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## US Rockets Target Iraq Hospital

Jacques Charmelot, Agence France Presse —

BAGHDAD, 4 May 2008 — A US rocket attack damaged a hospital in the Iraqi capital's Sadr City district yesterday, wounding 28 people as American forces claimed to have killed 14 insurgents in the district.

The US military said it used a rocket in an attack on insurgents in Sadr City that witnesses earlier reported was an airstrike. An international agency reporter at the scene said the district's main Al-Sadr Hospital was badly damaged and a fleet of ambulances was destroyed. Just outside the hospital, a shack, which appeared to have been the target, was reduced to a pile of rubble.

The military said it destroyed a "criminal element command and control center" by munitions from a "rocket system" at approximately 10 a.m. "Intelligence reports indicate the command and control center was used by criminal elements to plan and coordinate attacks against Iraqi security and coalition forces and innocent Iraqi citizens," it said.

Hospital staff said at least 28 people wounded in the strike were brought inside for treatment at the complex, which had its windows shattered, and medical and electrical equipment damaged.

Medical staff and other hospital workers were livid. "They (the Americans) will say it was a weapons cache that was hit," said the head of the Baghdad health department, Dr. Ali Bistan, who arrived at the scene to assess the damage. "But in fact they want to destroy the infrastructure of the country."

He charged that the attack was aimed at preventing doctors and medicines from reaching the hospital, which is in an area that has seen increased clashes between American troops and fighters loyal to Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr. Hospital corridors were littered with glass shards, twisted metal and hanging electrical wiring. Partitions in wards had collapsed.

Huge concrete blocks placed to form a blast wall against explosions had toppled onto parked vehicles, including up to 17 ambulances, disabling emergency response teams.

Nurse Zahra described her shock at the attack. "I was very afraid. I thought I would die. Everyone was scared. They ran in all directions," she said. "Now I'm more sad than frightened because hospital facilities have been destroyed." Hospital guard Alaa Muhammad, 26, was at a side entrance when the attack came. "There were five missiles that exploded outside the parking lot," he said.

An AFP reporter saw three huge craters, each about six meters across, created by the impact of the rockets. Youths scrambled over the rubble to search for anyone trapped underneath.

Residents said that the shack that appeared to have been the main target of the strike was a transit point for Muslim pilgrims.

The AFP reporter witnessed several US helicopters sweeping above Sadr City amid a steady barrage of gunfire.

The strike came as the US military said it had killed at least 14 Sadr followers since Friday in a series of clashes around Sadr City.

The firefights, which began at 7:20 a.m. on Friday and have continued sporadically, saw US forces use air support and tanks as they clashed with insurgents in the impoverished district of some two million people. US forces have been clashing with Sadr followers since March 25 in Sadr City.