



## CRS Report for Congress

### Iraqi Civilian Deaths Estimates

Hannah Fischer  
Information Research Specialist  
Knowledge Services Group

#### Summary

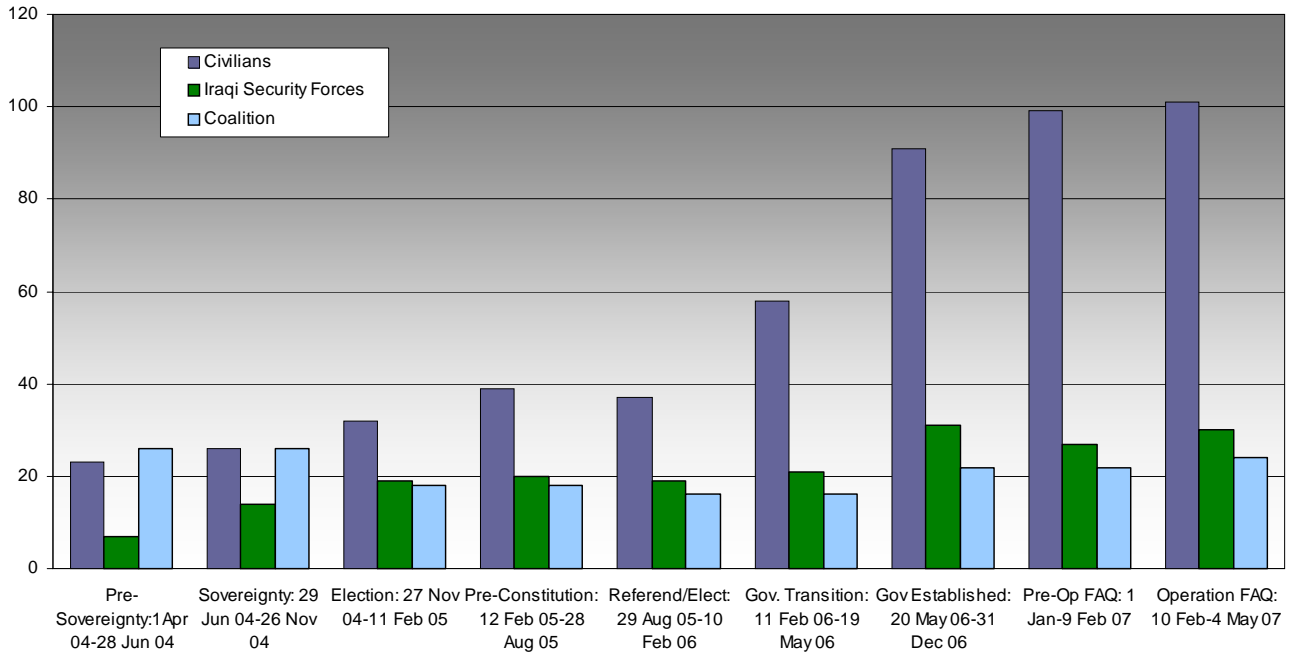
This report presents various governmental and nongovernmental estimates of Iraqi civilian fatalities. The Department of Defense (DOD) regularly updates total U.S. military death and wounded statistics from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), as reflected in CRS Report RS21578, *Iraq: Summary of U.S. Casualties*. However, no Iraqi or U.S. government office regularly releases statistics on Iraqi civilian deaths. Statistics on Iraqi civilian deaths are sometimes available through alternative sources, such as nonprofit organizations, or through statements made by officials to the press. Since the start of the U.S.-led “troop surge,” or Operation *Fardh al-Qanoon* (FAQ), on February 14, 2007, a number of sources have released estimates of monthly, rather than annual or total, Iraqi civilian deaths. This report has therefore been split into two sections: estimates of total or annual Iraqi deaths and estimates of post-Operation FAQ Iraqi civilian deaths. 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 fact. See also CRS Report RS22532, *Iraqi Police and Security Forces Casualty Estimates*. This report will be updated as needed.

#### Total or Annual Estimates of Iraqi Civilian Deaths

The Department of Defense (DOD) has not released a composite estimate of Iraqi civilian deaths during Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, it has released a bar chart of average daily Iraqi casualties, average daily Iraqi Security Forces casualties, and average daily coalition casualties. Unlike most numbers in this report, which are estimates of Iraqi civilian deaths, this is a chart of total Iraqi civilian casualties. It does not, in other words, distinguish between deaths and wounded.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: June 2007 Report to Congress in Accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007 (Section 9010)*, June 2007, at [<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/9010-Final-20070608.pdf>], p. 24.

**Figure 1. Average Daily Casualties, April 1, 2004-May 4, 2007**

**Source:** CRS rendition of DOD graph, as derived from the Multi-National Corps - Iraq, [<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/9010-Final-20070608.pdf>].

**Notes:** Casualty data 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 only for comparative purposes.

As *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* notes, “Not all civilian casualties are observed by or reported to Coalition forces; as a result, these data only provide a partial picture of the violence experienced by Iraqis.”<sup>2</sup>

For some time, the United Nations attempted to release more comprehensive statistics on Iraqi civilian deaths. From August 2005 to March 2007, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) released a series of quarterly reports on human rights in Iraq that included sections on Iraqi civilian casualties. On April 25, 2007, however, the Iraqi government announced its intention to cease providing civilian casualty figures to the United Nations.<sup>3</sup> Ivana Vuco, a UN human rights officer, stated, “[Iraqi] government officials had made clear during discussions that they believed releasing high casualty numbers would make it more difficult to quell unrest.”<sup>4</sup> Since the Iraq government’s decision not to release new casualty statistics, UNAMI has not released any new reports on the human rights situation in Iraq, but it has continued to release the Secretary General’s quarterly report on United Nations activities in Iraq. The most recent

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Tina Susman, “Iraq won’t give casualty figures to U.N.,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 26, 2007, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

of these reports states that, despite the recent U.S. military buildup in Baghdad, “civilian casualties continue to mount.”<sup>5</sup> No figures are given to support this statement.

In the most recent UNAMI *Human Rights Report*, released on March 31, 2007, UNAMI estimated that 3,462 Iraqi civilians were killed in November 2006 and 2,914 Iraqi civilians were killed in December 2006.<sup>6</sup> These figures represent a tally of two civilian death 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 reports the number of unidentified bodies it receives.<sup>7</sup> For 2006, the total number of civilians violently killed, as reported by UNAMI, was 34,452, with an average of 94 civilians killed every day. UNAMI also reports that 36,685 civilians were wounded in 2006, including 2,222 women and 777 children.<sup>8</sup> An earlier version of the UNAMI report stated, “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 Ministry further indicated that the number of deaths is probably underreported.”<sup>9</sup>

## Figure 2. Annual or Total Iraqi Civilian Death Estimates

(Prepared by CRS with data from noted sources. Note different time periods.)

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| Iraq Body Count (IBC)<br>March 19, 2003 - August 22, 2007  | 70,264<br>- 76,771   |
| Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (ICCC)<br>March 1, 2005 - August 22, 2007                              | 36,686               |
| Brookings Institution’s Iraq Index<br>Cumulative Estimate<br>May 2003 - July, 2007                   | 104,900              |
| United Nations Assistance Mission<br>for Iraq (UNAMI)<br>January 1, 2006 - December 31, 2006         | 34,452               |
| Iraq Health Minister Ali al Shemari<br>March 19, 2003 - November 10, 2006                            | 150,000              |
| <i>The Lancet</i> , “Mortality after the 2003<br>Invasion of Iraq”<br>March 19, 2003 - July 31, 2006 | 426,369<br>- 793,663 |

Iraqi government officials, usually from the Iraqi Ministry of Health, have, on occasion, released their own death toll estimates to the press. In November 2006, Iraq’s Health Minister Ali al Shemari told reporters in Vienna that there had been 150,000 civilian deaths during the war so far. He later explained to the *Associated Press* that he based the figure on an estimate of 100 bodies per day brought to morgues and hospitals. However, one observer noted that such a calculation would yield a result closer to 130,000 deaths.<sup>10</sup> More recently, an anonymous Iraqi Health Ministry official released data indicating that more than 17,000 Iraqi civilians and police officers died violently in

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004)*, June 5, 2007, at [<http://tinyurl.com/yorhhw>].

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 November - 31 December 2006*, at [<http://tinyurl.com/2hlg7h>]. All U.N. figures exclude casualty estimates from the Region of Kurdistan.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Wadhams, “Iraq civilian toll spikes to nearly 6,000,” *Associated Press*, July 19, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 November - 31 December 2006*, at [<http://tinyurl.com/2hlg7h>], pp.4-5.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 May - 30 June 2006*, at [<http://tinyurl.com/ml6c8>], p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Steven R. Hurst, “Iraqi Official: 150,000 Civilians Dead,” *Associated Press*, Nov. 10, 2006.

the latter half of 2006.<sup>11</sup> The same official added that the numbers he released remained incomplete, suggesting that the final tally of violent deaths could be higher. Over the full year of 2006, the Iraqi Health Ministry has a reported death toll of 22,950 civilians.<sup>12</sup>

The British medical journal, *The Lancet*, has published two articles by researchers looking into civilian casualties. The first, “Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: Cluster Sample Survey,” used a cluster sample survey of households in Iraq to develop an estimate ranging from 8,000 to 194,000 civilian casualties due to violent deaths since the start of the war.<sup>13</sup> This report has come under some criticism for its methodology, with an argument that some of the casualties could have resulted from the long-term negative health effects of the Saddam Hussein era. Former British Foreign Minister Jack Straw has written a formal Ministerial Response rejecting the findings of the *Lancet* report on the grounds that the data analyzed were inaccurate.<sup>14</sup>

The second article, “Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey,”<sup>15</sup> increased the number of clusters surveyed from 33 to 47 clusters and reported an estimate of between 426,369 and 793,663 Iraqi civilian deaths from violent causes since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This article, too, has sparked some controversy.<sup>16</sup> Stephen Moore, a consultant for Gorton Moore International, objected more strongly to the methods used by the researchers, commenting in the *Wall Street Journal* that the *Lancet* article lacked some of the hallmarks of good research: a small margin of error, a record of the demographics of respondents (so that one can be sure one has captured a fair representation of an entire population), and a large number of cluster points.<sup>17</sup> However, documents written by the UK Ministry of Defence’s chief scientific advisor have recently come to light, which called the survey’s methods “close to best practice” and “robust.”<sup>18</sup>

A number of nonprofit groups have also released unofficial estimates of Iraqi civilian casualties. The Iraq Body Count (IBC) is one source often cited by the media; it bases its online casualty estimates on media reports of casualties, some of which may involve security forces as well as civilians. As of August 22, 2007, the IBC estimated that

---

<sup>11</sup> Sudarsan Raghavan, “War’s Toll on Iraqis Put at 22,950 in ‘06; Statistics From Health Ministry Official Show Tripling of Civilian, Police Deaths,” *Post-Newsweek Media, Inc.*, Jan. 8, 2007, p. A1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Jack Straw, Written U.K. Ministerial Statement Responding to a Lancet Study on Iraqi Casualty Numbers, Nov. 16, 2004, at [<http://tinyurl.com/3hv8j>].

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy et al., “Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey,” *The Lancet*, Oct. 21, 2006, 368(9545):1421-1429.

<sup>16</sup> Sabrina Tavernise and Donald G. McNeil, Jr., “Iraqi Dead May Total 600,000, Study Says,” *New York Times*, Oct. 11, 2006, p. A16.

<sup>17</sup> Steven E. Moore, “655,000 War Dead?,” *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 18, 2006, p. A.20.

<sup>18</sup> *Newsday*, “High Death Toll Backed,” Mar. 27, 2007, p. A25.

between 70,264 and 76,771 civilians had died as a result of military action<sup>19</sup>. Because the IBC documents each of the casualties it records with a media source and provides a minimum and a maximum estimate, its numbers are often regarded as fairly authoritative.

The Brookings Institution has used modified numbers from the UN *Human Rights Report* and the Iraq Body Count to develop its own estimate for Iraqi civilians who have died by violence. It estimates that 90% of the deaths reported in the UN *Human Rights Report* happened as a result of violence, and it uses this number as an estimate of January 2006 to October 2006 Iraqi civilian deaths due to violence. To expand the dates to include May 2003 to December 2005, Brookings includes 1.75 times the Iraq Body Count total (Brookings does 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.”<sup>20</sup> Figures for November and December 2006 come from estimates reported by the United Nations *Human Rights Report*, while 2007 numbers are estimates from the authors of the Brookings report. By using this method, the Brookings Institution estimates that between May 2003 and August 20, 2007, 104,900 Iraqi civilians have died due to violence.

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 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 36,686 civilian deaths from March 2005 through August 22, 2007 and 7,375 police and security force deaths from June 2003 through August 22, 2007.<sup>21</sup>

## Post-FAQ Monthly Estimates of Iraqi Civilian Deaths

In a January 10, 2007, address to the nation, President George W. Bush announced the “New Way Forward,” a change in strategy in which the U.S. would commit “more than 20,000 additional American troops” to OIF, the vast majority of whom were to be deployed to Baghdad.<sup>22</sup> In support of the New Way Forward, Operation *Fardh al-Qanoon* (FAQ) was launched on February 14, 2007, with an increased emphasis on population

---

<sup>19</sup> Iraq Body Count at [<http://www.iraqbodycount.net>]. IBC is a nongovernmental organization managed by researchers and volunteers.

<sup>20</sup> Brookings Institution, *Iraq Index: Tracking Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, Apr. 5, 2007, at [<http://www3.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf>], p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Iraq Coalition Casualty Count at [<http://icasualties.org/oif/IraqiDeaths.aspx>]. ICCC is a nongovernmental organization managed by researchers and volunteers.

<sup>22</sup> President George W. Bush, *President’s Address to the Nation*, January 20, 2007, at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html>].

security in Baghdad as its primary focus.<sup>23</sup> 28,500 troops were eventually deployed as part of FAQ.<sup>24</sup>

Since the “troop surge” of Operation FAQ, a number of sources — including the U.S. military — have attempted to monitor Iraqi civilian deaths on a monthly basis as a method by which to gauge the success of the operation.<sup>25</sup> While the U.S. military has not made its figures public, several ministries in the Iraqi government have released somewhat regular figures since February 2007. Other sources, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Associated Press* have also attempted to track Iraqi civilian deaths on a monthly basis since the troop surge. We have compiled a number of these estimates into the chart below. This chart is to be used for comparative purposes only; as noted above, no one source can at this point be said to provide definitive statistics on Iraqi civilian casualties.

**Figure 3. Post-Operation FAQ Monthly Iraqi Civilian Casualty Estimates**

|  | Dec., 2006 |       | Jan., 2007 |      | Feb., 2007 |       | March 2007 |       | April 2007 |       | May 2007 |       | June 2007 |       | July 2007  |       | Aug. 2007  |       |  |
|--|------------|-------|------------|------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|-------|----------|-------|-----------|-------|--|-------|--|-------|--|
|  | 1-14       | 15-31 | 1-14       | 1-31 | 1-14       | 15-28 | 1-14       | 15-31 | 1-14       | 15-30 | 1-14     | 15-31 | 1-14      | 15-30 | 1-14   | 15-31 | 1-14   | 14-31 |  |
| Iraqi Health Ministry                                      |            |       | 3,190      |      | 1,165      |       | 1,872      |       | 1,664      |       | 2,231    |       | 2,097     |       | 1,539  |       |  |       |  |
| Iraqi Ministries of Interior or Defense, or other Ministry |            |       |            |      | 1,646      |       |            |       |            |       | 1,949    |       | 1,227     |       | 1,980 ( <i>New York Times</i> )<br>1,653 ( <i>Reuters</i> )<br>* |       | 2,318 ( <i>New York Times</i> )<br>1,773 ( <i>Los Angeles Times</i> )* |       |  |
| <i>Los Angeles Times</i> estimate                          |            |       | 1,991      |      | 1,646      |       | 1,872      |       |            |       |          |       |           |       |  |       |  |       |  |
| <i>Associated Press</i> estimate                           |            |       | 3,880      |      |            | 3,090 |            |       |            |       |          | 2,155 |           | 1,646 |  | 1,760 |  | 1,809 |  |

**Source:** Prepared by CRS with data from noted sources.

\* Different estimates citing the same or similar sources. *Reuters* cites “government statistics”; the *Los Angeles Times* cites the Iraqi ministries of Defense, Interior, and Health; and the *New York Times* cites the Iraqi Interior Ministry. Note that the *Los Angeles Times* estimates for January, February, and March are editorial estimates made by the paper, while the August estimate is cited to the Iraqi Interior Ministry.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: June 2007 Report to Congress in Accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007 (Section 9010)*, June 2007, at [http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/9010-Final-20070608.pdf], p. iii.

<sup>24</sup> CRS Report RL31701, *Iraq: U.S. Military Operations*, by Steve Bowman.

<sup>25</sup> Molly Hennessy-Fiske, “Iraqi civilian death toll drops to year’s lowest, official says,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 2007, p. A9.