

Death Squads in Iraq

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I've been writing for more than two years on Iraq's Shiite-led death squads (see "[Phoenix Rising](#)," in *The American Prospect*). It's been an open secret at least that long. Since that time, the number of Iraqis kidnapped, bound and gagged, and executed - or simply gunned down in the streets - by pro-government Shiite gangs is incalculable. But it is likely to be in the range of 25,000 in two years.

Ellen Knickmeyer, writing in the *Washington Post*, has been doggedly following the story lately, and her [latest piece](#) slams the Iraqi government and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which controls the Interior Ministry, for trying to suppress information about the number of dead. The piece notes this stunning fact: that Shiite death squads are killing more people than the insurgents. Here's the relevant paragraph:

Execution-style killings of the kind frequently blamed on police or Shiite militias allied with the government appear to be killing more Iraqis than bombings of government and civilian targets by Sunni Arab insurgents.

She goes on to quote the cynical nonsense from a spokesman for the prime minister, who has the gall to blame "Baathists" for the killings, even though the overwhelming majority of those murdered are pro-insurgency Sunnis:

Abdul Razzaq Kadhum, the prime minister's spokesman, declined Wednesday to give a breakdown of the figure of 379 execution-style killings given by Jafari. "These are obviously terrorist, Saddamist and Baathist acts against civilians, and they all go under victims of terrorism," he said.

The scale of the torture-murders is staggering. Here's John Pace, the former UN human rights chief in Iraq, whose sober claims on this topic have been widely reported (but with little investigative followup):

"The Baghdad morgue received 1,100 bodies in July alone, about 900 of whom bore evidence of torture or summary execution. That continued throughout the year and last December there were 780 bodies, including 400 having gunshot wounds or wounds as those caused by electric drills."

Pace has charged that uncounted torture-murders and executions have been in the range of 500-1,000 a month for a long time. You can read about Pace [here](#), and [see the transcript](#) of his interview on Democracy Now! with Amy Goodman.

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