

## Abu Ghraib-style brutality

**Maliki's secret detention site in Baghdad**

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In a disclosure that is widely being compared to the Abu Ghraib scandal, it has been reported that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ran a covert prison in Baghdad for the purposes of holding and torturing hundreds of Sunni insurgents.

The sadistic and brutal torture at the secret site was first reported by the *Los Angeles Times* on April 19. In response, Maliki ordered the prison in the old Muthanna Airport in West Baghdad closed, releasing 71 men. Three army officers have been arrested in connection with the abuse.

More than 300 detainees were transferred, with “most” displaying fresh scars, the international agency Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported.

Human Rights Watch has interviewed 42 of the more than 431 detainees and reported that many were raped, sodomized with broomsticks and pistol barrels or forced to engage in sexual acts with one another and their jailers. The men were routinely asphyxiated with plastic bags and then shocked into consciousness with electricity applied to their genitals.

The organization confirmed that the men's accounts were “credible and consistent.”

“We were tortured for four long months continuously,” a former inmate told al-Jazeera in an interview.

“The horror we found suggests torture was the norm in Muthanna,” said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at HRW, calling for the prosecution of all those responsible including those in authority.

The detainees were from the northern region of Mosul and Nineveh province and were captured between September and December 2009. At that time the Iraqi army was conducting sweeps throughout the area in response to militant Sunni opposition, according to the HRW report.

*New York Times* states that the arrests were made by the Baghdad Brigade. The security group is controlled by Maliki's office, bypassing the military and the police, and has been criticized in the past for its unconstitutionality. In turn, the secret prison—a military barracks converted into a detention facility hidden from view by concrete blast walls—was run by the Baghdad Operations Command, one of several regional security commands set up by Maliki that answer directly to him, according to several news sources.

The revelation threatens to undermine the attempts of the prime minister to put together a coalition after narrowly losing the March 7 national elections. Maliki's State of Law coalition won 89 seats in the 325-seat parliament, two behind that of Ayad Allawi. Maliki has bitterly fought the election result, successfully pressuring the judiciary to sanction a recount of Baghdad's vote, 20 percent of the total.

Maliki called the reports of torture a “lie” and “smear campaign.”

“There are no secret prisons in Iraq at all,” he countered, according to the *Times*. “America is the symbol of democracy, but then you have the abuses at Abu Ghraib,” Maliki said. “The American government took tough measures, and we are doing the same, so where is the problem and why this raucousness?” He described the prison at Muthanna as a transit site.

Senior American military spokesman in Iraq Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza responded with the usual statements, “We believe the government of Iraq is aware of the need to conduct a thorough investigation of this incident and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.”

There have been other allegations of secret prisons within Nineveh province itself run by Iraq's Second Army Division, the *Times* reported.

The latest torture revelations combined with Maliki's election machinations threaten to inflame the smoldering civil war between Sunnis and Shia. Ayad Allawi has said he will not abide by the recount and has demanded a new election with UN and international monitoring. As interim prime minister in 2004, Allawi personally executed six prisoners at a Baghdad prison in order to set an example for the interior ministry police, according to eyewitnesses at the time.

The existence of a ghost network of detention facilities specializing in barbaric forms of torture, however, has been documented for years, including at the very site at Muthanna. (See "US 'democracy' in Iraq: death squads, torture and terror")

In May of 2005, the *New York Times* magazine exposed how the US military had modeled Iraqi interior ministry police commandos on the death squads unleashed in the 1980s to crush the left-wing insurgency in El Salvador.

The following are excerpts from the detainees' testimony available from the website of the Human Rights Watch:

"Detainee A was captured with 33 others in Mosul on the night of September 17, 2009: 'The interrogators would tie my arms behind my back and blindfold me before they would hang me upside down and beat me. They would suffocate me with a bag until I passed out and would wake me with an electric shock to my genitals. Even after they forced me to confess that I killed 10 people, the torture never stopped. Ten days before I was transferred out on April 8, I endured a horrific beating for speaking to an inspection team from the Human Rights Ministry. After they left, the prison staff beat me so badly that I urinated blood.'"

"Iraqi soldiers arrested Detainee E, a 21-year-old, on December 19 at his home in Mosul: 'During the first eight days they tortured me daily. They would put a bag on my head and start to kick my stomach and beat me all over my body. They threatened that if I didn't confess, they would bring my sisters and mother to be raped. I heard him on the cell phone giving orders to rape my sisters and mother.' During one torture session, the man, who was blindfolded and handcuffed, was stripped and ordered to stroke another detainee's penis. After he was forced to the floor, the other detainee was forced on top of him. 'It hurt when it started to penetrate me. The guards were all laughing

and saying, 'He's very tight, let's bring some soap!'" When I experienced the pain, I asked them to stop and that I would confess. Although I confessed to the killings, I mentioned fake names since I never killed anyone. So the torture continued even after I confessed because they suspected my confession was false.' One of the guards also forced him to have oral sex."

"Detainees G and H, father (59) and son (29) respectively, were arrested at their house in Mosul on September 30. Both endured sessions in which interrogators hung them upside down and beat them. During one session the father was stripped naked in front of the son, and the son was told they if he did not confess they would rape his father. The father was told that if he did not confess they would kill his son. The son was subsequently sodomized with a broomstick and the guards' fingers."

*The Human Rights Watch report can be accessed here.*



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