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## Storm of Violence in Iraq Strains Its Security Forces

By [STEVEN LEE MYERS](#) and SAM DAGHER

BAGHDAD — A deadly outburst of violence appears to be overwhelming [Iraq](#)'s police and military forces as American troops hand over greater control of cities across the country to them. On Friday, twin suicide bombings killed at least 60 people outside Baghdad's most revered Shiite shrine, pushing the death toll in one 24-hour period to nearly 150.

Like many recent attacks, the bombings appeared intended to inflame sectarian tensions, to weaken Iraq's security forces and to discredit its government.

The bombings on Friday ominously echoed attacks like the one at a Shiite shrine in [Samarra](#) in February 2006 that unleashed a wave of sectarian bloodshed and pushed the country toward civil war.

The latest bombings — there have been at least 18 major attacks so far this month — so far have not prompted retaliatory attacks, but they have strained what remains a fragile society deeply divided between Sunnis and Shiites.

Two suicide bombers struck within five minutes of each other on streets leading to the shrine of Imam Musa al-Kadhimi and his grandson. One of the attacks, and perhaps both, were carried out by women, witnesses said.

Nearly half of those killed were Iranians making a pilgrimage to the shrine, a golden-domed landmark in the predominantly Shiite Kadhimiya neighborhood of Baghdad that is devoted to 2 of the 12 imams of Shiite Islam. At least 125 people were wounded, many of them also Iranians.

A loose coalition of Sunni militant forces, the Islamic State of Iraq, has claimed responsibility for carrying out many of the recent attacks.

Seemingly attentive to the public wrath, Prime Minister [Nuri Kamal al-Maliki](#) took the unusual step of ordering the creation of a special committee to investigate the attack on Friday and the lapses in security that apparently allowed it to happen. The state television network, Al Iraqiya, reported on Friday evening that Mr. Maliki also ordered the detention [nytimes.com/2009/04/25/.../25iraq.ht...](http://nytimes.com/2009/04/25/.../25iraq.ht...)

network, Al Iraqiya, reported on Friday evening that Mr. Maliki also ordered the detention of two national police commanders responsible for security in the area.

The killing of so many Iranians prompted Iraq to close its border crossing to Iran at Muntheriya in Diyala Province, through which thousands of Iranians a week pass on pilgrimages to Iraq's holy Shiite sites.

The deadliest of the three bombings on [Thursday](#) struck a restaurant filled with Iranian travelers in Muqdadiya, a town in Diyala not far from the border. The toll in that attack rose to 56, with Iranians making up the majority of the dead. Over all, at least 89 people were killed in the bombings on Thursday, and more than 100 were wounded.

After the attacks on Friday, angry Iraqis who gathered amid the bloody debris blamed lax security and corruption of the police and government officials for what had happened. Some of their anger had a strongly sectarian cast.

"They have been ruling us for 1,400 years," said a Shiite army soldier who identified himself only as Abu Haidar, referring to the Sunni domination of Shiites in Iraq. "We took it over for four years, and they are slaughtering us."

The Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella insurgent group that includes [Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia](#), describes the recent attacks as part of a campaign called Harvest of the Good, which it announced in March.

In a statement distributed on extremist Web sites at the time, the group's leader, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, ridiculed [President Obama](#) as "Washington's black man" and called his plan to withdraw American forces by 2011 an "implied avowal of defeat."

On Thursday, Iraq's military claimed to have arrested Mr. Baghdadi, but what was touted as a major success appeared to be in question.

Extremist Web sites denied his arrest, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors claims and other statements by terrorist and extremist groups. The American military command also said in a statement that it could not confirm "the arrest or capture" of the leader, who the American military believes to be a fictitious Iraqi figurehead of a movement that includes many foreign fighters.

American and Iraqi officials have expressed growing concern that the Islamic State of Iraq, [Al Qaeda](#) and other [extremists have been able to regroup](#) and exploit gaps in security that are forming as American commanders have closed scores of combat outposts across the country, leaving day-to-day security in the hands of the Iraqis. "All the killing of Shiites is done by Al Qaeda," a man who identified himself only as Abu Mohammed said after Friday's bombings. "America was not able to finish them off. How can our forces do it?"

A senior national police official on Friday bluntly cited the limitations of Iraq's security forces  
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and their equipment for detecting explosives, typically hand-held wands used at checkpoints that the official described as fakes.

“We need to redeploy our security units to fill gaps because the American withdrawal gave the terrorists motives to reactivate their sleeper cells,” the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he said he would be punished for speaking frankly about such shortcomings. “We need more cars, modern equipment to detect explosives.”

Maj. Gen. Abdul-Aziz Mohammed Jasim, a senior commander at the Ministry of Defense, cited other factors behind the recent violence. They included what he called “reactions to political issues” that had divided Iraq since provincial elections in January and the release of thousands of detainees held by American forces into a feeble economy.

As part of a new security agreement with Iraq that took effect this year, the Americans are required to release all Iraqis in their custody or to transfer them to Iraqi jails. “They are releasing detainees randomly, and some of the detainees who have been released might still have contact with Al Qaeda,” General Jasim said in a telephone interview. “And when they return back to their normal life and do not find work, they return back to Al Qaeda.”

General Jasim also lamented the inability of Iraqi forces to stop attacks against what he described as soft targets, like markets and mosques. “The security procedures are continuing,” he said, “but the security forces cannot exist in every inch.”

It was not clear whether the attacks on Friday were specifically aimed at Iranians or the Shiite site they were visiting. The chief administrator at the shrine, Sheik Fadhil al-Anbari, blamed the police for failing to stop the bombings, which he said were intended to disrupt an economy that the visiting pilgrims had bolstered.

“The crowds of the Iranian visitors have brought a boom to the economy in Kadhimiya, and Al Qaeda does not want this,” he said in a telephone interview. “These attacks are clearly meant to sabotage the country.”

*Mohamed Hussein and Suadad N. al-Salhy contributed reporting from Baghdad, and an Iraqi employee of The New York Times from Diyala Province.*

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