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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 deaths and wounded statistics from Operation Iraqi Freedom, 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 nongovernmental 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

President George W. Bush estimated in a December 2005 speech that “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].”¹

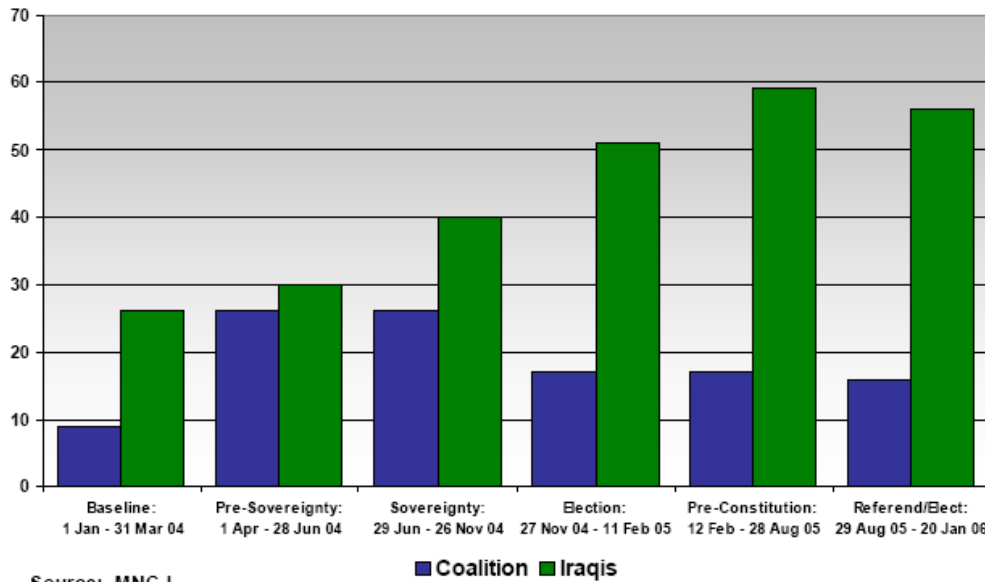
President Bush’s statement has not, however, ended the effort to determine the number of Iraqi civilian deaths during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). After the speech, aides said that Bush’s statement was not a government estimate but a reflection of figures in news media reports. A number of other sources, from the Department of Defense (DOD) to nonprofit organizations have all contributed their own estimates to the discussion, using a number of different methodologies. This proliferation of Iraqi civilian

¹ 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>].

casualty estimates has meant that the estimates given in this report might best be treated as a range, rather than as a means to pinpoint an exact number.

The 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 along with the average daily coalition casualties. The chart does not distinguish between deaths and wounded, nor does it distinguish between civilians and security forces (or ISF).²

Average Daily Casualties — Iraqi (incl. ISF) and Coalition January 1, 2004 — January 20, 2006



Note: 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.

The data underlying this chart is classified because “it could allow insurgents to assess the effectiveness of their attacks.”³ Therefore, it is not possible to say precisely what is the average rate of Iraqi casualties.

Other recent Iraqi casualty information has been connected to the violence that erupted after the bombing of the Shiite shrine, the Askariya, in February 2006. The *Washington Post* has reported that officials overseeing Baghdad’s morgue have come under pressure not to reveal the growing number of casualties which, if true, makes it

² U.S. Department of Defense, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: February 2006 Report to Congress in Accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2006 (Section 9010), Feb. 17, 2006, at [http://www.dod.gov/home/features/Iraq_Reports/docs/2006-02-Report.pdf].

³ Sabrina Tavernise, Dexter Filkins, and Eric Scmitt, “U.S. Quietly Issues Estimate of Iraqi Civilian Casualties,” *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 2005, p. 10.

difficult to verify the veracity of any individual estimate.⁴ Total casualty estimates have ranged from a high of 1,300, as given by workers at a Baghdad morgue, to a low of 379, according to Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari to the *Washington Post*.⁵

Iraq government officials have also made estimates concerning Iraqi civilian fatalities as a whole. In June 2005, the Interior Ministry of Iraq released numbers indicating that, in the 10 months ending May 31, 2005, an estimated 8,175 Iraqis had been killed by insurgents. This tally did not include either Iraqi soldiers or civilians killed during American military operations.⁶

A few weeks prior to the ministry's release, in early June 2005, the Interior Minister of Iraq, Bayan Jabr, a Shiite Islamist, stated that 12,000 Iraqi civilians had been killed by insurgents in the past 18 months. Jabr estimated that more than 10,500 of the victims were Shiite Muslims, based on the locations of the deaths.⁷ If the ministry's numbers are consistent, then they would indicate an increase in the rate of Iraqi civilian deaths. In the 10 months between August 2004 and early June 2005, the rate of death for Iraqi civilians would have been around 800 per month, whereas between December 2003 and early August 2004, the rate of death would have been around 500 per month.⁸ However, the Iraqi Interior Ministry has not offered a description of the methodologies used to develop its estimates. Further, both the ministry's release and the minister's numbers are estimates of civilians killed by insurgents, not by military actions.

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 April 26, 2006, the IBC estimated that between 34,512 and 38,661 civilians had died as a result of military action.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.

⁴ Ellen Knickmeyer, "Pressure seen on probes at Baghdad morgue; Former U.N. Envoy says 'both sides' exerting influence; Death count in dispute," *Washington Post*, Mar. 1, 2006, p. A13.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sabrina Tavernise, "Data Shows Rising Toll of Iraqis From Insurgency," *New York Times*, July 14, 2005, p. A1.

⁷ Ellen Knickmeyer, "Iraq puts civilian toll at 12,000; Insurgents claiming about 20 people a day," *Washington Post*, June 3, 2005, p.A1.

⁸ Sabrina Tavernise, "Data shows rising toll of Iraqis from insurgency," *New York Times*, July 14, 2005, p. A1.

⁹ Iraq Body Count at [<http://www.iraqbodycount.net/>]. IBC is a nongovernmental organization managed by researchers and volunteers.

¹⁰ Jack Straw, House of Commons Hansard Written Ministerial Statements for Nov. 17, 2004, at [<http://tinyurl.com/d5cmw>].

The Brookings Institution in its statistical compilation, the *Iraq Index*, bases its estimation of civilian deaths on IBC numbers but filters them in an attempt to capture only the deaths of civilians in acts of war and to exclude, for instance, the deaths of Iraqi police, police recruits, or Iraq Civil Defense Forces. The Brookings Institution's estimate of a civilian-only death rate ranges from 14,030 to 24,557.¹¹ The *Index* acknowledges that "these estimates are most probably lower than the actual number since many separate incidents go unreported or unnoticed. The upper bound is therefore 1.75 times the lower bound, a rough estimate which reflects the fact that the 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 December 2003 — May 2005 period."

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 of the *Lancet* report compared the wartime mortality rate to the mortality rate in Iraq before the war. They then applied the rise in casualties in the 33 areas they studied to Iraq as a whole to develop an estimate of 100,000 civilian casualties due to violent deaths since the start of the war.¹² 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.¹³ 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 are useful for different kinds of inquiries. The ICCC separates police and soldier deaths from civilian deaths and thus is particularly useful in tracking the two populations separately. The ICCC estimates that there were 8,643 civilian deaths between March 2005 through April 2006 and 3,269 police and security force deaths from January 2005 through April 2006.¹⁴

¹¹ Brookings Institution, *Iraq Index: Tracking Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, at [<http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex>].

¹² 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.

¹³ Jack Straw, Written U.K. Ministerial Statement Responding to a Lancet Study on Iraqi Casualty Numbers, Nov. 16, 2004, at [<http://tinyurl.com/3hv8j>].

¹⁴ Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, at [<http://icasualties.org/oif/IraqiDeaths.aspx>]. ICCC is a nongovernmental organization managed by researchers and volunteers.

Iraqi Police and Security Forces Casualty Statistics

As with civilian casualty statistics, casualty statistics on Iraqi security forces are rough estimates at best. The following selected statistics represent the cited estimates from senior U.S. and Iraqi officials on Iraqi security forces casualty numbers. In addition to these numbers, in a recent 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.”¹⁵ Therefore, this estimate would imply that, from May 1, 2003 to April 26, 2006, 4,372 Iraqi Security Forces have died and another 33,850 have been wounded.

Iraqi Security Forces Personnel and Police Officers Killed

Iraq Coalition Casualty Count estimate of Security Forces and Police killed, June 2003 -April 26, 2006	4,569 ^a
Brookings' Institution, <i>Iraq Index</i> , estimate of Security Forces and Police killed, June 2003 - March 1, 2006	4,512 ^b
General Peterson's spokesperson, estimate of Iraqi Police Officers killed in 2005 (General Patterson is the top America police trainer in Iraq)	1,497 ^c
General Peterson's spokesperson, estimate of Iraqi Police Officers wounded in 2005	3,256 ^d
<i>The Australian</i> estimate of Security Forces and Police Officers killed, March 19, 2003 - June 30, 2005	2,471 ^e
Richard Engle, reporter for NBC, estimate of Security Forces and Police Offices killed, May 9, 2004 - May 9, 2005	1,900 ^f
Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Richard Myers' estimate of Security Forces deaths only, June 2003 - March 2, 2005	1,600 ^g
Then Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz estimate of Security Forces and Police deaths, March 2003- February 3, 2005	1,342 ^h

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

b. Brookings Institution, *Iraq Index: Tracking Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, at [<http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex>].

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

d. Ibid.

e. “We will stay until our job is done,” *The Australian*, June 30, 2005, Worldtable Section, p. 7.

f. Richard Engle, “Insurgents targeting Iraqi police with car bombs to maximize carnage,” *NBC News Transcripts*, May 6, 2005.

g. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *FY06 Department of Defense Appropriations*, 109th Cong., 1st sess., March 2, 2005 (Washington, FDCH Political Transcripts, 2005).

h. U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Military Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Hearing, 109th Cong., 1st sess., Feb. 3, 2005 (Washington, FDCH Political Transcripts, 2005).

¹⁵ 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.

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