

Police Seek Part in New Regime

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Officers sacked by the Ba'athist regime ask for their jobs back so they can help rebuild security.

A group of 200 police officers forced out of work by the regime of President Saddam Hussein have urged the head of the coalition forces in Iraq, Paul Bremer, to reinstate them as a way of promoting security.

In a letter to Bremer, signed by Colonel Hussein Ali Hussein, a Shia Moslem, the police say they would be well placed to root out the worst of the pro-Saddam officers still serving under the occupying forces.

Their appeal comes on the heels of a warning by the International Crisis Group that "serious trouble" will break out unless American forces in Baghdad restore personal security and public services. In a report entitled *Baghdad: A Race Against the Clock*, the ICG recommended "getting more Iraqi police on the streets by speeding up training of credible, vetted elements of the old force, giving Iraqi officers greater latitude to work. . . and re-appointing senior officers untainted by corruption and regime-related criminality".

"Two months into the new era," the ICG said, "the US and associated forces have dealt poorly with the issues that effect Baghdadis most directly. They must quickly give people a feeling of greater safety in streets and homes and of improving services. . . . Time is running out."

In his letter to Bremer, Colonel Hussein said his fellow-signatories - described as a group of officers with experience in civil, technical and administrative affairs - "were either forced to retire or thrown out of their jobs for obvious reasons," in other words for not complying with Saddam's regime.

"Most of us suffered frequent arrests and torture by Iraqi intelligence, and our families were subjected to recurrent harassment by the authorities. All this because we refused to partake in the crimes committed by the previous regime," he added.

The colonel said supporters of Saddam Hussein had managed to "filter back in to various police departments" since the overthrow of the regime. He offered to cooperate with the coalition "in exorcising the department of collaborators from the previous regime".

Interviewed by IWPR, some of the dismissed officers said they had documents showing the links between some of the policemen who have been re-appointed and the old regime. They said a number of Ba'athist officers had already returned to their bad old ways - letting thieves go in return for a bribe or a percentage.

As the 200 police officers pleaded for reinstatement, former New York Police Department Commissioner Bernard Kerik said 8,000 of the Baghdad's 19,000-strong police force had failed to return to work - although all of them had showed up a few weeks earlier to collect their monthly 20 US dollar stipend.

Kerik, who has been charged with rebuilding the Baghdad police force, said thousands of police had returned to work since he arrived in mid-May. But he said he still needed 11,000 more if he was to secure the capital.

In an interview with IWPR, one of the 200 officers forced out of work, 53-year-old Colonel Mohammed Abdul Razak, said he was ordered to retire last year after he arrested a group of senior Ba'athists in a brothel.

"I was quite surprised when my papers came through a year ago telling me that I had to retire," he said. "I still had 12 years left to serve. The problem was that one of the men I had arrested was the first cousin of the interior minister, Mahmoud Theyab. The minister himself visited me afterwards, asking me to release his cousin, but I refused. I was a strict, but decent officer."

Another dismissed officer, Colonel Jewad Kadem, spoke of being jailed for a few days every now and then, just because he was not a Ba'ath party member. He said he received none of the salaries or bonuses such as modern cars and acres of land that were given to officers favoured by the regime.

Lieutenant Kena'an Jihad, a Kurd who lived in Baghdad, was forced to retire in 1980 after refusing to join the Ba'ath party. Even after he retired, he said, he was not allowed to travel outside Baghdad. He felt doubly hated by the regime - once for being a Kurd, and twice for not becoming a Ba'athist.

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