

# US subjects Iraqi detainees to “inhuman treatment”

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Numerous reports have emerged of brutal treatment and frequent torture of detainees rounded up and arrested by US occupying forces in Iraq. In a June 30 statement, the human rights organization Amnesty International wrote: “The conditions of detention Iraqis are held under at the Camp Cropper Center at Baghdad International Airport—now a US base—and at Abu Ghraib Prison may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, banned by international law.”

News sources have also reported commando-style raids on Iraqi homes, in which civilians are handcuffed, hooded, forced to kneel or lie face-down in the dirt for hours and subjected to other forms of torture. Those arrested and taken away are routinely denied access to family members or legal counsel and are not informed of the charges against them.

Amnesty International (AI) says that detainees in Baghdad “have invariably reported that they suffered cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment immediately after arrest.” Those captured were tightly bound with plastic handcuffs, and sometimes denied access to water and toilet facilities on the first night of arrest.

AI reports the case of Uday and Rafed Adel, 31-year-old twins, who were arrested on May 16. They were picked up in a round-up in Baghdad following looting in the Iraqi capital. They were tightly handcuffed, taken to various transfer centers and finally to Camp Cropper. Rafed said, “They did not interrogate us and they treated us like animals. In the first week we were not allowed to wash and didn’t have sufficient water.”

Following 20 days of detention, the brothers were told they would be released, but were instead taken to Abu Ghraib prison. Some prisoners were released, but many remained in detention, and detainees staged a demonstration on June 12. The US officer in charge promised to inform prisoners individually the next day about their status. But only six were released and the

others received no information about their cases, causing prisoners to stage another protest.

AI writes that in response to the protest, “The guards opened fire above their heads. One detainee, Jassem, hurled a post at a generator and was reportedly shot dead as he walked back to the tent. Seven detainees were wounded.”

Detainees began to arrive at Camp Cropper at the end of April. The first prisoners were left in the open sun and heat until tents were built on the third day. They were only allocated four liters of water each daily, which was insufficient for the extremely hot conditions. According to AI: “The toilets were unscreened holes in the ground.... Washing was prohibited by guards until skin diseases became widespread.”

Prisoners were only allowed contact with the International Committee of the Red Cross (IRC). Relatives seeking information on detained family members were provided with no information by the US forces, and were not allowed to visit them.

AI is also investigating the US military’s three-week detention of an 11-year-old boy.

Khraisan al-Abally, 39, an Iraqi businessman detained during a raid on his home April 30, told the *Associated Press* that for eight days US interrogators subjected him to sleep deprivation, bound him hand and foot and forced him to kneel naked.

AP interviewed al-Abally twice, on June 20 and June 30. He said US troops raided his home April 30, taking him and his 80-year-old father into custody and shooting his brother Dureid. Dureid had fired at the US troops, thinking they were looters. Khraisan said military officials later told him that his brother had died, although the US now claims to have no knowledge of his fate.

The US claimed the al-Aballys had information about Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, a top official in the Hussein regime. Khraisan al-Abally said he had no knowledge of

al-Douri.

Al-Abally told AP that during his eight-day interrogation, “he was bound and blindfolded, he was kicked, forced to stare at a strobe light and blasted with ‘very loud rubbish music.’

“‘I thought I was going to lose my mind,’ said al-Abally.... ‘They said, “I want you on your knees.” After three or four days it’s very painful. My knees were bleeding and swollen.’” The US military would not comment on al-Abally’s detention or treatment, but has defended such practices, saying that it considers sleep deprivation, noise abuse and restraining detainees and forcing them to remain in uncomfortable positions for prolonged periods of time all to be legal and acceptable.

Human Rights Watch is investigating al-Abally’s allegations. Johanna Bjorken, an HRW researcher in Iraq, said that if his claims are true “it’s very possible you’ve inflicted cruel treatment, which is a violation of the Geneva Conventions.”

The methods used by US military in their raids and searches of Iraqi homes have also been condemned for violating Arab cultural traditions. Many view these raids by armed foreigners as a defilement of the sanctity of the home.

As part of Operation Sidewinder, these raids have been concentrated in recent days in the area around Tikrit, birthplace of Saddam Hussein. As of July 1, the military reported taking 180 people into custody. During the raids, teams of troops order terrified families outside while they search through their possessions. Women were separated from the men, an affront to Muslim tradition.

The *Los Angeles Times* reports on the June 27 raid of the home of Sheik Khazal Mahdi. The Mahdi family said that about 30 US troops in a dozen vehicles arrived at their home shortly before midnight, bursting into their residence, where many were sleeping. The men and women were separated; most of the men were handcuffed and some were blindfolded.

“The Americans come into our homes by force,” Sheik Mahdi told the *Times*. “Where is the democracy that the Americans promised?”

The search went on until daybreak. The troops seized some weapons and arrested eight men. The family has been unable to contact their detained relatives. An army spokesman said US officials have set up liaison offices where relatives can make inquiries, but the Mahdis say they have no idea where to go.

The family also says the US troops took about 5.5 million dinars (about US\$4,000) during the raid. Seizure

of cash has reportedly become a common practice of the US military, which often claims the money has come from illegal activities. Family members told the *Times* that the money came from the recent sale of some sheep, and was to be used for a medical procedure for the sheik’s wife. Military officials have ludicrously stated that seized funds may be returned if individuals can prove that the funds were acquired legitimately.

With the mistreatment and torture of Iraqi detainees—in violation of international law—the US is continuing a policy it has pursued for months in Afghanistan, where an unknown number of prisoners have been held and tortured with no legal redress.

On June 21 an Afghan detainee died while imprisoned at a US “holding facility” near Asadabad in the eastern province of Konar. In keeping with US policy, military authorities have refused to release any information on the man’s identity or details of his death.

Two Afghan prisoners also died in separate incidents last December while being interrogated at Bagram air base. Military pathologists determined that both men died as a result of blunt force trauma and the deaths have been classified as homicides.

The US military’s treatment of detainees in Iraq and Afghanistan—which has included sleep deprivation, extended shackling of prisoners, selective withholding of medical treatment, blindfolding, hooding and forcing prisoners to stand in painful positions for hours—is clearly illegal under the UN anti-torture convention as ratified by the US Congress in 1994. The Bush administration has sought to justify this flouting of international law by referring to all those who fall into the clutches of the US military as “terrorists.”



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