

THE CIVILIAN DEATH TOLL IN IRAQ

Submission to the Iraq Commission from Iraq Body Count (<http://www.iraqbodycount.org>)

Authors: John Sloboda ¹ and Hamit Dardagan (co-founders)

Executive Summary

1. This submission analyses data from published reports of violent civilian deaths during 2007 in Iraq.
 2. The vast majority of civilian deaths continue to occur in Baghdad and the surrounding central provinces, which are areas of US responsibility
 3. While civilian deaths through violence (particularly shootings, assassinations, and post-capture executions) have shown some decrease in Baghdad itself since the US “surge” begun in February 2007, this decrease has been offset by an increase in violent deaths in the surrounding provinces, particularly marked in the case of bombing attacks.
 4. This is a likely (and predictable) result of armed groups leaving Baghdad and continuing their activities elsewhere. Such an outcome mirrors the pattern shown in previous localised assertions of US military might, such as in Fallujah 2004.
 5. Recent monthly death totals are still very significantly higher than the death tolls for most of the first three years of the conflict.
 6. Civilian death data make it hard to escape the conclusion that US military strategies are leading to a re-distribution of the pattern of internal violence, rather than showing clear signs of ending it.
-

Background and methodology

7. The Iraq Body Count (IBC) project is an independent non-partisan citizen initiative whose members are based primarily in the UK (with a smaller number based in the USA).
8. Since March 2003, team members have scanned over 200 of the world’s major press and media sources on a daily basis for all reports of violent civilian deaths in Iraq. This includes many sources from Iraq and neighbouring countries.

¹ Correspondence to John Sloboda, Oxford Research Group, 56-64 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4LT john.sloboda@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk 0207 549 0298

9. Where at least two independent sources corroborate one another, then the minimum and maximum reported deaths given in those sources are entered into an on-line data base which contains basic identifiers to ensure each data entry is unique, and that there has been no double counting.

10. All data is date and place specific, at least to the level of month and governorate (and often to a precise time on a specific day, at a specific address). Many reports provide information about cause of death (particularly weaponry, and sometimes assailant).

11. A regularly updated database is maintained at <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/database> and is available at all times for public inspection and downloading.

12. The media-derived total is conservative (in the sense that it is certain to be an undercount, and generally rises as new information is uncovered), even though the total includes and incorporates all cumulative totals provided by official Iraqi sources, such as the Iraqi Ministry of Health. For this reason, we use maximum figures in this report (on average 10% higher than minimum figures), as they are likely to be closer to the reality.

13. IBC data are now routinely accepted as the world's most consistent ongoing source of high quality integrated data about civilian deaths in Iraq. They form the primary data source for research institutes that provide casualty analyses for the US Government (e.g. Brookings Institute), the UN (e.g. Center for Human Security) and the EU (EC Joint Research Centre).

The US troop surge

14. In June 2007, the US Department of Defence laid before Congress its quarterly report "Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq". In this report it reiterates that the main purpose of the military surge, properly known as Operation Fardh-al Qanoon (FAQ), is intended to provide population security, especially in Baghdad, and to contain the sectarian violence (section 1.3 page 17).

15. The DOD assessment is that "the overall level of violence in Iraq this quarter remained similar to the previous reporting period but shifted location. Insurgents and extremists are unable to operate as freely in Baghdad because of FAQ and in Anbar Province because of growing tribal opposition to AQI. Accordingly, many insurgents and extremists have moved operations to Diyala, Ninewa, and the outlying areas of Baghdad Province." (P. 19)

16. In describing the situation in Baghdad, the DOD reports; "Although it is still too early to assess whether a sustainable trend is emerging, attacks in Baghdad declined as Coalition and Iraqi force presence expanded while Sunni insurgent groups and Shi'a militants departed or refrained from operations. Despite the departure of large numbers of JAM fighters from Baghdad, JAM has continued to act as a de-facto government in Sadr City. Although sectarian-motivated Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence has declined in Baghdad, violence against Coalition and Iraqi security forces remained

consistent with previous levels. Despite heightened security measures and increased ISF proficiency at reducing civilian casualties from sectarian murders and executions, AQI maintained the ability to conduct infrequent, high-profile, mass-casualty attacks in Baghdad.” (p. 19).

17. The DOD report, however, presents few detailed figures to support its conclusions. The IBC database allows a far fuller assessment of the civilian death toll than anything available in official figures.

Civilian deaths in Baghdad and elsewhere in 2007

18. Table 1 shows IBC-derived death totals for each province in Iraq, from January through May 2007.

19. The vast majority of civilian deaths continue to occur in Baghdad and the central provinces, with few deaths in the Kurdish areas and those in the south under British influence.

20. Although the overall figures show a downward trend, 2007 has seen significant increases or spurts in the death toll in several provinces, notably Anbar, Babylon, Diyala, and Ninewa. This confirms the conclusions drawn by DOD (para 15 above).

21. The principal means by which paramilitary and sectarian groups kill civilians are by (a) bombs (including vehicle-bombs and mortars) and (b) shootings, assassinations, and post-capture executions.

22. Figure 1 shows country-wide trends in these deaths, alongside violent deaths from all causes. This shows that there has been a significant decrease (of about one third) in the number of deaths from shootings/assassinations/post-capture executions, although they are still running at over 30 per day. However, the average number of deaths from bombings has increased post-surge (from 20 per day in January to 27 per day in May).

23. Tables 2 and 3 (and associated figures 2 and 3) show deaths by bombs and shootings/assassinations/post-capture executions, comparing Baghdad to the rest of the country.

24. Although deaths from bombings in Baghdad have dropped over the period (from around 500 to 300 per month), they have risen elsewhere in Iraq (from around 200 to 400 per month), thus the overall level of civilian deaths from such bombings remains unchanged.

25. Deaths from shootings/assassinations/post-capture executions outside Baghdad rose in the initial months of the surge and have now returned to their pre-surge level of around 300 per month. The most noticeable reduction has been in Baghdad itself, where the number of such deaths dropped from around 1100 in January to around 600 in February, and remains at this lower level.

Commentary and conclusions

26. A great deal of the commentary that has tried to evaluate the surge has been in response to very short term trends in death tolls. The merit of IBC's systematic and integrative approach is that it reveals more significant, long-term trends.

27. On the basis of cumulative data derived from a large number of reliable and cross-referenced sources, it is possible to conclude that one major effect of the surge to date has been to noticeably suppress the level of killings by shooting, assassination and post-capture execution within Baghdad itself.

28. In contrast the surge has had little impact on the capacity of paramilitary groups to operate outside Baghdad, and similarly little impact on those who use explosive devices, whether in Baghdad or not.

29. Although the most recent monthly death totals are lower than at the beginning of 2007, they are still higher than most months in the first three years of the conflict. Violence against civilians has inexorably grown since 2003 and peaked in the summer and autumn of 2006, when it approached 3000 deaths per month. The apparent achievement of the surge to date is to return Iraq to the already high casualty levels of Spring 2006, when between 1500 and 1800 civilians were being reported killed every month.

30. Given the proven ability of paramilitary groups to weather or entirely evade localised US-led assaults, we draw the conclusion that US military strategies are leading to a re-distribution of the pattern of internal violence, rather than showing clear signs of ending it.

Table 1. Total reported violent civilian deaths in Iraq for 2007, by province and month from January 1st to May 14th*(Source: <http://www.iraqbodycount.org>).*

		Jan-07	Feb-07	Mar-07	Apr-07	1-14 May-07
Kurdish autonomous:	Dahuk	0	0	0	0	0
	Erbil	0	0	0	0	69
	Sulaymaniyah	0	1	5	0	0
Baghdad:	Baghdad	1609	1278	1072	930	485
"UK zone":	Basrah	7	14	10	34	5
	Missan	6	2	4	0	0
	Muthanna	0	5	0	0	0
	Thi-Qar	0	0	0	1	0
US zone and other:	Anbar	62	264	146	168	57
	Babylon	63	182	240	57	47
	Diyala	132	177	302	264	79
	Kerbala	4	0	5	135	1
	Najaf	1	17	1	1	46
	Ninewa	133	149	386	129	27
	Qadissiya	1	3	41	15	2
	Salah al-Din	22	122	94	30	26
	Tameem	42	45	71	62	18
	Wassit	36	84	33	19	2
Country total		2118	2343	2410	1845	860
Per day rate		68	84	78	62	61

Table 2. Reported violent civilian deaths from vehicle bombs for 2007, in Baghdad and elsewhere, by month from January 1st to May 14th.
(source: www.iraqbodycount.org)

	Jan-07	Feb-07	Mar-07	Apr-07	1-14 May-07	(all)
Baghdad	474	674	402	283	167	2000
Non-Baghdad	177	451	667	455	206	1956
All	651	1125	1069	738	373	3956

Table 3. Reported violent civilian deaths from shootings/assassinations/post-capture executions for 2007, in Baghdad and elsewhere, by month from January 1st to May 14th. (source: <http://www.iraqbodycount.org>)

	Jan-07	Feb-07	Mar-07	Apr-07	May-07	(all)
Baghdad	1122	601	635	497	305	3160
Non-Baghdad	322	512	637	438	162	2071
All	1444	1113	1272	935	467	5231

Figure 1. Reported violent civilian deaths per day for Iraq – all provinces (source: <http://www.iraqbodycount.org>)

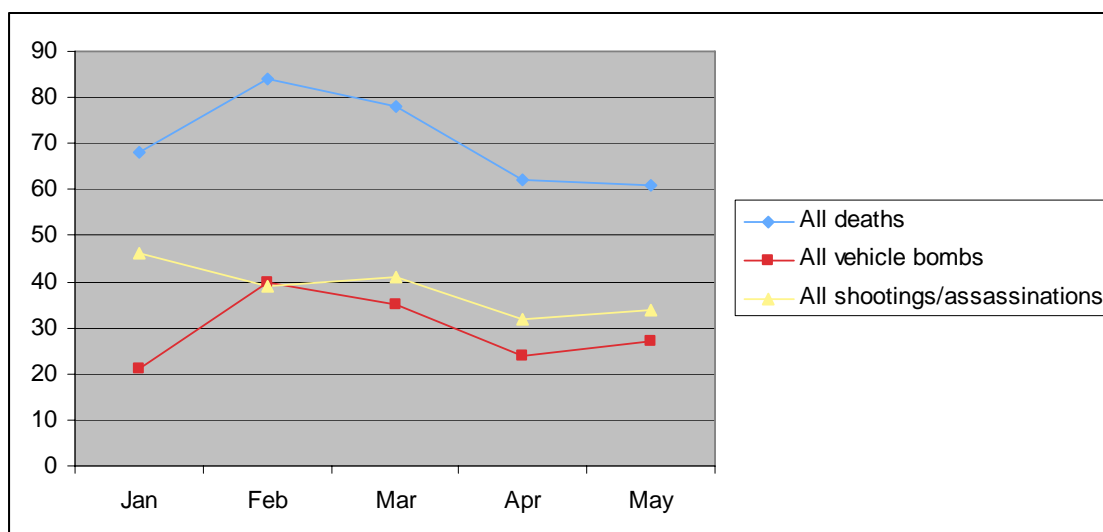
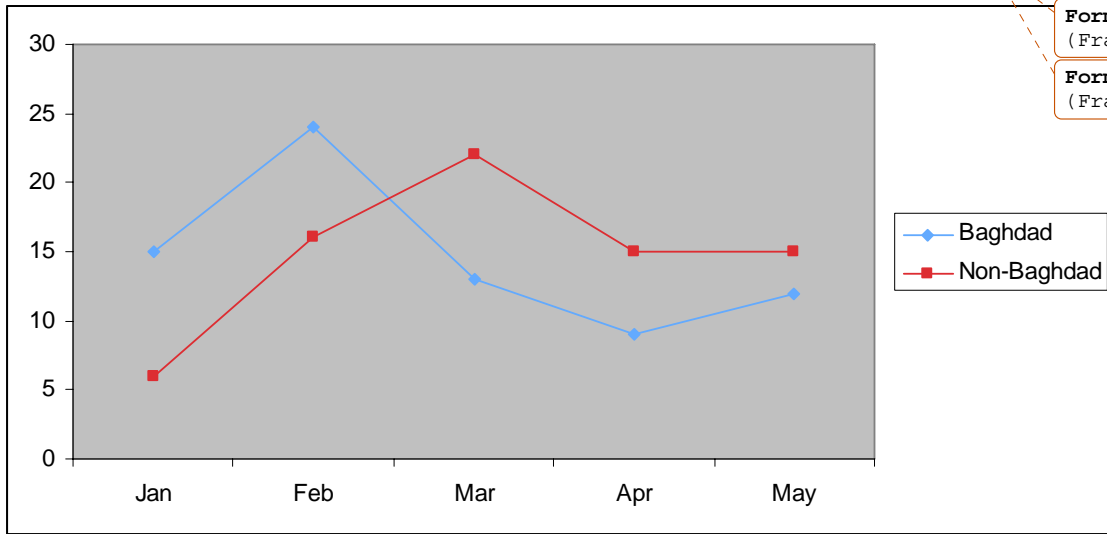


Figure 2: Reported civilian deaths per day from paramilitary bombings for 2007. Baghdad and non-Baghdad. (source: <http://www.iraqbodycount.org>)



Formatted: French (France)
Field Code Changed
Formatted: French (France)
Formatted: French (France)

Figure 3: Reported shootings/assassinations/post-capture executions per day for 2007. Baghdad and non-Baghdad. (source: www.iraqbodycount.org)

