

August 17, 2006

Bombs Aimed at G.I.'s in Iraq Are Increasing

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 16 — The number of roadside bombs planted in [Iraq](#) rose in July to the highest monthly total of the war, offering more evidence that the anti-American insurgency has continued to strengthen despite the killing of the terrorist leader [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](#).

Along with a sharp increase in sectarian attacks, the number of daily strikes against American and Iraqi security forces has doubled since January. The deadliest means of attack, roadside bombs, made up much of that increase. In July, of 2,625 explosive devices, 1,666 exploded and 959 were discovered before they went off. In January, 1,454 bombs exploded or were found.

The bomb statistics — compiled by American military authorities in Baghdad and made available at the request of The New York Times — are part of a growing body of data and intelligence analysis about the violence in Iraq that has produced somber public assessments from military commanders, administration officials and lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

“The insurgency has gotten worse by almost all measures, with insurgent attacks at historically high levels,” said a senior Defense Department official who agreed to discuss the issue only on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak for attribution. “The insurgency has more public support and is demonstrably more capable in numbers of people active and in its ability to direct violence than at any point in time.”

A separate, classified report by the [Defense Intelligence Agency](#), dated Aug. 3, details worsening security conditions inside the country and describes how Iraq risks sliding toward civil war, according to several officials who have read the document or who have received a briefing on its contents.

The nine-page D.I.A. study, titled “Iraq Update,” compiles the most recent empirical data on the number of attacks, bombings, murders and other violent acts, as well as diagrams of the groups carrying out insurgent and sectarian attacks, the officials said.

The report’s contents are being widely discussed among Pentagon officials, military commanders and, in particular, on Capitol Hill, where concern among senior lawmakers of both parties is growing over a troubling

dichotomy: even as Iraq takes important steps toward democracy — including the election of a permanent government this spring — the violence has gotten worse.

Senior Bush administration officials reject the idea that Iraq is on the verge of civil war, and state with unwavering confidence that the broad American strategy in Iraq remains on course. But American commanders in Iraq have shifted thousands of soldiers from outlying provinces to Baghdad to combat increased violence in the Iraqi capital.

The increased attacks have taken their toll. While the number of Americans killed in action per month has declined slightly — to 38 killed in action in July, from 42 in January, in part reflecting improvements in armor and other defenses — the number of Americans wounded has soared, to 518 in July from 287 in January. Explosive devices accounted for slightly more than half the deaths.

An analysis of the 1,666 bombs that exploded in July shows that 70 percent were directed against the American-led military force, according to a spokesman for the military command in Baghdad. Twenty percent struck Iraqi security forces, up from 9 percent in 2005. And 10 percent of the blasts struck civilians, twice the rate from last year.

Taken together, the new assessments by the military and the intelligence community provide evidence that violence in Iraq is at its highest level yet. And they describe twin dangers facing the country: insurgent violence against Americans and Iraqi security forces, which has continued to increase since the killing on June 7 of Mr. Zarqawi, the leader of the insurgent group [Al Qaeda](#) in Mesopotamia, and the primarily sectarian violence seen in Iraqi-on-Iraqi attacks being aimed at civilians.

Iraq is now locked in a cycle in which strikes by Sunni Arab militants have prompted the rise of Shiite militias, which have in turn aggravated Sunni fears. Beyond that, many Sunnis say they believe that the new Shiite-dominated government has not made sufficient efforts to create a genuine unity government. As a result, Sunni attitudes appear to have hardened.

As the politics in Iraq have grown more polarized since the elections in December, in which many Sunni Arabs voted, attacks have soared, including sectarian clashes that have killed an average of more than 100 Iraqi civilians per day over the past two months.

In addition to bombs, attacks with mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and small-caliber weapons against American and Iraqi military forces have also increased, according to American military officials. But the number of roadside bombs — or improvised explosive devices as they are known by the military — is an especially important indicator of enemy activity. Bomb attacks are the largest killer of American troops. They also require a network: a bomb maker; financiers to pay for the effort; and operatives to dig holes in the road, plant the explosives, watch for approaching American and Iraqi forces and set off the blast when troops approach.

With the violence growing in Iraq, American intelligence agencies are working to produce a National Intelligence Estimate about the security conditions there — the first such formal governmentwide assessment about the situation in Iraq since the summer of 2004.

In late July, D.I.A. officials briefed several Senate committees about the insurgent and sectarian violence. The presentation was based on a draft version of what became the Aug. 3 study, and one recipient described it as “extremely negative.” That presentation was followed by public testimony on Aug. 3 by Gen. [John P. Abizaid](#), the top American military commander in the Middle East, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the sectarian violence was “probably as bad as I’ve seen it, in Baghdad in particular” and said if it was not stopped, “it is possible that Iraq could move towards civil war.” General Abizaid later emphasized that he was “optimistic” that the slide toward civil war could be prevented.

Officials who have read or been briefed on the new D.I.A. analysis said its assessments paralleled both aspects of General Abizaid’s testimony.

The newest accounts of the risks of civil war may already be altering the political dynamic in Washington. After General Abizaid’s testimony, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Senator [John W. Warner](#) of Virginia, said that if Iraq fell into civil war, the committee might need to examine whether the authorization provided by Congress for the use of American force in Iraq would still be valid. The comments by Senator Warner, a senior Republican who is a staunch supporter of the president, have reverberated loudly across Congress.

Bush administration officials now admit that Iraqi government’s original plan to rein in the violence in Baghdad, announced in June, has failed. The Pentagon has decided to rush more American troops into the capital, and the new military operation to restore security there is expected to begin in earnest next month.

Yet some outside experts who have recently visited the White House said Bush administration officials were beginning to plan for the possibility that Iraq’s democratically elected government might not survive.

“Senior administration officials have acknowledged to me that they are considering alternatives other than democracy,” said one military affairs expert who received an Iraq briefing at the White House last month and agreed to speak only on condition of anonymity.

“Everybody in the administration is being quite circumspect,” the expert said, “but you can sense their own concern that this is drifting away from democracy.”

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