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At Least 47 Die in Baghdad Blast; 2nd Attack in 24 Hours

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BAGHDAD, Iraq, Feb. 11 — In the second deadly strike in Iraq in two days, a suicide bomber careened a car packed with explosives into a crowd of Iraqi Army recruits in central Baghdad, killing at least 47 and wounding at least 50 others, police officials said. The attack today provoked a new wave of fears that the security situation is spinning out of control.

Several Iraqi politicians said the strike, nearly identical to the bombing of an Iraqi police station in the nearby town of Iskandariya on Tuesday, was timed to intimidate a delegation of United Nations election experts who recently arrived to determine if early elections can be held in Iraq.

"These terrorists want to inflame the area to get the United Nations to give up on the idea of elections," said Wael Abdullatif, a judge from the southern city of Basra who sits on the Iraqi Governing Council. "A week ago, things were quiet. But as soon as the delegation arrived, the violence exploded."

The car bomb in Iskandariya killed at least 54 people and wounded at least 60 others, most of them Iraqi men who were applying for jobs at the police station, a doctor said.

This morning, as hundreds of young men lined up outside the central recruiting office of the fledging Iraqi Army, a man with a scarf wrapped around his face plunged his car into the crowd and detonated powerful explosives, witnesses said.

The blast gouged a seven-foot-deep crater in the street, blew apart barriers made of sandbags and sent bodies flying, said Saad Shilal, one of the recruits.

"I knew this was dangerous work," Mr. Shilal said as he lay in a hospital bed. "But I thought the area was secure."

Hours later, a huge crowd formed around the debris scene, with many people looking for loved ones.

"My son, my son," wailed Saleema Fahad. "What is his destiny?"

Most of the more than 100 casualties in the two blasts were Iraqis applying for jobs with the new Iraqi Army and police forces.

The recruiting station of the Iraqi Army headquarters is next door to the volunteer center run by the Dawa Islamic Party, a prominent Shiite party whose leaders recently returned from exile in London and Iran.

The bombing on Tuesday morning in Iskandariya, 30 miles south of Baghdad, ripped through a police station where many Iraqis had lined up to apply for jobs.

The local police chief said that attack was carried out by a suicide bomber, though the American military could not confirm that.

"This terrorism will never stop us serving the country," the head of the Iraqi police, Gen. Ahmed Ibrahim told Al Jazeera, the Arab-language television network. "These terrorist actions take place all over in the world, such as in Istanbul and Saudi Arabia, and now they happen in Iraq because we have turned into a free country that will never suit them."

Both attacks appeared to be aimed at Iraqi civilians ready to aid occupation forces in securing the country against groups of criminals, terrorists and insurgents. In Iskandariya, the bomb exploded as a line of job applicants, mostly men, snaked out the door of the police station.

The car that detonated held about 500 pounds of explosives, an American military spokesman said. It was the third deadliest bombing since American-led forces ousted Saddam Hussein in April, and it continued a disturbing pattern of insurgents or terrorists killing Iraqis who are willing to work alongside occupation forces.

The attack came days after American officials released details of an intercepted document supposedly written by a suspected Jordanian terrorist, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, in which Mr. Zarqawi boasts of directing about 25 suicide bombings in Iraq and requests help from Al Qaeda in igniting a sectarian war.

As usual, no group claimed responsibility for Tuesday's bombing. But a spokesman for the occupation forces, Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt of the United States Army, said Mr. Zarqawi was a suspect in all of the major bombings in Iraq, including the one in Iskandariya.

Military officials have said they expect spectacular attacks in the months leading up to the scheduled transfer of sovereignty to an Iraqi government on June 30. Both bombings certainly met that description.

Only two other bombings in Iraq have killed more people. On Feb. 1, two suicide bombers walked into separate offices in Erbil of the main Kurdish political parties and detonated their explosives, killing 109 people. In late August, a car bomb exploded in the holy city of Najaf in southern Iraq, killing at least 80 people, including a respected Shiite cleric.

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