
OFFICIALS CONFIRM 25 DEAD, 130 WOUNDED AFTER GUNMAN TARGETS IRAQI PROTESTS

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09.12.2019

The Hill (7 December 2019)

By Marina Pitofsky

Iraqi officials confirmed Saturday that 25 people died and 130 are wounded after a gunman targeted anti-government protesters in the countrys capitol overnight.

Three of the dead were law enforcement officers and the rest were protesters, CBS News reported.

The gunfire continued until early Saturday morning, shots fired in Baghdads Khilani Square and Sinak Bridge. These areas have been the center of the uprising, and chaos erupted after the electricity was cut and people fled into mosques and other areas to escape the shooting.

A car park that protesters were using as a base for their sit in was lit on fire, as shots were fired into surrounding buildings. Protesters raised a bloody white flag as they returned to the site Saturday, according to CBS News.

Iraqi security forces were deployed to the square early Saturday morning.

A prominent Shiite cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, the head of the countrys parliaments Sairoon bloc, said a drone targeted his home in Najaf Saturday as well. Nassar al-Rubaie, head of Sairoon's political committee, sharply criticized the attack in televised remarks and called for an emergency parliamentary session to address the violence.

Anti-government protestors initially blamed supporters of Iran-backed Iraqi militias, which have attacked past protests. A string of knife attacks also targeted protesters this week, after the militias held a counter-demonstration in Baghdad.

The attacks Friday night came just hours after the U.S. enacted sanctions on the head of Asib al-Haq, an Iran-backed militia accused of deadly sniping attacks on protesters. The U.S. Treasury sanctioned leader of the group Qais al-Khazali, his brother Laith al-Khazali and Husain Falih Aziz al-Lami.

The Friday attack was the deadliest since Oct. 1, when thousands of Iraqi protesters launched demonstrations calling for political change and an end to Irans influence in the countrys affairs, according to CBS News. Security forces used live rounds of ammunition and tear gas to break up the protests.

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