

Hundreds killed and wounded in Iraq bombings, ambushes

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27 July 2012

More than 100 people were killed in a series of bombings and shootings throughout Iraq July 23, in the bloodiest single day of sectarian fighting in at least a year. Official Iraqi sources placed the casualty total at 115 dead and over 300 wounded.

The violence was directed mainly at Shiite targets, including police and military units stationed in Sunni-majority areas, and markets and other civilian targets in Shiite-majority areas. The Sunni-based group Al Qaeda in Iraq claimed responsibility for most of the attacks.

The single largest death toll came in the town of Taji, 12 miles north of Baghdad. Bombs planted near five houses in the predominantly Sunni town exploded an hour after dawn. When police and other rescue workers rushed to the scene, a suicide bomber infiltrated the crowd and blew himself up. All told, 41 people were killed.

Two more suicide bombers using car bombs attacked joint Iraqi army and police patrols in the northern metropolis of Mosul, a predominantly Sunni city near the Syrian border, killing seven people. Four more people were killed in Mosul in separate attacks.

The attacks in Taji and Mosul were the only suicide attacks among the 40 or so reported for the day—a fact that suggests a shift in tactics by AQI. All the other incidents involved bombs placed in cars or buildings and detonated remotely, or attacks by gunmen who engaged in combat with troops or police and then withdrew.

In the most ambitious attack, several carloads of men attacked Iraqi army facilities in Udaim, between Baghdad and the northern oil city of Kirkuk. They used rocket launchers and grenades, overran at least one of the outposts, killed 16 soldiers and took an officer prisoner, and then escaped.

There were another eight car bombs in Kirkuk and its

environs, hitting police convoys and patrols and killing at least nine people, with another 32 wounded.

Monday's attacks were the most widespread of the year, affecting six of Iraq's 18 provinces, and extending, hour after hour, from the far north to the far south of the country. Among the towns hit were Husseinia, Tuz, Dujail, Balad and Baquba, all north of the capital; Sadr City, the huge Shiite suburb on the eastern end of Baghdad; and Diwaniya, a largely Shiite city in the south.

After the bomb blast in Diwaniya—when a car exploded at a busy vegetable market, killing five people and wounding 32—local residents denounced police and began smashing police cars, before marching on government buildings. Police opened fire on the crowd, killing one demonstrator and wounding dozens more.

There were further attacks July 26, killing at least 19 people, the majority of them policemen, as the Islamic fundamentalists continued to target security forces rather than civilians. One Iraqi army helicopter was forced down by hostile fire near Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, after it was called in to assist security forces attacked at a checkpoint near Hadid, in a rural part of Diyala province.

After a lull of more than three months, bomb attacks and shootings escalated sharply during the month of June, when at least 237 people were killed and 603 wounded, most of them Shiite civilians killed in attacks on processions and other religious ceremonies. According to a United Nations accounting, 2,101 Iraqis were killed in violent attacks from January to June of this year, compared with 1,832 in the first half of 2011.

The latest round of attacks appeared timed for the start of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, which began Friday, July 20 for most Sunni Muslims, and Saturday, July 21 for most Shiites. Those observing the daytime

fast typically take their meals late at night and sleep late in the morning. The shootings and bombings started just after dawn Monday, and in several cases soldiers and police were asleep when their outposts were attacked.

The reputed leader of AQI, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, issued a statement Sunday calling for an offensive against the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The Islamic fundamentalist group, which alienated much of the Iraqi population through indiscriminate massacres of civilians during the sectarian civil war of 2007-2008, has sought to revive its fortunes by posing as the defender of the Sunni minority against the Shiite-based regime in Baghdad.

The puppet forces placed in power by the US invasion and occupation of Iraq have fractured along ethnic and religious lines over the past two years, despite the formation of a coalition government of all the major parties at the end of 2010, after enormous pressure from the Obama administration.

The Sunni-based Iraqiya party, despite winning the most seats in parliament, has been largely excluded from positions of power. It has been boycotting parliament and cabinet activities in response to an arrest warrant issued for the Sunni vice-president, Tariq al-Hashemi, last December, charging him with involvement in terrorist attacks.

The government of the autonomous Kurdish region in the north conducts itself as a virtually independent power, negotiating separate deals with major oil companies and with neighboring Turkey, in defiance of orders from Maliki. Al-Hashemi fled to the Kurdish region after his arrest was ordered, and regional president Massoud Barzani has refused to turn him over to the national government.

Sectarian tensions within the bourgeoisie have been exacerbated by the ongoing civil war in Syria. The Maliki government openly sympathizes with the beleaguered regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, based largely on the minority Alawites, a branch of Shiism; Sunni politicians have sided with the US-backed opposition, drawn largely from the Sunni majority in Syria.

The mounting violence in Iraq thus reflects both the long-term impact of the US invasion and occupation of that country, as well as the most recent intervention by American imperialism that seeks to destabilize

neighboring Syria.

There is ongoing discussion of further US military action in the region. Obama administration officials and leading congressmen cited the wave of bombing in Iraq as an indication that Al Qaeda in Iraq was planning to strike targets in the United States.

Matthew Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, told the House Homeland Security Committee that statements from AQI and the arrest of several “associates” of the group in the United States and Canada highlighted “the potential threat posed to the United States.”

Once again, unverified claims of threats of “terrorism” are being used to justify US military aggression and political subversion in a country that has already suffered an historic catastrophe from eight years of war and occupation.



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