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## Al-Qaeda Claims the Blame for Baghdad Blasts

The Islamic State of Iraq, a militant umbrella group linked to al-Qaeda, claimed the blame on December 10 for a series of coordinated bombings in Baghdad this week that killed 127 people and wounded more than 500. The group posted a message on its website that it would “uproot pillars of this government and ... demolish its corners.”

Fox News cited further comments posted online by the militant Islamic group stating that the attacks in the Iraqi capital had targeted the “bastions of evil and dens of apostates.”



It also warned, “The list of targets has no end.”

Iraq’s Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki answered questions posed by legislators about the bombings during a December 10 closed session of Parliament, and lawmakers coming out of the session told reporters that al-Maliki had blamed the ineffectiveness of his nation’s security on rival political blocs that he claimed had prevented him from appointing a chief of secret police. He also cited the lack of cooperation among security forces in Baghdad and harkened back to a 2003 decision by the United States to disband the Iraqi army.

As Iraqi government officials were assessing the effects of the bombings, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates landed in Baghdad on an unannounced visit to meet with Prime Minister al-Maliki and President Jalal Talabani, and to consult with U.S. military commanders who are preparing for the exit of American forces to begin in the spring. Gates had just ended a two-day trip to Afghanistan, where he told a group gathered at Kabul airport: “While we hope to transfer power in July 2011, we will have a large number of forces here for some time beyond that. This is the first time in Afghan history when foreign forces are here to help, and we intend to be your partner *for a long time*.” (Emphasis added.)

A Reuters news report about the bombings tended to explain the power struggle within Iraq along sectarian, Sunni-Shiite divisions. For example:

- “By staking its reputation on improving security, Iraq’s Shi’ite-led government has made itself a target for insurgents determined to undermine the prime minister ahead of national polls next year.”
- “The 2003 U.S. invasion triggered years of sectarian bloodshed between Iraq’s once dominant minority Sunnis and majority Shi’ites, who stand to dominate any democratic vote.”
- “Sunni Islamist insurgents such as al Qaeda consider Shi’ites heretics, and by bombing Shi’ite targets, they were able to spark a sectarian war that almost tore Iraq apart.”
- But more recent attacks on Shi’ites have failed to trigger a similar response, partly due to government crackdowns on Shi’ite militias, militia ceasefires, and reluctance of the Iraqi public to support sectarian causes after years of war.”

Such language seems geared to validate the U.S.-led overthrow of Saddam Hussein (a secular Sunni not



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fanatically committed to any ideology) and to portray the present Shiite-led government as a moderate force besieged by “Sunni Islamist insurgents such as al Qaeda.”

Such descriptions not only greatly oversimplify religious divisions within the Islamic world, they unfairly castigate moderate, pro-Western Sunnis who have lived peacefully alongside Middle Eastern Christians for centuries. For example, Christians have long been treated with tolerance in Jordan, which is over 95-percent Sunni Muslim and five-percent Christian.

More specifically to Iraq, as we noted, Saddam Hussein was a secularized Sunni who — though by all accounts was an autocratic tyrant — permitted religious freedom in his country, even choosing a Chaldean Christian, Tariq Aziz, as his Vice President. While Saddam had no strong animosity against Shiites, shortly after he took control, the Islamic Revolution in neighboring Iran brought Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to power, and the creation of a Shiite theocratic state. (The revolution was seen as a fundamentalist Islamic backlash against the Westernizing and secularizing efforts of the Western-backed Shah Pahlavi.) Saddam viewed the neighboring regime change with trepidation, since Iraq has a Shiite majority, and he feared a similar revolution at home. Though his fears may have led to a paranoid repression of groups he viewed as threats, the repression was politically, not religiously, motivated.

As for Iraq’s present government, the connection between it and Iran was made plain in June 2005, when Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari made a pilgrimage to Iran, where he laid a wreath at a shrine of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran’s theocratic ruler responsible for imprisoning 52 U.S. embassy personnel for 444 days from 1979-80.

Al-Jaafari was succeeded by Nouri al-Maliki in 2006. During al-Maliki’s exile from Iraq more than 20 years ago, he became a senior leader of the radical Islamic Dawa Party, which supported the Islamic Revolution in Iran and in turn received support from the Iranian government.

?Al-Maliki lived in Iran from 1982 until 1990. From 1990 until the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, al-Maliki lived in Syria, where he worked as a political officer for Dawa, and developed close ties with Hezbollah, the Lebanese-based Islamic terrorist group that has repeatedly called for Israel’s destruction.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq’s next-door neighbor, has benefited in every way from President George W. Bush’s decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein," observed BBC News Baghdad correspondent John Simpson. "It’s probably the best thing that has happened to Iran since the Islamic Revolution there in 1979."

In view of this history, the recent surge of bombings in Iraq can be seen not as an attempted Sunni revolution against an entrenched Shiite government, but as a power struggle among radical Islamic terrorists, all of whom are allied with Iran in one way or another.?

*Photo of Gen. Abboud Qanbar, commander of the Baghdad Operations Command: AP Images*



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