

Crimes against Humanity: Routine Torture and Murder in Iraq's Prisons

By [Dirk Adriaensens](#)

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In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

"How Many Times Did You Blow Yourself Up?" Or, Why Iraq is Revolting"

The inhuman prison system in Iraq, a legacy of the US occupation

[Azzaman reported on 25 January:](#)

The question "How many times did you blow yourself up?" is part of a joke doing rounds in Iraq. It refers to a prisoner who under duress and in order to prevent his interrogators from torturing him any further admitted that he had blown himself up several times. For his tormentors the response was 'good' enough to brand him 'terrorist' and keep him behind bars without proper trial for many years. Many Iraqi prisoners, some of them still languishing in their prison cells and other released, speak of their torture and imprisonment in Iraqi jails in these terms.

Hurling empty and ridiculous accusations is part of the skills that U.S. troops and their jailers have bequeathed Iraqi security forces. The shortest way for an Iraqi in custody today is to quickly confess to the accusation hurled at him to escape humiliation and torture.

The issue of tens of thousands of jailed Iraqis is at the top of demands of Iraqi demonstrators and protesters. Stories of families being destroyed following the arrest of their breadwinners without charges and proper trial are common in Iraq. Some of the prisoners started their terms at the age of 19 or even younger and have been in jail for many years without trial.

Would the government have the guts to ponder the future of a young generation in prison for so long and of children whose father has been jailed simply on ungrounded suspicions and for so long? What kind of future awaits them? The government should listen carefully to the demands of the hundreds of thousands of protesters who have taken to the streets of major cities in central Iraq.

Freeing prisoners and putting an end to jailing people without proper trial is only a first step. Maliki's government should be dissolved and put on trial. Reparations should be paid to all the victims who have been unjustly and illegally detained for so many years, including the detainees in American administered prisons.

Many Human Rights Organisations, including The BRussells Tribunal, have [frequently alarmed the world community](#) about the horrible conditions in Iraq prisons, where torture, rape, sodomy and outright murder are endemic.

34 Detainees tortured to death in 3 months

Journalists obtained a list of 34 names of detainees who died in prison after being tortured, within three months in 2012. The list is a formal document from the Ministry of Justice, requested by the Human Rights Committee in the Iraqi Parliament. Most of these prisoners had no autopsy reports from the Forensic Medical Department.

[When the spokesman of Ministry of Justice, Haidar al-Saadi, was asked about this](#), he denied the validity of this information, and accused external parties conspiring secretly and promoting lies. When the reporter gave him the official documents in which the Ministry of Justice confessed of the death of the detainees he became speechless and did not know the answer but he promised the reporter to prepare the answer the next day. Unfortunately, when the BBC called him the next day he closed his phone!!!

Women imprisoned for many years instead of their husbands and sons

[The Iraqi News Network reported on 16 January](#) that Hussein Al-Shahristani, the Deputy Prime Minister of Energy and Chairman of the Ministerial Committee that was formed to study the demands of the demonstrators visited one of the women prisons in Baghdad. Al-Shahristani found out that there was a female inmate who was there for six years and her case was never submitted to court. She was arrested because her son was suspected to be involved in terroristic activities. A few days ago, Noori Al-Maliki assured that the government would never allow arresting the mother, the wife, the son, or the sister instead of the wanted husband or father, and that everyone is responsible for his / her own crime. That is a lie, one more to be added to Nouri's credentials.

When the woman was asked about the reason behind her arrest, she said that her son entered his house one day carrying a black sack containing items she didn't know about. The security forces came to their house the next day and arrested her because she didn't report her son to the authorities about that sack. The woman used to live in one of the eastern areas and remained in prison for the last six years without any judicial procedure.

Wesaal Al-Jaf, the Member of the Human Rights Parliamentary Committee confirmed that there are a huge number of detainees whose cases have not enough evidence to back the accusations. Al-Jaf demanded to form a united investigation group to review the cases of the detainees. It is known now that every institution, whether civil or military, has its own detention centers or secret prisons. Al-Jaf added that releasing the prisoners is the first step towards a just judicial system.

Torture and murder in Al Rasafah secret prison

[Many Iraqi families have testified that their sons are in a secret prison in Al-Rasafah Prisons Compound](#), named *Quarries 13*, run by the Iraqi Correction Office, under the authority of the Ministry of Justice. Al-Rasafah Prisons Compound includes many public prisons, like Al-Rasafah 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and the 5th Prisons, in addition to the uncovered secret prison, in which the prisoners face torture every day. When the families went to visit their sons, entrance was prohibited.

The Prison Management didn't confirm or deny whether their sons were imprisoned there or not, but the Management assured the visitors that there are more than 50 prisoners in that building, and they cannot call their families or consult a lawyer. The families said their sons

were in that prison for 3 to 5 years, and they knew nothing about this until the released prisoners told them.

One of the released prisoners said that he was in that secret prison. The Prison consists of metal caravans divided into small cells 2 meters long and 1 meter wide. The ground and walls are all of rusty iron, the toilet is inside this cell too, and is sometimes blocked so the dirty water floods out. In the winter, the rain pours inside and fills the cells. Many prisoners have serious diseases, like scabies, as a result of this terrible condition. The prisoners are enduring continuous torture and many of them died after the harsh torture.

New information about the torture of the security guards of Al-Hashimi & Al-Isawi

[Iraqi Rabita reported recently](#) that they have received new information about the methods of torture used against the security guards of Al-Hashimi and Al-Isawi. The investigators have been torturing those guards continuously for 14 days, using electricity, beating, cutting their tongues with sharp razors and then filling their mouths with salt.

A committee from the Ministry of Interior came to see one of those prisoners, then a judge sent by Al-Maliki met him, the prisoner told the judge that he couldn't walk, so they wrapped him with a blanket and carried him. The judge told the prisoner that this was a "political issue" and that he couldn't do anything for him. One of the imprisoned guards told the investigator who was beating him to stop hurting him if he had some honour left. The investigator replied that the guard and his family have no honour, and that he will slaughter all the Sunni Iraqis and throw them in the Tigris River.

These are the names of some of the investigators who tortured the guards on a sectarian basis:

- Major Ali Hasan Al-Bahadli: an ex convict, accused of murder and rape. Maliki released him to torture people especially for this case.
- Lt. Colonel Nema Al-Gharbawi.
- Saad Al-Lami - the judge who supports all of this.

Another prisoner said that they brought a laptop into the prison facility with files of crimes, and that the prisoners had to memorize those crimes, to confess those crimes in front of the media or the judges, then they checked if the prisoners had "memorized" those crimes well. In case there's a proven crime, but the prisoner is Shiite, the prison management blackmails that prisoner and asks a lot of money. In return, they "transfer" his accusations to a Sunni prisoner from the arrested guards and release the Shiite.

Ahmad, One the brothers of Al-Hashimi's guard Muhammad Shawqir, visited the prison and asked about his brother. Instead they arrested him on false grounds. Then he was brought before a judge and when the judge said he was innocent, they brought him back to his cell and accused him of another crime, and so forth.

[One of Al-Hashimi's security guards who is now in jail told Iraqi Rabita:](#)

On 31 December 2012, we had a very long session of beating and torture. There were 12 security guards of Al-Isawi with us. The torture session was to prepare them to sign some

confessions, this time against the Al-Anbar heads of tribes, Ali Hatam Al-Sulaiman and Abu Risha.

The oddest thing was that the investigators told the prisoners that they had to confess against Masoud Barazani, that he was "leading and funding death squads in Mosul to kill the academics and the Imams in the mosques".

In the morning, they brought cameras from Al-Iraqia TV to record those confessions on TV. So, the prisoners started to accuse Ali Hatam that he bombed many areas in Al-Anbar, Ramadi and Ana, and that Abu Risha killed many of his opponents in Ramadi and Heet, and was cooperating with Al-Qaeda to raid checkpoints. They recorded those confessions to be used by Maliki when needed.

One of Al-Hashimi security guards who is now in jail called me, telling me the following:

In December, 31st, 2012, we had a very long session of beating, swearing and torture, there are 12 security guards of Al-Eesawi with us, the torture was to prepare them to sign on some confessions, this time was on Al-Anbar heads of tribes, one of them is (Ali Hatam Al-Sulaiman) and (Abu Risha).

What was also odd is that the investigators told the prisoners that they have to confess on Masoud Barazani, and that the latter is leading and funding death squads in Mosul to kill the academics and the Imams in the mosques.

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If the accusations are false, who are the real criminals?

Here are some clues. And this is only the tip of the iceberg.

[Al-Maliki himself has dropped all charges against mass murderer Ismael Hafid Al-Lami.](#)

This well-known criminal nicknamed Abu Diri was summoned to Al-Rasafah Criminal Court, after a direct decision by Nouri Al-Maliki to drop all charges against that man. Ismael Al-Lami was accused of many sectarian killings, kidnapping, torturing and burying the victims alive. Nouri Al-Maliki headed the Asaib Ahlu Haq Militia and they formed a Special Operations Cell. This Cell is connected directly with Al-Maliki's Office and is run by Abu Diri himself. Its main duty is to assassinate everyone opposing Al-Maliki policy. Abu Diri is a well-known killer of Iraqis, carried out many crimes in 2006 and 2007 on behalf of the Al-Mahdi Militia, Al-Jaafari and Iran. He used terrible ways to torture and killed many Iraqis, whether they were Sunni or Shiite. Later, he escaped to Iran and joined the Iranian Basij, but he went back to Iraq after an invitation from Al-Maliki himself.

[Jawad Al-Bolani, the former Minister of Interior escaped to Beirut after a scandal of being involved in terroristic activities.](#) Hamid Al-Mutlag, the Iraqi League Representative said that the former Minister of Interior Jawad Al-Bolani escaped to Beirut, after it was discovered he was involved in terrorist activities. Al-Mutlag demanded the government to take legal actions against the officials who have corruption cases in order not to allow them to escape the

country, assuring that when those corrupted people escape, and no one punishes them, the Iraqi people would never trust the government again.

Al-Mutlag said in a statement that such an escape by Al-Bolani increased the suspicions of corruption. Al-Mutlag added that Al-Bolani had connections with terrorist activities from the first day of his job as Minister of Interior. The Parliament Defense and Security Committee have ample evidence about terrorist operations supervised by Al-Bolani and his brother. Al-Mutlag added that it's the duty of the government to arrest such criminals to submit them to the Iraqi judiciary.

Al-Zamili: from serial killer as Deputy Minister of Health to Parliament Member in a committee to provide security for the Iraqis!

To make things even worse, and to fully understand the anger of the Iraqi people and the demands of the Iraqi protest movement, here is [the incredible case of Hakim Al-Zamili](#).

Hakim Al-Zamili was well known when Ibrahim Al-Jaafari was the Prime Minister in Iraq. The Iraqis used to call him the Butcher of the Ministry of Health (MOH), because he was leading militias that kidnapped employees from the MOH, or patients from the hospitals and health centres, to kill them and throw them on the garbage dump. He also formed a militia to watch the families who visited the morgues to look for their sons who were killed. A member of this militia would address one of the family members and if the victim was a Sunni, he would contact the militia to kidnap that family member and kill him. Hospitals became a source of horror for every Sunni in Iraq, because as soon as they would enter a hospital, they would be kidnapped and brutally killed.

When he held that position, the MOH distributed medicines that caused miscarriages to pregnant women. So, Al-Elwiyah Hospital registered the miscarriages of 25 infants daily.

The most famous crime Al-Zamili was that when his militia kidnapped Dr. Al-Al-Mahdawi who was nominated to be the Deputy Minister of Health, they met with Al-Mahdawi in the MOH building, and there he and his security guards were kidnapped, and until now they are still missing.

He was accused of kidnapping Ammar Al-Saffar, the second nominated Deputy Minister of Health, although Al-Saffar was from the Dawa Party. No one found his corpse or found out anything related to his kidnapping, until the Dawa Party closed the case for unknown reasons.

After many complaints, and after his crimes exceeded all limits, when even Al-Maliki couldn't stop this murderous creature, the American Forces arrested him and submitted him to the Iraqi Judiciary, accused of kidnapping tens of innocent people. After he was arrested, he directly confessed things about the Minister of Health, he also mentioned to the Americans the names of 61 members of death squads in Baghdad, Najaf and Samawah. He confessed that he used the ambulances to transport weapons and wanted members of the Mahdi Militia, and to transport the kidnapped victims to the Kalf-al-Sadda Area to kill them there. After those confessions and details the Americans formed a committee headed by Colonel Mark Martins, this committee transferred Al-Zamili and Hameed Al-Shammari, the Head Security Guard in the MOH, into an open court, saying that *this trial would be more important than the trials of Saddam's regime officials*.

But, since the Iraqi judiciary is terribly corrupted, and the Mahdi Militia controls the courts, the judiciary and the police stations, all the accusations against Al-Zamili were dropped, and he was finally released after the witnesses failed to testify against his crimes. That's how Al-Zamili was released after less than a year, although the Americans claimed that his trial would be the trial of the decade! Later it was discovered that his militia threatened the judges and witnesses, kidnapped their family members and threatened to rape and kill them, [even when the Coalition Forces assured their safety](#) !

The MOH under Al-Jaafari's rule was controlled by the Sadr bloc. Dr. Ali Al-Shammari, the ex-Minister of Health was nominated by the Sadrists. But, after Dr. Al-Shammari found out about the crimes the Mahdi Militia against the Sunnis in the MOH, after he noticed that he was actually leading a Ministry of kidnapping and torture and a slaughter house, not a Ministry, he was threatened by the Sadrists when he dismissed many criminals who used to work in the MOH, as Ismael Haqqi, the Red Crescent President declared. Dr. Al-Shammari decided to seek help from the Americans, had loads of evidences and files that proved corruption and crimes committed by the Sadrists and the Mahdi Militia in the MOH. He also decided to leave his job because of those crimes. The accusations incriminated Al-Mahdi Militia and Muqtada Al-Sadr personally, crimes committed in every department related to the MOH. Unfortunately, the Americans also decided to ignore those evidences and closed the case. Were they themselves involved? Were these militias used as local stooges to carry out their counterinsurgency program? All the available evidence points in that direction.

Having a person like Al-Zamili in the Iraqi Parliament despite his terrible crime record, tells us that Iraq is run by a group of criminals, supervised by a parliament that is more criminal than the government itself. He is a Parliament member now, and there's no need to be astonished if we find him one day as the Minister of Justice. Hadi Al-Ameri has no diploma, but he's the Minister of Transportation, Ali Al-Adeeb has no doctorate certificate, but he's the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, so, contemporary Iraq has the dubious reputation to give important positions to criminals.

After all these and other cruelties and human rights abuses inflicted upon the Iraqi people, does it come as a surprise that millions of people are currently demonstrating against this corrupted government? The Iraqi people want to live in peace and dignity, and they want security for their families. They are fed up with this country that looks more like a huge open air concentration camp than as a "blossoming democracy".

Translation of Iraqi reports: Lubna Al Rudaini

Dirk Adriaensens is coordinator of SOS Iraq and member of the executive committee of the BRussells Tribunal. Between 1992 and 2003 he led several delegations to Iraq to observe the devastating effects of UN imposed sanctions. He was a member of the International Organizing Committee of the World Tribunal on Iraq (2003-2005). He is also co-coordinator of the Global Campaign Against the Assassination of Iraqi Academics. He is co-author of Rendez-Vous in Baghdad, EPO (1994), Cultural Cleansing in Iraq, Pluto Press, London (2010), Beyond Educide, Academia Press, Ghent (2012), and is a frequent contributor to GlobalResearch, Truthout, The International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies and other media.

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