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## Basra Protests Continue for Second Day

By Pamela Constable  
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NAHRAN OMAR, Iraq, Aug. 10 -- Violence spread through the sweltering southern region surrounding Basra city today, where protracted shortages of electricity and gasoline sparked a second day of angry demonstrations in the country's second city and in surrounding towns and villages.

Gunmen chased a car on the highway to Basra in which a Washington Post correspondent was travelling this afternoon with an Iraqi translator and driver. The gunmen, driving in another vehicle, shot out the tires of the journalists' car and passed it. The Washington Post driver, Dhia Ahmed, spun the car and sped in the other direction as the gunmen were shooting. He swerved into this tiny village about 50 miles north of Basra and hid the car inside a local family's walled compound. None of the three passengers was harmed.

In Basra on Saturday, angry crowds burned a gasoline tanker and threw stones at British troops stationed in the city, protesting the utility shortages that have made life nearly unbearable in heat that reaches up to 125 degrees fahrenheit daily.

Today, residents in the region said the violence in Basra had worsened, and that two people had been killed and seven others wounded in clashes between irate mobs and British troops. They said more tanker trucks had been stolen at gunpoint and that Iraqi police had fled from other violent confrontations.

The reports from Basra could not be confirmed, but in interviews in long gas station lines and in towns along the highway today, many residents expressed deep anger at the shortages, which they blamed largely on British authorities that have occupied the region since coalition forces overthrew president Saddam Hussein in April.

"We have no fuel, no water, no electricity for days. Children are dying in hospitals," said Tha'ara Amar, 25, a shopkeeper in the city of Amarah, where residents said a large protest rally had been organized by local Shiite Muslim leaders Saturday. "Tell the British to give us benzine, and then we will turn in our guns."

A businessman named Hussain, 56, said he and other residents had initially welcomed the British forces but had grown increasingly frustrated and angry at the lack of services and basic supplies, especially as the infernal summer heat climbed day by day. "In the beginning we were happy. We opened our windows to freedom as the Americans and the British asked us," said Hussain. "But now we have nothing, not even our basic necessities. If nothing changes, we are ready to make a lot of chaos."

Another 50 miles further along the highway to Basra, drivers waiting in an all-day line at a gas station called out angrily as a British military convoy passed. Many wearing bath towels over their heads against the relentless heat, and said they expected to remain in line until Monday.

In the distance, the intense orange flames and thick smoke from oil refineries flickered in the air. The Basra region produces much of Iraq's oil, but the industry was badly damaged in the war against

Hussein, and most oil and gas has been imported from Kuwait and other countries since the war.

The drivers said people in the nearby town of Saleh Casr had forcibly commandeered a gasoline tanker today en route from Basra and taken out the gas. Some said they wanted the British forces to leave, but others said they wanted them to keep better order and crack down on widespread smuggling of gasoline and other supplies.

"We haven't had any electricity since the war. The British promised us everything, and they have given us nothing," said Mukul Sayeed, 52, an engineer waiting in line. "We were happy when the coalition forces got rid of a big tyrant, but if they don't help us, we are all going to become like Fallujah people."

Fallujah is a town in central Iraq where many residents were supporters of Saddam Hussein, and numerous attacks have occurred against American troops patrolling the area.

The growing protests appeared to have been orchestrated, in part, by Shiite Muslim leaders whose branch of Islam predominates in southern Iraq. Along the highway to Basra, monuments that once featured portraits of Hussein have been freshly painted with portraits of senior Shiite leaders.

Even in this tiny farming village, residents complained angrily about the shortages and about the growing lawlessness that has accompanied them. The family that invited the visiting journalists to hide inside their farmyard said their new truck had been stolen by gunmen this morning.

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