Iran.⁸⁷ Although the MEK has been weakened in recent years, its revelations of Iranian nuclear facilities in Natanz and Isfahan in 2002 did lead to international concern over Iran's nuclear program and altered their significance.⁸⁸ The group also alleged in September 2010 that Iran has another nuclear site near Qazvin, 70 miles west of Tehran.⁸⁹

The MEK has also gained support as US tensions with Iran have risen, and some Americans and Europeans have come to see the MEK as a possible tool in leading to regime change in Iran. MEK supporters have since successfully lobbied Washington to end the group's isolation at Camp Ashraf and to remove its name from the list of foreign terrorist organizations. The MEK enlisted several current and former high-level US diplomats, politician, and military leaders – many of whom received large speaking fees for providing such support.⁹⁰

The MEK tightly safeguards its funding, but has long devoted large amounts of money to lobbying Congress and attracting powerful figures to their cause.⁹¹ In 2007, the State Department stated that the MEK still had the "capacity and will" to commit terrorist acts and also rejected any notion that the group was a viable opposition movement in Iran.⁹² Several US think tanks, including RAND, have categorized the MEK as a cult.⁹³

In May of 2012 it was reported that the US Treasury Department had issued subpoenas to 11 high-ranking US officials, including recent Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell, former Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, Hugh Shelton, and former director of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge. These individuals were investigated for accepting money from an outfit associated with the MEK in exchange for publically supporting the group.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the MEK succeeded in being delisted as a terrorist group by the US State Department on September 28, 2012.⁹⁵

IRAQ'S CRISIS IN LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The most important single factor that now divides Iraq, and encourages internal violence, is now the level of division at the top of its leadership, and the result lack of effective governance and progress towards development and removing the underlying causes of violence.

The presence of US troops in Iraq artificially suppressed the severity of Iraq's internal political, military, and economic challenges. As the New York Times reported, "finally confronting the social, economic, and religious divisions that were papered over by the presence of American troops" would pose a greater challenge than previously anticipated.⁹⁶ Rival political and sectarian factions throughout Iraq saw the drawdown of major US military presence as an opportunity to revive the fight for power, territory, and control, as new lines of influence were being negotiated in the vacuum left by the US withdrawal.

In the months since US withdrawal, increased tensions have divided a fragile coalition government, and underscored Iraq's significant political, military, and economic challenges. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta anticipated these problems, warning, "Let me be clear: Iraq will be tested in the days ahead-by terrorism, by those who seek to divide it, economic and social issues, by the demands of democracy itself."⁹⁷

The First Round of Iraqi Governments and Elections

Outside players have helped to shape a crisis that has its roots in Iraq's political development since 2003. Iran has played a critical role in backing given Shi'ite candidates and parties, as well as brokering post-election political agreements to form the majority government in every one of Iraq's elections since 2003. Ironically, American efforts to produce a representative government have had much the same effect, and have done much to create a Shi'ite-dominated government.

The deep sectarian divisions which divide Iraq have had a major impact ever since June 2004, when the US Coalition Provisional Authority transitioned control to a sovereign Iraqi Interim Government with Iyad Allawi as its prime minister. The creation of Allawi's government was intended to provide another half year for the US to continue to shape Iraq's governance before elections created a new and more lasting body.

In practice, however, the lack of Iraqi Sunni participation in the elections on January 30, 2005, proved to be a major blow to the American goal of creating an inclusive political process that would bring stability to Iraq. The elections were supposed to form a broadly based 275-member National Assembly that would write Iraq's new constitution. However, the Sunni boycott was apparent in the results, as 240 of the 275 seats were won by three parties: the Shi'ite United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) won 140 seats, the Kurdistan Alliance won 75 seats, and the Iraqiyya List, led by Iyad Allawi, won 40 seats.⁹⁸

Iran played an important role in bringing together the UIA coalition, which included most of Iraq's Shi'ite political groups, most prominent of which were the Abdul Aziz al Hakim-led Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (SCIRI) and Nouri al Maliki's Dawa Party.⁹⁹ The two major parties in the Kurdistan Alliance were the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The PUK's leader Jalal Talibani became President of Iraq and

Massoud Barzani became President of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Ibrahim al Jaafari of the Dawa Party became Prime Minister.

A second round of elections on December 15, 2005, created a new 275-member Council of Representatives with a five-year term. The Shi'ite-dominated United Iraqi Alliance was again the largest bloc, winning 128 seats. This time, Muqtada al Sadr's followers joined the bloc, and the end result put Islamic parties, with many leaders who had been exiled in Iran, in leading positions. The Kurds won 53 seats. The Sunni-Arab Tawafuq party, also known as the Iraq Accord Front, won the third most seats with 44. Allawi's former coalition Iraqiyya List joined others to form the Iraqiyya National List, which won only 25 seats.

Iran was instrumental in assembling the United Iraqi Alliance, whose formation of the government that followed saw Nouri al Maliki of the Shi'ite Dawa Party replace Jaafari as Prime Minister, SCIRI gain several important ministerial posts, and five Sadrists take ministerial posts.¹⁰⁰

The January 2009 Governorate Elections

Later Iraqi elections further divided Iraq, challenged its progress in governance, and helped sustain its internal violence. They also made it difficult for Iraq and the US to move forward in reaching viable plans to implement their Strategic Framework Agreement.

The January 2009 provincial elections saw the fragmentation of the Iranian-backed coalition that had formed the United Iraqi Alliance. Maliki's Dawa Party separated from ISCI (formerly SCIRI) and formed a new list called State of Law. The three major Iraqi Shi'ite parties competed with each other.¹⁰¹ State of Law came in first in most Shi'ite governorates, while ISCI's best performance in the South was in Najaf, where it tied with State of Law for seven seats each out of 28 in the governorate council. Sadr's list performed even worse, failing to win any governorate outright.¹⁰²

Although Iran's attempt to revive the United Iraqi Alliance failed, post-election complications gave Iran a major role in forming the next Iraqi government.

The March 2010 Parliamentary Elections

The March 7, 2010 parliamentary elections resulted in a very different outcome, and one that deeply divided many aspects of Iraq's political, economic, and security development. Iyad Allawi's Iraqiyya list won the most seats with 91, while Maliki and his allies – who split from the United Iraqi Alliance to form the State of Law list – won 89. The successor to the UIA, the Iraqi National Alliance, won 70 seats and the Kurds 57.¹⁰³

These results initially seemed encouraging to the US, as the two candidates seen largely as more secular and less connected to militias had scored the most votes, and the possibility for an inclusive government seemed promising. Iran had pushed for a unity Shi'ite alliance, though according to Reidar Visser, it only wanted to allow Sunnis token power. Allawi had also often warned in Iraq and foreign cities of the danger of Iranian influence.

Allawi initially had broad-based appeal.¹⁰⁴ In one poll, 56% of Iraqis said they would not see the government as fully legitimate if Allawi was not part of it, while 31% said they would see it as

“legitimate” or “somewhat legitimate.”¹⁰⁵ Maliki both challenged the integrity of the vote, and acted quickly to create a coalition that gave him more votes in Parliament than Allawi. He remained in office and effectively excluded Iraqiyya list and his main rivals from power.

This new coalition not only allow Maliki to govern by gave him control over much of the budget and the ability to dominated Iraq’s security forces – including the ability to place loyalist in many key command positions by making “temporary” appointments, and tolerating the sale of other positions and profiteering with the security structure by those he considered loyalists.

Struggle Over Iraq’s Electoral Commission

Throughout much of 2012, Prime Minister Maliki has remained at odds with rival political factions. This has led to growing political struggles with Sunni and Kurdish factions, and helped empower leaders like Al Sadr. These struggles have also led Maliki to steadily try to strengthen his control over the Iraqi military and security forces – steadily expanding his control through interim appointments of senior officers and bypassing or removing those who are not his supporters. While Sunni and Kurdish groups have sought to weaken his control, or -- in the case of the Kurds – maintain their own forces – the end result has been to push Sunnis and Kurds away from support of the central government and give Sunni extremist groups a new source of political support.

These political struggles have also played out in ways that could sustain violence in the future. One example is the struggle over the size of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and the political affiliation of its members. Maliki’s efforts to increase the size of the electoral commission, from nine to fifteen, seem to have been primarily driven by a desire to dilute the commission or undermine its effectiveness. Reidar Visser suggests “the thinking behind this is that a big commission could be more susceptible to divide and rule strategies, and Maliki is probably also eager to find seats on the commission for newfound friends”.¹⁰⁶

In September of 2012, Iraq’s parliament voted to reject Maliki’s proposal to increase the number of commissioners. While Maliki’s State of Law coalition and other pro-Maliki factions boycotted the vote in protest, parliamentary deputies from Iraqiyya, the Kurdistan Alliance, ISCI, and the Sadrists were left to vote, and they voted down the measure. With nine members, as opposed to fifteen, Maliki’s political opponents hope to make it more difficult for him to splinter the Iraqiyya-Kurdish-ISCI alliance and either tip the board in his favor, or leave it mired in disagreement, ineffectual, and irrelevant.

This led to a struggle over the composition of the electoral board’s nine members. While yet to be confirmed, reports emerging on the makeup of the nine commissioners indicate that four the members are Shiite, however only two are from Maliki’s Dawa bloc. Of the other two Shiites, one is from ISCI and the other is a Sadrist. Of the remaining five members, two are from the Sunni Iraqiyya party, two are Kurdish, and the ninth and final commissioner will either be a Turkmen or a Christian.¹⁰⁷

In any case, the composition of the IHEC does not threaten the Prime Minister’s position; in fact Maliki now enjoys two loyalists in the commission as opposed to one on the previous IHEC board. That said, Reidar Visser suggests that the process that led here “should serve as a wakeup call for Maliki with respect to his narrow support base in parliament”.¹⁰⁸ While previous

attempts to contest Maliki's grip on power have been largely unsuccessful, this recent battle over the election commission marks a rare occasion when his control has been effectively checked.

Non-Government by Paralysis

More broadly, the March 2010 election quickly began to produce near legislative paralysis as two conflicting coalitions struggled for power without showing the ability to compromise. Ramzy Mardini of the Institute For The Study Of War, wrote later that: "Iraqiyya...defeated Maliki's State of Law coalition. But Iraq's judiciary, under political pressure from the prime minister, re-interpreted the constitutional rules... This allowed Maliki to merge with another Shi'a bloc post elections, giving him the first opportunity to form government."¹⁰⁹

This gave more power to the Sadrist – the largest victor on the Shi'ite side. The subsequent stalemate to form a majority coalition that could appoint a new prime minister lasted eight months, setting an international record for the longest period of time between elections and the seating of a government.

With Iranian encouragement, Shi'ites – including Sadr – came together and supported Maliki continuing as Prime Minister. While experts have different views of Iran's role, some feel that Iran, with the strong support of Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani,¹¹⁰ worked hard to establish a Shi'ite led government. Iran played a role in the Independent High Electoral Commission's decision to ban Sunni and secular candidates from the vote.¹¹¹

Iran's efforts to include the supporters of both Maliki and Sadr in the new government followed a long-standing strategy in which Iran has supported diverse Shi'ite factions in order to serve their interests regardless of the outcome. Iran may also have provided \$8 million a month to Muqtada al Sadr's party for the 2010 election.¹¹² Without Iranian backing, Sadr is left with a far less durable foundation, while Iran is far less influential in Iraq without Sadr.¹¹³

Some do argue, however, that the impasse had some indirect positive outcomes. They argue that the bureaucratic machinery in the Iraqi government has been forced to mature as it had to run the country while Iraq's politicians have struggled to form a new government. They also argue that the judiciary was partially empowered, first in declaring it unconstitutional for the Council of Representatives to not meet, therefore pushing the parties to come to a deal, and second, in declaring the powers of the presidency set out in bylaws to be unconstitutional.¹¹⁴

The Erbil Agreement (or Lack of It)

In any case, the creation of a new Shi'ite coalition forced the Sunnis and Kurds to compromise on what was intended to be a national, but Maliki-led, government. An awkward combination of US and Iranian political pressures, and Allawi's and Iraqiyya's inability to compete directly with Maliki, led Allawi's Iraqiyya bloc and the Kurds to eventually agreed to participate in what was supposed to be a national government.

In November 2010, the outlines of a new government took shape. Maliki remained as Prime Minister, Jalal Talibani remained as President, and the speakership of the Council of Representatives went to Osama al Nujeifi – a member of Iraqiyya with a tense relationship with the Kurds, especially regarding Kirkuk's future.¹¹⁵

Allawi was supposed to have an independent role in national security and other decision-making as part of what came to be called the Erbil Agreement between Iraq's rival leaders. The Erbil Agreement also had Iranian support—although more as road to Shi'ite control than national unity. It produced a nineteen-point agreement that was supposed to create a unified government and give the Sunnis and Allawi's faction an important role.¹¹⁶

The agreement had the following terms – which Sunnis and Kurds have pressed to have enforced ever since:¹¹⁷.

- 1- Commitment to the Iraqi Constitution, with all of its articles without exception, and protection of Iraq's federal, democratic system.
- 2- A coalition government in which all major Iraqi components participate.
- 3- Commitment to the principle of partnership and participation in decision-making through:
 - a. Establishment of a Council on National Security, to be created through the passing of a special law at the same time as the government is formed.
 - b. Drafting of bylaws for the Council of Ministers that would give it added legitimacy and institutionalization. Through joint decision-making, the Council would ensure that administrative and financial powers are shared between the Prime Minister and his deputies.
 - c. Adherence to the principle of consensus.
- 4- Formation of a Federal Council within the first year of this Parliament. The President and his deputies have the right to veto legislation until this Council is formed.
- 5- Amendment of the current electoral law to guarantee that all Iraqis are represented fairly.
- 6- The census should be conducted on time in October 2010.
- 7- Review of the structures of the security and military forces to reflect a fair representation of all Iraqis in these forces.
- 8- Introduction of checks and balances in all Ministries and state Institutions.
- 9- Implementation of Article 140 of Iraq's Constitution and allocation of the necessary budget within a period that does not exceed two years following the formation of the government.
- 10- Passage of a law for water resources within the first year of the government formation on the basis of the latest agreed-upon draft.
- 11- Passage of a law for oil and gas within the first year of the government formation on the basis of the latest agreed-upon draft.
- 12- Supplying the Peshmerga forces with arms, equipment, and funds as part of the Iraqi national defense system.
13. Support for the Kurdistan Region's candidate for the post of President of the Republic.
- 14- Compensation for the victims of the former regime, including the victims of the Anfal campaign and chemical bombings of Halabja and other places.
- 15- The Kurdistan Region's blocs should have a fair representation within the sovereign ministries and other institutions based on national gains in the elections.
- 16- The Kurdistan Region should have the right to cross-examine candidates for the posts of minister of any sovereign ministries and those ministries that are relevant to the Region.
- 17- The Kurdistan Region's negotiating team should elect a candidate for the post of the Secretary of the

General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

18- In the event that the Kurdistan Region's blocs withdraw from the government due to a clear breach of the Constitution, the Iraqi government would then be considered dissolved.

19- The Prime Minister's bloc in both the Parliament and the Council of Ministers must make a commitment to the implementation of the above terms.

US officials applauded the 2010 Erbil agreement, and hoped it would provide a political breakthrough among Iraq's leadership, and allow them to address the country's problems. At the time, they stressed the influence the US had in pushing for the outcome, including the adoption of an American suggestion that Allawi head a new, "National Council for Security Policy". However, Maliki and Allawi could never agree on a functional role for the Council. Moreover, serious Sunni and Shi'ite differences remain, and key sources of tension between Arabs and Kurds have not been resolved. For example, the Kurds won Maliki's tentative acceptance of the international oil deals it was making outside of the federal government's authority, but it is still far from clear the extent of what this means in practice.

Moreover, the powers of the National Council for Security Policy were poorly defined and some critics argued that the power-sharing arrangement would sharply reduce the quality of governance. It was never clear how the National Council for Security Policy could fit into the legal framework of Iraq, since it was not mentioned in the constitution.

As a result, the creation of a new "unity" government resulted in a Shi'ite majority leadership in Iraq that benefitted Prime Minister Maliki, who has since sought to increase and consolidate his hold over Iraqi politics, oil revenues, and the Iraqi security forces. Ayad Allawi, the Shi'ite leader of Iraqiyya's coalition, failed to achieve lasting political gains, as did the Kurds.

Prime Minister Maliki's efforts to Consolidate Power

The end result was a growing set of tensions between Sunni and Shi'ite and Arab and Kurd that helped lead to today's level of violence. The resulting power structure did nothing eliminate the sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shi'ite, and ethnic tensions between Arabs and Kurds. Increased tensions over the failure to implement any of the Erbil agreements also led to growing struggles between Maliki and his political rivals.

This new round of struggles became public in October 2011, and which reached the crisis point when Maliki had the Ministry of Interior issue an arrest warrant for Iraq's Sunni Arab Vice-President, Tariq Hashemi on December 19, 2011. Tensions reached the point where Massoud Barzani, the president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, called for crisis talks to prevent the "collapse" of the government, warning that "the situation is headed towards deep crisis."¹¹⁸

The origins of this crisis – which had a new form of violent elements -- began in October-December of 2011 when Maliki's opponents claim the prime minister began a crackdown on some 600 rivals who he accused of being former Ba'ath Party members. This led to an increasing public confrontation between Maliki and key Iraqi political leaders, including Vice President Maliki, but also others such as Finance Minister Rafa al-Issawi and Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq who heads the prominent Sunni parliamentary bloc, the Iraqi National Dialogue Front.

The timeline involved is shown **Figure 16**.

Tensions between Maliki and Mutlaq came to a head during an October 2011 cabinet meeting the former Ba'ath party member, Mutlaq, threatened to stir public dissent against Maliki if he continued his de-Ba'athification campaign. In response, Maliki enacted constitutional powers to remove cabinet ministers with the consent of Parliament, dismissed his deputy, and presented three options to parliament in resolving the Mutlaq issue; (1) Mutlaq must resign his post; (2) Iraqiyya must fire Mutlaq and replace him with another politician from their ranks; or (3) Mutlaq must apologize to Maliki. To date, Mutlaq has not offered an apology.¹¹⁹ Since that time, tension between Maliki and his critics has escalated.

The Hashemi Crisis and Increasing Pressures for Violence

The situation reached the point in late 2011 where the Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government first has accused Iraq's Sunni Vice President, Tariq al-Hashemi and his bodyguards of plotting to overthrow the government by assassination. Maliki's government then charged Iraq's Vice President, Tariq al-Hashemi, with attempted murder.

In response, Vice President al-Hashemi fled to the Kurdish Zone in Iraq. The fact Kurdish leaders protected Hashemi – and conflicts between the KRG and central government over oil concessions and finances – raised tensions to the point where Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) leader Masoud Barzani threatened to separate the KRG from Iraq during his visit to Washington in April 2012.

Hashemi then went to Qatar and to Saudi Arabia. Hashemi claimed in an interview in Al-Jazeera on April 4, 2012 that accusations that he ran a death squad “have a sectarian dimension.” He claimed that he was the “fifth Sunni figure to be targeted” by the Shiite-led government, and that, “More than 90 percent of the detainees in Iraq are Sunnis.” al-Hashemi said he would return to Iraq to carry out his vice presidential duties, despite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's demands that he face trial.

He also claimed that but also that “Corruption in the country is widespread,” that the prime minister's policies were undermining “the unity of Iraq,” that al-Maliki's government was giving “military assistance” to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime, arguing that his support for Syria's leadership, and that, “There is information about Iraqi militias fighting alongside the Syrian regime,” al-Hashemi told Al-Jazeera. He also stated that there were “unconfirmed reports that Iraq's airspace was being used to help [Assad's] regime,” and hinted at Iranian involvement.¹²⁰

In April 2012, four of Iraq's top political leaders sent a letter to PM Maliki urging him to accept the terms of the 2010 Erbil power-sharing agreement. In that letter Muqtada al-Sadr, Ayad Allawi, Kurdish Regional President Masoud Barzani, and Speaker of Iraq's Council of Representatives Usama al-Najayfi threatened a vote of no confidence against PM Maliki, undermining the PM's mandate to rule.¹²¹ It should be noted, however, that Maliki's ramifications for ignoring the letter remain unclear since there are no constitutional provisions requiring he implement any such reforms. Additionally, Sadr's spokesperson recently stated that the powerful Shiite cleric has “called for supporting the current government and not overthrowing it, on the condition that all Iraqis should participate in it”.¹²²

As **Figure 20** shows, Ayad Allawi's Sunni Iraqiyya party boycotted meetings of parliament and cabinet, threatening to turn a dysfunctional government into a non-functioning one. In response, Prime Minister Maliki then stripped the boycotting Ministers of their posts, which drew accusations of authoritarianism. Iraqiyya was forced to end its boycotts without securing any political rewards.¹²³ In this vein, Maliki has continued a process of centralizing power in Baghdad under the pretext of bolstering weak local institutions, in direct opposition to provincial leaders who are pressing for greater autonomy and have explicitly sought regional status.¹²⁴

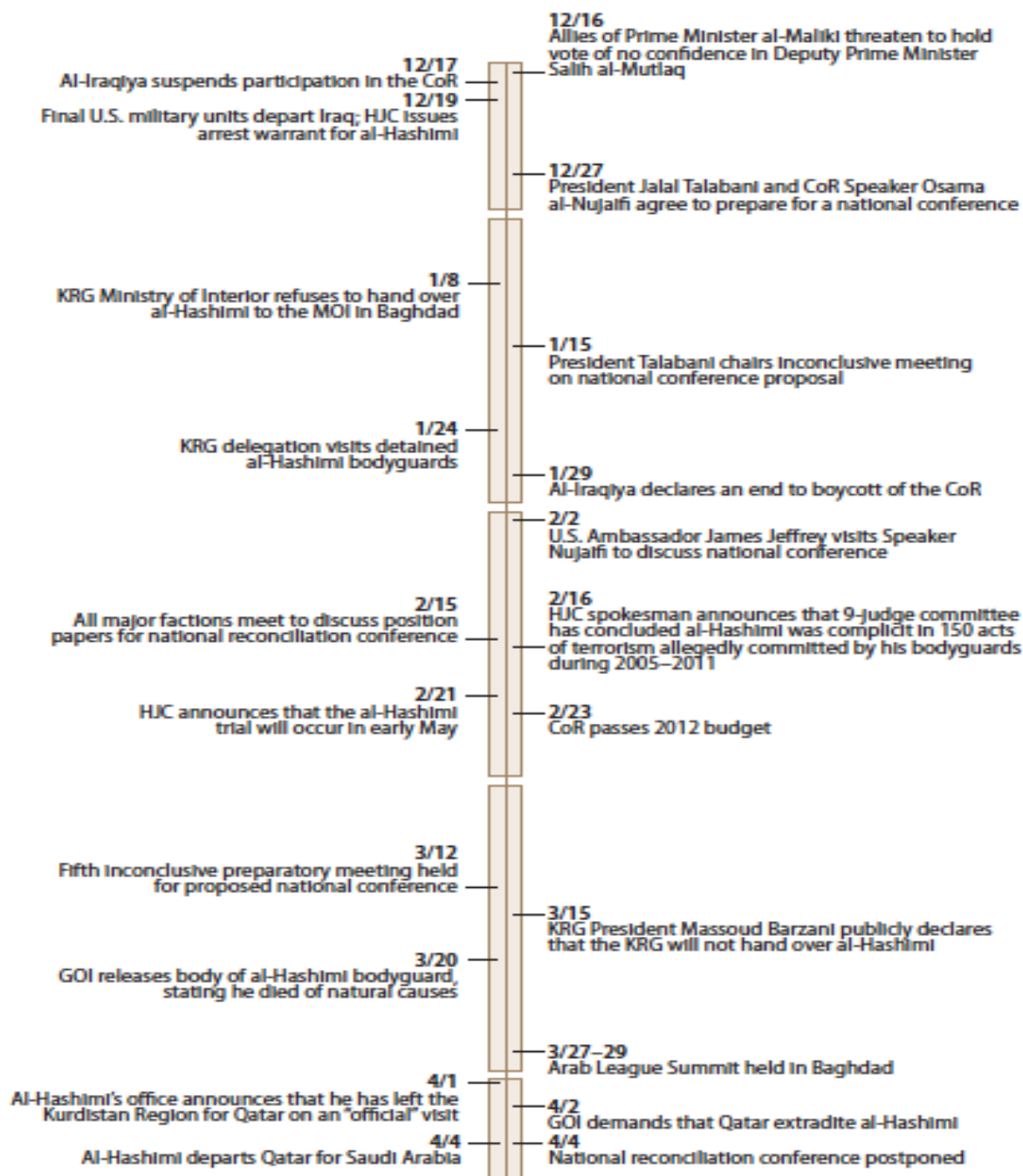
Analysts like Reidar Visser highlighted the fact that Iraqi political leaders faced severe limits in how far they could push for reforms:¹²⁵

"The problems are however about more than the sheer timing of the no confidence initiative. A second set of issues relates to the modalities for getting rid of Maliki envisaged in the proposal. In the leaked letter the Shia alliance is given the job of finding a suitable replacement, because "it is considered the framework for choosing the prime minister"...The constitutional problems here are perhaps best understood through a little bit of prospective history writing. If indeed the Shia alliance votes to change Maliki, it will likely break apart. Now, if all or nearly ally of Maliki's alliance defects in solidarity with him, the rump National Alliance is no longer the biggest bloc in parliament, and hence has no right to appoint the next PM. Nor has Iraqiyya, which has already dwindled in size to 85 deputies with indications it would be [further reduced to at least 75](#) if an attempt were made to force out Maliki. To avoid Maliki's bloc getting hold of the nomination of the next PM, Iraqiyya would need to first form a bloc with the Kurds or the Shiite Islamists, agree on a bloc leader and so on. Incidentally, this would imply a negation of their [own interpretation of article 76](#) of the Iraqi constitution on the prime ministerial nomination procedure...

As for the Kurds, their history of discrimination and suffering, and their search to broaden their area of control and develop their petroleum resources helped lead to another set of tensions with the central government. The April 2012 ICG report on "*Iraq And The Kurds*" illustrates this point. Referring to the Kurdish situation, the report states:¹²⁶

"They know that when Baghdad is weak, they can take steps to bring their dreams of statehood closer to reality, but that when the center is strong it will use its superior resources to push them back into their place-or worse. This is why the Kurds are so alarmed at attempts by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to amass power at the expense of his rivals, and build a strong state, armed with US weaponry, under his unchallenged control...Yet, this approach contains elements of a self-fulfilling prophecy: by pressing their advantage, Kurds inevitably aggravate matters, convincing the federal government that they are aiming for secession...."-ICG Report, April 2012, "Iraq and the Kurds"

Figure 20: Timeline of Dispute between Prime Minister al-Maliki and Members of al-Iraqiya, 12/15/2011–4/4/2012



Source: SIGIR analysis of open-source documents in English and Arabic, 12/2011–4/2012.

Source: SIGIR, *Quarterly Report to Congress*, April 30, 2012, p. 67

The Challenge of Federalism

Moreover, the issue of federalism also emerged as a new form of Sunni-Shi'ite problem and potential source of future violence. The Iraqi Constitution has an Article 119, which establishes the process of forming federal regions, and allows provinces to obtain increased autonomy from the government in Baghdad. As provincial demands for increased autonomy and official "regional" status grew and threatened Maliki's centralization concentration of power, Maliki moved to expand his grip on Iraqi politics.

SIGIR described the situation as follows at the end of 2011,¹²⁷

Iraq's Region Formation Law (Regions Law) provides that any province or group of provinces may choose to form a semi-autonomous federal region via popular referendum. But, before such a vote may occur, one-third of the Provincial Council members (or one-tenth of the voters) in the relevant provinces must submit a request to hold a referendum. If a simple majority of voters approves the measure in the referendum, a region is formed. This quarter, several provinces revived the issue of region formation, potentially further complicating their relations with Baghdad:

- **Salah Al-Din.** In late October, the Provincial Council issued a statement purporting to declare the overwhelmingly Sunni province to be an administrative and economic region. This move toward regionalism came as the GOI ordered the arrest of hundreds of prominent Sunnis in the province, accusing them of ties to the outlawed Ba'ath Party.
- **Anbar.** In late November, a Provincial Council member announced that about half of the members had agreed to move toward transforming the province into a region.
- **Diyala.** In December, the Provincial Council voted to declare the province a region unilaterally setting off demonstrations opposing such a step in many of the ethnically diverse province's Shia areas.

Prime Minister al-Maliki believes that Iraq's national structure is not ready for additional semiautonomous federal regions. Instead, he has been exploring various options to devolve some powers to the provincial governments. Previous regionalism movements arose in the Shia south. For example, in 2008, officials in the oil-rich province of Basrah made a serious push toward establishing a region. Their efforts failed, and subsequent attempts to transform Basrah into a region have also foundered. By the end of the quarter, efforts toward forming regions in other provinces appeared to have stalled, at least for the moment.¹⁷ Thus, as of mid-January, the Kurdistan Region (comprising Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Erbil provinces) remains Iraq's only federal region.

A Constantly Evolving Political Crisis at the Top...

While many once hoped that 2012 would mark an era of newfound independence in which Iraqi leaders would address the numerous problems their country faced, any such hopes were quickly dashed by increased political instability and the threat of more violence. The extent of the US challenge in Iraq and the severity of Iraq's deep political divisions became apparent just days after President Obama's December 2011 White House press conference with Prime Minister Maliki. With the withdrawal of US troops, it became clear that US-Iranian competition in Iraq was to play out in an increasingly uncertain and unstable environment.

The political crisis between Prime Minister Maliki and his political rivals since continued through the first half of 2012. In April, four of Iraq's top political leaders sent a letter to PM Maliki urging him to accept the terms of the 2010 Erbil power-sharing agreement. In that letter Muqtada al-Sadr, Ayad Allawi, Kurdish Regional President Masoud Barzani, and Speaker of

Iraq's Council of Representatives Usama al-Najayfi threatened a vote of no confidence against PM Maliki, undermining the PM's mandate to rule.¹²⁸

Maliki could largely ignore the letter since there were no constitutional provisions requiring he implement any such reforms. Additionally, Sadr's spokesperson stated that Sadr had, "called for supporting the current government and not overthrowing it, on the condition that all Iraqis should participate in it".¹²⁹

Other developments followed. In April 2012, Prime Minister Maliki ordered the arrest of Faraj al-Haidari, the head of Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC).¹³⁰ This latest episode may stem from differences between Haidari and PM Maliki over Iraq's contested 2010 elections, in which Maliki's bloc barely lost to Ayad Allawi's Iraqiyya party.

Some Iraqi leaders charged that Haidari found himself in the Salhayah police station for refusing to acquiesce to the Prime Minister's petition to throw out thousands of votes for Iraqiyya. Kurdish Member of Parliament and spokesman, Muaid al-Tayab, called the move "undemocratic and illegal". In a written statement, Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr stated, "This arrest should be done under the law, not under dictatorship".¹³¹ Still, Sadr recognizes the need for a unifying government amidst Iraq's political turmoil, and has stated publicly that he is against the fall of the Iraqi government.¹³²

In June 2012, a group of Iraqi MP's requested a no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister, however they fell short of reaching the number of signatures required to force the vote.¹³³ Maliki's political opponents continued to accuse the Prime Minister of consolidating power and taking undemocratic actions.

Maliki's allies appealed for a parliamentary debate on the performance of parliament speaker, Usama al-Nujayfi. Reider Visser reported that "the Maliki-Nujayfi struggle has the characteristics of a tit for tat escalation between Maliki's Shia Islamist State of Law bloc and Nujayfi's secular and Sunni-backed Iraqiyya."¹³⁴

The government also began to crack down on the media. On June 25, 2012 the *Washington Post* reported that Iraqi free press organizations condemned actions by the Maliki government to close independent media outlets.¹³⁵ While the government claimed it was only going after unlicensed operators, human rights groups alleged Maliki was seeking to silence political opponents by threatening to shut down those outlets critical of the PM.

The Associated Press reported that, "It's unlikely that the attacks in 13 cities were all timed to coincide with the afternoon verdict that capped a months-long case against Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, a longtime foe of Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki," "Still, taken together, the violence and verdict could energize Sunni insurgents bent on returning Iraq to the brink of civil war by targeting Shiites and undermining the government."¹³⁶

The political crisis between Shia Prime Minister Maliki and exiled Sunni Vice President Hashemi escalated yet again in September, 2012 -- with strong potential for new levels of violence Hashemi was sentenced to death by hanging on charges that he led Sunni death squads against political rivals.¹³⁷ Coinciding with the verdict, insurgents around Iraq carried out dozens of attacks killing 92 people in one of the deadliest days this year.

and its Impact on Governance, justice, Corruption, and the Security Services

It is easy criticize the Prime Minister and call for national unity as a key method of reducing Iraqi violence. No element of Iraqi politics is without fault, however, and it is important to note that Maliki has faced serious challenges and threats from his rivals, and it is unclear that anyone can govern Iraq without taking a strong stand on security. Still, the current political crisis has done Iraqi immense damage and resolving in favor the Shi'ite at the expense of the Sunni and Kurds can offer little hope for stability and security in the future.

Moreover, the end result has been to effectively paralyze progress in many forms of governance and the rule of law, and to polarize the Iraqi military, police, and security forces along lines of loyalty to give power brokers or ethnic and sectarian factions. The end result has been to continue the kind of “crisis government” that has existed in Iraq since Saddam Hussein seized full control of power in 1979, to keep the state a dominant and large corrupt and incompetent force in many aspects of the economy, and create a situation where many of the reforms the US and its allies attempted to make in the Iraqi security forces have quickly faded back into past methods of operations coupled to new levels of favoritism and corruption.

These problems do not simply exist at the top, but Iraq's deeply flawed and over centralized constitution and lack of meaningful representative government made them worse. Strong provincial and local government is not possible, but serious ethnic and sectarian splits exist throughout mixed areas in much of the country.

Reliance on petroleum export-dominated revenues coming from the central government, and past flows of flows of outside aid that involved minimal planning and fiscal controls compound the problem by feeding dependence on the central government and outside for jobs, investment, and operational funds that are often allocated without regard to economic need or priority for economic development.

Acute problems with Corruption, a “grey” and “black” economy, and crony capitalism are all sources of political tension and violence that are made worse by the lack of progress in governance and effective business laws and regulation and criminal justice. Many Iraqis are forced to use any opportunity they can to profiteer off of the “system” to survive or because they have no reason to be confident that their jobs or positions will continue or that a merit-based career will exist. On December 8 2011, *Iraq Business News* announced that,¹³⁸

Iraq has improved its position in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index from 4th worst to joint 8th worst. This places it ahead of Somalia, North Korea, Burma (Myanmar), Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Sudan, and on a par with Haiti. The improvement is to be praised, but being behind countries such as Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zimbabwe, is hardly cause for celebration.

There is no real way to make exact rankings, but virtually every analyst still sees Iraq as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, and one that affects Iraqi security as well as the attitudes of Iraqi towards violence. Corruption in the Iraqi security forces affects every level of promotion,

recruiting, and recruitment – along with favoritism and ties to local to national political factions and corruption of the justice system. The problems are so open that the head of its national SWAT team was arrested for Brigadier General Numan Dakhil was “caught during a sting operation in which he was filmed taking a \$50,000 bribe from a contractor.”¹³⁹

Similarly, AKNews reported on March 7, 2011, that, “The Parliamentary Integrity Commission revealed on Sunday the most corrupt government ministries, indicating that they are currently investigating the cases and that more details will follow. Bahaa al-Aaraji, the chairman of the committee told AKnews that the most corrupt ministries are those of health, trade, defense, sports and youth, as well as the Secretariat of Baghdad. ‘All legal proceedings will be taken against the ministers and director generals and others who are implicated in corruption in these ministries, even if the officials are currently abroad.’ “ Rahim Hassan al-Uqailee [Judge Rahim al-Akili; al-Ugeily], the head of Iraq’s Integrity Commission was then forced to leave office in September 2011, and did so while openly criticizing official interference in his inquiries, and saying he no political support for his anti-corruption efforts.”¹⁴⁰

US and other outside military observers noted by mid-2011 that US withdrawal had triggered a similar process of corruption throughout much of the Iraq military and police with appointments and promotions being openly sold, or awarded on the basis of nepotism, ethnic and sectarian ties, and political influence. The affected all ranks, and helped lead to a sharp decline in the quality and role of NCOs and junior officers. They also noted an almost immediate growth in the level of corruption and influence peddling in contract awards by the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior.

While there are still; islands of high integrity and competence within the Iraq security structure, these problems have grown steadily worse since the withdrawal of the last US combat forces at the end of 2011. In some cases, bases and facilities transferred to Iraqi forces have been partially looted, and in other cases the money that should have gone to operations and maintenance has never come or been stolen. This has compounded serious transition problems that come out of a past Iraq military culture that paid far too little attention to maintenance, repair, and sustainability.

Other outside expert report that these problems – and the ability of the security forces to deal with internal violence -- are made still worse by politics that lead the Prime Minister to appoint many commanders on a temporary basis to bypass parliamentary review and confirmation, and the entire command chain by having members of the Prime Minister’s office issue direct order by cell phone. They also report that the Prime Minister’s office makes use of use of “loyal” units in the National Police, intelligence services, counter-terrorism forces, and Army to bypass the overall command chain and help secure the Prime Minister’s position.

This encourages sectarian and ethnic divisions and the potential for further violence. The KRG maintains its own Pesh Merga forces, the regular police have become steadily more closely tied to local governments, and at least some Sunni militia element have reemerged. The Iraqi security forces can still be relatively effective, but their quality and integrity continues to deteriorate in many areas, and their coherence and loyalty to the state – as distinguish from the Prime Minister and given factions is deteriorating. There is no way to measure these trends, but there seems to be a broad consensus among both outside and Iraq experts that they are real and they exist.

As for the rule of law, policing has often reverted to the passive, confessions-based system that existed before the invasion, training has become pro forma and influence-based with positions sold, and influence peddling has dominated instead of a weak court and justice system. The problems in the courts are compounded by a lack of clear laws and regulations, and by the lack of competence in the various protection forces in the Ministry of Interior that are supposed to provide day-to-day security for commercial operations. As UNAMI documents in great detail, along with the human rights reporting of the US State Department, the end result is what these sources describe as a failed justice system tied to major human rights abuses.¹⁴¹ The US State Department annual human rights report, issued in May 2012, notes that,¹⁴²

The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) consist of internal security forces in the Ministry of Interior (MOI) responsible for domestic law enforcement and maintenance of order and conventional military forces in the Ministry of Defense responsible for external defense but cooperating regularly in internal security missions with the MOI. Human rights violations committed by ISF personnel were rarely investigated and perpetrators were seldom punished.

The MOI disciplinary and criminal court system for internal security forces heard more than 11,100 cases with 3,800 convictions between January and September; the remaining cases resulted in acquittals or were ongoing.

Impunity for security forces continued. A significant number of abuses were reported during the year. For example, elements of the 46th and 47th Brigades used live fire against antigovernment protesters and police in Kirkuk and Hawija on February 25, killing six persons and injuring more than 10. Despite photographic evidence of the events, no action was taken against the army units. There were continued reports of torture and abuse throughout the country in many MOI police stations and MOD facilities; the incidents generally occurred during interrogation. The MOI Internal Affairs Division did not release the number of officers punished during the year, and there were no known court convictions for abuse.

Security force officials were rarely pursued for suspected crimes because ministers can legally block an arrest warrant. Article 136(b) of the criminal procedure code gives ministers the opportunity to review and prevent the execution of arrest warrants issued by judges presiding over criminal investigations of employees in their ministry (see sections 1.e. and 4).

Although oversight by MOI and MOD internal affairs increased, problems persisted with the Iraqi Police regarding sectarian divisions, corruption, ties to tribes, and unwillingness to serve outside the areas in which they were recruited. The army and Federal Police recruited nationwide and deployed their soldiers and police to various areas, reducing the likelihood of corruption because of personal ties to tribes or militants.

The KDP and PUK parties maintained their own security apparatus, organized along military lines, dating from the struggle against the regime of Saddam Hussein and earlier. There were approximately 22 Peshmerga (Kurdish militia) brigades, all originally under the control of the two main Kurdish parties. Under the constitution, the KRG has the right to maintain Regional Guard Brigades, supported financially by the central government but under KRG control. Accordingly, the KRG established a Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. By the end of the year, eight of these Peshmerga brigades moved from party control to the control of the ministry, but the central government had not provided financial support for any of the Peshmerga.

KRG security forces and intelligence services detained suspects in KRG-controlled areas. The poorly defined administrative boundaries between the IKR and the rest of the country led to confusion about the jurisdiction of security and courts. The KDP maintained its own internal security unit, the Asayish, and its own intelligence service, the Parastin. The PUK maintained its own internal security unit, also known as the Asayish, and its own intelligence service, the Zanyari. The PUK and KDP security organizations remained separate and effectively controlled by political leaders through political party channels.

Corruption also exists in many provincial and urban governments, as well as in the Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, where both major parties (Barzani/KDP and Talibani/PUK) are seen as highly corrupt and as having profited extensively off of the misuse of aid and outside investment since the KRG was created in 1992, and the fixed share of Iraq's petroleum export revenues it received after 2003..

The net impact of these trends is as hard to measure as the problems in the security forces per se, but there is a broad consensus among experts that they are critical problems in Iraqi stability and capability to counter violence, and interact with Iraq's political struggles at the top and the lack of progress towards effective governance. It is equally unclear that these trends can now be reversed unless a truly functional national government can somehow be created, and it is all too clear that they cannot be reversed quickly.

THE SOURCES OF POLITICAL COMPETITION AND OF VIOLENCE BY IRAQI KEY FACTION

Extremist violence, the crisis at the top of Iraq's government, and corruption and divisions within Iraqi security forces, are only part of the challenge. Iraq's population and power structure is divided along sectarian and ethnic lines at a national level, and these divisions are exacerbated by the broader currents of Sunni extremism and violence in the region and by the role Iran plays in dealing with Iraq's Shi'ites.

The Shi'ites and the Role of Iran

Iran and the US compete for Shi'ite support on many levels. The US has strong ties to many Shi'ites who are more "national" and "secular," but Iran has exploited both sectarian divisions and divisions among the Shi'ites. Iran continues to provide both overt and covert support to various Shi'ite groups in Iraq, while many Iraqi Shi'ites have openly expressed their gratitude.

Between 1980 and 1988, Iran and Iraq fought a long and bloody war during which Iran developed significant intelligence networks and capacities across the border. This Iran-Iraq War ended with a major series of Iraqi victories that cost Iran at least 40% of its order of battle, and Iraq remained the dominant military power even after its feat by the UN Coalition in the Gulf War of 1990-1991.

This situation changed radically with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) reports, the removal of Saddam Hussein, "a once hostile neighbor became friendly and weak, its new leadership more pliable and vulnerable to penetration".¹⁴³ After the US-led overthrow of Iran's longtime rival, officials in Tehran saw the opportunity to pursue multiple objectives, from ensuring a manageable level of chaos in Iraq, to combating U.S. objectives, and projecting influence further afield.

While there are some indications that Iran might have been willing to cooperate with the US during the period immediately after the US successfully toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Iran has since worked to expand its influence in Iraq, to create a friendly Shi'ite state, and undermine American interests. It has had significant successes over time.

In the initial period after the US invasion, Shi'ites in the Governing Council praised Iran's role in Iraq, particularly for harboring the opposition prior to 2003.¹⁴⁴ Sayyid Abd el-Aziz al-Hakim of SCIRI even suggested Iraq pay reparations to Iran for the Iran-Iraq War.¹⁴⁵ As sectarian violence, political infighting, and economic hardship have ebbed and flowed, Iran has maintain its influence through close ties to Iraqi Shi'ites.

It also began to deploy military advisors and intelligence experts. The Iranian Al Quds force became a serious problem by 2004.¹⁴⁶ This intervention was led by the head of the Al Quds Force, Qassem Suleimani, and the decision to deploy it was clearly made by Iran's Supreme Leader.

After the US invasion of Iraq, Iranians identified the Sadrist movement as an effective vehicle for exporting influence and authority in Iraq. Muqtada al Sadr took over the Sadrist movement after his Saddam Hussein assassinated his father in 1999, and when the US invaded and toppled

Saddam in 2003, Sadrists gained de facto political and military control over several critical Shi'a areas, including large parts of Baghdad, Basra, and southern Iraq.

Iran's Quds Force channeled funds, weapons, and influence to Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM), the militant faction of the Sadrists. "In addition to supplying mortars, rockets, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and other small arms, the Quds Force provided Shi'a militants with Iranian-made, highly-lethal IEDs known as explosively-formed penetrators (EFPs)."¹⁴⁷ Iranian EFP's generated significant attention from US policy makers. In public statement before the United States Senate Committee on Armed Services, then Director Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess, Jr. offered:

"Iran also continues to provide money, weapons, and training to select Iraqi Shia militants and terrorists despite pledges by senior Iranian officials to cease such support. Iran offers strategic and operational guidance to militias and terrorist groups to target U.S. forces in Iraq. In addition to providing arms and support, the Quds Force is responsible for training Iraqi insurgents in Iran, sometimes using Lebanese Hizballah instructors. The Quds Force provides insurgents with the training, tactics, and technology to conduct kidnappings, small unit tactical operations, and employ sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In addition to weapons and support, Iran continues training Iraqi Shia militants in the use of IEDs, particularly deadly IEDs known as explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), and the counter-measures designed to defeat these weapons." - Director Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess, Jr, April 10, 2010¹⁴⁸

The US has had some success in combating Iranian influence in Iraq, but the 2003 invasion reopened linkages between Iranian and Iraqi Shiites. Previously, Ba'athist rule suppressed open cultural connections to Persian culture and Iran.¹⁴⁹ Iraqi Shi'ites lost contact with relatives in Iran, and some Iraqis even received financial incentives to divorce their spouses if they were suspected of having Persian ancestry.¹⁵⁰ Some urban Iraqi Arab Shi'ites stopped celebrating Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, though Kurds continued to celebrate it.¹⁵¹

Following the US invasion, movement across the Iran-Iraq border became easier. Iranian religious books in Arabic began to replace those from Lebanon and Egypt, and the Iranian government sponsored popular book fairs at Baghdad universities.¹⁵² Even independent Iraqi clerics like Grand Ayatollah Sistani benefitted from Iranian knowledge of media and the Internet, which expanded the distribution of their work.¹⁵³ Moreover, Iranian exploited the fact that some senior commanders in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, members of the Iranian judiciary, and other Iranian leaders were born in Iraq, in addition to some Iraqi expatriate businessmen being based in Iran.¹⁵⁴

After 2004, Iran began to provide significant support to Shi'ite Islamic groups. In 2005, the *London Times* identified eight significant Islamic groups with Iranian ties: the Badr Brigades, the Dawa Party, the Mahdi Army, the Mujahedin for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, Thar Allah (Vengeance of God), the Jamaat al Fudalah (Group of the Virtuous), al Fadilah (Morality), and al Quawaid al Islamiya (Islamic Bases).¹⁵⁵ One estimate placed the amount of Iranian aid per month to Shi'ite militias like the Mahdi Army at \$3 million in 2009.¹⁵⁶ In 2006, Iranian and Iraqi Shi'ite interests aligned to an even greater degree against Sunni resumption of power in Iraq. Clerics were mainly silent about Iran's role in Iraq, while Iranians continued to visit Shi'ite holy sites in Najaf and Karbala, and trade boomed between the two countries. During 2005-2010, Iran also pursued "divide and influence" tactics by simultaneously working with Shi'ite leaders like Maliki and Hakim, supporting the Hakim faction's Bader Corps militia, and supporting Sadrist militias like the Mahdi Army (Jaydsh al Mahdi). Iran became increasingly aggressive after 2006,

and provided training, money, and key military technology to anti-US militias like advantage triggering devices for IEDs, and special components like Explosively Formed Projectiles to defeat US armor.

Iran had enough influence over the Iraqi government so that Prime Minister Maliki blocked most US efforts to actively attack the Al Quds force and hostile Iranian agents between 2007 and early 2008. Maliki did take action against the Al Quds Force during the Charge of the Knights campaign in March-April 2008, but this only limited the role of the Al Quds force in Iraq until the end of 2009. Maliki never attempted to force Iran to remove the Iraqi-deployed elements of the Al Quds Forces during the period before the departure of US forces in 2011, and the US never attempted to take consistent action against Iran's role in dealing with the militias and acting as an advisor to the Maliki government.¹⁵⁷

Iran still keeps significant Al Quds presence in Iraq and it plays an important role in influencing Iraqi military and security. Iran has also used overflights of Iraq, and the flow of personnel through Iraq to support the pro-Assad forces in Syria, and succeed in pushing Maliki into supporting Assad.

Its actions have helped to divide Sunni and Shi'ite in Iraq – each supporting different sides in Syria. This presents the risk on one hand that a surviving Assad regime would create a much stronger axis of Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon. On the other hand, it presents the risk that if Syria should come under Sunni Arab control and reject Iran, Iran would respond by trying to exert far stronger influence in Iraq to compensate. Both alternative would problem raise the level of violence in Iraq.

If Iraq does become increasingly violent and the Shi'ite dominated Iraqi government looks for outside aid, this may push it towards dependence on Iran. Moreover, Iran is already pressuring Iraq to support keeping Assad's regime alive in Syria, and could treat Iraq as a kind of hostage if any major US military intervention against Iran took place in the Gulf. Iraq must also deal with Iran's military superiority over Iraq for the foreseeable future. Continued US security assistance is now uncertain, and Iraq lost virtually all of its military capabilities to defend against Iran as a result of the 2003 invasion.

Competition for Religious Influence

Iran's ability to compete with the US in Iraq is still limited by the fact that tensions between Iranians and Iraqi Shi'ites continue to exist. Iraqis – including Iraqi Shi'ites – have not forgotten that the two countries fought an eight-year war that involved trench warfare, human wave attacks, mustard gas, over a million deaths, and millions more wounded and displaced.¹⁵⁸ Relations between Iraqi exile groups in Iran and the Iranian regime before the US invasion were fraught with tensions and resentments.

Iran has also had to contend with the power of Iraq's Shi'ite leader Grand Ayatollah al Sistani, in spite of the fact he was born in Iran and is said to speak Arabic with a Persian accent.¹⁵⁹ Like many other Iraqi clerics, Sistani belongs to the "quietest" trend of Shi'ite Islam, tending to separate the religious from the political. However, he faces competition from other Shi'ite religious leaders who want to see closer integration between religion and politics, including

Kazim al Haeri of Qom, who would be a leading replacement for Iraq's Shi'ite community if anything were to happen to al Sistani.¹⁶⁰

Sistani and most Iraqi Shi'ites do not accept the Iranian Ayatollah as a Supreme Leader of the world's Shi'ites. Sistani rejects the religious legitimacy of a velayat-e faqih, or supreme religious leader, much less the religious authority of Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.¹⁶¹ One Shi'ite cleric, Sayyid Iyad Jamaluddin, who later joined Allawi's list in the December 2005 elections, argued "The leadership of the jurist as in Iran is unique in the history of the Shi'a sect...Ayatollah Khomeini did not rely on specific religious texts to implement the doctrine of the rule of the jurist."¹⁶² Most Shi'ite parties no longer even support the idea of a theocratic state, though there was some support from Shi'ite quarters for an Islamic state when Iraq's leaders initially drafted its constitution.¹⁶³ In 2004, Sistani criticized Iran's strategy of what some call "managed chaos".¹⁶⁴

"Iran's policy in Iraq is 100 percent wrong. In trying to keep the Americans busy they have furthered the suffering of ordinary Iraqis...We are not asking them to help the Americans, but what they are doing is not in the interests of the Iraqi people; it is making things worse. We [Iranians] have lost the trust of the Iraqi people [Mardom-e Aragh az dast dadeem]."¹⁶⁵

Sistani has also often used his moral authority to reduce violence in Iraq and bridge Sunni-Shi'ite and Arab-Kurd tensions that Iran has at times sought to exploit against the US. In 2004, for example, he struck a deal to end a bloody three-week siege of Najaf's Imam Ali shrine between Muqtada al Sadr and the Iyad Allawi's government.¹⁶⁶

Iraq's Shi'ite religious leaders may have ties to their counterparts in Iran, but most remain their own masters. Sistani has always pursued his own agenda, sometimes to the benefit of US interests in Iraq and sometimes not. It was Sistani's nod of approval that allowed the US to delay Iraq's first elections with minimal unrest.¹⁶⁷ According to a leaked State Department memo, Sistani's "domineering authority and religious credibility" is Iran's "greatest political roadblock."¹⁶⁸

These differences must be kept in perspective. The relationships between Iranian and Iraqi Shi'ites is far more complex than one where Sistani and the Najaf hierarchy are polar opposites to Iranian clerics, as some proponents of the Iraq War suggested they would be.¹⁶⁹ Iran has also made headway with at least some Iraqi Shi'ite clerics that are not Sadrist. A State Department source claimed that Sistani prevents Iranian students from enrolling in the religious seminary, or the howzeh, to curb Iranian infiltration; however, according to State Department cables, other imams are "'in the pocket of the Iranians', despite their proclaimed loyalties to Sistani."¹⁷⁰

Furthermore, Sistani has long supported Shi'ite unity and has opposed blocs that would cut across sectarian lines. Sistani allegedly opposed the United Iraqi Alliance's plans to ally with Kurds and Sunnis in 2006.¹⁷¹ In February 2012, amidst the post-US withdrawal political crisis, Ahmed Safi, who often speaks for Grand Sistani, said that the cleric believed that Iraq's leaders were taking the country "into the unknown," and "politicians must work fast and make concessions to solve the crisis."¹⁷²

Iraqi versus Shi'ite

Polls still show that Iraqi Arabs remain Iraqis first rather than Shi'ites or Sunnis. Polls since 2003 have repeatedly shown that most Iraqi Arabs – Sunni and Shi'ite – see themselves as Iraqi and Arab, although the situation with Shi'ite extremists is very different. In a poll conducted in 2008 by the Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies of Iraqis, 69.8% of respondents identified themselves as Iraqi before any other identity.¹⁷³

Moreover, Sistani has continued to call for national unity. In December 2011, following a series of major explosions throughout Baghdad that killed 60 and injured over 200 people, Sistani blamed Iraq's top politicians for the ongoing crisis. Speaking through his representative, Ahmed al Safi, Iraq's top Shi'a cleric said, "The prestige of the government must be preserved ... part of its prestige is punishing abusers. People can be patient with lack of electricity, or lack of services, but not blood. They cannot be patient over their blood. Why don't you exert your efforts to preserve the blood of these people?"¹⁷⁴ In February 2012, after reports that Turkey would host a conference to promote confidence and dialogue between Iraq's leaders, Grand Ayatollah Sistani agreed to send a representative to Turkey to head the Shi'a delegation.¹⁷⁵

A key question is what will happen if Sistani dies? Iran is already positioning a cleric to replace him, and since Sistani seems to be increasingly ill, another power struggle and crisis is waiting in the wings.

Maliki's Role in Dealing with Iran and the US

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's personal and political relationship with Iran has a long and complicated history, and one that illustrates the complex relationship between Iraq's Shi'ite leaders and those of Iran. Maliki fled to Iran in 1979, where he and the Dawa Party were granted space for a rebel training camp.¹⁷⁶ However, tensions between Dawa and the Iranian government culminated in Iran's initiative in 1982 to organize the Shi'ite resistance in the form of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), peeling away members from Dawa and turning over Dawa's training camp to SCIRI.

As a senior member of Dawa in exile in Iran, Maliki cooperated with Iran to run missions against Saddam Hussein's regime. However, Maliki chafed under his Iranian handlers and could never fully trust them. Many of those memories still rouse Maliki. On one occasion, he was told he needed to travel twelve hours to reach the one Iranian official who could grant him a travel permit he needed, only to have the official reject his request.¹⁷⁷ On another occasion, Maliki's recalls his wife giving birth in Ahwaz as the city was under threat from a Saddam bombing, and no Iranians would help him evacuate his wife.¹⁷⁸

Iran played an important role in bringing together the United Iraqi Alliance, which chose Maliki as their compromise candidate for Prime Minister in May 2006 following five months of negotiations. Iran thought, as Jeffrey White, a former Defense Intelligence Agency Middle East analyst, put it, "he was weak and pliable."^{179 180} At the same time, Maliki initially faced critics who saw him as America's lackey and reportedly once told then-Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, "I'm a friend to the United States, but not America's man in Iraq."¹⁸¹ Maliki also resisted early American requests to outlaw Shi'ite militias because he depended on their political support.¹⁸²

Maliki also put distance between himself and the US by criticizing a US raid on Sadr City, condemning US forces and security contractors for civilian deaths,¹⁸³ and proposing amnesty and eventual political reconciliation for insurgents, even those who had killed Americans.¹⁸⁴ US displeasure with the amnesty proposal led to the sacking of the official in Maliki's government who had leaked the proposal.¹⁸⁵ Rumors began to circulate in late 2006 that the US was looking to replace the Maliki government for being weak on Shi'ite militias compared to efforts against Sunni insurgents, and its inability to rein in Shi'ite death squads within the Iraqi security forces that were feeding the sectarian civil war.¹⁸⁶¹⁸⁷

More broadly, Maliki demonstrated that Iraqi political leaders would steadily assert their own identity. He gradually emerged as a much stronger politician than his critics (and supporters) initially assumed. He maintained close ties with both Iran and the US. He worked with ISCI and the US to combat Shi'ite militias. He battled the Sunni insurgency, convinced disenfranchised Sunnis to participate in the government, integrated militia groups into the government's security forces through the Sons of Iraq program, and won important battles against Sadr's Mahdi Army.

Maliki had to carefully balance Iraq's relationship between the United States and Iran. He depended on American forces to bring stability to Iraq, but needed to maintain an image of independence from the US. Only close cooperation could create enough stability for American forces to leave. According to some sources, Maliki was frustrated by his impression that the US was not committing enough equipment and training to Iraqi security forces, while the US was frustrated that US weapons would fall into the hands of rogue Shi'ite soldiers because Maliki had not done enough to break ties with Shi'ite militias.¹⁸⁸

Maliki maintained a relationship with Tehran while he fought against Iranian weapons smuggled into Iraq and increasingly committed forces to fight the Sadrists militias who were funded by Tehran.¹⁸⁹ Appearing with Ahmadinejad in Tehran in August 2007, he called Iran's role in Iraq's security "positive and constructive."¹⁹⁰ In early 2008, he almost unilaterally shaped a major offensive against Sadr's militias and other Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias in Basra. While the success of the offensive depended on the US rapidly deploying forces and aid, it played a critical role in expanding the central government's control in Shi'ite areas and limiting Iranian influence.

By late 2008, this campaign and overall patterns in the fighting already had a major impact on the pattern of US and Iranian competition. It produced increased stability that served both Iraqi and American interests and began to create the conditions that made it possible for US forces to drawdown. This success impeded Iran's strategy of supporting unrest in Iraq, but it did not necessarily reduce Iran's political power. Iran continued to build up both its political and economic ties to a more stable Shi'ite south and its political leaders. Iran was strong enough to play a major role in shaping the creation of a compromise Iraqi government following the 2010 election, and it also played a major – if not fully understood – role in getting Sadr to throw his support behind Maliki after the 2010 elections.

Some analysts feel Iran's role in encouraging the support of the Sadrists was instrumental to Maliki's 2010 electoral success. "Tehran has not been shy about wielding its influence. It was at Iran's urging that hardline Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr grudgingly threw his political support behind longtime foe Nouri al-Maliki, allowing him to remain prime minister in 2010 after falling short in national elections."¹⁹¹

The end result was an almost complete reversal of most of the more critical the initial judgments of Maliki. Where Maliki was once seen as weak, his critics are now concerned with Maliki's consolidation of power and authority. Since late 2010, Maliki has served as both acting Minister of Defense and acting Minister of Interior. Protesters, rival politicians, and journalist who speak out against corruption, lack of services, or criticize the government, have been intimidated, beaten, and detained. When tens of thousands protested in February in solidarity with the Arab uprisings elsewhere, 19 were killed and thousands more arrested. Iyad Allawi remains outside of the political system and his party has referred to Maliki as "authoritarian and despotic."¹⁹²

As noted earlier, the signs of Maliki's increased aggressiveness and determination to marginalize political rivals are also becoming steadily more evident. Maliki's arrests of some 600 Sunnis and Ba'athists in October-December 2011 have reinforced this position, as did his calls for Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Mutlaq to be expelled from the Council of the Republic over a spat during a October 2011 cabinet meeting in Baghdad. Increasingly bold and belligerent, Maliki stormed out of that meeting threatening Multlaq, "We're coming for you and all of your people".¹⁹³

The continuing challenges to Maliki's authority, however, are illustrated by Maliki's crisis with Vice President al Hashemi, for whom Maliki issued an arrest warrant on charges of terrorism. Thisd caused al Hashemi to flee to the Kurdish region, and he remains in de-facto political exile. Experts disagree on how much this has been a power grab and how much it reflects Maliki's feelings of insecurity, but it is clear that Maliki's unilateral actions have alienated Iraqi political opponents, increased tensions with the US over the failure to agree on a continued troop presence, and alienated other Arab leaders. This situation most clearly benefits Iran, who can operate more freely without US and other Arab interference, and is hardly a formula for a more unified and stable Iraq.

The Sadrists

The Sadrist faction has played a major role in both Iraq's political crises, and the US and Iranian political competition over Iraq's Shi'ites. The Sadr's have long been a prominent family in Iraq, both for religious scholarship and their resistance against Saddam. Mohammad Baqr Sadr, the founder of the Dawa Party in the late 1950's was hanged by Saddam Hussein in 1980. Baqr al Sadr was an ally of Ayatollah Khomeini during his years in exile in Najaf from 1964-1978.¹⁹⁴ Saddam Hussein also ordered the execution of Muqtada al-Sadr's father, Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, in 1999.¹⁹⁵

Baqr al-Sadr's cousin, Muqtada al-Sadr, emerged as a key voice of Shi'ite opposition to the US after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and whose followers began attacking coalition forces in Iraq. Muqtada al-Sadr's base of support is in Sadr City, a Shi'ite neighborhood in Baghdad, and encompasses mainly lower-class Iraqi Shi'ites.¹⁹⁶ His Mahdi Army, 60,000-strong in 2003,¹⁹⁷ relied on Iranian funding and arms through Iran's Qods Force. Sadr used the Mahdi Army to challenge the US occupation and attack Sunnis between 2004 and 2008.

The Mahdi Army attacks on US troops were serious enough by 2004 to threaten postponement of the 2005 elections.¹⁹⁸ This could have produced a level of instability and division between Shi'ite factions that did not serve either Iranian or US interests. Iran pressured Sadr into a ceasefire, and

the elections proceeded in 2005 as scheduled, bringing to power an Iran-friendly coalition of the United Iraqi Alliance, the PUK, and the KDP.¹⁹⁹ The end result helped both Iran and Sadr. The Sadrist Trend won 30 seats in the December 2005 elections, the largest group in the United Iraqi Alliance, which was the largest bloc with 128 seats.²⁰⁰

Sadr, in turn, maintained links to Iran, and Iran to Sadr and Iraq. In 2006, Sadr pledged to support Iran if it were attacked.²⁰¹ At the same time, Sadr had problems in maintaining his political position, personal security, and controlling his militia and followers. The Mahdi Army's killings of Sunnis increased, especially after the February 2006 bombing of the Al Askari Mosque;²⁰² a Shi'ite mosque in Samarra built in 944 C.E. where Shi'ites believe the 12th Imam hid, marking the first time a religious site was targeted in Iraq after the invasion.²⁰³ Although Sadr was the formal leader of the Mahdi Army, he was not completely in control of violence committed by his loyalists. On October 27, 2006, his deputy denounced the dissidents as "people who violated and stood against the wise and honorable leadership."²⁰⁴

In early 2007, Sadr fled to Iran,²⁰⁵ fearing arrest by the Iraqi government or Coalition forces, as well as various assassination threats. In Iran, he purportedly split his time between living in Tehran and studying at an Islamic seminary in Qom, where he would boost his clerical standing.²⁰⁶

Writing for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on May 29, 2012, Reidar Visser stated that:²⁰⁷

"Given the heavy influence that Iran wields over the Sadrists, their new position can shed much light on Iran's current strategy in Iraq. While Sadr's movement was once considered a native Iraqi movement with considerable autonomy from regional patrons, its followers were pushed into Iran's arms after the U.S. army began to target them—at times with lethal force—after 2007. Their leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, resides in Iran for long periods—further adding to Tehran's influence and leverage over him—and it seems unlikely that Iran would allow him to travel freely between the two countries if his activities were seen as subversive to Iranian interests. Thus, if Iran truly feared a move to unseat al-Maliki, it would have plenty of economic and security-related leverage to employ against the Sadrists"

Shifts also took place in 2007 that limited both Sadr and Iran's influence. Maliki had initially prevented the US from forcefully attacking Sadr's Mahdi Army in order to maintain the Shi'ite political alliance that Iran had played a role in creating.²⁰⁸ In 2007, that alliance broke down and the US launched a "surge" that targeted both Sunni and Shi'ite extremes.²⁰⁹ This was a major factor in Sadr's declaration of a ceasefire in August 2007 and helped lower the level of violence in Iraq.²¹⁰ Maliki, SCIRI, and government forces cooperated with the US to combat Sadr's Mahdi Army, which was suffering backlash from Iraqi Shi'ites, especially after it took over Karbala's religious sites.²¹¹

Another major turning point in the power struggle between Sadr and Maliki occurred in 2008, when Maliki retook Basra from the Sadrists using government forces, Badr fighters, and SCIRI loyalists in "Operation Charge of the Knights".²¹²²¹³ During the Battle of Basra, Iraqi security forces recovered weapons from Sadrists marked "Made in Iran."²¹⁴ Iran played an integral role in the ceasefire reached between Sadr and government forces.²¹⁵ Sadr's defeat in the Battle of Basra helped bring stability, while it shifted the power balance among Iran's allies. Iran took advantage of the subsequent fracturing of Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army into Special Groups to increase its influence across these more independent Shi'ite groups.

Sadr's faction failed to win outright control of any province in the 2009 provincial elections. However, it gained several key appointments in southern Iraq through post-election deal making. Sadr did, however, come to benefit from the broad perception on the part of Iraq's Shi'ites and others that SCIRI and other more moderate Shi'ite parties failed to govern effectively, were often corrupt, and served their own interests.

The 2010 parliamentary elections took a striking anti-incumbent course, greatly diminishing the strength of other Shi'ite parties. The Sadrist Movement, as part of the Iraqi National Alliance, won 70 seats, compared to Iraqiyya's 91 and State of the Law's 89. After eight months of deadlock following the elections, Iran likely brokered the deal that brought Sadr and Maliki together to represent a majority bloc. However, the "Irbil Agreement" reached in November 2010, which preceded the formation of the Iraqi government, was pushed by US diplomats and did not give any concessions to Sadr.²¹⁶

The Sadrist faction gained control over several ministries, although this may ultimately lead Iraqi voters to hold them responsible for some of Iraq's on-going problems. This included appointments to several service-related ministries, including Housing and Construction, Labor and Social Affairs, and Water Resources, making it difficult for Sadr to indiscriminately blame outside actors for Iraq's problems.²¹⁷ As of November 2011, Sadrist also chaired the Integrity Committee, Public Works, and the key post of Minister of Planning and Development Coordination.

Sadr returned to Iraq in January 2011, after almost four years of self-imposed exile in Iran. Many hailed his return as a sign of strength and a new era in Iraqi politics. However, threats to his safety again cropped up in 2011, this time from a Mahdi Army splinter group known as Asaib al Haq. Sadr returned to Iran just two weeks after his initial return to Iraq.²¹⁸ In July 2011, the US accused Sadr's militias for the elevated level of US troop deaths in June 2011. The officials also accused Iran of arming the militias with upgraded rocket-propelled munitions, possibly in an effort to ensure a full US withdrawal and to claim credit for forcing that withdrawal.²¹⁹

Sadr remained adamant that US troops should withdraw by the December 2011 deadline and threatened to reinstate his Mahdi Army if this deadline was not met.²²⁰ In May of 2011, Maliki called on Sadr to accept an extension of US troops in the country if it was backed by a solid majority of Iraqi political parties, the possible result of several high-level US visits with Iraqi leaders in 2011 urging Iraq to make such a request.²²¹ Maliki stated a request might be made if there were a "consensus" among political blocs, which could be achieved without Sadr's support.²²²

In a May 13, 2011 sermon, Sadr hinted that he might retract the withdrawal demand if a consensus was formed among Iraqi people that US troops should stay. Sadr stated, "The matter of the lifting of the freezing of the Mahdi Army is connected to the public and political agreement among Iraqis."²²³ However, two weeks after this sermon, Sadr supporters held a massive march to demand US troops leave on schedule,²²⁴ and on August 9, 2011, Sadr again threatened direct retaliation against any US troops remaining past the deadline,²²⁵ including those used to train Iraqi forces.²²⁶

In September 2011, Sadr suspended his attacks on the US and other targets, stating, "Out of my desire to complete Iraq's independence and finish the withdrawal of the occupation forces from

our holy lands, I am obliged to halt military operations of the honest resistance until the withdrawal of the occupation forces is complete,” but went on to state that, “if the withdrawal doesn’t happen...military operations will be resumed in a new and tougher way.”²²⁷ How Sadr reacts to a limited US advisory presence is a critical aspect of future US-Iranian competition.

Since that time, Sadr has continued to be a major barrier to any meaningful implementation of the Strategic Framework Agreement as well as a major divisive force in Iraq’s internal politics and one with obvious – if sometimes faltering -- links to Iran. In February 2012, Sadr commented that the US had not sufficiently left Iraq following two episodes, one involving four armed Americans in Baghdad believed to be CIA operatives and another involving a US helicopter that made an emergency landing just outside of Baghdad. Sadr stated that the US has failed to “disarm.” He also posted a statement saying, “I ask the competent authorities in Iraq to open an embassy in Washington, equivalent to the size of the U.S. Embassy in Iraq, in order to maintain the prestige of Iraq.”²²⁸

Sadr also remains a pivotal player in Iraqi politics, especially since his return to Iraq. Sadr’s relevance was demonstrated as recently as January 2012, when visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoglu met with him amidst accusations by Maliki of Turkish meddling and support of Sunni factions.²²⁹ As a supporter of Iraqi unity, Sadr is a critical component of Maliki’s legitimacy and further distancing between the two would undermine Maliki’s authority. Still, in December 2011, pro-Sadrists politicians supported dissolving the Parliament and holding new elections, and Sadr’s officially disbanded Mahdi Army occasionally threatens to rearm and remobilize .

Muqtada al-Sadr’s also called Maliki a dictator, suggesting that he now intended to distance himself from the Prime Minister, or at least oppose Maliki’s centralization of power. In February 2012, Sadr stated that “The dictator of the government is trying to make all the accomplishments as if they were his accomplishments...”²³⁰ Sadr’s influence also reaches beyond his own supporters. Members of Iraq’s al Ahrar bloc revealed in February 2012 that members of the Financial Committee in Parliament promised to include the demands of the Sadrists in the 2012 budget law draft.²³¹

Al-Monitor reported in May 2012:²³²

“The events of April 28 are a big win for Sadr and his patron, Iran. Sadr as power broker reminds Maliki and the prime minister's rivals that all such negotiations go through Sadr and Tehran. Sadr probably also enjoys some payback with Maliki, especially after US-backed Iraqi forces, under Maliki's direction, crushed Sadr's forces in Basra in 2007. Sadr does not want Maliki to run for a third term in 2014, the ninth point in the ultimatum.

In perhaps a sign of Maliki's effort to appease Sadr, an Iraqi court this week ordered the release of senior Hezbollah operative Ali Musa Daqduq, who directed the training of Iranian al Quds (the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad) operatives in Iraq and had admitted his role in kidnapping and killing five American soldiers in Najaf in 2007. The release is a finger in the eye of the United States, which had transferred custody of Daqduq to Iraq in December, when US forces left Iraq. President Obama raised Daqduq's case with Prime Minister Maliki when they met in Washington that month.”

Sadr also has important options. He could attempt a Sadrist break with Maliki that attempted to bring Maliki's government down; launch an attempt by the Sadr faction to position itself as a peacemaker and power broker; launch an attempt at increasing the Sadr factions power using its splinter organization, AAH, join the broader political sphere; or simply exploit populist opinion to build up his power while his rivals are tied down in power struggles over control of the government.

SCIRI/ISCI

The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), formerly known as the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), has strong ties to Iran that began with SCIRI's refuge in Iran during the Saddam Hussein era. ISCI's originally followed the *vela yet-e faqih* and the Iranian Ayatollah, while the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps trained and staffed its 15,000-member militia, now called the Badr Organization,²³³ during the Iran-Iraq War.²³⁴²³⁵ US intelligence officials claim that members of SCIRI were closely tied to Iranian intelligence during the period immediately after the invasion and that the group was heavily funded by Iran.²³⁶ ISCI also served to bolster Iran's influence in Iraq through ISCI member Bayan Jabr's tenure as Minister of Interior, when he inserted the Badr Brigade into the Iraqi Security Forces.²³⁷

The leadership of ISCI has, however, undergone many changes over the years and has been more independent of Iran than these initial US assessments indicate. Mohsen Hakim was the foremost Shi'ite leader in the world from 1955 to 1970²³⁸ and his sons Ayatollah Sayed Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim and Ayatollah Sayed Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr were among the founders of SCIRI.²³⁹ Sayed Baqir al-Hakim was his father's representative and eventually worked with Sayed Baqir al-Sadr to establish the Islamic Movement, a political group opposed to the Ba'athists.²⁴⁰ Baqir al-Hakim was arrested and tortured in 1972, and re-arrested in 1977.²⁴¹ He was eventually released in 1979, but in 1980 fled to Iran, shortly after his brother Baqir al-Sadr was assassinated by Saddam's regime.

Sayed Baqir al-Hakim played an important role in forming SCIRI in 1982 while in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War.²⁴² The next year, Saddam's regime arrested 125 members of his family;²⁴³ his brother Mahdi al-Hakim was assassinated in Sudan in 1988.²⁴⁴ In 1991, ISCI led a failed Shi'ite uprising against Saddam Hussein.²⁴⁵ Over the years, the Hakim family claims over 60 members of the family were killed by the Saddam regime.²⁴⁶ Sayed Baqir al-Hakim rose in the ranks of Iraqi Shi'ite leadership, and in 2003, he became a grand ayatollah and the leading Shi'ite cleric.²⁴⁷ In his speech after his return to post-invasion Iraq, he thanked Iran for its help and condemned the American occupation.²⁴⁸ However, he later participated in the new Coalition-supported Iraqi government and claimed to support separation of church and state.²⁴⁹

In August 2003, Sayed Baqir al-Hakim and about 75 others died in a car bomb attack on the Imam Ali Mosque, Shi'ite Islam's holiest mosque.²⁵⁰ Baqir Hakim's brother, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, took over the leadership of SCIRI. Despite Abdel Aziz Hakim's connections to Iran, he reformed the organization and even built a relationship with President George W. Bush.²⁵¹ He also changed the movement's name from SCIRI to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), removing the word "Revolutionary," which ISCI officials said was in reference to the Saddam Hussein regime.²⁵² That same year, ISCI distanced itself from Iran by stating that it would place more importance on the leadership of Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani.

Under Aziz al-Hakim's leadership, ISCI pushed for greater decentralization and for a period advocated the creation of an autonomous region of nine Shi'ite-majority provinces, much like the Kurdistan Region.²⁵³ In 2008, al-Hakim collaborated with Maliki in getting the Iraqi Army and ISCI's Badr Organization to cooperate in fighting against Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army in Basra. The resulting victory strengthened Maliki's hand in security and was a turning point in the civil war.²⁵⁴

Since that time, however, the Hakim faction and SCIRI have lost a significant amount of their influence and power. In 2007, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, formerly a heavy smoker, was diagnosed with lung cancer in Houston and went to Iran for treatment.²⁵⁵ He died in August 2009.²⁵⁶ Ammar al-Hakim followed in his father's footsteps to take over the formal leadership of ISCI.

This was followed by sharply diminished support for ISCI in the elections that followed. The provincial power law of 2008 enacted prior to the 2009 provincial elections favored the ISCI's desire to decentralize power. However, splits among Shi'ite factions contributed to major losses for ISCI in the 2009 elections, including in Baghdad, Najaf, and Basra.²⁵⁷ ISCI joined with the Sadrists, the Iraqi National Congress, and other groups in the Iraqi National Alliance, to win 70 seats in the March 2010 elections. However, ISCI placed a disappointing third after Iraqiyya and State of Law.

This may explain why Ammar al-Hakim traveled to Iran in April of 2010. ISCI agreed to accept Iraqiyya's inclusion in the government. Iran simultaneously echoed this public support, which was considered as a possible calculation by Iran that its interests were best served through stability.²⁵⁸ The ISCI's continued reluctance to support Maliki as prime minister contributed to the long impasse that followed. However, Ammar al-Hakim was among Iraq's leaders that supported the Irbil Agreement that brokered the impasse with the help of US diplomats.²⁵⁹

In spite of its losses in the 2010 election, ISCI remains a powerful Shi'ite group in Iraq. It is also one that still seems to have strong ties to Iran, although such information is dated. According to a State Department memo released by Wikileaks in November 2009, Iran provides an estimated \$70 million to ISCI each year.²⁶⁰ Ammar al-Hakim consistently rejected the idea of extending the US troop presence past the December 2011 deadline. In addition, ISCI has staunchly opposed the dissolution of parliament that has broader support following the post-withdrawal political tension.

The Kurds

The Kurds have actively sought to create a de facto federal Kurdish entity, to expand their area of control in mixed areas outside the current boundaries of the KRG, and to obtain independence in dealing with their petroleum resources. They have a long history of tension and warfare with the Iraqi central government, and have reason to fear its growing strength and the impact of potential Arab Shi'ite domination of the regime

Under the Shah, Iran supported Iraqi Kurd's fight against Saddam as a way of putting pressure on Saddam concerning Iran-Iraq border issues and control of the Shatt al-Arab. The Khomeini government, however, ruthlessly suppressed Kurdish independence movements during the Iran-Iran War. Iran has maintained offices in Irbil and Sulaimaniya since the Kurdish security zone was established in 1992.²⁶¹

At the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003, Iran maintained relatively good relations with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).²⁶² However, Iran's internal Kurdish problem has continued to complicate its relationship with Iraqi Kurds. Like Syria and Turkey, Iran does not want to see Kurdish independence and wants to limit Iraqi Kurdish influence. Meanwhile, President Jalal Talibani, a Kurd, has spoken out against Iran's regional influence.²⁶³

A leaked State Department cable suggests that Iran may have tried to give indirect financial assistance to Gorran, a small Kurdish group that ran in the March 2010 elections, by funding the Jaff tribe, the largest Kurdish tribe in Iraq, some of whom are members of Gorran.²⁶⁴ Stephen Zunes, who chairs the Middle Eastern studies program at the University of San Francisco, suggests that this may be because Iran saw Talibani as inching too close to the US.²⁶⁵

As with Azeris and Baluchis, the United States has worked with Kurds to limit Iranian influence and help them resist Iranian pressure. Tensions exist between Iran and the Kurds namely because Iraqi Kurdistan gives sanctuary to the Kurdish resistance group Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PEJAK), which has carried out successful attacks on Iran.²⁶⁶

Iran also accused the United States of funding PEJAK.²⁶⁷ In retaliation, Iran has carried out limited operations against Kurdish opposition groups inside the Iraqi border.²⁶⁸ After a bombing in Iran killed 10 civilians in late 2010, Iran publicly announced that it had carried out an anti-terrorist operation in Iraq that Kurdish leaders denied took place.²⁶⁹ In August 2011, Iran again shelled PJAK targets in northern Iraq, spawning Kurdish President Talabani's request in front of the UN General Assembly in September that both Turkey and Iran stop bombing Iraqi territories in the Kurdistan region, saying it caused innocent civilian deaths.²⁷⁰

Arab-Kurd tensions in northern Iraq are still a major concern. Land disputes over the oil-rich area continue without proper attention from Baghdad. Tensions between Kurdish fighters and the Iraqi Army remain high despite US-led programs to encourage collaboration. In November 2011, a standoff occurred between the two sides as the Iraqi Army attempted to assume control over a US base in Kirkuk due to be transferred in the coming weeks. A compromise was negotiated, though details of the incident highlight the mistrust Kurds have for Baghdad and the measures Maliki may consider simply to showcase his control.²⁷¹

Kurdish support for Vice President Hashemi further jeopardizes the tenuous relationship between the KRG and Baghdad. This is particularly the case since al Hashemi fled to the Kurdish region to escape accusations by Maliki of running a sectarian death squad. Tensions are further threatened by Maliki's threats to withhold funds from the Kurdistan Regional Government, and to fire Babakir Zebari, the Kurdish chief of staff of the Iraqi Army, in response to Kurdish sheltering of al Hashemi.²⁷² This has both led to new Kurdish threats to seek independence, and growing Kurdish efforts to win US support for the Kurdish position – efforts which link the Kurds more closely to the US than an Iran which often been ruthless in repressing its own Kurdish population.

The Sunnis

Like the Kurds, Iraqi Arab Sunnis have strong incentives to support the US rather than Iran, and do so in spite of the tensions that followed the US invasion in 2003. Former Prime Minister Iyad

Allawi, though a Shi'ite, has strong ties with Sunnis and has often criticized Iran for interfering in Iraq. When he rose to power in post-invasion Iraq, he was supported by Jordan, Egypt, the UAE, Qatar and Rafik Hariri in Lebanon.²⁷³

Ali A. Allawi, who served as an Iraqi political advisor, former Minister of Defense, and former Minister of Finance, has since argued in *The Occupation of Iraq* that the underlying objective of the Interim Government was to limit Iran's influence in Iraq prior to the 2005 election, which would likely see increased Iranian influence and domination by Iraqi Shi'ites.²⁷⁴

As long as Allawi was the head of the Interim Government, the US and regional Arab states had an ally in place who would limit religious Shi'ite power in the government.²⁷⁵ The UAE and Qatar supported the Interim Government and voiced support for Allawi again when he ran in January 2005.²⁷⁶ As the 2005 elections approached, Allawi's Minister of Defense, Hazem Sha'alan, denounced Iran by calling it "Iraq's number one enemy" and accused Iran of seizing border posts, sending spies into Iraq, and infiltrating the Iraqi government.²⁷⁷ Iran's support for Shi'ite militia groups who targeted Sunnis further deepened Sunni mistrust of Iran.

The low turnout of Sunnis brought the legitimacy of the January 2005 elections into question and sharply undercut the viability of American efforts in Iraq by giving Iran more influence in the government. This situation eased, however, as the December 2005 elections approached, which saw a rise in Sunni voter participation. Sunni leaders again criticized Iranian influence in the election, such as Interim President Ghazi al Yawer, and the possibility of a religious state working in Iraq.²⁷⁸ However, in both sets of 2005 elections Sunnis did not fare well.

A key turning point occurred in 2008 when Sunnis turned on al Qa'ida and other insurgents and cooperated with coalition forces in what became known as the Sunni Awakening. Many Sunnis were alienated by de-Ba'athification laws, the disbanding of the Iraqi military, and exclusion from the 2003 Governing Council -- where Shi'ites and Kurds close to Iran gained power.²⁷⁹ As foreign fighters poured across Iraq's western border, many Sunnis in Anbar province were enticed into insurgency by Qa'ida, who offered post-invasion security and a rationale that insurgency was their religious duty.²⁸⁰

However, Sunni attitudes towards al Qa'ida began to shift as they became familiar with al Qa'ida's methods. Al Qa'ida's harsh intimidation tactics, including using suicide bombers, were largely unacceptable to Iraq's Sunnis. Sunni tribes increasingly saw al Qa'ida as a foreign entity that posed a greater threat to their livelihood than Iranian or Shi'ite dominance.²⁸¹

US attitudes towards Iraq's Sunnis also began to change around this time. The US began to openly acknowledge the importance of Sunni tribes in post-Saddam Iraq and quickly took advantage of growing anti-al Qa'ida sentiments. The 2007 US troop surge subsequently supported the Sons of Iraq program -- a US initiative to transfer the success of the indigenous Sunni Awakening to other Sunni areas in Iraq. The Sunni Awakening had a considerable impact on the scale of al Qa'ida in Iraq from the end of 2006 through the fall of 2008.²⁸²

The relative absence of al Qa'ida intimidation contributed to Sunnis participating in large numbers in the January 2009 provincial elections and the March 2010 parliamentary elections. Allawi's Iraqiyya slate presented an appealing option for many Sunnis, though likely undercut the success of other Sunni parties, namely the Iraqi Accordance.²⁸³ Members of the Awakening

also did not fare well as candidates.²⁸⁴ However, Allawi's inability to form a majority coalition, and Sadr's acceptance of Maliki as prime minister under Iranian influence, was a setback for Sunnis hoping to see Allawi as prime minister.²⁸⁵ The long-term acceptance of Allawi's Iraqiyya bloc and Maliki's willingness to ease his grasp on power and lead with an even hand, could dictate the level of acceptance Sunnis have for Iraqi government institutions.

The disqualification of nearly 500 Sunni candidates by the Justice and Accountability Commission (JAC) prior to the 2010 elections was also a major setback for Sunnis. The JAC was headed by Ali al Lami, a Shi'ite under US custody in 2005-2006 for assisting Iranian agents in Iraq.²⁸⁶ General Odierno described al Lami, and his predecessor Ahmed Chalabi, as "influenced by Iran" and working to undermine Iraqi elections.²⁸⁷ Chalabi was also a main contributor of pre-war intelligence and has been accused of giving US secrets to Iran.²⁸⁸²⁸⁹

Many Sunnis who fought under the Awakening and Sons of Iraq program anticipated integration into the ISF, appointment to government posts, and payment for their sacrifice. All of these entitlements have been slow to occur and Sunnis have become increasingly frustrated with the Shi'ite-led government. The Awakening fighters have reported being harassed by both sides – by a reemerging al Qa'ida threat and Shi'ites who question their allegiances. These frustrations have contributed to many Sunnis rejoining al Qa'ida.²⁹⁰ In February of 2011, US Ambassador to Iraq James Jeffrey testified that Sunnis were experiencing no payment difficulties under Awakening agreements, and as of August 2011, the US reported more than half, or 50,000, had been integrated into the ISF or given civilian government jobs.²⁹¹

As has been described earlier, Prime Minister Maliki's continued consolidation of power, and further repression of various Sunni elements, has become an alarming trend since US troops withdrew. Sunnis have been denounced or arrested as "Ba'athists" even when it was unclear they had any ties to current Ba'athist movements, had ever been supporters of the Ba'ath, or had held more than low-level positions of the kind where party membership was necessary to have a job or career. His actions have alienated many Sunnis, particularly in Anbar and Mosul provinces. Many Awakening members are former insurgents and Ba'ath Party members who fought in the Sunni uprising early in the war. As US troops withdraw, these groups remain heavily armed, outside of the Iraqi police force and army, and increasingly keen on establishing autonomy.

The October 2011 SIGIR report to Congress acknowledged the job placement of Sunnis promised under the Sons of Iraq program was stalled. The GOI was considering reforming the program to ensure that the SOI in heavily dominated Sunni provinces like Anbar receive equal compensation as their counterparts in Baghdad. As of November, 2011, the Sons of Iraq continued to operate in nine provinces and numbered approximately 48,000.²⁹² However, within two weeks of the complete US withdrawal in December, reports suggested these units still remained outside the Iraqi police force and army, yet continued to operate independently while the GoI required their dismantling by the end of 2011.²⁹³

Signs of Sunni resistance to Maliki's increasing centralization of power have increased since that time. In June 2011, Speak Nujeifi warned that Sunnis in Iraq may seek separation from the Shi'ite-run government, or demand more autonomy by pressing for the establishment of more independent regional status.²⁹⁴ Sectarian divisions are becoming more apparent as several predominantly Sunni provinces seek regional status. In October 2011, Salahuddin Province

declared itself an “administrative and economic region in a united Iraq”.²⁹⁵ While this move was unconstitutional (provinces can request regional status but cannot unilaterally declare themselves as such), and Salahuddin council eventually backed off, the move nonetheless demonstrates the growing discomfort of Sunnis to Maliki’s centralization of power.

US estimates of Al Qa’ida’s current threat have been discussed earlier. Although al Qa’ida in Iraq is weaker than it was at the height of the Sunni insurgency, analysts suggest it is shifting its tactics and strategies to exploit gaps left by the withdrawal of US troops in an attempt to rekindle sectarian conflict. Instead of attempting to control territory and impose their ideology, it has gone underground and periodically conducts large-scale attacks. In November 2011, General Buchanan stated there were 800 to 1,000 members of al Qa’ida in Iraq. The military reported in July 2010 there were approximately 200 “hard core” fighters.²⁹⁶ In addition, in February 2012, US Intelligence officials told Congress that al Qa’ida in Iraq was likely behind a series of bombings in Syria.²⁹⁷

Since October 2011, however, the Maliki government has acted on the basis that there are other major Sunni threats. Anonymous Iraqi officials reported intelligence provided by Libya which uncovered a planned Ba’athist coup- with the backing of Muammar Qaddafi-to be carried out after US troops withdrew from Iraq; this claim is highly unlikely given the fact that the Libyan leader was in the process of being captured and killed during these dates. Nevertheless, Maliki responded by arresting over 600 alleged Ba’athist conspirators.²⁹⁸ An unidentified source within the Iraqi government later stated the intelligence tip never occurred. Though the scale of these arrests is unprecedented, similar actions had occurred before. The previous month, for example, 145 university employees in Tikrit were arrested for being Ba’athists.²⁹⁹ As recently as December 2011, Maliki sought to expel and arrest Sunni politicians, such as Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al Mutlaq and Vice President Tariq al Hashemi.

The Sunni response has been symbolic calls for autonomy from Baghdad – which, have been met by Maliki with a warning of “rivers of blood” if Sunnis seek an autonomous region.³⁰⁰ In addition, several political blocs have boycotted parliament. These developments, combined with a resurgent al Qa’ida and Maliki’s authoritarian streak, are a troubling pattern of sectarian tensions following the US troop withdrawal. Indeed, the political crisis that occurred in the aftermath of the US withdrawal has only widened the gap between Sunnis and Shi’ites. A growing number of Sunnis see the government as exclusively Shi’a in power, while Sunni leaders face unfounded accusations, including terrorism.

Moreover, the number of attacks that are either linked to al Qa’ida or deemed looking “similar in nature as previous al Qa’ida attacks” has increased drastically. These attacks often involve suicide bombers, armed men dressed as police and military, and attacks on Shi’a religious sites. The Islamic State of Iraq, which includes several terrorist groups including al Qa’ida, has claimed responsibility for several waves of deadly bombing since the US withdrawal, including a failed assassination attempt on Prime Minister Maliki.³⁰¹ This increase in attacks might contribute to accusations against Sunni politicians and create a cycle that threatens long-term security. Anecdotal accounts by Sunnis suggest Iraq is again segregating along sectarian lines.³⁰²

In February 2012, the US Department of the Treasury announced sanctions against the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) stating, among other things, the ministry had

helped al Qaeda agents in Iran and provided them with identity cards and passports and had given money and weapons to al Qaeda in Iraq.³⁰³

THE IRANIAN ROLE IN VIOLENCE IN IRAQ

The preceding analysis has already shown how important a role Iran now plays in Iraq. It is one of the many ironies of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 that it is Iran that may have “won” that war. The US invested heavily in terms of blood and treasure. Over 4,400 Americans have died after the insurgency in Iraq began in March 2003.³⁰⁴ The U.S. spent some \$800 billion on the war, and appropriated over \$60 billion dollars for operations, aid, and reconstruction efforts related to Iraq between 2003 and April of 2012.³⁰⁵ Now that US forces have left Iraq, however, it is Iran that has benefited most in strategic terms from the removal of Saddam Hussein and a major military rival. Moreover, Iran’s efforts to win influence by political, economic, and military means since 2003 now makes it an important player in Iraq’s continuing cycle of violence.

Iran continues to maintain a close military relationship with various—and sometimes competing—groups across Iraq. In October 2012, Iran’s Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi met with Prime Minister Maliki in Baghdad to discuss Iran’s ongoing security arrangements with Iraq. Afterwards, Vahidi stated that “Iraq holds a special position in the foreign policy and defense diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”³⁰⁶ Also in October 2012, Qassem Suleimani, the commander of Iran’s Quds Force, made an unannounced visit to Iraq’s Kurdish region, where he met with Kurdish President Jalal Talabani and top aides to discuss regional issues such as Syria, and Turkey.³⁰⁷

There also is little doubt that Iran is still seeking to exploit regional instability in order to influence events in Iraq to the extent possible through the use of violence, as well as by legitimate political, religious, and cultural channels.

Experts disagree over the exact role that Iran now plays in causing or encouraging violence in Iraq at this time, but there is little disagreement over the fact that Iran provides training and some funds and equipment to Shi’ite militias, that its Al Quds force is active in both Iran’s politics and in supporting Shi’ite militias, and that Iran provided arms and special explosive lenses and triggering device components for IEDs during the time US and British forces were fighting extremists and insurgents between 2003 and 2011.

Testifying before Congress in 2011, Kenneth Pollack stated, “There is no question that Iran has huge equities in Iraq, that it intends to maximize its influence there, and that Iran’s goals in Iraq are almost inimical to our own.”³⁰⁸ Speaking to Iranian support of Iraqi militias, Lieutenant General Ray Odierno stated, “We have weapons that we know through serial numbers...trace back to Iran.”³⁰⁹ The US Department of Treasury has officially designated Iran’s Ministry Of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) as a terrorist organization for its support of militant groups within Iraq.³¹⁰

Since 2011, the end of the US troop and aid presence in the field has given Iran the advantage. The US troop withdrawal followed on the failure of Iraqi and American officials to agree on

extending the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and on the terms of a meaningful Strategic Framework Agreement. This alone increased Iranian influence by default.³¹¹ The withdrawal of U.S. troops and diplomatic officials has since led to a striking decrease in US funds, humanitarian and military assistance, and on-the-scene diplomatic and military support.

Today, Iran's goals in Iraq have three broad objectives; making Iraq a friendly power that serves Iran's interest rather than threatens it, combating a perceived US threat, and getting Iraqi support in projecting influence throughout the region. Iranian officials are also concerned that a politically stable, economically viable, and ethnically cohesive Iraq would challenge Tehran for regional leadership and influence.

Iran's Goals in Iraq and the Al Quds Force

The International Crisis Group writes that Iran has pursued a “complex three-pronged strategy: encouraging electoral democracy (as a means of producing Shiite rule); promoting a degree of chaos but of a manageable kind (in order to generate protracted but controllable disorder); and investing in a wide array of diverse, often competing Iraqi actors (to minimize the risks in any conceivable outcome)”.³¹²

Iran's first concern is to establish a non-threatening, pro-Iranian Shi'a government that is strong enough to prevent instability from spilling across the border in Iran, yet weak enough to not pose a military threat. For officials in Iran, the pursuit of this goal translates into a delicate and sometimes uncomfortable balance between keeping neighboring Iraq from unraveling into a failed state, and making certain that the once hostile neighbor does not reemerge as a regional competitor.

This is a difficult balancing act at best. While Iraq's most important and visible leaders are Shiites, they do not agree on many aspect of the nation's future path or the role Iran should – play. One has only to consider the different positions of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the leading religious figure, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and Muqtada al-Sadr.

Iran's influence is exerted through diplomatic and economic means, and some of this is a normal. As the ICG notes in one of its reports, the “presence of large numbers of Iranians inside Iraq...is neither abnormal nor a new development”.³¹³ Moreover, the absence of strong Iraqi border regulation and a pro-Iranian government in Baghdad provides Iran an illegal, cross-border trade market, allowing much needed outlet to offset increasing international sanctions.³¹⁴

At the same time, Iran's Supreme Leader and the IRGC still use the Al Quds Force to support all three of Iran's objectives ever since it first began to have a presence in Iraq in 2003 – a presence which often had ties to Iraq's Shi'ite political leaders.

In October 2012, the New York Times' Michael Gordon reported that it was not Iranian President Ahmadinejad, but the leader of Iran's covert Quds Force, Qassim Suleimani, who controls “sole authority for Iranian actions in Iraq”.³¹⁵ Major General Suleimani personally oversees the implementation of Iran's “two central...foreign policy initiatives, exerting and expanding Tehran's influence in the internal politics of Iraq and providing military support for the rule of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria.”³¹⁶

In May of 2012, the American Enterprise Institute released a study on Iran's role in neighboring countries, titled "*Iranian Influence in the Levant, Egypt, Iraq, and Afghanistan*". That report described Qassim Suleimani's role at the top of a covert network of proxies and security officials. AEI reports that Suleimani's relationships "with Iran's proxies around the world are deep and personal," adding "he maintains a web of military alliances...that is likely to become even more important"³¹⁷ The May 2012 AEI report also stated that, "Iran seeks to maintain a Shi'a-dominated, weak, and fractured Iraqi government that will be friendly toward Iran and generally support Tehran's foreign policy".³¹⁸

Combating the US Threat

Second, Iran seeks to counter any U.S. threat on its western border. Iran has adopted a policy designed to undermine U.S. influence in the region, drive American troops from its border, foment anti-Western sentiment, prevent a U.S. or Israeli led strike on its territory, and establish a buffer against any possible future attack. From their vantage point in Tehran, the Islamic Republic's leaders saw what they perceived to be a very real threat against their regime from 2003-2011.

While the fall of Saddam Hussein reduced one threat, the stationing of the US military in Iraq placed a much more capable enemy on its border. Iranian fears were increased by President Bush's "axis of evil speech," by calls from various US officials and analysts for regime change, and by repeated reports that US was planning to invade. While these fears were often grossly exaggerated, they led Iran to restructure many of its defense and military contingency plans, and support Iraq insurgents and extremists groups as a means to tying US forces down in Iraq in a war of attrition.³¹⁹

The withdrawal of US forces in December of 2011, has eased Iran's fears, but fueled its ambitions and the crisis in Syria has made Iraq part of a much broader Iranian struggle to maintain its influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the region. As a result, Iran is seeking to counter US influence in both civil and military aid, in arms sales, and as a source of contingency aid to the Iranian government under the terms of the Strategic Framework agreement. As some US experts note, Iran also seems to be going further: "Iran sought to expel the U.S. presence from Iraq by attacking American troops and diplomats via its armed proxies and pressuring Iraqi politicians not to extend the American presence".³²⁰

Iran also uses its role in Iraq as a means of maintaining surveillance and control over dissident groups Tehran has confronted in the past. The Mujahideen-e Khalq, which formerly received support from Saddam Hussein to carry out attacks against Iran, and Kurdish nationalists in Iraq are two such groups that carefully monitors.³²¹

Projecting Regional Influence

Finally, Iran seeks to establish a pro-Iranian, Shi'a government in Iraq that will help Iran project its influence and support its strategic and foreign policy objectives throughout the region. Despite current diplomatic isolation and economic hardship, Iran still sees itself as a regional power to be taken seriously, and as the guardian of Shiites throughout the region. While Iranian attempts to export the revolution have diminished since the height of revolutionary fervor in the

early 1980's, Iran still finds willing recipients of its aid and attention in Shia pockets and communities in a number of places in the region.

These groups sometimes take the form of disenfranchised and underserved Shia groups, as is the case in Bahrain, Tajikistan, or Afghanistan. Other times, Iran has forged successful ties with sizable Shia communities, such as those in Lebanon and Iraq. In the case of Iraq, the two countries share many political, religious, and cultural ties, despite lingering mistrust over the Iran-Iraq war.

CONCLUSION

Like many nations across the region, Iraq is at an important crossroads in its history and is grappling with a changing political landscape. So far, the end result is deep sectarian and ethnic tension, growing political divisions, ineffective governance, corruption that extends deep into the security forces, and continuing – and probably growing—violence. Iraq still has the opportunity to establish a new, unified national identity and improve internal security, or deteriorate into civil strife, political crisis, and economic instability. It still has the opportunity to make the kind of economic and political reforms that will give Iraq the unity and strength its people need and secure its own destiny.

The reality, however, is that Iraqi violence remains high and may well be increasing. The structural causes of violence remain as strong as ever, Iraq lacks unified and effective leadership, and sectarian and ethnic divisions remain a critical problem. The security forces are not becoming more effective, are corrupt, and are divided. Moreover, US-Iranian strategic competition over the future of Iraq is a further source of division and violence, and continues to undermine and challenge US interests throughout the region.

The Iraq War almost seems to have vanished from America's political consciousness, and Iraq's problems receive little media and only limited analytic attention. The US-Iraqi strategic relationship is still important to Washington.

This point was clarified as recently as August 21 2012, when General Martin Dempsey met with Prime Minister Maliki in Baghdad and reiterated that, "We still retain significant investment and significant influence. But now it's on the basis of a partnership and not on the basis of ownership," adding "I'm not going to try to understate the role of Tehran."³²² It is unclear, however, that the US has a clear set of plans and policies to deal with Iraq, or that the US Congress is prepared to provide the future resources the US country team in Iraq will need to be effective.

If the US is to help Iraq achieve stability and security, and diminish Iran's ability to influence it, the US must look for ways to strengthen Iraq's hand and increase its autonomy. To this end, the US needs the strongest possible country team to try to resolve Iraq's current political crisis by easing tensions between the central government and opposing groups, maximizing the potential of its oil and gas wealth, advancing security throughout the country, and provide assistance in infrastructure development. This means the US cannot afford to "forget" Iraq, ignore its critical role in world energy supplies and US strategic interest in the region, or fail to properly staff and fund the political, economic, and security efforts that still offer the best hope of reducing Iraq's violence and securing its future.

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