

# Baghdad bombings cast doubt on US troop withdrawals

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Wednesday's bombings against key government buildings in the centre of Baghdad have dealt a significant blow to the claims of both the Obama administration and the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that the country has been pacified and secured by the US military "surge" in 2007 and 2008.

The attack was one of the most ruthless, well-coordinated and lethal of the entire war. Insurgents were able to get two trucks filled with tonnes of explosives into the heavily-guarded Green Zone, where the US embassy and main Iraqi government buildings are located, without being detected by the array of troops, police and mercenary contractors who secure the area. One truck was parked on the road near the Finance Ministry and the other positioned close to the Foreign Ministry.

The bombs were detonated within minutes of one another, close to 11 a.m. The blast at the Finance Ministry killed at least 35 people and left scores of office workers and bystanders seriously wounded. The bombing outside the Foreign Ministry, which left a crater over three metres deep and some 10 metres wide, caused even greater carnage. At least 60 died and hundreds were injured.

A ministry employee told Reuters: "The windows of the foreign ministry shattered, slaughtering the people inside. I could see ministry workers, journalists and security guards among the dead." The explosion collapsed nearby homes and rocked buildings throughout the centre of the city, including the Iraqi parliament complex and the hotel where Maliki was scheduled to deliver a press conference.

A short time later, three more bombs exploded in other areas of Baghdad and a barrage of mortar rounds

was fired into the Green Zone. The overall casualty toll in the worst insurgent attack in Iraq's capital for some 18 months is currently estimated at 101 dead and over 600 wounded. Eleven army and police commanders have been arrested for negligence and a "review" of security has been ordered.

The bombings coincided with the anniversary of the massive blast that devastated the United Nations headquarters on August 19, 2003, and killed 19 people, including the head of UN operations in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Perhaps more significantly, the Iraqi insurgents struck on the eve of the elections in Afghanistan, where the Obama administration has ordered a surge of troops to assert American geo-political interests in Central Asia. Whether it was the intention or not, the bombings in Baghdad made clear that as US imperialism expands the Afghan war, it has still far from consolidated a puppet government in Iraq.

Maliki has blamed the attack on supporters of the former Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein, who made up part of the anti-occupation insurgency. His government however—which is dominated by two Shiite fundamentalist parties that have been favoured by Washington since 2003—has a long list of enemies, all of which have ample motive to seek to destabilise or bring it down. The methods employed by the US occupation to establish neo-colonial control over Iraq and its resources have spawned or fuelled bitter sectarian, ethnic and social divisions.

The traditional Sunni Arab ruling class and military officer caste that was represented by the Baathist regime has been stripped of much of their wealth and privileges. The Sunni population as a whole was the target of the most brutal US military operations and vicious sectarian pogroms by Shiite fundamentalists in

the Iraqi security forces and pro-occupation militias. Over two million Sunnis are still living as refugees in countries such as Syria and Jordan because they do not believe it is safe to return.

The government is increasingly hated by ethnic Kurdish nationalists. Maliki is seeking to prevent a long overdue referendum from being held in the oil-rich province of Kirkuk and other Kurdish-populated areas. The ballot, which was supposed to have been held two years ago, is to decide if the territories will be taken from Baghdad's control and incorporated into the autonomous Kurdish Regional Government that rules the country's northern provinces. Kurdish factions consider Maliki's delays, and the US backing for them, to be an abject betrayal of the promises that Washington made to get their support against the Hussein regime.

The government is also reviled by many among the majority Shiite population of the country. Maliki's regime is growing evermore dictatorial. The security forces repress rival Shiite factions, independent media and secular political and social trends. Tens of thousands of supporters of the Sadrist Shiite current were killed or imprisoned during the surge, on Maliki's orders.

The animosities and simmering tensions throughout the country guarantee that there will be ongoing violence against the government and the prospect of a complete disintegration of Iraq into civil war. For the US ruling class, such a development would threaten the opening up and exploitation of the country's oil and gas resources—the real goal for which it has squandered the lives of over 4,300 soldiers and \$700 billion. American troops will be needed for years to come to stand between the rival factions and suppress any possible disruption to the US imperialist agenda.

Plans for a further troop build-up in Afghanistan, however, hinge in many respects on making available the forces and resources currently committed to Iraq. Even before Wednesday's bombings, the US military was seeking to alter Obama's schedule for the withdrawal of most of the 130,000 troops still occupying the country.

It is not even two months since US forces were moved out of Iraq's urban centres to bases on their outskirts, as the first stage in the planned exit of most troops by the end of 2011. On Monday, the US

commander in Iraq, General Raymond Odierno, proposed the plan be revised. He has called for American forces to move back into cities and towns in the north that are disputed between the Baghdad government and the Kurdish nationalists—particularly Mosul—where there has been a spike in violence and bombings.

Major General Robert Caslen, the commander in the Mosul area, told US National Public Radio: "Now that we have moved out of the city, we would think they [insurgents] will stop the attacks, but the fact is they haven't. The attacks are still occurring, and guess who they are going after? They are going after the people. And that shows the intent of those groups is to control and intimidate the people, discredit the government, discredit the Iraqi security forces, so they can fill the gap instead."

An identical argument can and most likely will be advanced to justify putting American troops back on the streets of Baghdad.



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