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HE FINDS IT ATTACHED TO THE REST OF THE WORLD."
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Numbers drop for civilian deaths, foreign fighters in Iraq

- Story Highlights
- Fewer fighters enter Iraq from Syria and Iran in November, U.S. general says
- Iraqi civilian death toll in November is the lowest since February 2006
- November figure marks third consecutive decline in civilian casualties
- U.S. troop death toll in Iraq for October and November is lowest since early 2004

BAGHDAD, Iraq (CNN) -- Two indicators of the state of the war in Iraq appeared favorable in November, when fewer fighters entered Iraq from neighboring countries and fewer Iraqi civilians killed, according to two reports on Sunday.

Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, the No. 2-ranking U.S. commander in Iraq, told CNN fewer weapons and fighters entered Iraq from Iran and Syria over the past month.

And Iraq's Interior Ministry said civilian deaths caused by war-related violence in Iraq dropped for a third straight month in November.

Odierno said the U.S. military is "pleased" with Syria's improvement.

He was reluctant to give credit to Iran, telling CNN's Wolf Blitzer he has adopted a "wait-and-see" approach to Iran after noting "a small reduction" in the number of explosively-formed penetrators found in Iraq.

"That's a positive sign," Odierno said, referring to the drop in EFPs.

"We've seen some decline in activity. I hope that from our perspective that in fact they have stopped supplying some of these extremist groups. That would be very good. I'm not ready to say they have," he added.

[Watch Odierno describe what Iran is doing in Iraq »](#)

The U.S. military maintains that explosively formed penetrators -- a sophisticated and powerful type of roadside bomb -- are made in Iran and their components are shipped into Iraq by the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force, the Iranian unit accused by the United States of training and arming insurgents.

Iran has denied any involvement.

Odierno said there has been a 25 to 30 percent reduction in the number of foreign fighters entering Iraq from Syria, and credited Syria for taking "some steps to limit that."

"We're pleased [with] the fact that they are taking some additional responsibility with their own internal security measures," Odierno said. "Again, there's still too many coming across, and we would like to see it eliminated completely."

The Iraqi Interior Ministry reported Sunday that 538 Iraqi civilians were killed in the violence across the country in November, including 131 bodies recovered by Iraqi security forces in Baghdad, according to the ministry's figures.

It is the lowest monthly civilian death toll since sectarian tensions heightened across Iraq after the February 2006 bombing of the Askariya mosque in Samarra.

The figure compares with 758 Iraqi civilians killed in October and 844 in September, according to the ministry.

The monthly death tolls from the ministry were substantially higher earlier in the year. In January, 1,990 deaths were reported; February, 1,646; March, 1,872; April, 1,501; May, 1,949; June, 1,227; July, 1,653; and August, 1,773.

The U.S. troop death toll in Iraq was 37 in November and 38 in October, marking the smallest number of American fatalities in a two-month stretch since early 2004, when there were 20 in February and 52 in March.

Overall, 2007 has been the deadliest year for the U.S. military in Iraq since the war began.

Nearly 30,000 more American troops were deployed this year in and around Baghdad to take on insurgents as part of what Washington calls the "surge."

The year started out with 83 deaths in January and 81 each in February and March. The numbers jumped higher in the spring, with 104 in April, 126 in May and 101 in June.

Those three months were the deadliest stretch in the war in [Iraq](#) for U.S. troops.

As the military established its new counterinsurgency strategy, the attacks began dropping from the 101 deaths tallied in June to 78 in July, 84 in August, 65 in September, 38 in October and 37 in November.

U.S. and Iraqi officials have pointed to several trends in recent months.

Along with the "surge," they cite military strides against Shiite and Sunni militants; improvement in Iraqi security forces; growing grass-roots Sunni tribal opposition to al Qaeda in Iraq; and the fact that Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army militia has abided by a cease-fire.

Authorities say results have included decreases in sectarian violence, attacks and military and civilian casualties, as well as the decision by some Iraqi refugees who fled their war-torn country to consider returning home because of improved security.

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