

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Kennedy, Patrick F <KennedyPF@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 12, 2011 8:43 AM
To: H
Cc: Nides, Thomas R; Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: RE: COMPLETE TEXT of USA Travel Warning

Travel Warning
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of Consular Affairs
Print Email Iraq
September 13, 2011

The Department of State warns U.S. citizens against all but essential travel to Iraq given the dangerous security situation. Civilian air and road travel within Iraq remains dangerous. This Travel Warning replaces the Travel Warning dated April 12, 2011, to update information and to remind U.S. citizens of ongoing security concerns for U.S. citizens in Iraq, including kidnapping and terrorist violence.

The United States has reduced the number of U.S. military forces in Iraq and ended the combat mission there on August 31, 2010. Consistent with agreements between the two countries, the United States is scheduled to complete its withdrawal of military forces from Iraq by December 31, 2011.

Some regions within Iraq have experienced fewer violent incidents than others in recent years, in particular the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR).

However, violence and threats against U.S. citizens persist and no region should be considered safe from dangerous conditions. Attacks against military and civilian targets throughout Iraq continue, including in the International (or "Green") Zone (IZ). Methods of attack have included magnetic bombs placed on vehicles; roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs); mortars and rockets; human- and vehicle-borne IEDs, including Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFPs); mines placed on or concealed near roads; suicide attacks; and shootings. Numerous insurgent groups remain active throughout Iraq. Although Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) operations against these groups continue, attacks against the ISF and U.S. forces persist in many areas of the country. U.S. citizens in Iraq remain at a high risk for kidnapping.

While sectarian and terrorist violence occurs at levels lower than in previous years, it occurs often, particularly in the provinces of Baghdad, Ninewa, Salah ad Din, Anbar, and Diyala.

The security situation in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), which includes the provinces of Sulymaniya, Erbil, and Dohuk, has been more stable relative to the rest of Iraq in recent years, but threats remain.

U.S. government personnel in northern Iraq are required to be accompanied by a protective security detail when traveling outside secure facilities. Although there have been significantly fewer terrorist attacks and lower levels of insurgent violence in the IKR than in other parts of Iraq, the security situation throughout the country remains dangerous. Increasingly, many U.S. and third country business people travel throughout much of Iraq; however, they do so under restricted movement conditions and almost always with security advisors and teams.

The Turkish military continues to carry out operations against elements of the Kongra-Gel terrorist group (KGG, formerly Kurdistan Workers'

Party or PKK) located along Iraq's northern border. Additionally, extensive unmarked minefields remain along the international border. The Governments of Turkey and Iran continue to carry out military operations against insurgent groups in the mountain regions. These operations have included troop movements and both aerial and artillery bombardments.

U.S. citizens should avoid areas near the Turkish or Iranian borders because of these ongoing military operations. Borders in these areas are not always clearly defined. In 2009, three U.S. citizens were detained by Iranian authorities while hiking in the vicinity of the Iranian border in the Kurdistan region. The U.S. Embassy has limited resources to assist U.S. citizens who venture close to or cross the border with Iran. The Department of State discourages travel in close proximity to the Iranian border.

Travelers should be aware that a potential threat of attack still exists when using commercial carriers to enter or depart Iraq, even though there have been no recent attacks on civilian aircraft. International carriers are routinely flying into Erbil and increasingly, into Baghdad.

Infrequent indirect fire attacks have impacted on or near the Baghdad and Basrah airports. There has been no reported damage or injuries to commercial operations or personnel. In addition, there remains a high risk to road travelers as described above.

The U.S. Embassy is located in the International Zone (IZ) in Baghdad.

The IZ is a restricted access area. As of June 30, 2009, Iraqi authorities assumed responsibility for control of the IZ. Travelers to the IZ should be aware that Iraqi authorities may require special identification to enter the IZ or may issue IZ-specific access badges.

Some terrorist or extremist groups continue to target U.S. citizens for kidnapping. Individuals residing and traveling within the IZ should continue to exercise good personal safety precautions.

The U.S. government considers the potential threat to U.S. government personnel in Iraq to be serious enough to require them to live and work under strict security guidelines. All U.S. government employees under the authority of the U.S. Ambassador must travel in groups of two or more within the IZ and carry a working cell phone or radio when exiting the U.S. Embassy compound. U.S. government personnel require special permission and a protective security detail at all times when traveling outside the IZ and outside secure facilities, and may be prohibited from traveling to certain areas of Iraq based on prevailing security conditions. State Department guidance to U.S. businesses in Iraq advises the use of protective security details. Detailed security information is available at the U.S. Embassy website and at the U.S. Central Command website.

The U.S. Embassy provides services to the general public, including U.S.

citizens, in Iraq. The ability of the U.S. Embassy to provide services to U.S. citizens outside Baghdad is particularly limited given the security environment. U.S. citizens who choose to visit or reside in Iraq despite this Travel Warning are urged to take responsibility for their own personal security and belongings (including their U.S. passports) and to avoid crowds, especially rallies or demonstrations.

U.S. citizens who choose to travel in Iraq should be aware that Iraqi authorities have arrested or detained U.S. citizens whose purpose of travel is not readily apparent. Persons also have been detained for taking photographs of buildings or other scenic sites. All U.S. citizens in Iraq, including those working on contract for the U.S. government, are urged to inform the U.S. Embassy of their presence in Iraq by enrolling in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) in order to obtain updated travel information. By enrolling, U.S. citizens make it easier for the Embassy to provide updated security information or to contact them in emergencies.

U.S. citizens may obtain the latest security information or other information about Iraq by contacting the U.S. Embassy, located in the International Zone, via email, landline (from U.S. dial 1-240-553-0581 ext. 4293 or 2413) or by accessing U.S. Embassy Baghdad's website. The after-hours emergency numbers are 011-964-770-443-1286 (from the United States) or 0770-443-1286 (within Iraq). As cell phone service is unreliable in Iraq, emergency calls may also be placed through the Department of State at 1-888-407-4747.

Travelers may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions in Iraq by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States and Canada, or from other countries on a regular toll-line at 1-202-501-4444.

Stay up to date by bookmarking our Bureau of Consular Affairs website, which contains current Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts as well as the Worldwide Caution. You can also download our free Smart Traveler App for travel information at your fingertips. Follow us on Twitter and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on Facebook as well.