

NO SHIITE SHERLOCK

Kudos to Spencer Ackerman for FOIAing the rationale behind General Petraeus' Magic September numbers out of the military. Generally, Ackerman explains that the numbers for sectarian violence don't count attacks on same sect people or on the Iraqi government.

Interestingly, attacks against "same-sect civilians," U.S. forces, the Iraqi government or Iraqi security forces "are excluded and not defined as sectarian attacks." So even though Sunni insurgent groups loathe the Shiite-controlled government, insurgent attacks on it aren't considered sectarian violence.

And he notes that the kind of violence that is quickly homogenizing Baghdad's neighborhoods—executions, murders, and kidnapping—may not count either, if the Shiite officials doing the counting don't want it to count.

For executions, murders and kidnappings — situations in which sectarianism may be difficult to determine — MNF-I says it uses "host nation" reporting in addition to its own. Many media and non-governmental organizations consider information on casualties released by the Iraqi ministries to be self-serving, misleading or contradictory.

Some important kinds of violence aren't included in this total: as Ackerman points out, Sunni attacks on Shiite policemen wouldn't count, organized Shiite violence that the government likes to pretend is policing doesn't count, and Shiite-Shiite violence, which is increasing in the South, doesn't count.

That's part of the gimmick of calling this ethno-sectarian violence, I guess, rather than just labeling it a civil war.