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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

September 28, 2007

Congressional Committees

Subject: DOD Should Provide Congress and the American Public with Monthly Data on Enemy-Initiated Attacks in Iraq in a Timely Manner

In January 2007, the President stated that the high levels of violence in Iraq had overwhelmed the political gains that the Iraqis had made and required a new U.S. strategy for stabilizing the country. The new strategy recognized that until the Iraqi people have a basic measure of security, they would not be able to make significant and sustainable political and economic progress. To help Iraqi leaders provide security for their population, the United States deployed about 30,000 additional troops to Iraq during the spring of 2007, bringing the total number of U.S. military personnel up to about 160,000 as of mid-June 2007.

Enemy-initiated attacks data are a key indicator of progress in improving Iraq's security situation, an important condition that, according to the administration, must be met before the United States can reduce its military presence in Iraq. While attacks data alone may not provide a complete picture of Iraq's security situation, Department of Defense (DOD) and Multinational Force-Iraq (MNF-I) officials state that the data provide a reasonably sound depiction of general security trends in the country. Since 2004, we have periodically provided this information to Congress in classified and unclassified briefings, reports, and testimonies.¹ In response to GAO's requests, various DOD components—most recently the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)—have assisted GAO in publicly reporting trends in the security situation by declassifying the attacks data on a monthly basis. In our report on the status of the achievement of Iraqi benchmarks, we provided attacks data through July 31, 2007.² This report provides data through August 31, 2007.

While the administration has provided the Congress with aggregated attacks data in DOD's quarterly reports and more limited attacks information in the July and September 2007 benchmarks reports, it is important that the Congress and the American public receive the monthly attacks data routinely from the Department of

¹For example, see GAO, *Rebuilding Iraq: Resource, Security, Governance, Essential Services, and Oversight Issues*, [GAO-04-92R](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 2004); GAO, *Securing, Stabilizing, and Stabilizing Iraq: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight*, [GAO-07-308SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 2007); GAO, *DOD Reports Should Link Economic, Governance, and Security Indicators to Conditions for Stabilizing Iraq*, [GAO-06-152C](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 2005).

²GAO, *Securing, Stabilizing, and Rebuilding Iraq: Iraqi Government Has Not Met Most Legislative, Security, and Economic Benchmarks*, [GAO-07-1195](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2006).

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE 28 SEP 2007		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2007 to 00-00-2007	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE DOD Should Provide Congress and the American Public with Monthly Data on Enemy-Initiated Attacks in Iraq in a Timely Manner				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Washington, DC, 20548				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 9	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Defense. We are recommending that DOD make the data publicly available each month in a timely manner.

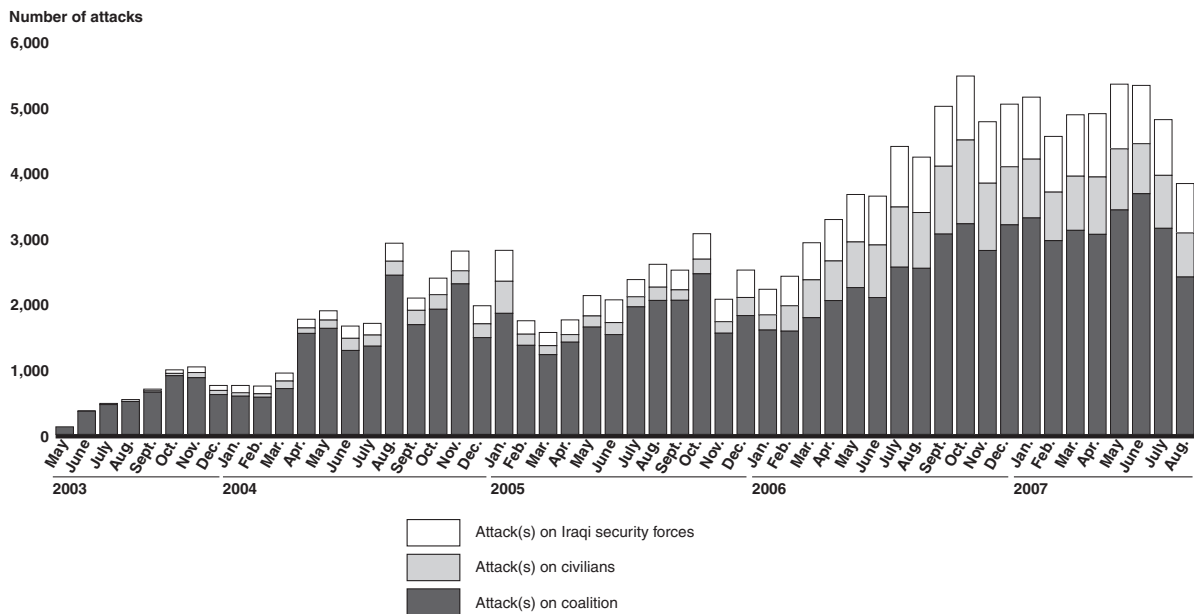
The updated attacks data we provide in this letter are sufficiently reliable for establishing general trends in the number of enemy-initiated attacks in Iraq. To determine the reliability of the data, we reviewed MNF-I's attacks reporting guidance, compared the unclassified data to classified sources, and discussed how the data are collected, analyzed, and reported with DIA and MNF-I officials. While the attacks data provide a reasonably sound depiction of security trends, DOD documents and officials acknowledge that these data provide only a partial picture of the violence in Iraq because not all attacks against civilians and Iraqi security forces are observed by or reported to coalition forces. Our latest analysis of attacks data was conducted from June through August 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Enemy-Initiated Attacks Remain at High Levels

Overall security conditions in Iraq have deteriorated and grown more complex, since May 2003, as evidenced by the increased numbers of attacks and the Sunni-Shi'a sectarian strife that followed the February 2006 bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra. Enemy-initiated attacks against the coalition and its Iraqi partners increased through October 2006 and have remained at high levels since that time (see fig. 1). These attacks have increased around major religious and political events, including Ramadan³ and elections. Coalition forces are still the primary target of attacks, but the number of attacks on Iraqi security forces and civilians also has increased since 2003.

³Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Over the past 4 years, the month of Ramadan began about October 27, 2003; October 16, 2004; October 5, 2005; and September 24, 2006. In 2007, Ramadan began on September 13.

Figure 1: Enemy-Initiated Attacks against the Coalition, Iraqi Security Forces, and Civilians (May 2003 through August 2007)



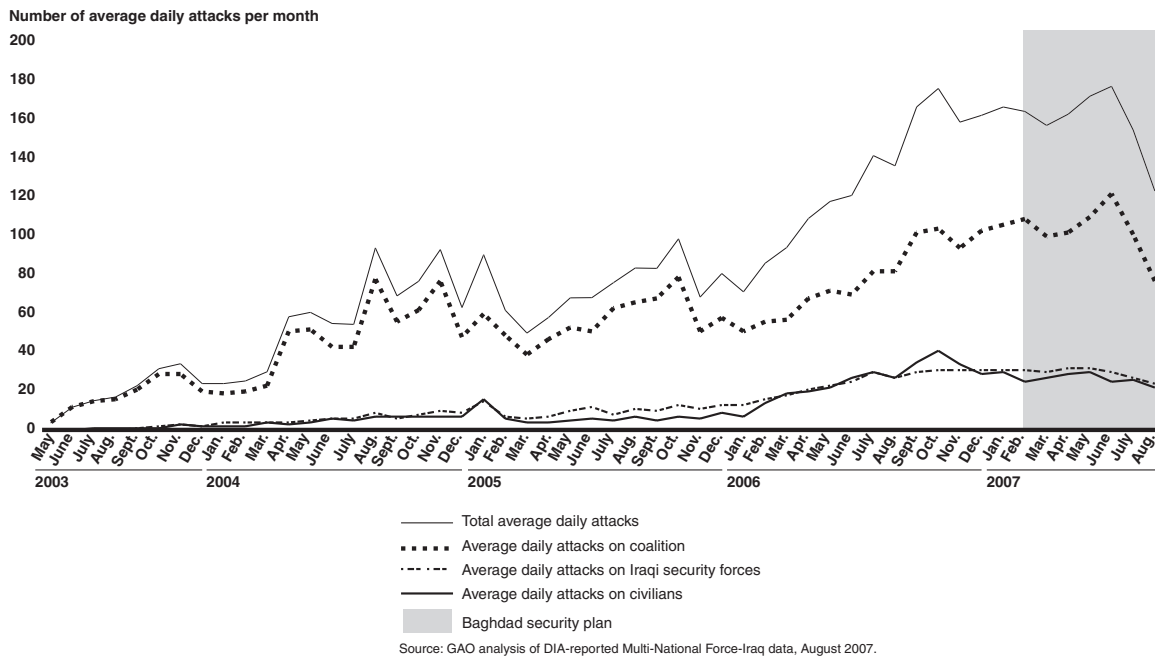
Source: GAO analysis of DIA-reported Multi-National Force-Iraq data, August 2007.

Note: Attacks against infrastructure account for less than 1 percent of enemy-initiated attacks.

Following the President's announcement of the new U.S. strategy, the average number of daily attacks⁴ decreased slightly from about 170 in January 2007 to about 160 in March 2007 but then increased to about 180 in June 2007 (see fig. 2). The average number of daily attacks in June 2007 was about the same level as the prior high of about 180 attacks per day, which occurred in October 2006 around the time of Ramadan. The average number of daily attacks decreased to 123 in August 2007—the lowest level since June 2006 when the average number of attacks was 121 per day. The decrease in the average total number of daily attacks in August 2007 was primarily due to a decrease in the number of attacks against coalition forces. Further, the average number of daily attacks against civilians decreased to 22 in August compared to an average of approximately 30 per day over the preceding 14 months. Although the average number of daily attacks has declined in recent months, data from previous years indicates the number of attacks typically increases during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan began on September 13, 2007.

⁴The average number of daily attacks is calculated by dividing the total number of enemy-initiated attacks against the coalition, Iraqi security forces, and civilians for a specific month by the number of days in the month.

Figure 2: Average Number of Daily Attacks against the Coalition, Iraqi Security Forces, and Civilians (May 2003 through August 2007)



Note: The Baghdad security plan was implemented in February 2007.

The enemy-initiated attacks counted in DIA's reporting include car, suicide, and other bombs; ambushes; murders, executions, and assassinations; sniper fire; indirect fire (mortars or rockets); direct fire (small arms or rocket-propelled grenades); surface-to-air fire (such as man-portable air defense systems or MANPADS); and other attacks on civilians. They do not include violent incidents that coalition or Iraqi security forces initiate, such as cordon and searches, raids, arrests, and caches cleared. DIA derives its attack trend data from an MNF-I data base. According to DIA, the incidents captured in military reporting do not account for all violence throughout Iraq. For example, they may underreport incidents of Shi'a militias fighting each other and attacks against Iraqi security forces in southern Iraq and other areas with few or no coalition forces. DIA officials stated, however, that they represent a reliable and consistent source of information that can be used to identify trends in enemy activity and the overall security situation.⁵

In DOD's quarterly reports to Congress, the department has provided highly aggregated attacks data to portray security trends.⁶ For example, in its June 2007

⁵In June 2007, DIA notified GAO that its April 2007 attack data were incorrect because it had excluded attacks from a new subordinate command established on April 1, 2007. According to DIA, Multi-National Division-Center did not properly forward its April attack data because of inadequate reporting procedures; it has since corrected the problem. This report contains the corrected April data.

⁶DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2007, Report to Congress in Accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 2007, Section 9010, Public Law 109-289* (Washington, D.C.: June 2007).

report, DOD provides information on average weekly attacks since April 2004 for inconsistent time periods that range from 6 to 32 weeks and coincide with political events and recent military operations in Iraq (see encl. 1). Further, the administration's July and September 2007 Iraq benchmarks reports discuss some types of attacks but do not provide specific information on overall changes in monthly attack levels over time. We believe that more detailed monthly attacks data would provide routine and up-to-date information that would allow Congress to regularly track changes in Iraq's security situation.

Recommendation for Executive Action

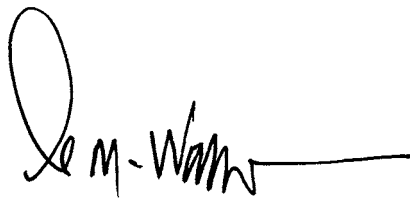
Given the importance of congressional oversight and the American public's interest in progress in stabilizing Iraq, we are recommending that DOD should, on a monthly basis, make data on the enemy-initiated attacks available to Congress, the American public, and GAO in a timely manner.

Agency Comments

The Department of Defense concurred with our recommendation stating that it will provide the attack data specified in the report to GAO and Congress (see encl. 2). On September 14, 2007, the department included monthly attacks data for the period June 2004 through August 2007 in its quarterly report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*.

We distributed copies of this letter to appropriate congressional committees. This letter will also be available at no charge on our Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff have any questions about this letter, please contact Joseph Christoff, director of GAO's International Affairs and Trade team, at (202) 512-8979 or by email at christoffj@gao.gov. Other key contributors to the report include Judith McCloskey, David Bruno, Lynn Cothorn, Mattias Fenton, Dorian Herring, Melissa Pickworth, and Jena Sinkfield.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. M. Walker", followed by a horizontal line.

David M. Walker
Comptroller General of the United States

cc: The Honorable Robert M. Gates

List of Recipients

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United States Senate

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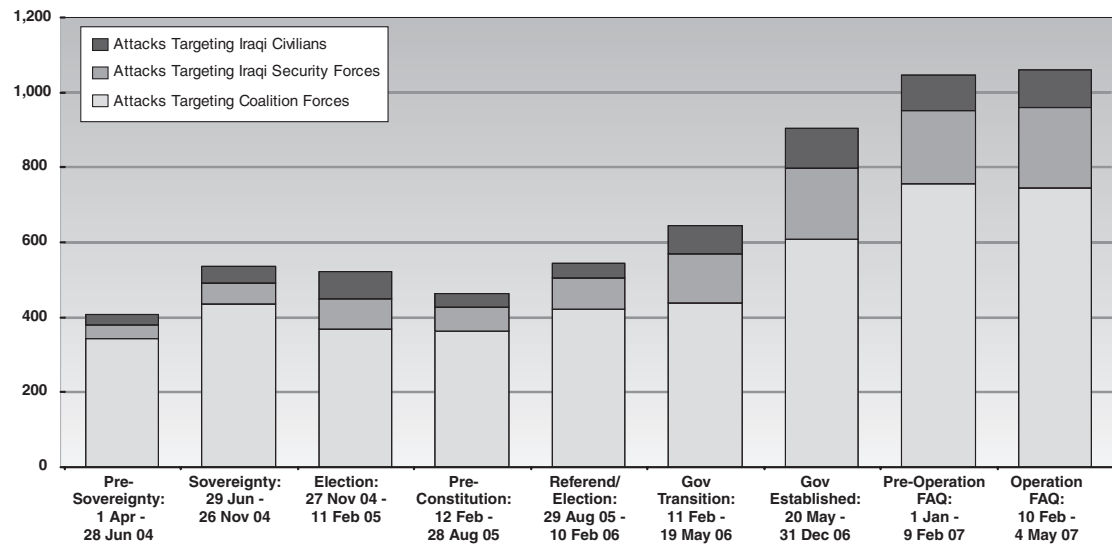
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Enclosure 1

Attacks Data Presented in DOD's June 2007 Quarterly Report to Congress



Source: DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, June 2007, Report to Congress in Accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 2007, Section 9010, Public Law 109-289 (Washington, D.C.: June 2007).

Comments from the Department of Defense



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AUG 17 2007

Mr. Joseph A. Christoff
Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Christoff:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, GAO-07-1048R, "DOD Should Provide Congress and the American Public with Monthly Data on Enemy-Initiated Attacks in Iraq," dated July 20, 2007 (GAO Code 320498). The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Recommendation 1: The GAO recommends that DoD should, on a monthly basis, make data on the enemy-initiated attacks available to Congress, the American public, and GAO.

DoD Response: Concur. The Department will continue to provide the attack data specified in the draft report to Congress and to the GAO on a monthly basis. The Department will continue to provide the monthly data available to the American public in the quarterly report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, available at www.defenselink.mil.

If you have any questions concerning these comments, my point of contact is Mr. Peter Velz at 703-571-2525.

Sincerely,

Mark T. Kimmitt
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
for the Middle East



(320498)