



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on April 23, 2010

Iraqi Secret Prisons: Taking a Cue from the United States?

The Iraqi government has run a secret prison where minority Sunni Muslims were kept outside of the ordinary Iraqi system of justice and tortured, according to various press reports.

"More than 100 were tortured. There were a lot of marks on their bodies," an Iraqi official familiar with the inspections [told](#) the *Los Angeles Times*, which broke the story on April 19. "They beat people, they used electricity. They suffocated them with plastic bags, and different methods." The *Los Angeles Times* also reported that "an internal U.S. Embassy report quotes [Iraqi Human Rights Director Wijdan] Salim as saying that prisoners had told her they were handcuffed for three to four hours at a time in stress positions or sodomized."



The *New York Times* [reported](#) April 22 that the prison was designed to operate separate from the ordinary Iraqi system of justice. Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki's personal army ran the prison, called Ninevah Wall, that tortured prisoners. "The prisoners were arrested by the Baghdad Brigade, a security force controlled by Mr. Maliki's office, not by the military or the police," the *New York Times* reported. "Both the brigade and the command have faced criticism in the past for acting outside the law and giving Mr. Maliki unconstitutional power," the *New York Times* added. "This secret prison has a sectarian character, and it shows that the security forces and the army have an iron fist outside of the framework of the Constitution," Osama al-Najafi, a Sunni member of Parliament said of the prison. Maliki's coalition government has just lost a narrow parliamentary election last month to former U.S.-installed Interim President Ayad Allawi (who was [reported to have personally executed detainees](#)).

Meanwhile, U.S. officials have been lecturing Iraqi officials for doing just about precisely the same thing American forces did at Abu Ghraib (electro-shock torture, sodomy, etc.) and Guantanamo Bay (stress positions, lack of due process, etc.). The *New York Times* [reported](#): "The senior American military spokesman in Iraq, Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza, said that American officials had raised concerns about the prison with the Iraqi government."

The similarities between Iraqi and U.S. actions don't end there. The *New York Times* [noted](#) that "Mr. Maliki ordered the prison closed and said he had been unaware it existed, according to the officials. His move brought the release of 71 detainees and the transfer of others to established prisons, but more than 200 remain in the place, on the grounds of the Old Muthanna military airfield, in northern Baghdad."

Sound familiar? Maliki has ordered the prison closed, and it hasn't closed. Maliki's actions mirror President Obama's [promises to close Guantanamo within one year](#) of his executive order of January 22, 2009. That date has come and passed. A few detainees have been released, but most detainees remain



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detained outside the ordinary system of justice in the United States and have no real prospects for a trial of any sort, either by "military commission" or the jury trial required by the U.S. Constitution's [Sixth Amendment](#).

It would be difficult to argue that the Iraqi government has not learned from the American example. It's just a pity that American leaders haven't offered a better example.



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