



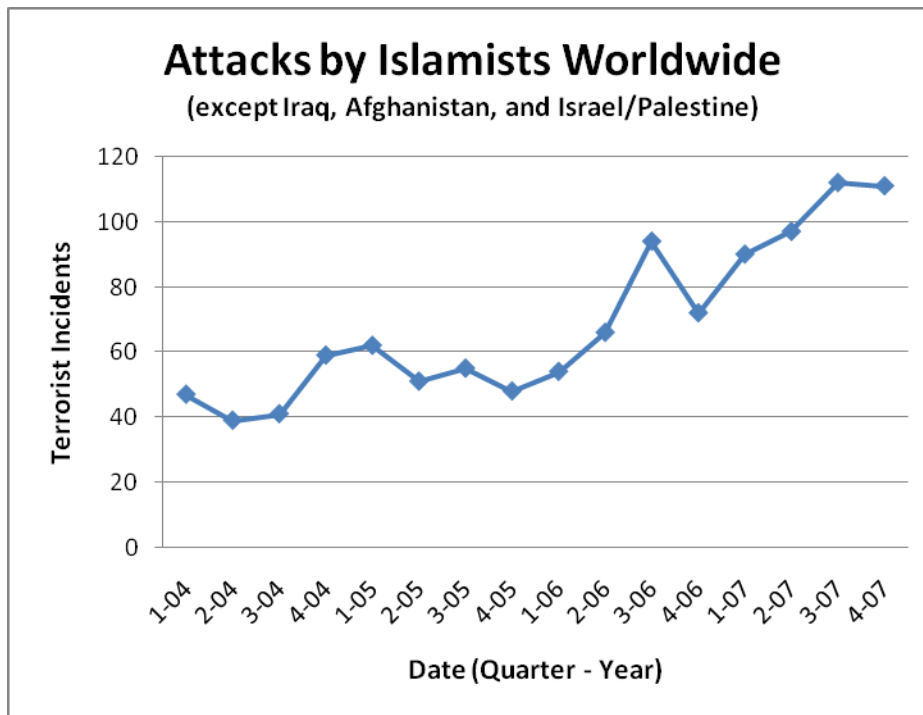
American Security Project

April 3, 2008

TO: Interested Parties  
FROM: Bernard I. Finel, Senior Fellow, [bfinel@americansecurityproject.org](mailto:bfinel@americansecurityproject.org)  
RE: Global Trends in Extremist Violence Compared to Iraq

---

Even as events in Basra at the end of March call into question the lasting impact of the “surge,” additional evidence from around the world reinforces the fact that Iraq is not the “central front” in the war on terror, but rather an unfortunate distraction. In the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2007, Islamist attacks globally remained at a historically high level, despite a reduction of violence in Iraq.



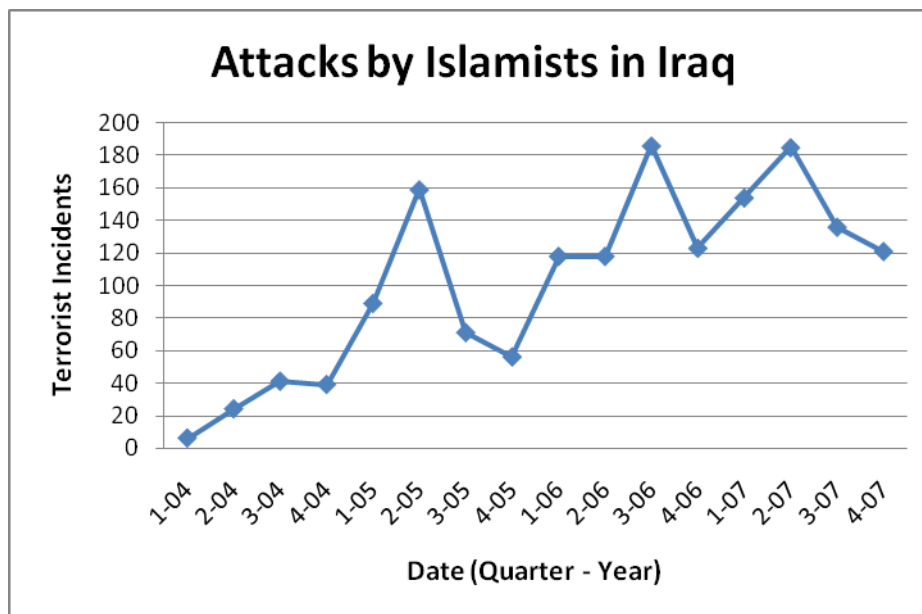
Source: NCTC Worldwide Incidents Tracking System, <http://wits.nctc.gov> (accessed April 1, 2008).

**Progress in Iraq is not translating into “victory” in the war on terror.**

- Islamist attacks around the world remain at historically high levels.
- Al Qaeda’s sanctuary in Pakistan remains secure.
- Al Qaeda has become more active in Pakistan and in North Africa.

**There is no plausible mechanism by which progress in Iraq could affect the broader struggle against violent Islamist groups.**

- Though jihadists may be emboldened if the United States withdraws from Iraq, there is no evidence that remaining in Iraq has in any way deterred or diminished the strength of the movement elsewhere.
- The American occupation of Iraq continues to serve as a potent rallying cry for jihadist groups worldwide.



**Source:** NCTC Worldwide Incidents Tracking System, <http://wits.nctc.gov> (accessed April 1, 2008).

**Recent events in Iraq demonstrate that the Iraqi government does not share America’s goals, but instead intends to use American forces to settle internal feuds and disputes that ought to be subject to a political process in Iraq.**

- The United States is increasingly being drawn into internal disputes in Iraq. There is no comparison between America’s role in Iraq today and the Cold War presence in South Korea or West Germany. Then we worked closely with established governments to defend *de facto* international borders against external aggression. Now we are taking sides in a civil conflict.
- The United States policy of boosting local militias – most notably in the Kurdish north of Iraq and the Sunni west – will inevitably make it difficult for the central government to establish control. We have no credible policy for disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating these militias into Iraqi society. The “surge” has purchased short-term stability at the cost of ensuring Iraq remains dysfunctional for years to come.

### Questions for General Petraeus:

If Iraq is a “central front in the war on terror,” why has progress in Iraq not translated into diminished Islamist violence worldwide?

How might progress in Iraq translate into a weakening of the jihadist movement? Short of establishing a functioning democracy in Iraq, is there any reason to believe that eliminating al Qaeda in Iraq will have any broader significance?

Do you believe that Iraq can be a stable country as long as power is spread out among a large number of sectarian militias? If not, what is your plan for disarming and integrating these militias into the political process?

Press reports suggest that the Maliki government did not consult with the United States before launching the Basra operation. Yet, American forces were forced to join the offensive once it stalled. What is your plan to guard against similar developments in the future? Or, lacking a plan, do you believe it is appropriate for American forces to be deployed at the behest of the Iraqi government?

For more information, or to read the full *Are We Winning? Interim Report*, visit. [www.americansecurityproject.org](http://www.americansecurityproject.org).