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Death toll rises to 95 in worst attack since US pullout World leaders condemn deadly Iraq bombings



The site of explosion in front of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry in central Baghdad

BAGHDAD (Al Arabiya, Agencies)

Leaders of the European Union and the United Nations condemned a series of deadly bombings that killed almost 100 people and injured hundreds in Baghdad earlier on Wednesday, in the worst day of carnage to hit the Iraqi capital since American troops pulled out.

As U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon said he was saddened by the "appalling" attacks, Iraqi officials raised the death toll from 75 to 95 and said at least 563 people were wounded.

The attacks included two massive truck bombings outside government ministries just minutes apart, including one near the heavily fortified Green Zone, a car bombing and a spate of mortar attacks.

The bloodshed struck on the six-year anniversary of a truck bombing on the U.N. compound in Baghdad in 2003, killing U.N. special envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello and 21 other people.

Worst day of carnage

One of the truck bombs exploded outside the finance ministry in the capital's northern neighborhood of Waziriyah, destroying part of a bridge near the ministry compound, and left more than 200 injured, nearby hospitals said.

Another truck bomb exploded outside the foreign ministry in a residential area close to the Green Zone sending plumes of smoke and dust into the air, leaving a crater three meters (10 feet) deep and 10 meters in diameter.

The walls of the ministry compound in the Salhiyeh district were destroyed and its facade badly damaged.

"We accuse the Baathist alliance of executing these terrorist operations," said Major General Qassim Atta, the spokesman for the Iraqi Army's Baghdad operations, referring to the party of executed former dictator Saddam Hussein.

Atta said the attacks at the finance and foreign ministries were truck bombings, and added that security forces had arrested two senior al-Qaeda leaders in the Mansur neighborhood of western Baghdad.

Violence

A car bomb also hit a market in the western neighborhood of Bayaa, killing two people and wounding five others, a defense ministry official said, while two mortars landed in the Green Zone -- an area of foreign embassies and government offices -- and one exploded outside, a security official said.

According to a tally of tolls distributed by hospitals in the capital, at least 75 people were killed.

The attacks -- shortly before Muslims are due to begin the holy fasting month of Ramadan later this week -- pushed the city to a standstill as security forces shot into the air and closed off roads, while ambulances struggled to make progress amid traffic jams.

It was the bloodiest day in the capital since June 24 when 62 people were killed in the mainly Shiite slum area of Sadr City when a bomb on a motorcycle rickshaw exploded.

Recent attacks in the capital have appeared to target various ethnic groups in a bid to spark sectarian violence, which engulfed Iraq in 2006 and 2007, but no such intra-communal bloodshed appears yet to have been sparked.

Despite a reduction in violence in recent months, attacks on security forces and civilians remain common in Baghdad, the restive northern city of Mosul and in the ethnically divided oil city of Kirkuk.

The number of violent deaths fell by a third last month to 275 from 437 in June, following the pullout of U.S. forces from urban areas on June 30.