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Insurgent attacks in Iraq at highest level in 2 years The Boston Globe

Militants exploiting political uncertainty, Pentagon says

By Bryan Bender, Globe Staff | May 31, 2006

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon reported yesterday that the frequency of insurgent attacks against troops and civilians is at its highest level since American commanders began tracking such figures two years ago, an ominous sign that, despite three years of combat, the US-led coalition forces haven't significantly weakened the Iraq insurgency.


In its quarterly update to Congress, the Pentagon reported that from Feb. 11 to May 12, as the new Iraqi unity government was being established, insurgents staged an average of more than 600 attacks per week nationwide. From August 2005 to early February, when Iraqis elected a parliament, insurgent attacks averaged about 550 per week; at its lowest point, before the United States handed over sovereignty in the spring of 2004, the attacks averaged about 400 per week.

The vast majority of the attacks -- from crude bombing attempts and shootings to more sophisticated, military-style assaults and suicide attacks -- were targeted at US-led coalition military forces, but the majority of deaths have been of civilians, who are far more vulnerable to insurgent tactics.

"Overall, average weekly attacks during this 'Government Transition' period were higher than any of the previous periods," the report states. "Reasons for the high level of attacks may include terrorist and insurgent attempts to exploit a perceived inability of the Iraqi government to constitute itself effectively, the rise of ethno sectarian attacks . . . and enemy efforts to derail the political process leading to a new government."

As if to underscore the grim report, a spate of violence swept Iraq yesterday. Bombs and other attacks killed 54 people, including an American soldier, according to wire reports. The deadliest bombing, in a popular market in a town about 20 miles north of Baghdad, killed at least 25 people and wounded 65.

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On Monday, 40 other people were killed in various attacks, including two CBS journalists who died in a bombing that critically wounded a network correspondent. To date, 2,468 US soldiers have died since the March 2003 invasion, while more than 4,000 Iraqi civilians have died in war-related violence since the beginning of the year, according to government figures and media reports.

The Pentagon report, made public yesterday, contained some positive news, including an opinion poll that indicates most Iraqis don't like the insurgents' use of violence as a political tool. In addition, according to the report, a growing number of Iraqi security forces can operate without US military support, more ethnic groups are represented in the security forces, oil production has remained steady, and more than 10,000 new business registrations have been issued.

But the overall picture of progress in Iraq is grim, dominated by the seemingly ceaseless violence.

Despite military crackdowns on insurgents and the installation of the new Iraq government, the Pentagon wasn't optimistic about quelling the violence in the near future. Officials who briefed reporters on the Iraq assessment cautioned that violence against troops and Iraqi civilians probably won't slow until at least 2007 -- if the unity government exerts more of its own authority and, according to the report, "addresses key sectarian and political concerns" that fuel the bloodshed. [Continued...](#)

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