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Bombs targeting Shi'ite muslims kill 44 in Iraq

August 07, 2009



A bus that was hit by a roadside bomb attack in Baghdad's Sadr City district.

MOSUL, Iraq (Reuters) - A suicide car bomber killed 38 people as they left a Shi'ite Muslim mosque just outside the volatile northern Iraqi city of Mosul, officials said, while a series of bombs in Baghdad has killed six Shi'ite pilgrims.

Police said 95 people were wounded in the suicide bombing, one of several attacks in recent weeks targeting Shi'ite religious gatherings. A week ago a series of blasts outside Shi'ite mosques in Baghdad killed 31 people.

Sunni Islamist militants such as Al-Qaeda, who consider Shi'a heretics, are often blamed for such attacks.

"I was in the house when this explosion happened. I hurried to the mosque to search for my father in the ruins ... I found him seriously wounded, and took him to hospital, but he died," said Khalil Qasim, 19, crying.

Mosul authorities urged citizens to donate blood and appealed for construction vehicles to lift debris

trapping victims of the attack, which took place in Shreikhan, a majority Shi'ite Turkoman village just north of Mosul city.

Bombings and shootings are reported almost daily in Mosul.

The insurgency in Iraq has waned in the last 18 months, but insurgents have been able to hide out in the mountainous areas around Mosul, 390 kilometers north of Baghdad, and have exploited divisions between Mosul's feuding Arabs and Kurds.

The dispute in the northern province of Nineveh, of which Mosul is the capital, threatens to split the province and inflame tensions that could threaten Iraq's long-term stability.

"There are parties that seek to create chaos inside Mosul by dragging Iraq into sectarian fighting," Nineveh's governor, Athil al-Nujaifi, said.

Square One

Many Iraqis also fear attacks on Shi'a may reignite the sectarian slaughter between Sunnis and Shi'a that has only abated in the last 18 months. Tens of thousands have been killed in the bloodshed since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

"These bombings are an attempt to return Iraq to square one," said analyst and professor Hamid Fadhel.

"I expect these attacks to rise the closer we get to the elections. The coming months will be a very critical time for Iraq," he added, referring to national polls due in January.

Politicians are in the throes of discussing coalitions, and violence may make cross-sectarian alliances difficult.

In Baghdad, roadside bombs exploded as minibuses carrying Shi'ite Muslims home from pilgrimage a day earlier passed by.

Roadside bombs struck two minibuses in separate incidents in the poor Baghdad Shi'ite district of Sadr City and another roadside bomb struck a minibus in east Baghdad, a hospital source said, killing a total of six and wounding 24.

Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims poured into Iraq's holy city of Karbala on August 6 to mark the birth of Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi, a Messiah-like figure Shi'a believe vanished centuries ago and will return to bring peace on earth.

The event was the second big religious gathering in Iraq since the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from urban centers in June, which thrust Iraqi security forces into the leading role.

The August 6 pilgrimage and the previous event passed largely peacefully, but insurgent attacks are still common, raising doubts about the Iraqi security forces' ability to stand alone.

[Link to original story on RFE/RL website](#)

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