



## IS THE CONFLICT IN IRAQ 'CIVIL WAR'?

November 29, 2006

*While journalists, politicians and the general public debate whether the fighting in Iraq constitutes a "civil war," various commissions are preparing reports recommending strategies for a successful outcome.*

Fighting between groups of Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims has killed more than 3,700 Iraqis in October, according to a United Nations report.

The increase in violence has led news organizations such as NBC and the Los Angeles Times to officially refer to the situation as a "civil war," sparking a debate over words and their implications for U.S. policy

"It's something that we have a responsibility to ask ourselves as we're reporting and to try to get as close to the truth as possible," Marjorie Miller, foreign editor at the Los Angeles Times, told the NewsHour.

### **A civil war?**

President Bush has not yet called the situation in Iraq a civil war.

"No question it's tough," Mr. Bush said. "There's a lot of sectarian violence taking place, fomented, in my opinion, because of these attacks by al-Qaida, causing people to seek reprisal."

Traditionally, the term "civil war" refers to an armed conflict between a government and internal challengers that results in the deaths of a large number of people -- 1,000 over a year is a common benchmark, according to Nicholas Sambanis, a professor of political science at Yale University.

However other historians say the different sides in a civil war usually have stated goals that divide the general public.

"At this point in Iraq there are still Sunnis and Kurds and Shiite who want to have stability, and they are trying to put down the insurgents. Now it is also purely possible that at some point they will give up. Then it is a civil war," Donald Kagan, a history professor from Yale University who's written extensively about war, told the NewsHour.

Historians also disagree about whether the use of the term "civil war" is helpful or harmful.

Some believe that it is used as propaganda to scare America into removing troops.

"I think most people regard civil wars as bigger things, more difficult, more complicated, more hard to resolve without a long, hard war than does the alternative term. And I think that's why people are using it," said Kagan.

Others think using the term forces the public to pay attention to the situation.

"It's inevitable that, in public discussions, things will be simplified. Probably the most neutral term to use would be 'the war in Iraq,' but then you have to explain what's going on. If you want another shorthand term that does turn people's attention one way or another, 'civil war' does that," Richard Betts, a professor of political science at Columbia University, told the NewsHour.

## **The Iraq Study Group**

As the use of the term is debated, others are looking for ways to create a successful outcome in Iraq.

One team attempting this is the Iraq Study Group, a bipartisan commission led by former secretary of state James Baker, a Republican, and former Representative Lee Hamilton, a Democrat.

The group is meeting this week and expects to present its policy recommendations to Congress in December.

Although its decisions are not yet final, one idea being examined is to engage Iraq's neighbors, especially Iran and Syria, to get them to help support the country's fledgling government.

In addition, the group, made up of five Republicans and five Democrats, is considering a plan that could include a gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops, The Washington Post reported.

## **Other options in Iraq**

President Bush is not bound to act on the Iraq Study Group's recommendations, and he has expressed a desire to consider the results of other groups analyzing Iraq, including one from the Pentagon and one from the president's own National Security Council.

The Pentagon panel seems to favor a policy of "Going Long" -- a plan in which the number of troops would be boosted initially. But more troops would be used to train Iraqi security forces and fewer would be used in direct combat positions, The New York Times reported.

Arizona Republican Senator John McCain, a Vietnam veteran who may run for president in 2008, also has argued that the United States needs to increase, not decrease the number of troops in Iraq, despite the clear strain it will put on the military.

"There's no good options," McCain told ABC News. "But the consequences of failure are severe, and I believe that we must do what's necessary to prevail. And I understand how terrible this is. The young men and women who are in the military today, and God bless them, they'll respond if called upon to."

-- *Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra*

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