

At least 44 Sunnis dead in foiled rescue attempt

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At least 44 Sunni detainees have died during a battle between would-be Sunni rescuers and pro-government Shiite militiamen guarding the suspected militants at a police station northeast of the capital, Iraqi police officials said Tuesday.

Police said the detainees died after Sunni militants attacked the station in Diyala province Monday night in an attempt to free them, the Associated Press reports, but there is conflicting information on the cause of death.

Three police officers say the station, which has a small jail, came under attack by Islamic militants. The three say the Shiite militiamen killed the detainees at close range.

A morgue official in the provincial capital of Baqouba says many had bullet wounds to the head and chest. All four spoke on condition of anonymity fearing for their safety, the AP reports.

Iraq's military says 52 detainees were killed when the attackers shelled the station with mortar rounds.

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