

Casualties:

According to Government of Iraq (GOI) officials, as of 29 April, 925 persons have been killed and 2,600 persons injured during the military operation in Sadr City since the conflict started in late March 2008¹. UNAMI have confirmed that between 24 March and 30 April, 335 people have been killed in Sadr City. Local NGOs report that approximately 60% of the victims are women and children.

Restrictions on Movement:

A strict curfew preventing vehicle movement is enforced in sectors 1-9. Access within sectors 10 -19 is unsafe due to heavy fighting between militias and ISF/MNF-I. In these sectors, the population has limited access to food, water and health care. Access is further complicated by the extensive use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), many of which are reportedly in garbage piles and lining main roads. In the remainder of the city, movement is restricted by ongoing aerial engagement of militias by MNF-I and unexploded ordinance/bombs. Frequent armed clashes result in the closure by ISF / MNF-I of main access points for humanitarian workers and providers of essential services.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):

Hundreds of families have voluntarily or forcedly fled their homes according to local NGOs due to confrontations between militias and ISF/MNF-I, particularly in the south-west sectors (Thawra 1 and 2) of the city. They are now seeking shelter in mosques (300-400 people), schools or with host families in the north-east sectors of the city. IOM reports that 500 displaced families are in temporary shelter in six locations on the periphery of Sadr City².

Damages:

Numerous houses have been destroyed or damaged, in particular along Chwadir Street, in sectors 1-19 and 60s-70s. This is due to air strikes that have targeted militias operating in the north-east sectors of the city (60s and 70s) and continuing fighting in sectors 10-19.

Food:

The food security situation is deteriorating. Most families in Sadr City rely on the Public Distribution System (PDS) but PDS centres remain closed in sectors 1-9 and food supplies are scarce. In the remainder of the city, limited supplies of basic foods are available at inflated prices. Local NGOs report that the PDS distribution for April has not taken place in most areas.

Health:

The two main hospitals (Ali Imam and Sadr) are open but have limited supplies of drugs and are inaccessible to the population affected by the fighting. Six of eighteen Public Health Centres (PHCs) remain closed, including the only two in sectors 1-9. The Habybyie Maternity Hospital is operating at reduced capacity. Medical staff face difficulties reaching PHCs and hospitals.

The halting of refuse collection caused by ongoing fighting, threats to sanitation workers and the presence of IEDs poses public health concerns.

Water:

The city's already-limited water infrastructure has been damaged. In addition, the lack of electricity and/or petrol in many sectors has prevented water pumping. Many families now have to carry water by hand from community cisterns being filled intermittently by emergency water tankers. NGOs and local officials are concerned about water quality and the potential spread of communicable disease, notably cholera.

Education:

Primary schools are closed in sectors 1-9 and secondary school exams have been moved to the north-east sectors of the city. Some schools (as well as other public buildings)³ are reportedly occupied by ISF/MNF-I or militias. Twenty-two school buildings have been damaged by fighting⁴.

1. Civilian spokesman for Baghdad Law Enforcement Plan 29 April 08.

2. IOM Report on Sadr City Displacement 22 April 2008

3. Municipality, Passport Office, Ashbeliya Bank, State Court, Directorate of Education Rusafa3 (allegedly transformed into a detention facility), Qutaiba primary school in sector 10, Al Fadelah primary school in sector 19, and four schools in sector 1, two in sector 3 and two in sector 4.

4. Iraqi Directorate of Education

Humanitarian Response

1. The UN and NGOs have continued delivering limited humanitarian assistance such as water, through water tankers, food and medical supplies. They stand ready to provide further support. Other supplies have been provided by GOI forces and MNF-I.
2. However, this type of emergency assistance cannot meet the vast needs of Sadr City's population. Government services and more importantly, access to normal commercial operations is essential requiring a cessation or pause in the fighting.
3. More specifically this needs to include: the opening of the PDS distribution centres and access to PDS agents as the primary means to address food insecurity; enabling unimpeded access for ambulances to all sectors of Sadr City; enabling the reopening of primary health centres (especially in sectors 1-9); the restocking of medical supplies and allowing access for medical personnel.
4. Hostilities within densely populated urban areas will inevitably lead to civilian deaths and injuries as has already been the case. Those involved in the conflict need to respect the principles of distinction and proportionality, in accordance with international law, whilst recognising the difficulties in distinguishing between civilians and militias dressed in civilian clothes.