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Iraq Church Siege Ends With 52 Dead



The combo picture shows Our Lady of Deliverance church the morning after its congregation was taken hostage in Baghdad on Monday.



Iraqi security forces stormed a Baghdad church where militants had taken an entire congregation hostage for four hours, leaving at least 52 people dead, including a priest, Iraqi officials said Monday.

It was not immediately clear whether the hostages died at the hands of the attackers or during the rescue late on Sunday night in an affluent neighborhood of the capital, AP reported.

The incident began when militants wearing suicide vests and armed with grenades attacked the Iraqi stock exchange at dusk Sunday before turning their attention to the nearby Our Lady of Deliverance church -- one of Baghdad's main Catholic places of worship -- taking about 120 Christians hostage.

Maj. Gen. Hussein Ali Kamal, the deputy interior minister, said 52 people were killed and 67 wounded, in the bloodbath. Officials said at least one priest and 10 policemen were among the dead. Many of the wounded were women.

> Hasty Action

A Christian member of parliament on Monday described the Iraqi rescue operation as "not professional," saying "it was a hasty action that prompted the terrorists to kill the worshippers."

"We have no clear picture yet whether the worshippers were killed by the security forces bullets or by terrorists, but what we know is that most of them were killed when the security forces started to storm the church," Younadem Kana said.

Video footage from an American drone that was overhead during the attack showed a black plume of smoke followed by flashes from inside the building before what appears to be soldiers going in. US forces often supply air support to Iraqi forces conducting operations on the ground, feeding them video footage of what American drones see from the air.

The casualty information was confirmed by police and officials at hospitals where the dead and wounded were taken.

There were conflicting accounts about the number of attackers involved in the assault, with Baghdad military spokesman Maj. Gen. Qassim Al-Moussawi saying Sunday night that security forces killed eight, while the US military said between five and seven died.

Two police officers on the scene, however, say only three attackers were killed and another seven arrested afterward.

Police pushed back onlookers from around the church by erecting a barbed wire fence but residents and people from the Christian community claimed that it was too little, too late.

> Converts in Egypt

A cryptically worded statement posted late Sunday on a militant website allegedly by the Islamic State of Iraq appeared to claim responsibility for the attack. The group, which is linked to Al-Qaeda in Iraq, said it would "exterminate Iraqi Christians" if Muslim women in Egypt were not freed.

It specifically mentioned two women in Egypt that extremists maintain have converted to Islam and are being held against their will in Egypt. The two are wives of priests and are believed to have converted to Islam to leave their husbands since divorce is banned by Egypt's Coptic Church. One woman disappeared in 2004 and another in July.

Egypt's Christians had maintained they were kidnapped and staged rallies for their release.

Both were later recovered by police, denied any conversions and were then spirited away to distant monasteries. In the message, the militants claim the two are still Muslim and called upon the Vatican, which held a meeting earlier in October to discuss the fate of Christians in the Middle East, to release the women.

No Threat



03

Turkey does not believe that its neighbors including Iran pose a threat, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Sunday.

Asia Stocks Rise



05

Asian stock markets climbed on Monday, boosted by faster growth in Chinese manufacturing and expectations that the US central bank will pump more money into the world's largest...

New President



10

Dilma Rousseff has been elected president of Brazil to succeed Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, electoral officials have confirmed. Rousseff, 62, who has never before held elected office, becomes the country's first woman president.

Foreign Investment



06

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO) plans to attract foreign investments in the tourism industry.

Taliban Briefly Overrun District in Ghazni

The Taliban briefly overran a district seat in eastern Afghanistan, torching government buildings and capturing police officers after an intense gunfight, officials said Monday.

The government was back in control of Ghazni province's Khogyani district headquarters a few hours later, said Interior Ministry spokesman Zemer Bashary, adding that three rooms in the government headquarters had been burned and a vehicle damaged. He did not have any information on casualties, AP reported.

Local police chief Mohammad Yasin, who wasn't there during the attacks, said government buildings were captured and set on fire.

All the police guarding the district headquarters were either killed or taken prisoner, Taliban spokesman Zabullah Mujahid said, and their weapons and vehicles were confiscated.

He put out a press release later saying the Taliban had left the district after damaging the headquarters.

A NATO spokesman said he did not have any details of the incident.

In recent months, Ghazni has become one of the most unstable provinces in Afghanistan. Insecurity around the country shot up after NATO and Afghan troops began pushing into the Taliban heartland of the south in July.

Parliamentary elections held in September did not take place in most of Ghazni because of the insurgent threat.

Afghanistan has more than 350 districts.

Around 10 are under direct Taliban control but they have a presence in many more.

Perspective

False Premise

By Mohiaddin Sajedi

Egypt's leading newspaper Al-Ahram in an editorial last week accused Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad of undermining Arab interests. Assad in a recent interview had said he has differences of opinion with the government in Cairo and he would travel to Egypt only when invited.

Differences between Syria and Egypt have existed for ages and manifest itself largely when it comes to the policies of the two Arab countries vis-à-vis Palestine and Lebanon.

It can also be said that their strategic approach to and vision about regional developments often contradict each other. However, this rift is a matter of concern to only Damascus and Cairo. Syria can defend its right if and when necessary and would hardly need outside help to do so.

Assad needs to respond to charges that he is not very interested in resistance or else he would have launched a resistance movement in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

This is an issue the Syrian leader should address in whatever form or fashion he deems fit. However, the Al-Ahram editorial calls for a response from a third party as it also focused on cordial ties between Tehran and Damascus and claimed that this harmony is harmful to the Arab world.

The Arabic-language newspaper said the timeline of the long-awaited departure of American troops from Iraq is known... But "has any date been set for the withdrawal of Iranian forces from Lebanon?"

To those who have eyes to see, it is visible that Iran has no military presence in Lebanon. Whatever is said and written about the alleged presence of our armed forces in that small country is without foundation and the result of propaganda tactics unleashed by Israel and the US.

Little surprise that Al-Ahram has sided with such a shallow allegation. The point is that Al-Ahram and the powerhouses in Egypt simply cannot swallow the fact that Israel was defeated in Lebanon and no Arab army so far had been able to vanquish the formidable Israeli military in warfare.

Genetics Seminar Planned

Avicenna Research Institute (ARI) intends to hold a seminar on Genetics, Law, Ethics and Psychology during November 10-11 to review genetic findings.

08

Anti-Putin Rally in Moscow

Over a thousand anti-government protesters were allowed to rally on Sunday in Moscow's central Triumph Square for the first time in years as authorities granted their opponents a moment to air their grievances.

Though veteran human rights defender Lyudmila Alexeyeva was granted permission by authorities to hold a rally for 800 people, scores of armed police stood by as the square filled up with more people than allowed, many of them chanting "Russia without (Prime Minister Vladimir) Putin!"

"We are holding this protest to uphold our constitutional rights. This is no longer the Soviet Union," Alexeyeva, a Soviet-era dissident, told a jubilant crowd, Reuters reported.

Opposition attempts to hold monthly rallies on the square, which lies on the city's main shopping street, have become a barometer of the Kremlin's willingness to tolerate dissent. Police have broken up a dozen rallies and detained protesters.

Alexeyeva hailed Sunday's rally as "a small victory." To the side of the square, a much smaller protest of around 200 and organized by fierce Kremlin critic Eduard Limonov formed, which had not been granted permission to rally.

Riot police detained at least seven protesters from that rally, a Reuters witness said. For over a year, Russia's marginalized opposition have been convening on Triumph Square on the 31st of each month symbolizing the right to free assembly guaranteed in Article 31 of Russia's Constitution.

