

New wave of sectarian violence in Iraq kills more than 70

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A series of bombs exploded in various parts of Iraq on Wednesday targeting Shi'ite pilgrims marking a major religious festival and killing more than 70 people. It was the worst eruption of sectarian violence since January.

In the deadliest incident, a bomb went off in the Kadhimiyah district in north Baghdad, where thousands of Shi'ites had gathered. An automobile exploded near a tent offering food and drinks to the pilgrims. According to AFP, "Human remains were scattered across the street, while cars and shops in the area were damaged." A medical official said 16 people died in the Kadhimiyah bombing, and 32 were wounded.

In total, AFP reports, the Iraqi capital was hit Wednesday by ten bombings and two shootings, resulting in at least 21 deaths and the wounding of dozens more. Other blasts occurred in the Karada district, where Shi'ite pilgrims were again the target.

In Hilla, in central Iraq, two car bombs killed 19 people, according to a police captain and a doctor in the city's hospital. A wave of attacks—two car bombs, two roadside bombs and two shootings—killed at least nine people in Baquba, in Diyala province, north of Baghdad. One of the car bombs exploded next to a police patrol, wounding four police.

North of Baghdad, in Balad, two more car bombs killed five people and injured 30. One of the car bombs allegedly went off near the local headquarters of the Shi'ite endowment.

In Al-Azizyah, reports the Associated Press, another car bomb killed two people and wounded two more. A

few miles north of Karbala, a Shi'ite holy city in central Iraq, a car bombing wounded an additional 24 people, authorities said.

In northern Iraq, three bombs went off in the city of Kirkuk, killing two people and wounding at least 17, an interior ministry official and a doctor at a local hospital reported. A car bomb exploded in Mosul, also in the northern part of the country, killing four people.

The attacks on Wednesday were the third time pilgrims have been victimized this week. On Sunday, writes Aljazeera, at least six people were killed "when two mortar bombs struck a Baghdad Square packed with Shia Moslem pilgrims." The following day, 26 people died and nearly 200 were wounded when a car bomb went off outside a Shi'ite religious office in the capital.

Sectarian attacks "remain common" in Iraq, as AFP notes, with 132 Iraqis killed in May, according to official reports. A list compiled by the Associated Press reveals that murderous incidents have occurred every month since the official withdrawal of US combat troops in December 2011.

In the worst attack, on January 5, bombings aimed at Shi'ites killed 78 people in Baghdad and outside of Nasiriyah. Nine days later, a bomb struck a Shi'ite procession near Zubair in southern Iraq, killing at least 53. On February 23, attacks in Musayyib and Baghdad resulted in 55 more deaths. Twenty-five policemen were gunned down March 5 in Haditha, scene of an infamous massacre carried out by the US military in November 2005. Two weeks later, insurgents killed 46 in Karbala, Kirkuk and Baghdad. Bombs hit 10 Iraqi

cities on April 19, killing at least 30 people. On the last day of May, a bomb exploded at a crowded restaurant in a Shi'ite neighborhood of Baghdad, killing 18 or more people.

The misery of the Iraqi people, victims of US-led aggression for more than two decades, continues. In American media accounts of Wednesday's violence, various pious references are made, for example, to the "troubling" element of sectarian violence "that left the country in shambles and continues to impede the rebuilding process today" (*Christian Science Monitor*).

Entirely missing from such accounts is the central role of American imperialism, which, seeking control of Iraq's energy supplies, invaded the country on the basis of lies and deliberately inflamed relations between Sunnis and Shi'ites to weaken opposition and consolidate its neo-colonial grip. The deaths June 13, and the hundreds of thousands—or more—of Iraqi dead since 2003, are entirely the responsibility of the US government, military and media propagandists.

With Washington relentlessly and recklessly pursuing its drive against the Syrian and Iranian regimes in particular, the political situation in Iraq remains a threatening standoff between the elites of the various ethnic communities.

Sunni and Kurdish partners of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in the fragile Iraqi coalition government, which came to power in 2010, bitterly accuse him of breaking promises to share power, carrying out anti-democratic measures and persecuting political opponents.

The Associated Press reports, "The continued impasse has raised the possibility of renewed sectarian violence and hampered plans for rebuilding the country ravaged by a decade of fighting. Six months after the departure of the last US forces, hopes seem to be fading that oil-rich Iraq can quickly transform into a functioning democracy. 'It's a sensitive and tense situation and anything could go wrong,' analyst Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group said of the political crisis."

Only on Sunday Maliki escaped an effort to kick him out of office by a technicality. President Jalal Talabani declared that "he would not ratify a petition for a no-confidence vote because it lacked the needed number of signatures." (AP)

Talabani had asked Maliki's opponents to provide a petition proving that they had significant support before he would put a non-confidence vote before parliament. Opposition groups sent 160 signatures, nearly half of Iraq's 325 legislators, but 11 were later withdrawn and another two suspended.

"Because there was no quorum, even though the letter's text was ready, it was not sent to parliament," Talabani's office declared in a statement.



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