

US and Iraq Regime Holding 51,000 Iraqi Behind Closed Bars, Most Illegally

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The U.S. is holding more Iraqis in prison than ever before—24,700—and is expanding its facilities to accommodate another 10,000, according to a new report.

In addition to those detained by the U.S., its Iraqi government partner is holding 26,000 Iraqis in jail, bringing the combined number of Iraqi prisoners to almost 51,000.

Given previous reports of torture and murder of inmates both in U.S. and Iraqi custody, it comes as no surprise the report describes conditions in the prisons as grim.

“U.S. forces are holding nearly all of these persons indefinitely, without an arrest warrant, without charge, and with no opportunity for those held to defend themselves in a trial,” writes Ciara Gilmartin, the Security Council Program Coordinator at Global Policy Forum(GPF), of New York City, which compiled the information.

“While the United States has put in place a formal review procedure that supposedly evaluates all detainees for release on a regular basis, detainees cannot attend these reviews, cannot confront evidence against them, and cannot be represented properly by an attorney,” Gilmartin said.

These conditions are “in direct violation” of international human rights law, says Gilmartin. Washington, however, claims due process does not apply as it is engaged in “an international armed conflict.” Human rights authorities, however, say the conflict is not international and that human rights law applies at all times.

In an effort to conceal conditions in its Iraqi compounds, the U.S. has closed them to human rights monitors such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Federation of Human Rights, Gilmartin said.

Detainees held by the U.S. are confined at Camp Bucca, near Umm Qasr, and at Camp Cropper, inside the U.S. base near the Baghdad airport. Among Camp Cropper’s 4,000 prisoners are “hundreds of juveniles,” Gilmartin reports, and its inmates suffer “from overcrowding, poor medical attention and miserable conditions.” Some inmates complain that they never see the light of day.

Camp Bucca, Gilmartin writes, with 20,000 inmates, “is perhaps the world’s largest extrajudicial internment camp.” Most of its detainees live in large communal tents and may be subject to scorching desert heat by day and bone-chilling cold by night. The facility is being expanded to house 10,000 more inmates. Bucca has a sordid history of riots by inmates over religious insults, maltreatment and poor conditions.

As for the prisons run by the Iraqi government, United Nations reports have described them “severely overcrowded” and having “dire sanitation and hygiene conditions.”

“Further,” according to Gilmartin, in the Iraq-run prisons there are “continuing reports of widespread and routine torture and ill-treatment of detainees.” Women inmates have told UN interviewers they had been raped and sexually abused. “The U.S. command, with its enormous influence over the Iraqi detention system, has a large responsibility for these conditions,” Gilmartin pointed out.

Global Policy Forum called for opening the Iraqi detention facilities “to national and international observers” and for establishing clear accountability for U.S. officers and contractors in charge of the prisons.

“The whole abusive system must be thoroughly overhauled or closed down,” Gilmartin said. “U.S. military and civilian leaders are not the only ones complicit in the abuse and lack of due process of Iraqi detainees. All who stay silent in the face of the Iraq gulag allow it to continue.”

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