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## Bomb Shatters Party, Killing 25 Iraqis

By [ERICA GOODE](#) and [STEPHEN FARRELL](#)

BAGHDAD — Sheik Ayed Salim al-Zubaie held a large dinner party at his house in [Abu Ghraib](#) on Sunday evening to celebrate the release of a family member who had been imprisoned by American forces for three years.

But as the guests sat in the garden waiting for dinner to be served, one, a man wearing a yellow dishdasha, or robe, detonated explosives hidden inside it. The bombing killed at least 25 people and wounded at least 29 others, the police said.

Witnesses speculated that the target of the attack was a group of sheiks attending the dinner who had been working with the Americans to fight insurgents.

“The smoke was everywhere mixed with blood and pieces of flesh,” said Yaseen Ahmed, 35, a guest who was wounded in the explosion and taken to a hospital in nearby Falluja. “I went unconscious after that.”

The bombing was one of the largest in and around Baghdad in recent months, a period in which attacks on Iraqi civilians and security forces and on the American military have fallen significantly from their peak in 2007.

Much of that drop has been attributed to the Awakening Councils — local forces, often made up of former Sunni insurgents, which are paid by the American military — and to the increase in American forces known as the surge.

One dividend of the relative quiet was the largest crowd in decades at a playoff match between two Iraqi soccer teams in Baghdad on Sunday. Government officials estimated that 40,000 people crowded into Shaab Stadium and thousands more stood outside to see the match between the Baghdad home team, Zawra, and a Kurdish team from Erbil.

“I’m here with my family because the security is much better and my daughter got tired sitting at home,” said Uday Adnan, 29. “I live in the Shaab neighborhood and I move freely even if it is 9 p.m., which I couldn’t do for a long time.”

Abu Ghraib, which was the setting of the bomb attack on Sunday and is known for its notorious prison, is a Sunni area about 18 miles west of Baghdad.

American helicopters picked up some of those most seriously wounded in the bombing, presumably to take them to a military hospital. “I just lost my brother, but I pray to God to save my son,” said Abdullah Hamdan, 50, whose 8-year-old son was wounded.

The soccer match lasted three hours and was won by Erbil, 1-0, in overtime. It was Kurdistan's second finals victory in a row. Last year's match was held in the north, because Baghdad was considered too dangerous.

This year, the stadium was heavily guarded, with convoys of soldiers, police officers and members of the Peshmerga, the Kurdistan security forces. The match was attended by some prominent politicians, including Ali al-Dabbag, the spokesman for the Iraqi government.

Many of the men who crowded the stadium — no women were visible — waved red-white-and-black Iraqi flags or white flags representing the Zawra team, in a sea of team T-shirts. Cheers erupting inside were quickly picked up by those standing in the streets.

Ahmed Hasan, 28, came from the other side of Baghdad with three friends to watch the game. "I'm afraid while I'm standing here, because the explosions may happen at any time, but seeing the thousands of fans is really joyful," he said.

Ahmed Abbas, the soccer federation's general secretary, said the last time the stadium had been filled to capacity was in 1990, at the championship finals. "This means a lot to us," he said.

Also on Sunday, American military officials said in a statement that they had captured two suspected senior leaders of [Al Qaeda](#), one known as Abu Uthman. According to the military, he was the mastermind of the kidnapping of an American journalist, Jill Carroll, in January 2006.

Ms. Carroll, abducted in western Baghdad on her way to interview a prominent Sunni politician, was held almost three months before being released. An interpreter working with her, Allan Enwiyah, 32, was shot dead at the scene of the kidnapping.

Abu Uthman, whose full name was given as Salim Ashur al-Shujayri, was captured Aug. 11, the statement said.

*Mudhafer al-Husaini contributed reporting from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Falluja, Iraq.*

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