

# Suicide attacks kill at least 68 people, 16 children in Iraq city of Basra Wednesday

By Abbas Fayadh  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BASRA, Iraq — Suicide attackers unleashed car bombings against police buildings in Iraq's biggest Shiite city Wednesday morning, striking rush-hour crowds and killing at least 68 people, including 16 children incinerated in their school buses.

The attacks wounded about 200 people and marked a revival of devastating suicide bombings, which had not been seen during this month's battles between U.S. forces and homegrown guerrillas across Iraq.

Basra Gov. Wael Abdul-Latif, a member of the Iraqi Governing Council, blamed al-Qaida, but a U.S. counterterrorism official said it was premature to make such judgments.

In Fallujah, the bloodiest battlefield in April, an agreement aimed at bringing peace to the city ran into trouble Wednesday. Insurgents attacked Marines, prompting fighting that killed 20 guerrillas. Marines said most weapons turned in by residents were unusable, undermining a crucial attempt at disarming fighters.

About 350 miles to the south, in Basra, bombers struck at 7 a.m., just as the city's main street market, near one of the targeted police stations, was opening for the day. Shoppers were headed to the stalls of vegetables and other goods, and children were passing on their way to school.

The attackers detonated four cars packed with missiles and TNT in front of three police stations — one of them next to Basra's main street market — and a police academy. An hour later another car bomb went off outside the police academy in Zubair, a largely Sunni town about nine miles from mainly Shiite Basra.

Police discovered two other car bombs before they were detonated and arrested three men in the vehicles, Abdul-Latif said.

The blast in front of the Saudia police station wrecked and charred vehicles, including school buses taking kindergartners and girls ages 10 to 15 to school.

Dead children, burned beyond recognition, were pulled from the wreckage. One body, black as carbon but apparently an adult, was taken away in a pickup truck.

An Associated Press reporter counted the bodies of 10 kindergartners and six older girls at Basra's Teaching Hospital, where the morgue was full and corpses were left in the halls.

Nine of the dead and 36 of the wounded were police, Abdul-Latif said.

President Bush condemned the suicide attacks in Basra and in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, where a car bomb blasted national police headquarters, killing at least four people and wounding 148.

The U.S. counterterrorism official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said at this point there is no evidence to suggest the bombings in Iraq and Saudi Arabia are related.

Bush said it was imperative that the United States stay the course in Iraq and help establish a democracy there.

"The Iraqi people are looking at Americans and saying, 'Are we going to cut and run again?'" Bush told more than 1,500 AP-member newspapers at the cooperative's annual meeting. "And we're not going to cut and run if I'm in the Oval Office."

Since the start of April, attention has shifted to Iraqi insurgents, with U.S. troops besieging the Sunni

stronghold of Fallujah and a radical Shiite militia launching a revolt in the south. Those two fronts — plus a flare-up of insurgent violence around Baghdad and across the country — have stretched U.S. forces in Iraq.

Throughout the month, U.S. coalition officials have warned that sudden terror attacks remained a threat, and security was increased during Shiite religious ceremonies in Karbala on April 11.

The U.S. counterterrorism official said those behind Wednesday's attack may include Sunni extremists attacking a Shiite area, a tribal group, former regime elements or the network belonging to al-Zarqawi.

"It is just premature to draw any conclusions," the official said.

U.S. officials and military commanders say foreign Islamic militants are among the fighters they seek to uproot from Fallujah — and they have suggested al-Zarqawi could be in the city.

But the relationship between Iraqi insurgents and foreign militants remains unclear. While Washington contends Iraq is a center of the war on terror, U.S. forces have captured few foreigners among hundreds of Iraqi insurgents. Al-Zarqawi complained of poor cooperation with Sunni guerrillas in a letter to al-Qaida leaders that the U.S. military said it intercepted in January.

Wednesday's attack was the bloodiest in Basra, a city in Iraq's far south that has seen little insurgent violence. Of the roughly 200 wounded, 168 were in critical condition.

The blast outside the Saudia station heavily damaged its facade and left a crater six feet deep and nine feet wide. When British troops in charge of Basra showed up to help, angry Iraqis blocked their way, blaming the British for failing to secure the city.

Iraqi Interior Minister Samir Shaker Mahmoud al-Sumeidi said the Basra attack resembled the March 2 suicide bombings and Feb. 1 bombings in Irbil that killed 109 people.

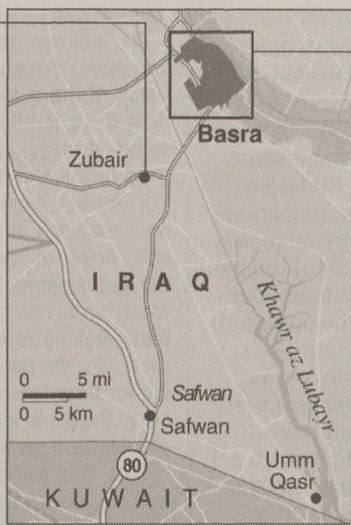
"Today, we all have lost children who are part of Iraq's future which the terrorists want to destroy. The Iraqi government ... confirms its resolution on defeating this cancer which is called resistance," al-Sumeidi said.

Four British soldiers were wounded in the police academy blasts, two of them seriously, the British Ministry of Defense said. Britain has about 8,700 soldiers in Iraq.

## Series of explosions hit Basra

Suicide attackers detonated nearly simultaneous car bombs against police buildings in British-controlled Basra during rush hour Wednesday. The attacks killed at least 68 people, including 16 children and wounded about 200.

**Zubair**  
Police academy in this Basra suburb was hit a second time, an hour after the first explosions. Four British soldiers were injured, two seriously.



**Basra**  
Four explosions hit three police stations, one on the main street market. Two vans carrying the children were passing by when the explosions occurred.



SOURCES: Earth Sciences and Image Analysis Laboratory, NASA Johnson Space Center

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— Samir Shaker Mahmoud al-Sumeidi, Iraqi Interior Minister

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Texas appeals court overturns two death sentences

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A state appeals court overturned two death sentences Wednesday, saying one of the men is mentally retarded and the other was convicted on insufficient evidence. Willie Mack Modden — who won a reprieve from the U.S. Supreme Court in 2002 just hours before he was to be executed — is one of dozens of inmates who have claimed mental retardation following the high court's ruling that those inmates cannot be executed. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals also ruled that evidence did not support a jury's finding that Kenneth Vodochodsky aided

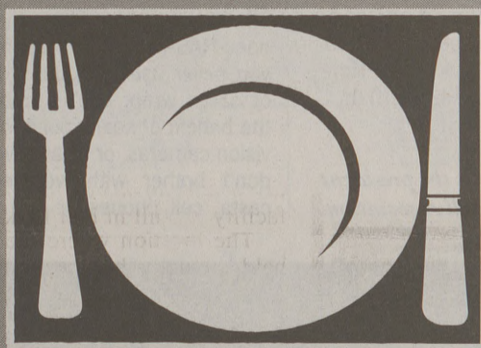
in an ambush that resulted in the 1999 deaths of two sheriff's deputies in Atascosa County.

Vodochodsky's case was sent back to trial court for consideration, while Modden's sentence was reduced to life in prison for a 1984 robbery-murder in Lufkin.

Texas has executed more than a third of the 908 people put to death in the United States since 1976.

Atascosa County's chief deputy and district attorney declined to immediately comment. Vodochodsky had said he was merely at the scene and could not be held responsible for the killings.

The ruling in the Modden case comes a year after a lower court determined he is retarded. Modden's attorney, Greg Wiercioch of the Texas Defender Service, said he was relieved by the ruling.



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