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## Across Iraq, Fresh Mass Graves and Fatal Bomb Attacks

By [ROBERT F. WORTH](#)

BAGHDAD, Iraq, March 9 - Twenty bodies, including those of civilian men and women, were found Wednesday in a remote valley near the Syrian border, Iraqi officials said, a day after 15 headless bodies were discovered south of Baghdad.

The 20 bodies were discovered by a shepherd near Qaim, a Euphrates River town about 250 miles northwest of Baghdad, a hospital official said. It was not immediately clear whether the victims were Iraqi Army and police officers, who have often been targets of large-scale killings by insurgents, or civilians suspected of collaborating with the Americans.

Insurgents continued a wave of attacks on Wednesday that left at least 10 people dead, including two suicide car bombings in central Iraq and an attack on a police patrol in Basra, in the south, where violence has been rare in recent weeks.

The attacks included the attempted assassination of Iraq's interim planning minister, Mahdi al-Hafidh, whose car was fired upon in Baghdad. Two of his the minister's guards were killed and a third was seriously wounded, Interior Ministry officials said. Mr. Hafidh was not injured.

Several prominent Iraqis have been gunned down in the past week or so, including an Interior Ministry official, a hospital director, and a judge and a lawyer working for the tribunal that will try Saddam Hussein and his associates.

Wednesday's violence began at 6:30 a.m., when a suicide bomber drove a garbage truck full of explosives into a parking lot next to the Sadr Hotel in central Baghdad, where American security contractors often stay. Gunmen exchanged fire with the hotel's armed guards for several minutes before the truck detonated about 35 yards from the eight-story hotel, which is next to the Agriculture Ministry building.

The explosion destroyed dozens of cars in the parking lot, leaving a huge crater in the concrete and sending a massive plume of black smoke into the sky near Firdos Square, where a statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled down by Iraqis and American soldiers nearly two years ago. All the hotel's windows were knocked out, but it did not appear to have been damaged structurally.

One Iraqi police officer was killed and 40 people were wounded in the blast, including 30 American contractors, according to a news release by the United States Embassy in Baghdad. None of the Americans were seriously injured, but four were flown out of Iraq for medical treatment, the statement said.

Within hours, Islamist Web sites posted statements from the network of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Iraq's most wanted militant, claiming credit for the attack. The statements said the attackers had chosen the hotel because it had a "Jewish staff" and because Israeli intelligence agents were staying there.

Also on Wednesday, an American soldier was killed in Baghdad when his patrol vehicle hit a roadside bomb, military officials said.

Gunmen also fired at a minibus carrying employees of a Kuwaiti company as it traveled through central Baghdad, killing one of the passengers and injuring three, Interior Ministry officials said.

In Habbaniya, 50 miles west, a suicide bomber drove an Oldsmobile sedan into an Iraqi Army base, killing two officers and a civilian and wounding at least 15 people, army officials said. The attacker is believed to have been a Sudanese, the officials said. Habbaniya is in the volatile Sunni Triangle, which has long been a stronghold of the insurgency.

In Basra, two police officers were killed and five were wounded when a roadside bomb exploded near their convoy. Attacks have been rare in southern Iraq in recent weeks. But several took place at the time of the elections in January in Zubair, about 20 miles west of Basra. Unlike most of the south, which is dominated by Shiites, Zubair is known as a haven for militant Sunnis.

The circumstances surrounding the bodies found near Qaim remained a mystery. One body was identified as that of Riyadh Aziz al-Sanad, a civilian who lives near Qaim and had been shot in the head, the hospital official said. All of the victims' bodies were returned to their families for burial, he added. Another hospital official in Qaim told Reuters that the victims had been killed two days ago.

The 15 bodies found Tuesday included women and children, and were discovered in an old military base between Karbala and Latifiya. Some of the men are thought to have been part of a group of Iraqi soldiers who were kidnapped two weeks ago, according to an Iraqi official cited by The Associated Press.

*Mona Mahmoud and Ali Adeeb contributed reporting for this article.*