

# Enforced Disappearance: The Missing Persons of Iraq.

Always Someone's Mother or Father, Always Someone's Child.

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Global Research, November 29, 2010

29 November 2010

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [US](#)

[NATO War Agenda](#)

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

**Editor's Note:** *The following is an adaptation of a presentation Dirk Adriaensens will give at the 6th International Conference Against Disappearances in London 9-12 December.*

## ***"Iraq has the most disappeared persons in the world"***

Forced disappearances and missing persons

A forced disappearance (or enforced disappearance) is defined in Article 2 of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly On 20 December 2006, as the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law. Often, forced disappearance implies murder. The victim in such a case is first abducted, then illegally detained, and often tortured; the victim is then killed, and the body is then hidden. Typically, a murder will be surreptitious, with the corpse disposed of in such a way as to prevent it ever being found, so that the person apparently vanishes. The party committing the murder has deniability, as there is no body to prove that the victim has actually died.[1]

Article 1 of the Convention further states that No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification for enforced disappearance.[2] Neither Iraq, nor the USA have signed or ratified this convention.[3] The United States refused to sign, saying that the text "did not meet our expectations", without giving an explanation.[4] Once again the United States placed itself outside the provisions of International Humanitarian law.

According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which came into force on 1 July 2002, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed at any civilian population, a "forced disappearance" qualifies as a crime against humanity, and thus is not subject to a statute of limitations.[5] The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on 3 August 2010 took up, on requests of the Human Rights Council, the issue of the missing persons.

For the final report, the drafting group came up with a definition. "Missing persons" are

those whose families are without news of them and those who are reported, on the basis of reliable information, unaccounted for as a result of an international or non-international armed conflict. Under both international humanitarian law and human rights law, States are obliged to take measures to prevent persons from going missing.[6]

### **Occupation, amnesty laws and reparations**

During the ensuing discussion, Experts raised a lot of relevant questions. Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, Advisory Committee Rapporteur, and Curtis Doebbler, international human rights lawyer, said they regretted the decision to limit the missing persons to situations of armed conflict, and drew attention to a serious omission in the text, even within its confines of armed conflict. The fact is that today, a great many disappearances are taking place in times of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and ever-increasingly in Honduras. Amnesty was also a tricky matter, and amnesty laws should be banned, it was argued, with an end put to violators of human rights establishing amnesty laws in their own favour. Moreover, there is a legitimate right to reparations and also families have a right to have any information about their relatives that had gone missing, Miguel d'Escoto said.

Whatever definition may be given to "missing persons" or "enforced disappearances," the problem in Iraq can be considered by all standards as dramatic, even apocalyptic. And since the US stated in 2007 that they were still involved in an "internationally armed conflict,"[7] Iraq's missing persons and forced disappeared after the invasion in 2003 are definitely the responsibility of those who started this war and are still de facto occupying the country: the USA, UK and, by extension, their installed Iraqi puppet government. They bear full responsibility for the situation of disappearances, extrajudicial killings and impunity they have created. Their militias and death squads have tortured, brutally assassinated, secretly buried and thrown thousands of bodies into the streets and rivers, many of them unidentifiable. More than one million missing persons in Iraq

Rough estimates indicate more than one million persons have disappeared in Iraq. According to UN data, the country has the most disappeared in the world. The disappearances stem from different periods since the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. Disappearances still occur on a very regular basis. The most important parties involved now are the Iraqi army, police, various militias, Al-Qu'aida and the American army.[8] The ICRC's Paul-Henri Arné said that Iraq after three conflicts - a war with Iran in the 1980s, the first Gulf War in 1991 and the U.S.-led operation in 2003 - was probably facing the highest number of missing people in the world.[9] Iraq's notorious secret prisons

The policy of ambiguity followed by US occupation forces and the growing phenomenon of secret US prisons in Iraq, which even international organizations have failed to locate, added to the large number of Iraq's secret prisons, which one member of the current Iraqi parliament estimated to exceed 420 secret prisons, have led to a large number of reported and unreported cases of forced disappearances.[10]

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been subjected to abuse and torture in prisons and detention centres.[11] Tens of thousands of Iraqis disappeared during the worst days of this dirty war between 2005 and 2007. Some were seen picked up by uniformed militias and piled into lorries; others simply seemed to vanish. Iraq's minister of human rights, Wijdan Mikhail, said that her ministry had received more than 9,000 complaints in 2005 and 2006 alone from Iraqis who said a relative had disappeared. Human rights groups put the total number much higher. The fate of many missing Iraqis remains unknown. Many are

languishing in one of Iraq's notoriously secretive prisons.[12] In September 2010, Amnesty International released a report "New Order, Same Abuses" mentioning that "several detainees have died in Iraqi custody due to torture or abuse by Iraqi interrogators and prison guards. It says that tens of thousands are being held without charges and that guards won't confirm missing persons' whereabouts to their relatives, which, for Iraqi families who'd lost loved ones, was one of the most devastating aspects of the U.S. occupation." [13]

### **Tens of thousands of Iraqis are seeking disappeared family members**

Since the war in Iraq in 2003, tens of thousands of people have been seeking family members. Between 2006 and June 2007, some 20,000 bodies were deposited at the Medico-Legal Institute in Baghdad, less than half of whom have been identified, the Red Cross said. Unclaimed bodies are buried in various cemeteries around the city.[14]

In addition, the Medico-Legal Institute (MLI) in Baghdad reported that it has been receiving an average of 800 bodies per month since 2003 and is unable to identify a significant proportion of these.[15]

On 29 August, 2007, the ICRC stated: "Not knowing the fate of family members missing as a result of war and violence during the occupation is a harsh reality for thousands of Iraqis. Mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, daughters, sons and their extended families are desperate to know the whereabouts or fate of their loved ones. Missing persons might have been captured, abducted, some perhaps killed and buried in unmarked graves, or they may lay in a hospital in critical condition or linger in a hidden place of detention. In the midst of conflicts, family members might be separated as they flee the combat zones looking for a safe haven. Sometimes they are never reunited. It is the responsibility of the authorities to ensure clarification of the fate of missing persons".[16]

### **Bodies not claimed for fear of reprisals**

The bimonthly UN Human Rights Report of 16 January 2007 stated: "The situation is notably grave in Baghdad where unidentified bodies killed execution-style are found in large number daily. Victims' families are all too often reluctant to claim the bodies from the six Medico-Legal Institutes (MLIs) around the country for fear of reprisals. The deceaseds' families are required to obtain permission from the police station which brought the body to the MLI, but many are too afraid and believe that police officers could be responsible for the disappearances and killings (...) The Baghdad Medico-Legal Institute is reported transporting some 200 unidentified bodies every week to cemeteries in Najaf and Karbala which relatives do not claim out of fear of reprisals. In addition, there are reports of bodies that end up buried in mass graves and are not recorded at the morgues." [17] [18]

"Relentless Sectarian Violence in Baghdad Stalks Its Victims Even at the Morgues," the New York Times headlined on 30 July 2006. The morgues have become a source of danger, at least for Sunni Arabs. Shiite militias have been staking out Baghdad's central morgue in particular, and the authorities have received dozens of reports of kidnappings and killings of Sunni Arabs there.[19] Even looking for missing relatives in hospitals is not safe.[20]

### **2003-2010: are half a million Iraqis missing?**

The problem of the disappeared and/or missing persons in Iraq is treated with secrecy by the occupying forces and Iraqi authorities. The figures given by the USA and the Iraqi

government are downplayed and totally unreliable.

According to the Iraqi government, thousands of Iraqis are listed as missing since the American invasion seven years ago – although it acknowledges that its figures are probably only a small fraction of the actual number. Most of those who disappeared are believed to be dead. But even those whose bodies have been found are not always identified quickly; on 25 May 2009, Dr. Munjid Salah al-Deen, the manager of Baghdad's central morgue, told the New York Times that his staff was working to identify 28,000 bodies from 2006 to 2008 alone.[21]

In a March 20, 2008 report, the Iraqi Red Crescent said it had registered about 70,000 cases of missing persons in Iraq since just after the war started.[22] Even the IRCS is not immune from the anarchy that plagues Iraq: on December 17, 2006, 30 of its staff were kidnapped from one of its Baghdad offices, 13 of whom are still missing.[23]

More than 82 percent of displaced people are women and children under the age of 12 (IRCS, June 2008).[24] UNHCR surveys in 2009 stated that 20% of IDPs and 5% of refugee returnees reported children to be missing.[25] This can be attributed to general violence including abductions, possibly armed recruitment and so forth.[26] The total internally displaced population as of November 2009 was estimated to be 2.76 million or 467.517 families.[27] If 20% of these families reported children to be missing, a simple calculation shows that more than 93,500 children of internally displaced families are missing. Moreover, many communities reported missing family members (30% of IDPs, 30% of IDP returnees, 27% of refugee returnees) indicating that they were missing because of kidnappings, abductions and detentions and that they did not know what happened to their missing family members.[28] A rough estimate would therefore bring the number of missing persons among the refugee population and the internally displaced after “Shock and Awe” to 260,000, most of them enforced disappearances. The UNHCR report of 2009 mentions that the majority of refugee returnees had fled due to generalized violence (51%), targeted threats or attacks (39%) or military operations (3%). One out of five Iraqis is either a refugee or an IDP[29]. When extrapolating UNHCR figures to the remaining 80% of the Iraqi population, the total number of missing persons since “Shock and Awe” could be more than half a million.

Sheikh Muthana Harith Al-Dhari, head of the influential Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq (AMSI) mentioned in an Al-Jazeera interview a few months ago that about 800.000 Iraqis are missing since 2003. He said that AMSI has meticulously documented missing persons since 2003 and that he could prove this number with names and events.

### **Dirty war as a key strategy to subdue the Iraqi people**

The killing orgy in Iraq is part of the US “dirty war” strategy described by Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker on 15 December 2003: “An American adviser said: ‘The only way we can win is to go unconventional. We’re going to have to play their game. Guerrilla versus guerrilla. Terrorism versus terrorism. We’ve got to scare the Iraqis into submission.’ (... )’The proposed operation – called ‘preemptive manhunting’ by one Pentagon adviser – has the potential to turn into another (Vietnam) Phoenix Program’ (...) We do need a more unconventional response, but it’s going to be messy.’”[30]Messy.... Indeed. And not reported in the Western mainstream press.

Craig Murray, former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, wrote in October of 2006: “The

evidence that the US directly contributed to the creation of the current civil war in Iraq by its own secretive security strategy is compelling. Historically of course this is nothing new — divide and rule is a strategy for colonial powers that has stood the test of time. Indeed, it was used in the previous British occupation of Iraq around 85 years ago.”[31]

“When a US-backed, US-financed ‘Shia’ organization murders a Sunni, it isn’t Shia killing Sunni; it isn’t sectarian violence, it is the US killing Sunni. When a US-backed, US-trained ‘Sunni’ militia murders a Shia, it isn’t Sunni killing Shia; it isn’t sectarian violence, it is the US killing Shia. When an Israeli-armed, US-supported Kurdish security squad murders an Arab, it isn’t Kurd killing Arab; it isn’t killing based on ethnic hatred, it is the US killing Arabs. When US-backed, US-financed, Israeli-armed ‘Muslim’ groups kill Christians, or ‘Christian’ groups kill Muslims, it isn’t Muslims killing Christians or Christians killing Muslims; it isn’t sectarian violence, it is the US and Israel murdering Muslims and Christians. (...) And when the US-backed, US-financed ‘Shia’ puppet government tortures and murders Sunni dissenters, it isn’t sectarian violence; it is US-sponsored state terrorism,” writes Jonathan Azariah.[32] There is truth in this assertion. The USA/UK organized “preemptive manhunting” and used Israel and Iraqi proxy forces to brutalize, imprison, torture and kill millions. Millions more were expelled from their homes, internally displaced and driven into exile. The US, UK and Israel are not the only ones who carry out this policy of ethnic cleansing. There is also proof of Iranian involvement and cooperation with the occupying forces in death squad activities in Iraq. Ban on releasing morgue data

Iraq says it has no central database to try to link the unidentified bodies that have been buried anonymously in the past few years with a list of names of the missing. There is also no record of victims of sectarian violence who have been buried informally in unmarked plots. Does Iraq really have no central database for the unidentified bodies? Or is the corrupt Iraqi Quisling government unwilling to give the real figures because they’re up to their neck involved in the so-called “sectarian killings?”

On September 7, 2006, The Washington Post reported that the issue of civilian casualties had been politically charged since the start of the Iraq war. Soon after the invasion, U.S. and Iraqi officials forbade Baghdad’s medical officials to release morgue counts.[33]

IPS was refused access to the central Baghdad morgue, and was told journalists are forbidden to report on the conditions inside, wrote Brian Conley and Isam Rashid on June 7, 2006. “The last manager for this morgue, Faik Bakr, received death threats because he said there were more than 7,000 Iraqis killed by death squads in recent months,” an employee told IPS. “Most of the dead arrived with their hands tied behind their backs.”[34]

On October 6, 2006, Global Security stated: “Partial statistics released by the Interior Ministry indicate as much as a 42 percent increase in the civilian death toll from August to September. According to the ministry, some 1,089 civilians died in September, compared to 769 in August and 1,065 in July. The number apparently does not include the unidentified bodies that pass through the Baghdad morgue in a given month. The morgue has reportedly been ordered to no longer release that data.”[35] The figures from the Baghdad morgue in that period as reported by news outlets like ABC News were higher than the official number: June: 1595 bodies; July: 1595 bodies; August: 1535 bodies[36]The Iraqi government has issued instructions to all security and health offices not to give out body count numbers to the media. Dozens of bodies are found every day across Baghdad. “We are not authorized to issue any numbers, but I can tell you that we are still receiving human bodies every day; the men have no identity on them,” a doctor at the Baghdad morgue told IPS on February 19,

2008.[37] Between 50 and 180 bodies were dumped on Baghdad's streets each day at the height of the killing, and many bore signs of torture, such as drill holes or cigarette burns.[38]

### **Political pressure to lower death toll**

On August 10, 2006 Reuters mentioned that Iraq's Health, Interior and Defence ministries consistently provided lower figures than those released by the morgue.[39]

The Guardian reported on March 19, 2008: "There is no shortage of estimates, but they vary enormously. The Iraqi ministry of health initially tried to keep a count based on morgue records, but then stopped releasing figures under pressure from the US-supported government in the Green Zone. The director of the Baghdad morgue, already under stress because of the mounting horror of his work, was threatened with death on the grounds that by publishing statistics he was causing embarrassment. The families of the bereaved wanted him to tell the truth, but like other professionals he came to the view that he had to flee Iraq. Dr Salih Mahdi Motlab al-Hasanawi, the health minister appointed after the ministry's ban on releasing official morgue figures, said the survey was prompted by controversy over civilian casualties." [40]

A spokesman for the Iraqi Health Ministry said that the ministry has required health officials in Baghdad not to receive any unidentified corpses and that unidentified corpses should only be received by the morgues institute.[41] An international official in Baghdad said Health Ministry officials had cited the higher toll before lowering it in response to what he said was political pressure. But the Health Ministry confirmed on September 7, 2006 that it planned to construct two new branch morgues in Baghdad and add doctors and refrigerator units to raise capacity to as many as 250 corpses a day. The morgue expansion plans show the dramatic surge in violence in Baghdad since the U.S. invasion. In 2002, before U.S.-led forces entered Iraq, the Baghdad morgue averaged 15 shooting victims a month, morgue officials have said. Most of the corpses taken to Baghdad's morgue are unidentified and are held for long periods awaiting identification.[42]

### **Media professionals prevented from writing about occupation crimes**

The unwillingness to tackle the issue of missing persons and unidentified bodies parallels the lack of interest in keeping a serious body count. Many experts have said the civilian death count is an incomplete one. Richard Brennan, who has done mortality research in Congo and Kosovo, said it is likely a "gross underestimate" because many deaths go unrecorded in war zones. Iraq Body Count numbers are likely even more incomplete, given that many killings occurred in incidents journalists were unaware of or in inaccessible areas.[43] Medialens mentioned that a study of deaths in Guatemala from 1960 to 1996 found that numbers of murders reported by the media actually decreased as violence increased, coinciding with the killing of journalists.[44] Media professionals in Iraq have been threatened, kidnapped and 355 (of whom 325 Iraqis) were assassinated, according to the BRussells Tribunal list: a figure that surpasses the media death toll in any other war zone in history.[45] Western embedded journalists are allowed to report from safety inside the Green Zone and they often repeat His Master's (Centcom) Voice. How can the full truth about the Iraqi death toll and ethnic cleansing be revealed in such impossible conditions?

Many casualties in areas outside Baghdad probably never appear in the official count, said

Anthony H. Cordesman, a military analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a research group in Washington, on August 15, 2006. That helps explain why fatalities in Baghdad appear to account for such a large percentage of the total number, he said in a 2006 report.[46]

### **Reports on unidentified bodies**

Dahr Jamail, one of the few non-embedded journalists, reported on February 6, 2009 that in the al-Adhamiya area of Baghdad, what used to be a park was now a cemetery with more than 5,500 graves. The first body was buried there on May 21, 2006. "Most of the bodies buried here are never reported in the media," Abu Ayad Nasir Walid, 45, manager of the cemetery told Jamail. "Most of the dead were never logged by anyone," Ali, a gravedigger said, "because we didn't check death certificates, we just tried to get the bodies into the ground as quickly as possible. I log their names in my book, but we've never had anyone come from the government to ask how many people are here. Nobody in the media nor the Ministry of Health seems to be interested." [47]

Such graveyards, and there are many, raise questions about the "official" number of enforced disappeared and missing persons in Iraq.

Robert Fisk had reported already on August 17, 2005 – half a year before the Samarra Golden Mosque bombing – that an estimated 1,100 bodies were received by the Baghdad mortuary in July, most executed, eviscerated, stabbed, bludgeoned, tortured to death. The figure is secret, he wrote. A rise of 85% compared with figures for the same month before the US-led invasion. The latest figures showed a rising trend: in 2004 and 2003 the numbers in July were 800 and 700 respectively. By comparison, equivalent figures for 1997, 1998 and 1999 were all less than 200. "So many corpses are being brought to the mortuary that human remains are stacked on top of each other. Unidentified bodies must be buried within days for lack of space – but the municipality is so overwhelmed by the number of killings that it can no longer provide the vehicles and personnel to take the remains to cemeteries." [48] [49]

The ICRC reported on 17 April 2007 that in 2006, an estimated 100 civilians were killed every day. Half of them remained unclaimed or unidentified. Thousands of unidentified bodies have thus been buried in designated cemeteries in Iraq. Bodies were sent for burial every three or four days just to make room for the daily intake, sometimes making corpse identification impossible. [50] Meanwhile tens of thousands of persons were being held in the custody of the Iraqi authorities and the multinational forces in Iraq. At the same time, tens of thousands of families remain without news of relatives who went missing during past and recent conflicts. [51]

There is a new job in Baghdad today. For a fee, certain people will scour dumps and riverbanks to find the body of a missing loved one. How long can people live with such violence and not be permanently scarred? [52]

### **Baghdad morgue figures**

As violence in the Iraqi capital continued to rise in 2006, the task of tracking down missing people had become a grim ordeal. Iraq's anemic investigative agencies have been ill-equipped to keep up with soaring crime, so for families seeking information, the morgues have often provided the only certainty. [53] According to Baghdad's central morgue Director

Munjid al-Rezali on April 16, 2009, at least 30,000 unidentified bodies had been delivered to Baghdad's central morgue since sectarian violence surged in 2006, and only about a third had since been identified. "In 2006, there was an average of 3,000 bodies a month ... I call this a year of horror.[54] The Baghdad morgue took in about 16,000 unidentified bodies in 2006 alone, the bulk of them victims of death squads and other sectarian violence, a source at the morgue said on 14 January 2007.[55] "Ninety percent of the bodies received in 2006 were unidentified, compared with 50 percent in 2007 and 15 percent in 2008," said Dr. Munjid Salahuddin, the director of the Institute for Forensic Medicine on 25 October 2009.[56]The United Nations, citing Health Ministry numbers, reported that 1,471 unidentified bodies were found in Baghdad in September 2006 and 1,782 in October 2006.[57]

### **The disappearing unidentified bodies of Wadi al-Salam cemetery in Najaf**

There are clues to count the number of unidentified bodies, such as the number of people buried at the main Shiite cemetery in the holy city of Najaf. A large percentage of the people buried there remain unidentified. But even there, the deaths are limited mostly to Shiites and include natural as well as violent causes, so they cannot be considered definitive. The director of the cemetery's statistics office, Ammar al-Ithari, said the number of burials jumped from just over 32,000 in 2004 and 2005 to nearly 50,000 in 2006 and 54,000 in 2007. It fell to nearly 40,000 last year, as violence declined. There are no statistics from before the war because records were destroyed in the fighting.[58]Middle East Online reported on September 9, 2007 that since the US-led invasion of Iraq began, as many as 40,000 unidentified corpses had been buried in Wadi al-Salam cemetery in Najaf, according to figures released by Ahmed Di'aibil, a Najaf government spokesperson. All corpses are numbered and photographed and the location of burial is noted. Figures are recorded in a register in the hope that families will eventually be able to identify the bodies. Thousands more bodies may have been hastily buried in the deserts surrounding Najaf.[59] Before the US invasion of Iraq, the volunteers buried up to 40 people every month. In the occupation's worst months, that figure increased 50-fold as volunteers buried an average of more than 2,000 anonymous occupation victims every month, CNN journalist Michael Ware reported on September 15, 2007.[60] Already on September 17, 2003, Robert Fisk wrote: "In Baghdad, up to 70 corpses - of Iraqis killed by gunfire - are brought to the mortuaries each day. In Najaf, for example, the cemetery authorities record the arrival of the bodies of up to 20 victims of violence a day," [61] a 15-fold increase compared to pre-war levels. And the situation gradually worsened from 2003.

When we take all these figures into account, a simple calculation suffices to conclude that probably 80,000 unidentified bodies have been buried in the cemetery of Najaf since March 2003.

Associated Press mentioned on October 25, 2009 that there was a new area of the Najaf cemetery "for the missing and unidentified, about 22,000 of them," according to cemetery officials.[62] So between 2007 and 2009 half of the unidentified bodies seem to have vanished. Can someone explain what happened to these disappeared bodies?Random reports of unidentified bodies outside Baghdad

On July 17, 2007, the BBC quoted the head of the hospital's forensics department in Kut on how unremitting the flow of bodies had become. "Up to now, we have received about 500 bodies. Most of them have been shot or tortured. They are in an advanced state of decomposition, so you can't stand to be close to them for long." It took them at least three



days to float downstream from where they had been dumped in the river. Most of them remain unidentified.[63]

On February 8, 2008, Voices of Iraq reported that the number of the unidentified bodies that have been buried in Karbala alone since June 2006 reached 2043.[64]

The number of unidentified bodies that were buried from December 2006 to February 2007 in mass graves in Wassit province, 180 km southeast of Baghdad, reached 177.[65]

An IPS report from Baquba of July 17, 2007 quoted Nima Jima'a, a morgue official, as saying: "The morgue receives an average of four or five bodies everyday. Many more are dropped in rivers and farms - or it is sometimes the case they are buried by their killers for other reasons. The number we record here is only a fraction of those killed." The number of unidentified bodies is not mentioned. Families are often unable to identify and collect the bodies. It is still extremely dangerous to travel around the city. Also, most bodies are never brought to the morgue at all to be identified or counted.[66]

More than 280 persons from the city of Fallujah were reported missing in a November 11, 2005 report of the Iraqi Monitoring Network for Human Rights (MHRI). Their fate is still unknown. These persons are officially registered with names and photo at the local authorities in the city. It is further estimated that the total number of missing persons in Fallujah exceeds 500.[67]

Every town, every village in Iraq has a similar story to tell about enforced disappearances and/or missing persons. No reports are available from Mosul, Basra, Ramadi, Al Qaim, Haditha and many other towns and villages where fighting and ethnic cleansing occurred."Surge" of US troops = surge in missing persons, enforced disappearances and unidentified bodies

A report from IraqSlogger of August 2007 revealed that the U.S. presence in Baghdad during the "surge" had shown virtually no progress in stemming the gruesome sectarian death squads pervading the capital. Between June 18 and July 18, 2007, up to 592 unidentified bodies were found dumped in different parts of Baghdad. [68] Most of the bodies found by the police - an average of 20 a day - were bound, blindfolded and shot execution style, victims of sectarian violence carried out by death squads. Many also bore signs of torture or mutilation. Despite official Iraqi and U.S. statements to the contrary, the reports indicated that the number of unidentified bodies in the capital had risen again to pre-surge levels in May and June 2007.[69]

The number of unidentified corpses discovered in Baghdad soared more than 70 percent during May 2007 (compared to the first months of 2007), according to statistics from the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, despite the optimistic twaddle of the Bush Administration and General Petraeus that the "surge" worked. The figures also showed a decline in the number of deaths of identifiable victims in Baghdad to 344 in May from 495 in April. While victims of car bombs, homemade bombs and mortar strikes can usually be identified, those who were kidnapped, tortured and executed are normally stripped of identification before their bodies are dumped.[70]

UNAMI's Human Rights report for the period from January to June 2008 stated: "Large numbers of unidentified bodies were found in Diyala, Nineveh, Anbar and Diwaniyah and mainly in Baghdad. Many of these bodies bore signs of torture, some were blind-folded and

others were decapitated.”[71]

The Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, researching the situation in Iraq, reported on February 6, 2009 that the number of outstanding cases at the beginning of the period under review, 1 December 2007 to 30 November 2008, was 16,387. [72]

### **Disappearances at checkpoints**

According to Mukhaled al-A’ani, a spokesman for local Iraqi NGO Human Rights Association (HRA), on June 6, 2007 the number of people who had disappeared after being arrested at checkpoints in the capital had increased significantly since February 2007. The Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights said it has looked into many cases of Iraqis missing after being stopped at checkpoints, but said “police officers have shown sufficient proof that they have not had anything to do with their disappearances.”[73] That contradicts many eyewitness accounts. So it is perfectly understandable that the apparent lack of justice in Baghdad has led to many of its residents distrusting authorities, whether army, police or government officials.[74]A case study: the Ministry of Health, a very unhealthy institution

### **Hakim Al-Zamili**

Minister of Health in 2006, Ali Al-Shimari, belonged to Moqtada Al-Sadr’s political movement while the latter’s military arm, the Mahdi Army, was acting inside hospitals with impunity. Sick and wounded patients were abducted from public hospitals and later killed. As a consequence, more and more Iraqis were avoiding hospitals. “The hospitals have become killing fields,” said Abu Nasr.[75] Ali Al-Shimari fled the country as soon as charges of sectarian acts were brought against officials at the ministry. Al-Shimari was granted political asylum in the USA.[76] After the attack hit Samarra’s Askariya shrine, also known as the Golden Mosque, on February 22, 2006,[77] Ali Al Shimari and his deputy Hakim Al Zamili, a commander of the Mahdi army, turned the Ministry of Health into a torture and killing centre. In September 2006, when the streets of Baghdad were swamped with thousands of brutally assassinated bodies, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the Ministry of Health not to release further figures about casualties to the United Nations, as it had previously done.[78] On February 8, 2007, occupation forces raided the ministry and arrested Hakim Al Zamili. He was accused of allegedly funnelling money to the militias. He used private ambulances and hospitals to carry out the killings. He was the key suspect in the kidnapping and (suspected) murder of his colleague, Ammar al-Saffar, who was also a deputy Health Minister.[79] After a two-day trial, marred by accusations of witness intimidation, the charges were dropped and Mr. Zamili was freed after spending more than a year in American custody.[80] According to accurate Iraqi sources, Hakim Al-Zamili killed 160 persons, among them D.r Raad Al Mahdawy – a Sunni – the general director of the health department in Diyala. Al-Zamili’s 2009 release was, according to some Iraqi witnesses, part of the deal for returning the bodies of 5 Britons, held hostage for 2 years by an obscure militia known as “Islamic Shia Resistance in Iraq.” This group of Britons was seized while they were installing anti-corruption software in Baghdad’s Ministry of Finance, by about 40 men “disguised” as Iraqi policemen in May 2007.[81] The Iraqi authorities acted as lead negotiator and broker for the deal.[82] “The first thing Hakim Al-Zamili did after being released was killing Hassan Aziz, a judge who was involved in trying to convict Mr. Zamili. Now this criminal is a member of the Iraqi new parliament!” an anonymous Iraqi source testifies. Hakim Al-Zamili, recently elected Member of Parliament from the Sadrist bloc, is now one of the strongest advocates for carrying out the death sentence on former Prime

Minister Tariq Aziz.[83] This is today's sad reality in Iraq's "blossoming democracy."

### **It is a crime to forcefully deport Iraqi refugees**

As long as these criminals - guilty of the worst crimes under the watchful eye of the US occupier - are allowed to be involved in the political process, the counterinsurgency policy will continue; the summary executions will continue; the enforced disappearances will continue, whatever the Obama administration may assert. On October 19, 2010, a UNHCR poll of Iraqis who have returned to Baghdad from neighbouring countries found that physical insecurity, economic hardship and a lack of basic public services has led the majority to regret their decision to return to Iraq. During the course of these interviews, returnees informed UNHCR staff of numerous instances of explosions, harassment, military operations and kidnapping occurring in their areas of return. Many interviewed stated that they were obliged to return to Iraq because they could no longer afford the high cost of living in asylum states. [84] On November 26, 2010, the New York Times reported: "A second exodus has begun here, of Iraqis who returned after fleeing the carnage of the height of the war, but now find that violence and the nation's severe lack of jobs are pulling them away from home once again (...) This new migration shows how far the nation remains from being stable and secure." [85] In this context, it is a crime that many European Countries forcefully deport Iraqi refugees from their countries of asylum to Iraq.

### **Iraqi refugees suffering from extreme levels of trauma**

According to figures released on January 22, 2008 by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Iraqi refugees in Syria were suffering from extreme levels of trauma, far higher than among refugees from other recent conflicts elsewhere. The figures revealed that 89.5 percent were suffering from depression, 81.6 percent from anxiety and 67.6 percent from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[86] One in five of those registered with UNHCR since January 2007 - more than 19,000 individuals - were registered as "victims of torture and/or violence" in Iraq. 77% of the Iraqi refugees reported being affected by air bombardments and shelling or rocket attacks. 80% witnessed a shooting. 68% experienced interrogation or harassment by militias or other groups, including receiving death threats, while 16% had been tortured. 72% were eyewitnesses to a car bombing and 75% knew someone who had been killed. The report highlighted the many forms of torture endured by Iraqi refugees, including beatings, electric shocks, objects being placed under fingernails, burns and rape.[87] Staggering figures, shocking realities.

### **Conclusions**

Conclusion 1. The simple calculations and projections that I just made, based on official reports and trustworthy sources, are more reliable than the twisted figures released by the U.S. and the Iraqi puppet government. It should be pointed out that numbers represent people and that the refusal to reveal the real figure of disappeared and missing persons is a crime against humanity. An incomprehensible lack of respect for human beings sent into oblivion because the Americans and their Iraqi stooges wanted it that way. It should also be remembered that the unidentified, the missing, the disappeared, or whatever you want to call them, are always someone's father or mother, always someone's child. Each of them had a face before it was dismembered, disfigured, treated with acid, drilled, burned, beaten, shot, then thrown into the streets and anonymously buried with other unidentified corpses. Each once had a face that could see and hear, laugh and cry, talk and feel... before it was wiped out. Human life and dignity sacrificed on the altar of corporate profit and greed.

Conclusion 2. Rarely has an invading and occupying army solved the problems of a country. Occupation is the most extreme form of dictatorship. Occupation is plunder: stealing resources instead of paying for them. Occupation is assassinating people instead of saving human lives. Occupation is giving psychopaths the occasion and the means to kill with impunity. The examples of Yugoslavia during the 2nd WW,[88] the dirty wars in Vietnam and in Central and Latin America should be eye-openers. Only the total withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraqi soil can guarantee the start of a genuine democratic process. Only total withdrawal can be the start of a fair and thorough investigation into the forced disappearances and missing persons of Iraq. Only total withdrawal can put an end to the chaos that the US invasion has created.

## Questions

Will the Human Rights Commission finally wake up and appoint a special rapporteur for the human rights situation in Iraq, to thoroughly investigate one of the worst humanitarian crises on this planet?

Will there ever be WikiLeaks revelations about the “dirty war” in Iraq? Will we ever know the real numbers of forced disappeared persons in Iraq, tortured and then killed by the notorious death squads and militias, organized, funded, equipped, trained and deployed by trumpeters of “Human Rights”: the United States of America and the United Kingdom?

Will the UN ever call for a total withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraqi soil and give real sovereignty back to the Iraqi people, represented by the Iraqi anti-occupation movement? Will the UN finally set up a Commission working on reparations that should be paid by the invading and occupying forces for losses caused during the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq?

**Dirk Adriaensens** is a member of the [BRussels Tribunal Executive Committee](#)

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