

<https://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/beyond/state-of-war/>

On the 18th anniversary, Iraq's state of war

by Lily Hamourtzidou

March 20, 2021



The

USS Abraham Lincoln returning to port carrying the 'Mission Accomplished' banner.
(US Navy/Public Domain)

Security since 2003

On May 1st, 2003, six weeks after the start of the invasion, US President Bush gave a speech announcing the end of major combat operations in the Iraq War. Above him hung a banner stating 'Mission Accomplished'. The war was officially over. Over 7,500 civilian lives had been lost in the six weeks of bombings and overwhelming firepower, but the greatest losses were yet to come. The vast majority of casualties occurred after Bush's speech and came as a result of coalition airstrikes and raids, but also of car bombs, suicide bombings, shootings and executions.

Since the war has been "over" in Iraq, since May 1st, 2003, just how peaceful has Iraq been? And what sort of peace are the Iraqis living in today?

Iraq has seen intense and consistently lethal force used on civilians during the weeks of "Shock and Awe," when its hospitals filled with the thousands who found themselves in the path of the invaders, day after day; then during the years of the US 'Surge', 2007 and 2008, when the coalition killed a further 2,363 non-combatants; and again when the Islamic State started its bloody campaign, killing 8,000 Iraqis over the summer of 2014. The violence has been constant and relentless, killing between 902 (2020) and 29,294 (2006) civilians a year.

The daily conflict has led to millions of Iraqis living as refugees, in poverty and disease, both internally and externally, in need, in fear, in uncertainty. The war-like conditions of their lives make a mockery of any claim to have brought them peace, security or a sense of safety and protection from violent death. War is not over for them. It has been allowed to continue and flourish, adding more corpses of men, women, children, poor, wealthy, young, old, professionals, unemployed, educated, illiterate, hopeful and hopeless alike. The bombers and the shooters, American, British, Iraqi or any other nationality, have killed people of all ages, social class and religion. Almost indiscriminately. No city, town or village is safe. No street, no building. No home, school, or office. No mosque, no church and no market. It is what happens in war.

From regular to "irregular" war

The invasion of 2003 was an example of regular war: a coalition of states attacked and invaded another state. When the war was declared over, a so-called irregular war began that continues to this day. This warfare has consisted of military attacks, but also attacks by militia, terrorists and insurgents. Small numbers of individuals, operating in cells and groups, have consistently and deliberately targeted the unarmed population and those associated with the state (policemen and political figures), to spread fear and death. Insurgents have conducted attacks using guerrilla tactics designed to inflict ever-increasing losses on the government and occupying forces. Methods used have included hit-and-run raids, ambushes, mortar and rocket attacks and IEDs. There have been dramatic attacks killing hundreds, but mostly smaller and less dramatic day-to-day violence that kills 1-2 people at a time.

In 2021 we continue to witness a violent struggle in Iraq, among state and non-state actors, for legitimacy and influence. Since the start of the year, 144 civilians and 222 combatants have been killed. These deaths and, these incidents have been recorded by Iraq Body Count, but there are many other incidents that have gone unrecorded by IBC, because they have not resulted in death. Reading through the reports, a picture emerges of a country still at war, with IEDs exploding with predictable regularity, suicide bombers getting arrested before they have the chance to blow themselves up,

shootings taking place at security points, and airstrikes being conducted daily by American, British and Turkish planes.

Irregular as this war may be, it is not, unfortunately, inconstant:

Two weeks in February 2021

The extent of the daily violence can be seen in a representative sample of reports of two weeks in February, reports that reveal a daily reality of living with suicide bombers, terrorists, militia, shooters and explosives.

Week 1

Between February 2nd and February 8th the press reported the arrest of a would-be suicide bomber, a number of assassination attempts, including those of a doctor and a teacher, various explosions and the killing of dozens of combatants across four provinces.

On February 2nd the National Security Agency in Salahuddin [arrested four terrorists](#), one of whom reportedly intended to blow himself up in Baghdad. On the same day, unidentified gunmen [opened fire at a security checkpoint](#) in Amara.

On February 4th an Iraqi soldier was [shot and seriously wounded](#) by an ISIS sniper in the outskirts of Jalawla, in Diyala. It was reported that 40 ISIS terrorists [had been killed in three provinces](#).

A doctor [survived an assassination attempt in Diyala](#), on February 5th. The 33-year-old was wounded when he was shot by unknown gunmen on Al-Mundhiriya road, near Khanaqin.

Unidentified [gunmen opened fire at a civilian in Nasiriyah, in Dhi Qar](#), on February 8th, injuring him. Later that day, [an anti-explosive team dismantled a homemade device](#) containing a highly explosive substance that unidentified persons had placed in front of a teacher's house, with the report noting that 'The phenomenon of setting up explosive devices in front of the homes of activists from the October [2020] demonstrations has increased in recent times, in addition to targeting figures in the governorate for unknown reasons.'

In other parts of the country, [an IED exploded at a store selling alcoholic drinks in Baghdad](#) and [another on the Diwaniyah highway](#), targeting a coalition convoy.

Week 2

Between February 9th and February 15th there were reports of more explosions, the dismantling of a car bomb, assassination attempts, aerial bombardment and a rocket attack across five provinces. It was further reported that 'in the past months' hundreds of explosive devices and detonators had been discovered near Fallujah.

An IED [exploded in northeast Baghdad](#) on February 9th; on February 10th [a car bomb was found and dismantled](#) in the Apterre Mountains in Salahuddin

An Iraqi soldier [was wounded in an ISIS attack](#) on a military post in Jalawla on February 11th, and a security forces member [survived an assassination attempt](#) when unidentified gunmen shot at his vehicle in the outskirts of Al-Khalis, in Diyala, on February 12th.

It was announced that, for the second day in a row, [Turkish warplanes continued their intense bombardment](#) of areas in Dohuk, while in pursuit of PKK militants. Shaaban Barwari, director of Dinarteh districty, said in press statements that the villages of Jam Sharti and Seri Jal Kira were subjected to intense bombing, indicating that the sound of warplanes flying in the skies of Amadiya and Aqrah districts had not stopped for 12 hours.

A terrorist [attack was repelled in Diyala's Al-Adhaim district](#) on February 13th, while on February 14th [a device exploded at a massage centre](#) in central Baghdad.

On February 15th it was announced that [more than 180 explosive devices had been defused and that 250 explosive devices were seized](#) and detonated east of Fallujah. "A security force from the Military Intelligence Division, in coordination with the rest of the military units, carried out an inspection campaign targeting different areas of the Karma district, east of Fallujah," the source said in a statement to the agency. He added, "The campaign resulted in defusing 96 improvised explosive devices in the form of homemade mines and 87 explosive devices in the form of 10 liters gallons," indicating that "the security forces managed to seize 150 explosive devices and 102 detonation devices."

A catastrophic legacy

On the 18th anniversary of the invasion, Iraq is still in a state of war. It is the catastrophic legacy of 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' that Iraq is kept in a perpetual war that has so far taken the lives of over 208,700 civilian men, women and children. Each year more are added: civilians and combatants, dead and injured, as people continue to live under the threat of bombs raining on their heads, bombers mixing with shoppers in markets, snipers targeting checkpoints, police and militia opening fire on protesters. Even during the Pope's much celebrated visit to Iraq March 5th-8th the killing didn't

stop. Five civilians met their death from shootings, an IED explosion and a hand grenade tossed into a crowd of people, during his visit, although these deaths were not mentioned in the sudden upsurge of headline western media attention. One of those victims was a child.

Is there any end in sight to the toll of death and injury, of Iraq's mounting loss and grief? It would seem not, even if the violence itself were to end tomorrow. Last month [a United Nations report](#) revealed that landmines and unexploded ordnances exceed the population of Iraq, estimating their number at 50 million.

In [Two Doves](#), Iraqi poet and teacher Faleeha Hassan writes,

Every time the presenter says 'Victory is on the horizon',

*My grandmothers' eyes rise to the ceiling —
She hides a mocking smile.*

With rage I scream at the screen 'no victory's coming'.

*She whispers: 'god is generous'.
'You sound like my father when I asked for new toys'.*

*She quietens and we contend,
Awaiting his return before a new battle,
Fearing that a last fight may end the life of a dove.*