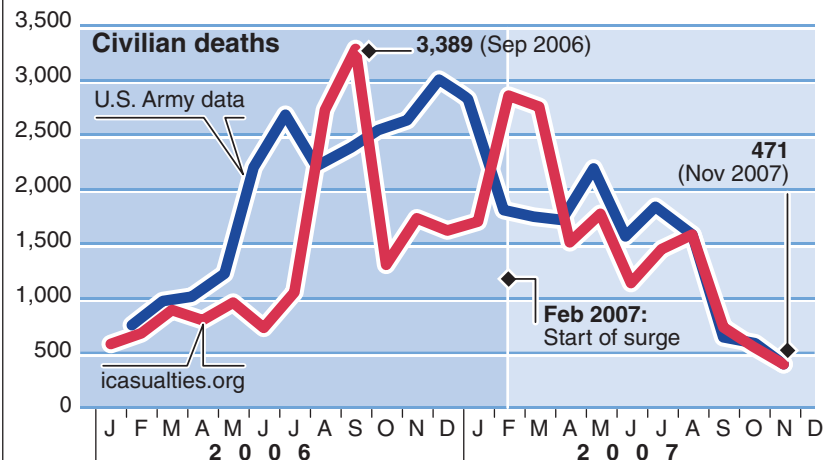


2008 seen as crucial year for Iraq

The U.S. surge of some 30,000 troops has been credited with dramatically reducing sectarian violence, with civilian deaths reported to be down to below 500 a month across Iraq from a high of almost 3,400 in 2006. Now Iraq's politicians have a chance to act before the surge is wound down next summer



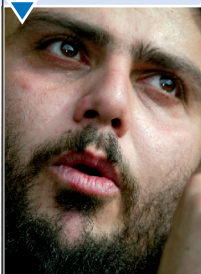
Death toll (Mar 2003 to Dec 2007)

Iraqi civilians	Up to 85,700*
U.S. forces	3,895
Britain	174
Italy	33
Poland	21
Ukraine	18
Bulgaria	13
Spain	11
Denmark	7
El Salvador	5
Other nations	19

*iraqbodycount.org

Northern pipeline: Improved security around Iraq-Turkey pipeline has boosted oil exports to near 2 million barrels per day

Muqtada al-Sadr: Shia cleric has shunned government but controls militias on streets. His **Mahdi Army** entered truce in August

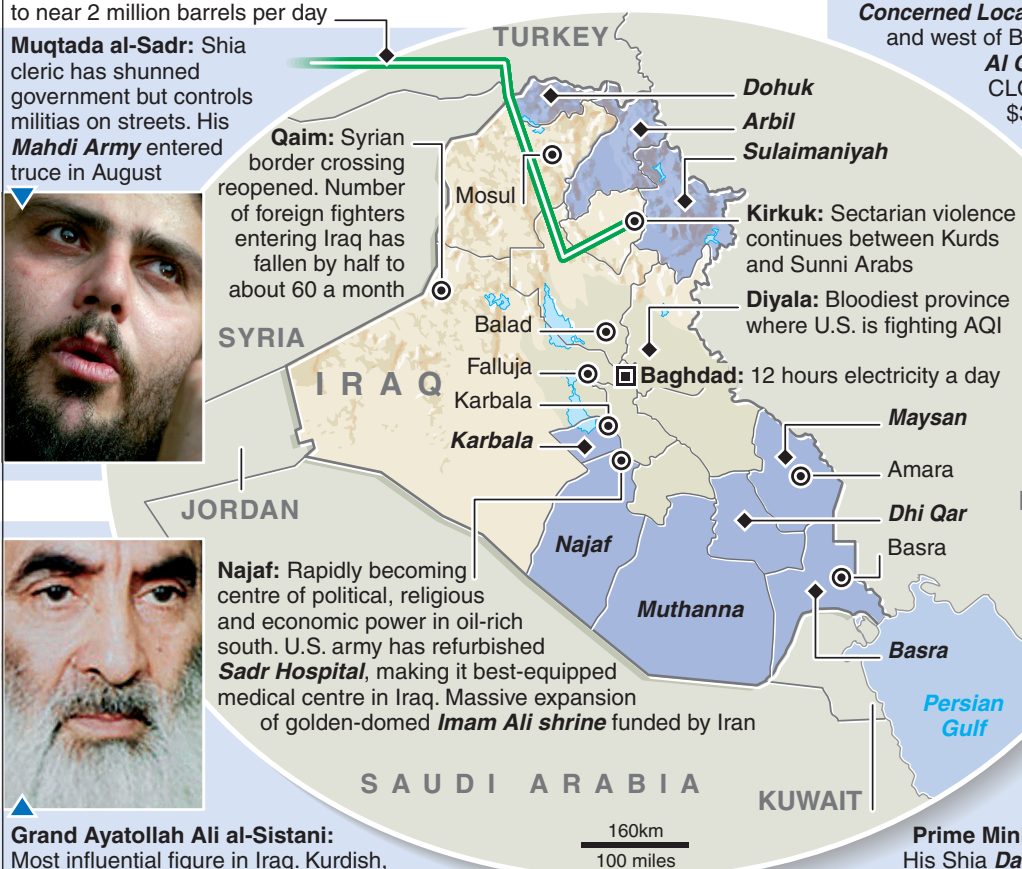


Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani:

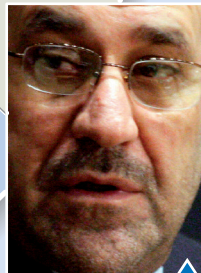
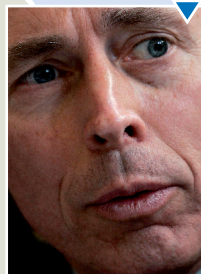
Most influential figure in Iraq. Kurdish, Sunni and Shia political leaders regularly travel to Najaf to discuss their plans with him before making them public

Pictures: Associated Press, Getty Images

Provinces handed back to Iraqi control



CLCs: U.S. **Gen. David Petraeus** has armed 80,000 Sunni militia members – **Concerned Local Citizens** – in north and west of Baghdad to help fight **Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)**. CLC members are paid \$300 a month by U.S. Army to patrol their neighbourhoods



Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki:

His Shia **Dawa Party** is accused of failing to reach out effectively to Sunnis. Hostile to CLCs, fearing they may later turn their guns against Shia government

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