

# Explosion in Basra Threatens Further Violence in Iraq

by [Azhar Al-Rubaie \(/experts/azhar-al-rubaie\)](/experts/azhar-al-rubaie)

Dec 10, 2021

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/anfjar-albsrt-yhdd-bandla-alnf-fy-almstqbl-fy-alraq\)](/ar/policy-analysis/anfjar-albsrt-yhdd-bandla-alnf-fy-almstqbl-fy-alraq)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Azhar Al-Rubaie \(/experts/azhar-al-rubaie\)](/experts/azhar-al-rubaie)

Azhar Al-Rubaie is a freelance journalist based in Iraq. His writing focuses on a variety of issues, including politics, health, society, wars, and human rights. Al-Rubaie is a contributor to Fikra Forum.



Brief Analysis

## The explosion that rocked Basra on Tuesday may prove a harbinger of greater instability throughout the country in the post-elections period.

**A**fter several years of relative security in Iraq's oil-rich southern city, an explosion—reportedly via a rigged motorbike—killed four and rocked Basra on Tuesday, December 7. Twenty others were severely injured by the blast, according to official sources. The terrorist bombing took place on Al-Samoud Street near Al-Jumhuri Hospital in the city center. This is a relatively crowded, civilian-heavy area due to the presence of both government departments and shops.

In response, Basra's security forces announced the imposition of strict security measures in the city's streets after the incident to prevent similar security breaches, while the forces tightened security procedures and scrutiny of movement of vehicles and motorcycles of lacking official registration numbers or documents.

The attack in Basra is not an isolated incident and reflects an increasing state of general insecurity in the country; recently, numerous terrorist attacks attributed to ISIS have occurred in northern Iraq. The latest incident occurred last Sunday in the village of Lahiban in the Makhmour district, south of Erbil, which resulted in the killing of ten Peshmerga and three civilians. According to government media, the joint security forces managed to take full control of the village the following day in response.

While the Iraqi Security Media Cell announced the restoration of order in Lahiban that Monday (December 6), analysts see these latest attacks as a wake-up call that the possibility of ISIS returning to the areas formerly under its return—including those areas where control is disputed between Baghdad and Erbil.

Yet other developments in Iraq are more likely to be behind the Basra attack. Observers of Iraqi affairs believe that the political differences that followed the Iraqi elections were behind these terrorist operations, and were allowed in

order to pressure the government for political gains satisfactory to all involved parties. Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr—who is generally considered the winner of last October's elections—published a tweet describing the bombings in Basra as “political explosions.” Adding that these attacks are putting lives in danger for the sake of some parliamentary seats, Sadr stressed again that arms should be confined to the hands of the state and that serious work must be done in Iraq to dissolve all militias that misuse weapons under the pretext of ‘resistance’ or any other excuse.

Political analyst Ali Al-Baydar, upon speaking to the author, likewise suggested that the Basra bombing incident is part of the ongoing conflict between Iraq's political parties and state institutions. “The losing parties are attempting to confuse the security sector in order to obtain political gains related to the elections, which rules out that ISIS was behind the bombing in Basra.”

Expanding on this point, Al-Baydar added: “ISIS cannot reach the southern areas [such as Basra] where there is a Shia majority in direct conflict with the organization, but it is possible that these events will continue in the coming days as long as there is no intention to suppress terrorist groups, and that solving the political crisis in the country depends on security stability and vice versa.”

In an interview on the Iraqi state television channel Al-Iraqiya, Major General Yahya Rasoul—a military spokesman for the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces—indicated that the Basra bombing was intended to target one of the investigating officers of the ongoing “death squads” case attempting to determine the killers of journalist Ahmed Abdel Samad and photographer Safaa Ghali in January 2020. Both journalists, Abdul Samad and Ghali, were working on covering the popular protests in Basra before they were shot.

On November 1, 2021, the Basra Criminal Court issued a death sentence against one of the men involved in the killing of journalists. The verdict came down after popular protests and demonstrations in Iraqi cities demanding government agencies to reveal the killers of Samar, Ghali, and the other journalists and activists who have been targeted and killed across the country.

According to the Media Office of the Prime Minister, Kadhimi stated: “Just as we arrested the killers of Hisham (Al-Hashemi) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/murder-husham-al-hashemi>), Ahmed, and Safaa, we will bring the criminals one by one, and they will stand before the just judiciary, and before the people to reveal their crimes. And the most important thing is that for those who think to themselves that they are above the state and the law, the logic of force will surely backfire on them.”

Both the Basra attack and ISIS attacks in the north demonstrate the continued importance of efforts to promote better security measures in Iraq, while emphasizing that limited international help may stretch the security forces thin. Yesterday, on December 9, the international coalition forces announced the end of their combat operations in Iraq along with the continuation of their presence for advisory purposes. This new arrangement is in accordance with the strategic agreement concluded between Baghdad and Washington. At the same time, ISIS and other armed groups still pose a threat. The latter is a particular concern via the activity of its cells that periodically attempt to launch attacks in various areas of the north of the country, targeting civilians and security officials.

The coalition played an important role in fighting ISIS alongside Iraqi forces when the terrorist organization controlled a third of the area of Iraq in 2014 until the announcement of its defeat in 2017. But this does not mean the defeat of ISIS completely, and the drawdown of coalition forces has placed greater pressure on the shoulders of the Iraqi forces in its continued fight against the organization.

Iraq is currently trapped in the midst of the security instability and the political chaos after failing to form a government months after the elections. Meanwhile, in the midst of this uptick of attacks, Iraqis are waiting for the current government to take serious steps towards settling differences. This should be the start of a new chapter of

efforts to save the country from the cycle of killing and intimidation, and ridding the country of terrorists and those who violate the rule of law. ❖

---

## RECOMMENDED

---



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Targeting the Islamic State: Jihadist Military Threats and the U.S. Response](#)

February 16, 2022, starting at 12:00 p.m. EST (1700 GMT)



Ido Levy,  
Craig Whiteside

[\(/policy-analysis/targeting-islamic-state-jihadist-military-threats-and-us-response\)](#)

