

July 18, 2006

Over 3,000 Iraqi Civilians Killed in June, U.N. Reports

By [KIRK SEMPLE](#)

BAGHDAD, [Iraq](#), July 18 — An average of more than 100 civilians per day were killed in Iraq last month, the highest monthly tally of violent deaths since the fall of Baghdad, the [United Nations](#) reported today.

The death toll, drawn from Iraqi government agencies, was the most precise measurement of civilian deaths provided by any government organization since the invasion and represented a dramatic increase over daily media reports.

United Nations officials also said that the number of violent deaths had been steadily increasing since at least last summer. In the first six months of this year, the civilian death toll jumped more than 77 percent, from 1,778 in January to 3,149 in June, the organization said.

This sharp upward trend reflected the dire security situation in Iraq as sectarian violence has worsened and Iraqi and American government forces have been powerless to stop it.

Underscoring the report, a suicide bomber attacked a marketplace in the southern Shiite holy town of Kufa today, killing 53 people and wounding at least 105, according to local hospital officials.

Kufa is a stronghold of [Muktada al-Sadr](#), the powerful Shiite cleric who counts an enormous following among the Shiite

poor and dispossessed in Baghdad and southern Iraq. The militia loyal to him, the Mahdi Army, has been blamed for many recent kidnappings and assassinations of Sunni Arabs.

Kufa and the nearby Shiite holy city of Najaf — because of their vastly Shiite populations and tight control by Shiite militias and the Shiite-dominated security forces — have been largely spared the sort of sectarian violence that has ravaged mixed cities like Baghdad and Baquba.

But today's attack, coupled with several other recent suicide attacks in both cities, suggested an ominous deterioration in security even in Iraq's demographically homogenous populations.

The attack occurred near the gold-domed Kufa mosque at an intersection where men, down on their luck and out of work, would gather every morning hoping that someone would hire them for a day of manual labor and the promise of a small wage.

This morning, a man drove up in a van, leaned out of the window and lured the laborers with an offer of work. As the men pressed in close, and as some started to climb in the back, the driver pushed a detonator and the van exploded, witnesses said.

The blast scattered bodies and street vendors' carts, blackened nearby walls, dyed the ground red with blood and ignited pandemonium in the street. When Iraqi police officers arrived, the crowd pelted them with stones. According to The Associated Press, many demanded that the Mahdi Army take over security of the city.

Dr. Munther al-Ithari, the chief of the city's medical directorate, said some survivors were in critical condition and he expected the death toll to climb.

It was one of the bloodiest attacks in Iraq this year and the latest incident in a 10-day surge of dramatic sectarian violence that has killed hundreds and wounded far more.

The attack underscored the futility, at least in the short term, of the government's latest efforts to short-circuit the vicious cycle of sectarian violence that has defined life in Iraq.

Iraq's elected officials condemned the attack, which came a day after dozens of gunmen suspected of being Sunni Arabs rampaged through a mostly Shiite market area in the town of Mahmudiya, killing at least 48 civilians and wounding scores, according to police officials.

Prime Minister [Nuri Kamal al-Maliki](#) vowed today to find and punish those responsible for the Kufa attack.

The Iraqi Islamic Party, a Sunni Arab organization, urged the country "to be wise and rational instead of drifting into the abyss," and it called upon the country's political and religious leaders to meet and discuss ways "to lead Iraq out of this dark tunnel."

"God knows what comes next," the statement said.

Asad Abu Gulal, the governor of Najaf Province, blamed the attack on insurgents from the volatile region south of Baghdad that includes Mahmudiya and Latifiya, where Sunni Arab fighters have frequently clashed with security forces and with Shiite militias.

"These two towns are exporting terror to Najaf and other provinces," he said. "If we do not provide a solution, all the areas close to them will be a target for the terrorists who come from there."

In its report, the United Nations said that 14,338 civilians had died violently in Iraq in the first six months of the year.

U.N. officials said they had based their figures on tallies provided by two Iraqi agencies: the Ministry of Health, which collates violent deaths recorded at hospitals around the country; and Baghdad's central morgue, where unidentified bodies are delivered.

Last month, The Los Angeles Times, drawing from statistics provided by the Ministry of Health and the Baghdad morgue among other agencies, reported that at least 50,000 people, and perhaps many more, had been killed since the invasion.

The article said that while most of those victims were civilians, they probably also included some security forces and insurgents. But the newspaper did not offer month-by-month breakdowns.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq published the new tallies in its bi-monthly human rights report, issued today. It was the first time that the United Nations had published combined death statistics from the Ministry of Health and the Baghdad morgue.

The Ministry of Health under Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari had rebuffed requests by the United Nations for civilian casualty statistics, officials said.

"There has been a great deal of sensitivity there and a great deal of concern about providing figures," Gianni Magazzeni, chief of the human rights office of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, said in an interview.

Mr. Magazzeni praised Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki for his efforts to address human rights concerns "more forcefully" than his predecessors.

"There is a greater willingness of the new government to be more forthcoming," he said. "The more information we have, the more information we can provide — including the

number of people who have been violently killed — and the more the government and others will be able to take action and address some of these issues.”

According to the United Nations' tallies, 1,778 civilians were killed in January, 2,165 in February, 2,378 in March, 2,284 in April, 2,669 in May and 3,149 in June.

The totals represent an enormous increase over figures published by media organizations and by nongovernmental organizations that track these trends.

The Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, an independent Web site that uses news reports to do its tallies, reported that at least 840 Iraqi civilians died in June, compared with an all-time high of 1,100 the previous month.

The United Nations report said that in recent months, “the overwhelming majority of casualties were reported in Baghdad.”

The capital has been the focus of raging sectarian violence, particularly since the bombing in late February of a major Shiite shrine in Samarra, which triggered several days of bloodshed, widened a rift between the Sunni Arab and Shiite communities and stoked fears that the country was sliding toward full-scale civil war.

Other parts of Iraq were also scarred today by violence, including the explosion of a homemade bomb near a garage outside Kirkuk that killed eight people, including six police officers, according to Brig. Hamid Abdul al-Jibouri of the Iraqi Army.

Iraqi employees of The New York Times in Kufa, Falluja, Kirkuk and Mosul contributed reporting for this article.

[Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
