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Iraqi Civilian, Police, and Security Forces Casualty Estimates

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Summary

This report presents various estimates of Iraqi civilian, police, and security forces casualties. The Department of Defense (DOD) regularly updates total U.S. military death and wounded statistics from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), as reflected in CRS Report RS21578, *Iraq: Summary of U.S. Casualties*. However, no Iraqi or U.S. government office regularly releases statistics on Iraqi civilian deaths, Iraqi police deaths, or Iraqi security forces deaths. Statistics on these topics are sometimes available through alternative sources, such as nonprofit organizations, or through statements made by officials to the press.

Many of the estimates included in this report are incomplete or have been released by non-governmental sources. Because these estimates are based on varying time periods and have been created using differing methodologies, readers should exercise caution when using these statistics and should look on them as guideposts rather than as statements of historical fact. This report will be updated as needed.

Iraqi Civilian Casualty Estimates

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the United States Department of Defense (DOD) have recently released reports that include sections on Iraqi civilian casualties. In its *Human Rights Report* for May 1 - June 30, 2006, the UNAMI estimated that 2,669 Iraqi civilians were killed in May 2006 and 3,149 Iraqi civilians were killed in June 2006.¹ These figures combine two counts: one from the Iraq Ministry of Health, which records deaths reported by hospitals; and one from the Medico-Legal Institute (MLI) in Baghdad, which tallies the unidentified bodies it receives.² The combined count of civilian casualties from January 2006 to June 2006 was reported as

¹ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 May - 30 June 2006*, at <http://tinyurl.com/ml6c8>, p. 3.

² Nick Wadhams, "Iraq civilian toll spikes to nearly 6,000," *Associated Press*, July 19, 2006.

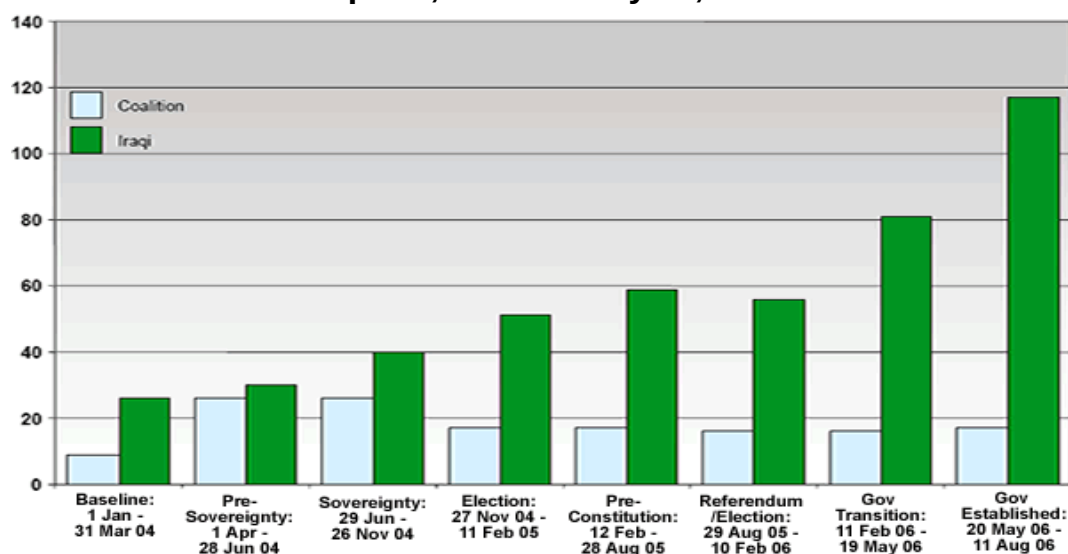
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14,228.³ In each of these figures, the Region of Kurdistan has been excluded. The UN report further states:

On 25 June, the [Iraqi] Ministry of Health publicly acknowledged information stating that since 2003 at least 50,000 persons have been killed violently. The Baghdad morgue reportedly received 30,204 bodies from 2003 to mid-2006. Deaths numbering 18,933 occurred from “military clashes” and “terrorist attacks” between 5 April 2004 and 1 June 2006. The Ministry further indicated that the number of deaths is probably underreported.⁴

The U.S. Department of Defense has not released an estimate of Iraqi civilian deaths during OIF. However, it has released a bar chart of the average daily Iraqi casualties and average daily coalition casualties. The chart does not distinguish between deaths and wounded, nor does it distinguish between civilians and security forces (or ISF).⁵

**Average Daily Casualties — Iraqi (incl. ISF) and Coalition
April 1, 2004 — May 12, 2006**



Source: DOD, Derived from Multi-National Corps - Iraq, [<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/may2006/d20060530SecurityandStabiltyRptFinalv2.pdf>]. Casualty data on this [chart] reflect updated data for each period and are derived from unverified initial reports submitted by Coalition elements responding to an incident; the inconclusivity of these numbers constrains them to be used for comparative purposes only.

Other Iraqi or U.S. government officials have also made estimates of Iraqi civilian casualties, often in conversations with the media. In a question and answer period after a speech in December 2005, President George W. Bush gave an estimate of civilian

³ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 May - 30 June 2006*, at [<http://tinyurl.com/ml6c8>].

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: August 2006 Report to Congress in Accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2006 (Section 9010)*, August 2006, at [<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Security-Stabilty-ReportAug29r1.pdf>].

deaths, stating “30,000 [Iraqi civilians], more or less, have died as a result of the initial incursion and the ongoing violence against Iraqis [during Operation Iraqi Freedom].”⁶ After the speech, however, aides said that Bush’s statement was not an official government estimate but a reflection of figures in news media reports.⁷

In a recent article in the *Washington Post*, Gianni Magazzeni, chief of UNAMI’s Human Rights Office, confirmed that there had been 1,536 violent deaths in Baghdad in August 2006, as reported by the Baghdad morgue.⁸ These figures showed a marked increase from the Baghdad morgue’s original estimate of 500 violent deaths in Baghdad in August 2006, which at the time gave rise to speculation that violence was decreasing in Baghdad.⁹ Separately, the Iraq Health Ministry confirmed that it planned to construct two new branch morgues in Baghdad and add doctors and refrigerator units to raise capacity to as many as 250 corpses a day.¹⁰ In an earlier interview with *Newsweek*, the Iraqi Ministry of Health’s spokesperson announced that the Ministry had seen a 30% rise in victims in the first few weeks of July 2006 and reported that the vast majority of the victims were young Sunni men.¹¹

In the midst of the rising civilian death toll, the head of the Multi-National Force-Iraq, Lt. Gen. Peter Chiarelli, noted in an interview with Knight Ridder that “escalation of force” incidents have gone down in a comparison between July of last year to July of this year. “Escalation of force” incidents typically involve a U.S. soldier giving a verbal warning or hand signal to a driver approaching a checkpoint or convoy. The situation escalates if the driver fails to stop, with the soldier firing a warning shot and then shooting to kill.¹² The same article reported that an anonymous military official said that there had been 3,000 “escalation of force” incidents from July 2005 to December 31, 2005, and that 16% of the incidents led to a civilian being killed or injured. However, from January 1, 2006 to May 31, 2006, 1,700 such incidents were reported and 12% led to a civilian being killed or injured.¹³

In addition to U.S. and government sources, the media have often cited the Iraq Body Count (IBC) and other nonprofit websites as sources of estimates of Iraqi casualties. The IBC bases its online casualty estimates on media reports of casualties, some of which may involve security forces as well as civilians. As of September 13, 2006, the IBC estimated

⁶ White House News release, “President Discusses War on Terror and Upcoming Iraqi Elections,” Dec. 12, 2005, at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/12/20051212-4.html>].

⁷ Adam Harvey, “Bush says civilian toll in Iraq 30,000,” *The Advertiser*, Dec. 14, 2005, p. 42.

⁸ Ellen Knickmeyer, “Body Count in Baghdad Nearly Triples,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 8, 2006, p. A12.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Malcom Beith, “Counting Corpses: The Baghdad morgue is at the center of a debate about the number of civilians killed in Iraq,” *Newsweek*, July 25, 2006.

¹² Nancy A. Youssef, “U.S. strives to curb Iraqi deaths; Stung by an increasingly hostile populace, the U.S. military has launched a major campaign to lessen the number of civilian deaths in Iraq,” *Buffalo News (New York)*, June 22, 2006, p. A1.

¹³ Ibid.

that between 41,860 and 46,537 civilians had died as a result of military action.¹⁴ In a written statement to the British House of Commons, Foreign Minister Jack Straw noted that he did not find the IBC's method of tracking casualties through media sources authoritative.¹⁵ However, because the IBC documents each of the casualties it records with a media source and because it provides a minimum and a maximum estimate, its numbers are widely regarded as fairly authoritative.

The Brookings Institution has used modified numbers from the UN human rights report and Iraq Body count to develop its own estimate for Iraqi civilians who have died by violence. The Brookings Institution estimates that 90 percent of the deaths reported in the UN human rights report happened as a result of violence, and they use this number as an estimate of January 2006 to July 2006 Iraqi civilian deaths due to violence. To expand their dates to include May 2003 to December 2005, they include 1.75 times the Iraq Body Count total (they do not specify the minimum or maximum total) to reflect "the fact that estimates for civilian casualties from the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior were 75 percent higher than those of our Iraq Body Count-based estimate over the aggregate December 2003 - May 2005 period."¹⁶ By using this method, the Brookings Institution estimates that between May 2003 and July 31, 2006, 59,000 Iraqi civilians have died due to violence.

Another source for civilian casualty estimates is the article "Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: Cluster Sample Survey," published in the British medical journal, *The Lancet*. Using a cluster sample survey of households in Iraq, the authors developed an estimate of 100,000 civilian casualties due to violent deaths since the start of the war.¹⁷ This report has come under attack for its methodology, and supporters of the war have argued that some of the casualties could have resulted from the long-term negative health effects of the Saddam Hussein era. In addition, British Foreign Minister Straw has written a formal Ministerial Response rejecting the findings of the *Lancet* report on the grounds that the data analyzed were inaccurate.¹⁸ Although the *Lancet* report is often referred to in the media, its results are vigorously contested by some.

Finally, the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (ICCC) has been tracking U.S. and coalition casualties since the beginning of the war and has recently begun tracking civilian casualties as well using an IBC-like method of posting media reports of deaths. ICCC, like IBC, is prone to the kind of errors likely when using media reports for data: some deaths may not be reported in the media, while other deaths may be reported more than once. Nonetheless, both sources may be useful for different kinds of inquiries. The ICCC

¹⁴ Iraq Body Count at [<http://www.iraqbodycount.net>]. IBC is a nongovernmental organization managed by researchers and volunteers.

¹⁵ Jack Straw, House of Commons Hansard Written Ministerial Statements for Nov. 17, 2004, at [<http://tinyurl.com/d5cmw>].

¹⁶ Brookings Institution, *Iraq Index: Tracking Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, Sept. 7, 2006, at [<http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf>], p. 10.

¹⁷ Les Roberts, Ridyah Lafta, Richard Garfield et al., "Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: Cluster Sample Survey," *The Lancet*, Oct. 29, 2004, 364 (9448): 1857-64.

¹⁸ Jack Straw, Written U.K. Ministerial Statement Responding to a Lancet Study on Iraqi Casualty Numbers, Nov. 16, 2004, at [<http://tinyurl.com/3hv8j>].

separates police and soldier deaths from civilian deaths and thus may be useful in tracking the two populations separately. The ICCC estimates that there were 12,740 civilian deaths from March 2003 through September 13, 2006, and 5,370 police and security force deaths from June 2003 through September 13, 2006.¹⁹

Iraqi Police and Security Forces Casualty Statistics

As with civilian casualty statistics, casualty statistics on Iraqi security forces remain estimates. The following selected statistics represent the cited estimates from nonprofits and senior U.S. officials on Iraqi security forces casualty numbers. In addition to these numbers, in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld remarked that Iraqi security forces are taking casualties, both in terms of deaths and wounded, at “roughly twice the rate of all coalition forces.”²⁰ This estimate may imply that, from May 1, 2003, to September 12, 2006, 5,800 Iraqi security forces have died and over 40,000 have been wounded.

Iraqi Security Forces Personnel and Police Officers Killed

Iraq Coalition Casualty Count estimate of Security Forces and Police killed, June 2003 - September 7, 2006	5,332 ²¹
Brookings' Institution, <i>Iraq Index</i> , estimate of Security Forces and Police killed, June 2003 - July 30, 2006	5,332 ²²
Associated Press, estimate of Security Forces and Police killed, January 2006 - June 2006	805 ²³
General Peterson's spokesperson, estimate of Iraqi Police Officers killed in 2005 (General Peterson is the top American police trainer in Iraq)	1,497 ²⁴
General Peterson's spokesperson, estimate of Iraqi Police Officers wounded in 2005	3,256 ²⁵

For more information, CRS Report RS21578, *Iraq: Summary of U.S. Casualties*, by JoAnne O'Bryant provides regular updates of U.S. military casualties.

¹⁹ Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, at [<http://icasualties.org/oif/IraqiDeaths.aspx>]. ICCC is a nongovernmental organization managed by researchers and volunteers.

²⁰ Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, “Donald H. Rumsfeld Delivers Remarks to the Council on Foreign Relations,” Feb. 17, 2006, as released by the Department of Defense.

²¹ Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, “Iraqi Police/Military,” [<http://icasualties.org>].

²² Brookings Institution, *Iraq Index: Tracking Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, at [<http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf>], p. 8.

²³ Nick Wadhams, “Iraq civilian toll spikes to nearly 6,000,” *Associated Press*, July 19, 2006

²⁴ Eric Schmitt, “2,000 more M.P.’s will help train the Iraqi police,” *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 2006, p. A1.

²⁵ Ibid.