

Baghdad Christmas Bombing Reports 'False'

News reports claimed three Christmas Day bomb attacks, two at a market in a Christian sector of Baghdad and a third near a church, killed at least 37 people and injured scores more. Here is a roundup of news coverage and the counterclaims that followed:



What Was Reported

Two bombs reportedly exploded on Wednesday in an outdoor market in a Christian section of Dora, in southern Baghdad. The blasts killed 11 and wounded 21, according to the Associated Press, which cited a police officer.

Soon afterward, a car bomb was said to have exploded near St. John Catholic Church, also in Dora, as worshippers were leaving a Christmas mass. News reports said the blast killed at least 26 people, and wounded a further 38.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Were Christians Targeted?

It depends on who you ask. According to the Associated Press:

"The Iraq-based leader of the Chaldean Catholic Church, Louis Sako, said the parked car bomb exploded after Christmas Mass and that none of the worshippers were hurt. Sako said he didn't believe the church was the target."

However, according to Agence France-Presse:

"The attack targeted the church, and most of the martyrs are Christians," a police colonel told AFP. "The attack happened when worshippers were leaving the church" after a service."

AFP initially cited an Iraq Interior Ministry spokesman, Saad Maan, as saying the car bomb targeted St. John church. Later, however, Maan reversed course:

” ‘The attack was against a ... market and not a church,’ Maan said, adding that ‘the targeted area is a mix of Muslims and Christians.’ “

In this BBC video, Rafid Jabboori of the BBC’s Arabic Service explains that Christians in the Dora region have been the target of violence for several years:

Facts Disputed

In the days following the reported blasts, some of the facts have been disputed. Videos purportedly showing the bomb blasts were said to have featured Iraqis wearing summer clothes, though the country is experiencing a cold winter.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Chaldean Patriarchate said the reports of the church explosion were false.

Fr. Albert Hisham said “the explosion happened ... in the vicinity of the Souk of the Assyrians, not far from the police station, and therefore a distance from the church. ... We invite the media to be completely certain of the facts before rushing to publication, in order to avoid spreading fear.”