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# Coordinated Attacks Strike 13 Iraqi Cities

By **ANTHONY SHADID**

BAGHDAD — Insurgents unleashed a wave of coordinated attacks across Iraq on Wednesday in a demonstration of their ability to strike at will, offering their counterpoint to American aspirations of bringing the war in Iraq “to a responsible end.”

In attacks in 13 towns and cities, from southernmost Basra to restive Mosul in the north, insurgents deployed their full arsenal: hit-and-run shootings, roadside mines and more than a dozen car bombs. The toll was in the dozens, but the symbolism underscored a theme of America’s experience here: its deadlines, including the Aug. 31 date to end combat operations, have rarely reflected the tumultuous reality on the ground and have often been accompanied by a wave of insurgent attacks.

“The message the insurgents want to deliver to the Iraqi people and the politicians is that we exist, and we choose the time and place,” said Wael Abdel-Latif, a judge and former lawmaker. “They are carrying out such attacks when the Americans are still here, so just imagine what they can do after the Americans leave.”

In coming days, the Obama administration will seek to portray the reduction in troops here to fewer than 50,000, reached Tuesday, as a turning point in seven years of invasion, occupation and war. **President Obama** will deliver a speech on Tuesday marking the deadline. The next day, the mission will be renamed “New Dawn” at a ceremony expected to draw much of the military brass to a sprawling base near the Baghdad airport.

Throughout the partial withdrawal, American officials have insisted that, while work remains, Iraq’s army and police force are ready to inherit sole control over security here.

Military officials have said they believe that insurgents number only in the hundreds, and the military has issued a daily drumbeat of announcements that leaders and cadres in the insurgency have been arrested or killed in American-Iraqi operations.

Wednesday's attacks, which killed at least 51 people, many of them police officers, were seemingly the insurgents' reply. Despite suggestions otherwise, the mostly Sunni insurgents proved their ability to undertake sophisticated attacks virtually anywhere in Iraq, capitalizing on the Shiite-led government's dysfunction and perceptions of American vulnerability.

"The countdown has begun to return Iraq to the embrace of Islam and its Sunnis, with God's permission," read a statement on a prominent insurgent Web site on Wednesday.

Beginning with the car bombing of a police station in the northern Baghdad neighborhood of Qahira, the attacks seemed to sow chaos and confusion among the Iraqi police and soldiers who responded. Twice, police officers brawled with soldiers at the scene, where the blast sheared the top floors off six houses and bent street lights like paper clips. In each confrontation, a shot was fired into the air before officers broke up the fight.

The police kept angry residents away, but the residents, in turn, heckled them for their impotence in stopping a blast that cut like a scythe through the street. While dismembered bodies were pulled from the rubble, others remained entombed.

"You get millions of dinars in salaries and you won't let us help our families?" one youth shouted. Another cried, "You just take money and don't care about us!"

An Iraqi investigator walked by. "This is the state?" he muttered. "This is the government?"

For weeks, there had been a sense of inevitability to the assaults, and American military officials had warned that the insurgents would seek to show their prowess during the holy month of Ramadan. But the anticipation seemed to do little to prepare security forces for the breadth of the strikes, which followed what has become a daily campaign of bombings, hit-and-run attacks and assassinations against security forces and officials in Baghdad and elsewhere.

The names of the towns and the cities where the police were attacked read like a history of the war: Falluja, Ramadi, Tikrit, Kirkuk, Basra, Karbala and Mosul.

In one of the worst assaults, in the southern city of Kut, Iraqi officials said a car bomb detonated by its driver killed 19 people and wounded 87, most of them police officers, in an attack that destroyed the police station near the provincial headquarters.

In Diyala Province, five roadside bombs were detonated in the morning in Buhriz. The first was against a police patrol, a second against reinforcements who were heading to the scene and three others targeting houses belonging to policemen, officials said. They were followed

by a car bomb that struck the provincial headquarters in Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, killing three people. Another car bomb struck a hospital in nearby Muqdadiya.

“The beginning of the storm,” said Saleh Khamis, 38, a teacher in Buhriz.

It is remarkable the degree to which the Aug. 31 date has gone unnoticed among Iraqis; many believe the American military will never really leave, despite a deadline of 2011 for its departure. Indeed, a sense of repetition seems to color everything in a summer of discontent, where American assurances of positive “long-term trend lines” meet the disbelief of a population that seems as angry as at any time since the invasion.

American soldiers in Humvees and armored vehicles, with a token Iraqi escort, drove through parts of Baghdad on Wednesday. The city’s sun-soaked streets were snarled with traffic, as police and army vehicles, sirens blaring, tried to break through traffic jams.

“It’s always the same,” said Khalil Ahmed, 30, an engineer, as he stared at cranes and bulldozers trying to rescue victims buried under the Baghdad police station. “It won’t change. Neither will it get better nor will it get worse.”

“All we can say is God willing,” he added. “What else do you say?”

At the scene of the bombing in Baghdad, so familiar now, residents grimly swept up glass from storefronts. Others milled among the dozens of police and army vehicles. No one seemed to express optimism; most said they were bracing for more attacks, as the country approaches six months without a new government and those long-uttered mantras of Iraqi grievances — shoddy public services at the forefront — go unaddressed.

“The situation doesn’t let us live our lives here,” said Mahmoud Hussein, 26, a mechanic. “No water, no electricity, no security. Every day it gets worse.”

*Reporting was contributed by Stephen Farrell, Moises Saman and Khalid D. Ali from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Baghdad, Baquba, Hilla, Kirkuk and Basra.*