

Beat: Miscellaneous

54 dead, 149 wounded in latest wave of attacks across Iraq

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USPA News - At least 54 people were killed and nearly 150 others were wounded in a series of attacks targeting mainly Shi'ite Muslim areas across Iraq on Sunday, further intensifying fears that widespread sectarian strife will continue to escalate, officials said on Monday. The violence on Sunday targeted mainly Shi'ite-majority areas across the southern and central region of Iraq.

The deadliest attack took place in the southwestern city of Najaf, 150 kilometers (93 miles) south of Baghdad, when an explosives-laden car exploded at the entrance of a fruit and vegetables market, killing 15 civilians and injuring 20 others. Another deadly attack came during the evening hours when a suicide bomber blew himself up inside Finjan Cafe in the al-Ameen neighborhood of eastern Baghdad, killing at least 11 people and injuring 26 others. The cafe, which was seriously damaged by the blast, was filled with youth when the explosion tore through the building. Other deadly attacks happened in Wasit province, where two car bombings at about the same time claimed the lives of at least eleven people. The first explosion happened at the entrance to an industrial district in Kut, killing six people and injuring 15 others, while a blast at a market to the north of the city killed five civilians and injured 12 others. Six more people were killed, including a senior police official, and six others were wounded when two explosives-laden cars exploded at a square near the Passport Department in downtown Basra. In addition, three police officers were killed and one was seriously injured when a roadside bomb hit a police patrol near Tikrit. Two car bombings also hit the center of the southern city of Nasiriyah, killing two civilians and injuring 35 others. Meanwhile, unidentified gunmen attacked a police post guarding an oil pipeline south of Mosul, killing four police officers and injuring five more before the attackers fled the scene. Six other attacks resulting in victims were reported across several cities, raising the day's death toll to at least 54 while 149 others were injured. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the latest wave of attacks, but al-Qaeda in Iraq and Sunni Islamist insurgents have been responsible for a majority of attacks in recent months. Martin Kobler, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), strongly condemned Sunday's attacks. "Nothing can justify such despicable and heinous crimes, targeting innocent people going about their daily business," he said, urging Iraqi leaders to address the country's problems. In a brief statement, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad also condemned the violence that targeted mostly civilians during rush hour. "We mourn the loss of life and stand firmly with the Iraqi people who seek to live in peace and who reject cowardly acts of terrorism such as this," the embassy said. In Canada, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird voiced his concern but said he is confident that Iraq's leaders and people will prevail against the threat of sectarian conflict. "In an increasingly fragile region, Iraq's future is threatened by the deteriorating situation in Syria and the aggressive ambitions of Iran," he said. Although violence in Iraq had declined dramatically since its peak in 2006 and 2007, political turmoil and sectarian violence has been on the rise following the pullout of the last U.S. soldiers in mid-December 2011. UNAMI said more than 1,000 people were killed in violence across Iraq in May, making it the country's deadliest month in more than five years. The monthly figures included May 27 when a wave of bombings killed 75 people and injured hundreds more at markets and Shi'ite neighborhoods in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. The Iraqi government put last month's death toll at nearly 700, but UNAMI said its figures are conservative and rely on direct investigation along with credible secondary sources. UNAMI said it recorded 560 security incidents across Iraq in May, including 176 incidents involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs), 82 car bombings and 243 incidents involving small arms fire. Baghdad was the worst affected province last month with 1,817 civilian casualties, including 532 fatalities and 1,285 injured. Kobler warned last month that systemic violence is "ready to explode at any moment" if Iraq's leaders fail to take immediate action. The UN mission said a total of 712 people were killed and 1,633 were wounded in violence across Iraq during the month of April, following 229 fatalities in March.

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