

Attacks On Iraqi Oil In November Highest Since War's End

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WASHINGTON -- Saboteurs have attacked Iraq's oil installations more often this month than in any month since the end of the war, a global security expert said Friday.

Gal Luft, executive director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, said insurgents and terrorists, including Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, are more and more focused on attacking oil facilities as a way of getting back at the U.S., the world's biggest oil consumer.

"It denies Iraq the ability to make revenue for reconstruction thus making the U.S. pay more and it is designed to make Iraqis very unhappy with whatever" the U.S. does because oil shortages hamper electricity flows and dent domestic gasoline supplies.

Luft estimates that there have been at least 21 separate attacks on Iraqi oil pipelines in November, compared to an average five-to-six attacks per month since the U.S. declared an end to "major combat operations" in Iraq on May 1, 2003.

"We have seen a steady rise in attacks in Iraq. November has been the worst month ever and if it is successful in Iraq, it could very well overflow into Saudi Arabia where there is 10,000 kilometers of pipeline," Luft said.

Saudi oil officials have long argued that their oil installations are isolated and well-guarded, making a significant attack difficult to pull off.

But Luft says the Saudis would be powerless to thwart an airborne attack on its vast oil infrastructure.

"We are witnessing a number of incidents of suicide tactics applied against oil facilities. Killing 10 American soldiers is nothing compared to the impact of the rise in oil prices on America and the terrorists did not even need to come to America," Luft told a conference.

Luft warned that terror groups are now looking to attack oil tankers as a way to seriously disrupt tanker traffic. He said several critical oil traffic choke points pass through areas where terrorists operate.

"Terrorist organizations have gone maritime, developing relations with pirates, especially in the Asian Straits of Malacca," Luft said. "There have been cases where terrorists boarded tankers to practice sort of like what the 9/11 hijackers did when they took flying lessons in Florida."

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