

# U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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## Immigration Services and Benefits Programs

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## Iraq

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	IRQ03004.ASM
<b>Date:</b>	May 19, 2003
<b>Subject:</b>	Iraq: Information on the Post-War Situation [2003] and on the Christian Community
<b>From:</b>	BCIS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Iraq / Armed conflicts / Ethnic conflicts / Freedom of religion / Intolerance / Paramilitary forces / Political violence / Political persecution / Public order / Public safety / Religious minorities / Religious persecution / Security forces / Vulnerable groups

### Query:

Please provide information on the current situation in Iraq since the cessation of major combat activities in that country. Also provide information on the Christian community in Iraq.

### Response:

#### BACKGROUND

Country conditions in Iraq are changing constantly since the cessation of major combat activities in that country in April 2003. The U.S. Department of State and Amnesty International USA representatives consulted by the Resource Information Center stated that the information they provided may soon be obsolete and must be considered in light of the rapidly changing and very unpredictable post-war environment. For specific questions on the situation in Iraq, or for updates, please contact the Resource Information Center.

CURRENT SITUATION: VIEWS OF U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, IRAQ DESK

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According to the Iraq desk at the U.S. Department of State, the process of establishing a secure and stable Iraq is evolving. Coalition forces are working to stabilize the situation, and it is unclear at this time how the human rights situation will change in the near future. It is also unclear how the system of legal recourse for Iraqis against their former abusers (Hussein regime members) will look and when it will be in place. The security situation in Iraq is currently very unstable, and occurrence of some human rights abuses is inevitable. There are ongoing paramilitary conflicts, and there is currently no reliable and consistent mechanism for assessing exactly what is going on, but paramilitary activities are expected to diminish over time (U.S. DOS 6 May 2003).

The Iraq desk representative pointed out that human rights reporting on Iraq has been based on secondary and even tertiary reporting for over 10 years. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and UN human rights monitors have long been barred from Iraq, although the UN Special Rapporteur for Iraq was allowed into the country for three days in 2002. Thus, most recent reporting on the human rights situation in Iraq is circumstantial, but as the security situation stabilizes, human rights monitors will be able to enter Iraq and report on conditions first-hand. The State Department has received hearsay reports that there have been fewer reprisals against former regime supporters than would have been expected, but that situation is likely to change for better or for worse, or both. It is hard to say, and it is too soon to predict (U.S. DOS 6 May 2003).

The representative offered the following example as an illustration of the current situation, particularly in the capital. Baghdad is currently divided into 39 military sectors. One sector reports relative calm with no looting, and that the Iraqi citizens there are very friendly and willing to defer to the authority of coalition forces. Meanwhile, the adjacent sector reports continual fire fights, violence, and unclear lines of authority. Thus, there is a significant amount of contradictory reporting, even on the situation in Baghdad (U.S. DOS 6 May 2003).

#### CURRENT SITUATION: VIEWS OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA REPRESENTATIVE

According to the Director of Amnesty International USA's Refugee Program, who was in Iraq in early May 2003, "lawlessness is endemic" and "there is a high level of tension among people on the street" (Director 16 May 2003). He said that he noticed a bit more normalcy every day that he was in the country; for instance, more shops were opening and more people were leaving their homes. But he also said that under the surface, tensions were worsening as citizens grew more frustrated over gasoline shortages and lack of basic services such as electricity, running water, and sanitation (Director 16 May 2003).

The Director said that Iraqis are "very fearful about the future governance" of Iraq, not only because the situation is uncertain, but also because many former Ba'athists, who tend to be Iraq's most privileged and highly educated citizens, are either still holding or are being

reinstalled in positions of authority (Director 16 May 2003). NOTE: The WASHINGTON TIMES has reported that a group of about 150 Kurds demonstrating recently outside U.S. military offices in Kirkuk "complained that American forces were giving too many administrative positions to members of Saddam's former ruling Ba'ath Party at the expense of other groups such as their own" (Taylor 19 May 2003).

The Director also described a situation of "free-for-all land and property grabs" in which, for instance, returning Iraqi refugees attempt to reclaim homes or property they formerly owned, or poor families occupy abandoned public or private buildings, or people squat in vacant lots or office buildings, sometimes room by room per family (Director 16 May 2003). He said that some of the better properties have been occupied by various political parties who then hang their banners outside the door. There is also a great deal of property grabbing in Kurdish-governed northern Iraq where returning Kurds and Turkmen are seizing their former homes and properties from Arabs who were paid to relocate there during Saddam's "Arabization" campaign. Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees who were once protected by Saddam's regime are being forced out of their dwellings or are being threatened to leave (Director 16 May 2003).

NOTE: According to a UN report, Iranian families who have lived in southern Iraq since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, farming land granted to them by Saddam Hussein's government, are being driven out of their homes by local Iraqis. Although there were no reports that any Iranians have been killed during property seizures, an Iraqi who was attempting to protect Iranians was reportedly shot to death (IRIN 16 May 2003). The WASHINGTON TIMES reported on the situation of property claims in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk stating that "[d]espite...competing property claims..., U.S. forces have managed to 'freeze' the tensions and cobble together a temporary city council consisting of six representatives from each of the region's main ethnic groups— Arabs, Kurds, Turkomen and Assyrians" (Taylor 19 May 2003). Notwithstanding the ease in tensions, the Kurds "...were particularly incensed that Arabs now living in homes from which Kurds were driven by Saddam's government are now enjoying equal representation with the Kurds on the newly formed city council" (Taylor 19 May 2003).

These and many other difficulties and uncertainties fuel existing and multiplying inter-personal differences which are common in Iraq. On a national level, Saddam Hussein's regime exemplified the tribal system of kinship loyalty and personal patronage in which "leaders" mete out rewards and punishments to their "patrons" (Director 16 May 2003). This system also plays out at the local level and is the back-drop to strong personal vendettas, as well as divisions within religious and cultural groups (e.g., Kurds, Shi'ites, Sunnis) and divisions among religious and cultural groups (e.g., Sunni vs. Shi'a, Kurds vs. Arabs) (Director 16 May 2003).

RECENT REPORTING ON POST-WAR CONDITIONS IN IRAQ

Following are reports from April and May 2003 on the situation in Iraq.

Human Rights Watch stated in a 27 April Press Release:

"Extensive research at five hospitals and morgues in Kirkuk and Mosul suggests that the high civilian [death] tolls [in northern Iraq] can be attributed to general lawlessness after the collapse of local authorities; the ready availability of weapons and ammunition; and the vast stores of ammunition and ammunition components left behind by the Iraqi military, including landmines, rocket-propelled grenades, and other explosives" (HRW 27 Apr 2003).

Human Rights Watch also quoted an Iraqi doctor in al-Razi Hospital in Mosul as saying that he could not speak openly to interviewers out of fear of reprisal by Ba'ath loyalists who were still spying on his activities (HRW 27 Apr 2003).

On 5 May, a DALLAS MORNING NEWS embedded reporter wrote that "there is strong evidence that Iraqis who cooperate with the U.S. soldiers are being terrorized, perhaps even killed" by alleged Fedayeen members and former Iraqi regime loyalists still operating in Iraq (Timms 5 May 2003).

Lt. Gen. David McKiernan, American ground forces commander in Iraq, stated in an interview with NEWSWEEK that he "hopes to see a civil administration take control of Iraq within 'a couple of months' " (Nordland & Peraino 5 May 2003). He also stated: "We're trying to ensure stability and security across Iraq. But there are still pockets, there are still regime loyalists, there still are foreign forces, there's crime" (Nordland & Peraino 5 May 2003). Lt. Gen. McKiernan also discussed coalition forces' concerns that there are "still pockets of Ba'athists [in Iraq]" and that there are "certain local influences [that have to be controlled]" (Nordland & Peraino 5 May 2003).

According to the WASHINGTON POST, U.S. military officials in Iraq stated in a 14 May press conference that violence by loyalists of the former regime is more dangerous to Iraq's stability than random street violence. The officials indicated that the resistance groups are loosely organized and comprise in part Iraqi former security and paramilitary forces (Slevin 15 May 2003, A1). Lt. Gen. McKiernan "cautioned that it will take time to stabilize a country that has neither law nor order" (Slevin 15 May 2003).

According to a Reuters article, as the UN entered Iraq to establish the first permanent humanitarian presence there since the war began, "U.N. agencies say the biggest problem facing Iraq is not a serious shortage of relief supplies but rather a breakdown in order and a crisis of governance" (Al-Khalidi 1 May 2003).

In a Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty article, the mayor of al-Fallujah, where Iraqi

civilians were shot by American forces during anti-American demonstrations, is quoted as saying that only a minority of al-Fallujah residents harbor anger and resentment of American forces in Iraq. Yet the mayor relays concerns that many high-ranking former Iraqi regime members, who were originally from al-Fallujah, returned there during the conflict. The article also states that "[t]he top [Ba'ath] party leaders have now fled but their loyalists remain and fear the new order will strip them of their former privileges. Loyalist clerics also continue to preach in the central mosque, which appears to have become one focal point for the unrest" (Eshanova 5 May 2003).

In a related article in Pakistan's DAILY TIMES, US military officials are quoted as saying:

"[T]he paramilitaries [involved in the al-Fallujah shootings] are remnants of several different Saddam groups. They include the dictator's fanatical Saddam Fedayeen death squads, as well as former Republican Guard fighters and special security officers" (Scarborough & Taylor 1 May 2003).

The article further states:

"A US intelligence official said yesterday [30 April 2003] that most of the Fedayeen forces who menaced coalition troops in the war have either been killed or fled the battlefield. Of the remaining Saddam loyalists, the official said...[y]ou're basically talking about ragtag elements" (Scarborough & Taylor 1 May 2003).

On 3 May, CNN reporter Nic Robertson wrote that "security in Baghdad is still far from assured" as many schoolchildren stayed home on the first day back to school, and in a surprise move, the interim police chief in Baghdad resigned citing differences with U.S. forces on how to establish Baghdad's new police force (Robertson 3 May 2003). Robertson also cites a UNICEF spokesman currently in Iraq who states that the country could still face a humanitarian disaster (Robertson 3 May 2003).

A BALTIMORE SUN article discusses the 2 May 2003 shooting death of a Baghdad woman who reportedly was a friend of Saddam Hussein's sons Uday and Qusay. In the article, the woman's 17 year old son alleges that his mother was killed by a jealous relative and that he will avenge his mother's killing in the absence of any justice system through which he might seek recourse (Calvert 5 May 2003).

The article also discusses crime and lawlessness in Iraq and ongoing attempts by American forces to establish durable rule of law:

"Even as some Baghdad police officers returned to the streets yesterday, this city of nearly 5 million remained a world without formal justice. In recent days, more and more shops have reopened, as have many schools, suggesting that the city is returning to its bustling

old ways. Yet many residents do not feel safe. Thieves continue to steal, particularly at night when the city still crackles with gunfire, and killers are getting away with murder. But the return of the police, overseen by the United States, is not a wholly welcome step. As much as residents want looting and robberies to stop, they harbor deep suspicions of a force that was guilty of rampant thuggery and worse under Hussein" (Calvert 5 May 2003).

An IRAQ PRESS article states that despite predictions of infighting, reprisals, and revenge killings following the fall of the Hussein regime, many ordinary Iraqis are eager to move forward and simply allow former regime members to go on with their lives. "There have [been] few cases of revenge and even members of the former intelligence and security organs which helped the deposed regime of Saddam Hussein hold a firm sway over the population are leading a normal life" (IRAQ PRESS 2 May 2003).

#### CHRISTIANS IN POST-WAR IRAQ

For information on the situation of Christians in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, see Responses to Information Requests Numbers IRQ00001.ZLA (27 June 2000, Iraq: Information on Chaldean Christians), IRQ00002.ZLA (28 June 2000, Iraq: Information on Chaldean Christians, Illegal Exit and Return), and IRQ03001 (13 January 2003, Iraq: Information on Treatment of Assyrian and Chaldean Christians).

Government-sponsored systematic persecution in Saddam Hussein's Iraq generally occurred along political (as opposed to religious) lines. Those who opposed or were suspected of opposition to the government were often threatened or brutally punished. "Saddam helped finance churches, and he usually treated Christian clergy well, even as his government brutalized or intimidated ordinary Christians along with Muslims" (Kaplow 21 Apr 2003). Currently, only about 3 percent of Iraqis are Christians, their numbers having dwindled over the past 20 years as those with close ties in Europe or the U.S. fled Iraq in search of greater prosperity and freedom. In relation to other religious groups, Iraq's Christians are wealthier, and some fear that democracy in Iraq will lead to a Shi'ite-dominated government that may be unfriendly to Christians. Nevertheless, "there have not been attacks on Christian communities, and Christians hope the chaos will end before any attacks can occur" (Kaplow 21 Apr 2003).

According to the Director of Amnesty International USA's Refugee Program, Iraqi Christians are just one minority group coopted by the secular Ba'athist government. Like other Iraqis, Christians often fell victim to persecution by the government, but the government generally did not discriminate against or persecute citizens based on their religion. While the Christian community accepted cooptation to ensure their survival as a vulnerable minority living under a brutal regime, they are currently "extremely fearful" of being associated with the former government and of what the future may hold in terms of a new government that may or may not be tolerant of religious minorities (Director 16 May 2003).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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