

Five US soldiers killed in Baghdad

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In the deadliest attack on US forces in Iraq since late January, five American soldiers were killed and three more wounded by a suicide bomber while on patrol on foot in Baghdad Monday. Four of the soldiers died at the scene; a fifth died later from wounds. Two Iraqi civilians were killed, according to Iraqi police, and another eight wounded. An Iraqi interpreter, working with the American forces, was also wounded in the blast.

The deaths brought the total number of US military personnel who have died since the invasion of Iraq to 3,980. Seventy-six members of the American military have died in Iraq in 2008; 40 in January, 29 in February and 7 in March. In the previous worst incident this year, on January 28, five US soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb explosion in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.

According to Iraqi police, the American troops had gotten out of their Humvees Monday and were talking to shopkeepers in the Mansour district of Baghdad when the attacker walked up to the group and detonated his explosives vest. Mansour is a predominantly Sunni district in the west of Baghdad. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki made a well-publicized but brief visit to the district February 16—after scores of soldiers scoured and carefully “secured” the area—in an effort to demonstrate how Baghdad had changed for the better.

In regard to the suicide attack, the AFP news agency cited the comment of an Iraqi army spokesman, Maj. Gen. Qasim Ata: “A terrorist wearing an explosive vest blew himself [up] against a dismounted US patrol.” The BBC noted: “The bomber had targeted the US military at their most vulnerable, as military patrols around the Iraqi capital are often conducted in armoured vehicles, our correspondent says. But the US cannot function unless they get out of their armoured vehicles and engage with the people, he adds.”

This passing comment does a good deal to explode

the myth that life in Baghdad has returned to “normalcy” as a result of the past year’s US military surge. In fact, the atrocious death counts of 2006 have fallen largely because Iraq has been carved up along communal lines; in most neighborhoods, the sectarian death squads no longer have anyone of the “wrong” sect left to harass or kill. American troops patrol and attempt to contain the ethnic enclaves that disastrous US policies have created.

Earlier on Monday, one of the chief Sunni collaborators of US forces in recent months in Diyala province, Sheik Thaer al-Ghadhban al-Karkhy, was assassinated by a female suicide bomber a few miles outside of Baquba, northeast of Baghdad.

The sheik’s brother, Duraid Mahmoud, witnessed the attack inside his brother’s house. Mahmoud told the Associated Press that the woman had visited the sheik’s house on Sunday, alleging that her husband had been kidnapped and asking for help. She was told to return Monday.

“She came back this morning and nobody checked her. She had an appointment with the sheik and the guards told her to go and knock on his door,” Mahmoud said. AP continued: “The woman was ushered into the house and blew herself up once she got close to the sheik, he [Mahmoud] said, adding that the sheik’s 5-year-old niece and a security guard were also killed.”

Female suicide bombers carried out two lethal attacks in Baghdad pet markets February 1, which killed nearly 100 people.

In southern Iraq Sunday, the corpse of a kidnapped neurologist, Dr. Khalid Nasir al-Miyahi, was discovered in a central area of Basra. More than 600 medical professionals have been killed in Iraq since the US launched its invasion. Many more have fled to Kurdistan in the north or left the country.

Two attacks took place Monday in Baghdad’s Shaab

neighborhood, a center for Shiite fighters. A roadside bomb targeted an American patrol, wounding an Iraqi civilian, and a few minutes later a parked car detonated, injuring six more civilians.

In Mosul two people died and five others were hurt in a car bomb attack Sunday against an Iraqi army and police patrol. In Tikrit, in the center of the country, a police officer was killed and two more were wounded when a roadside bomb detonated near their checkpoint.

An estimated 5,000 people marched on Basra police headquarters Saturday protesting the deteriorating security situation. The demonstrators carried signs denouncing the killing of women, workers, academics and scientists, according to *Al Jazeera*. Rival Shiite groups have been battling for control of Basra.

Also on Saturday, separate roadside bombings killed six people in Wajhiya, about 15 miles east of Baquba. On the same day, Iraqi police announced the discovery of a mass grave containing about 100 bodies near Khalis in Diyala province, about 50 miles north of Baghdad. Colonel Sabah al-Ambaqi of the Iraqi police said the grave was found in an orchard near al-Bu Tumaa, a Sunni village outside Khalis.

Shiite cleric Moqtada al Sadr has responded to criticism from some of his followers over the recent extension of the ceasefire with US and government forces. Reuters notes that members of his Mahdi army have voiced “complaints that rival Shiite factions and the US and Iraqi security forces could exploit the ceasefire to attack them.”

Sadr issued a four-page statement defending his policy. He was obliged to declare, “If a military war is conducted against us by the occupiers we will defend ourselves. Self-defense against the occupiers is beyond discussion.” Reuters writes that “many of his tens of thousands of followers among young and poor Iraqis in Baghdad and the mainly Shiite south have questioned the truce.”

These are the shifting sands on which US policy and the relative decline in violence are based. With more than a million dead since the invasion, and millions more having emigrated, Iraq is a ruined country, seething with tensions among factions armed to the teeth.

In response to the lethal bombings in the predominantly Shiite Karada neighborhood in eastern Baghdad March 6, which left nearly 70 people dead and

hundreds more wounded, *Time* magazine observed that the attack “continues a troubling trend: a slow but steady increase in deadly bombings across the country. The troop surge is ending and the U.S. has begun withdrawing soldiers from Baghdad, but these attacks may indicate that a military or political solution to the Sunni insurgency may be as far off as it was a year ago.”

After reaching a low point in December 2007, car bombings and suicide vest bombings have “increased steadily.” *Time* noted that the Karada bombing came on the heels of an official visit to Iraq by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad “and struck a neighborhood that is home to Iraq’s largest Shi’ite political party and many Shi’ite government officials.”

The magazine continues: “The long-term difficulty for the United States and the Iraqi government is that this suspicion of Iran is not simply a fantasy of radical Sunni insurgents. It is a very real fear of Sunni former insurgents currently cooperating in the fight against al-Qaeda. Former insurgent leaders routinely scorn the Iraqi government’s intentions, casting it as a pawn of the Iranians. So, as the Iraqi government strives to reduce violence by improving its relationship with Iran, it may be setting the stage for continued conflict with disaffected Sunnis.”

This is the fruit of US policy, essentially aimed at seizing control of Iraqi and Middle Eastern energy reserves: it has created conditions for an even more murderous civil war. Meanwhile, as Monday’s attack makes clear, the toll of dead and mutilated American soldiers will continue to climb.



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