



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on April 30, 2010

Iraqi Prison: Torture Was “Routine”

The New York-based Human Rights Watch reported April 27 that a secret Iraqi prison maintained by the current lame-duck Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki engaged in “routine” torture against detainees.



Human Rights Watch (HRW) uncovered routine instances of anal rape, suffocation, electrical shock torture, pulling out fingernails and toenails, and other tortures among the 300 prisoners detained at the Baghdad prison. HRW researchers [found](#): “Most of the 300 displayed fresh scars and injuries they said were a result of routine and systematic torture they had experienced at the hands of interrogators” at the Muthanna prison, which is also called Ninevah Wall. The HRW report also noted:

All the detainees interviewed described the same methods of torture employed by their Iraqi interrogators. The jailers suspended the detainees handcuffed and blindfolded upside down by means of two bars, one placed behind their calves and the other against their shins. All had terrible scabs and bruising on their legs. The interrogators then kicked, whipped and beat the detainees. Interrogators also placed a dirty plastic bag over the detainee’s head to close off his air supply. Typically, when the detainee passed out from this ordeal, his interrogators awakened him with electric shocks to his genitals or other parts of his body.

The torture also resulted in deaths. HRW [quoted](#) one detainee, who is a pediatrician: “When they brought him back to the cell, the doctor noticed swelling above his liver and suspected internal bleeding and told the guards that the man needed immediate medical attention. The guards took the tortured man out but returned him an hour later saying that he was fine. He died in the cell an hour later.”

But Prime Minister Maliki denies that he has sanctioned torture. “They gave themselves scars by rubbing matches on some of their body parts,” the prime minister told the [press](#) April 29. “These are lies — a smear campaign by some foreign embassies and the media.” Maliki seemed to take a cue from the Bush administration, with the *New York Times* [quoting](#) him as saying: “The American government took tough measures, and we are doing the same, so where is the problem and why this raucousness?”

Prime Minister Maliki also denied that the prison was a secret one, even though it had been run by Maliki’s Baghdad Operations Command (sometimes called the “Baghdad Brigade”), a squad controlled by Maliki’s office outside the ordinary Department of Justice prison system. “There are no secret prisons in Iraq at all,” Prime Minister Maliki told the [press](#). But Samer Muscati, the HRW researcher that produced the report, [told](#) the BBC: “It was a secret prison because people in the government didn’t know it existed, family members had no idea where their loved ones were, and these detainees didn’t have access to any legal recourse, and judicial process.”

The political fallout from this torture scandal will be tough to predict. Nearly all of the prisoners were



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minority Sunni Muslims, a group that garnered significant gains in the fractured March parliamentary elections. Maliki has demanded a recount of the election, which is expected to relegate his ruling coalition to a minority power. The fact that most of the prisoners tortured were minority Sunnis is politically dangerous. "This breeds extremism," Ninevah tribal leader Sheik Abdullah Humedi [told](#) the *New York Times* for April 28. "In our country a man who is raped will commit suicide, and how do you think he will do it?"

Photo of Iraqi-run prison: AP Images



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