

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 1598
September 4, 2007

Visas for Heroes: Congressional Action Needed to Safeguard America's Friends

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America is not alone in fighting the long war against transnational terrorism. In Iraq and Afghanistan and around the world, many people have put their own lives and the lives of their families at risk to advance the cause of freedom. Many of these freedom fighters are no longer safe in their home countries. Congress and the Administration must reform U.S. laws and procedures to provide increased opportunities for Iraqi refugees to come to the United States.

A Beacon of Freedom. Since the outbreak of the Iraq War, an estimated 2 million Iraqis have fled their home country. The United States has accepted only a fraction of these refugees. From October 2006 through March, the United States accepted 15,000 refugees in total, of which only 68 were Iraqis.

U.S. policies are responsible for this small inflow. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) enforces tougher security screening procedures for Iraqis. Though the United States has accepted high numbers of refugees from equally threatening countries, including 3,077 Somalis and 2,468 Iranians, the Administration will fall short of its promise to admit 7,000 Iraqis by the end of September 2007, admitting only 133 to date. A majority of stateless Iraqis flee to Jordan, straining the social services of a strong and supportive friend of the United States in the region. Others have fled to Syria, which risks radicalizing the Iraqi diaspora.

In its fight against transnational terrorism, the United States must protect Americans without sac-

rificing economic growth, civil liberties and privacy, and efforts to win the battle of ideas. The inability to admit more Iraqis into the United States fails that strategy.

Meeting Obligations to Friends. The Administration and Congress must do the following:

- **Increase the number of Iraqi refugees allowed into the United States.** Even if the United States meets the target of admitting 7,000 Iraqi refugees, millions of Iraqis would remain displaced.
- **Streamline the requirements for applicants.** The higher security standard for Iraqis is pointless, and it prolongs the application process. Federal agencies can safeguard security by acting with normal due diligence while judiciously conducting screening, interviews, and background checks. Also, the Administration should continue to refine and speed the process of waiving the "material support" bar for admitting refugees and asylum seekers.
- **The DHS and the Department of State must process applications faster.** Since the outbreak of the war, an average of 50,000 Iraqis have fled Iraq every month. Most of them flee because

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm1598.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

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their lives are in danger. The United States must manage the surge of refugee applications in a timely manner.

Doing the Right Thing. Millions of Iraqis are in danger because they championed ideals such as civil liberties and freedom. The United States has always provided a safe haven for the persecuted and should treat Iraqis no differently. Doing so would make a statement to the region and to the world that the United States values its friends and

accepts the challenge of averting humanitarian crisis and suffering.

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