



## IRAQI EXILES RETURN TO FIGHT SADDAM, REBUILD NATION

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***As cities around Iraq fall into coalition hands Iraqi exiles trained by the U.S. government assist the effort to stabilize and rebuild the country.***

Hundreds of Iraqis who fled during the regime of Saddam Hussein are returning to assist with an array of challenges facing their war-torn homeland, from fighting remnants of the largely toppled regime to helping restore normalcy.

Before the war began in mid-March, American military officials gathered thousands of Iraqis in cities throughout the U.S. to recruit **exiles** to fill different roles.

### **Free Iraqi Forces**

One group, the Free Iraqi Forces, is a team of 69 soldiers who are working behind the fighting to work as a bridge between U.S. forces and local Iraqis. American forces were careful in their planning of where these small teams of FIF soldiers would be sent.

"We selected the location that they would go to and the unit that they would go to based upon the Free Iraqi Force soldier's hometown," Army Reserve Brig. Gen. John H. Kern, commander of the Free Iraqi Forces, said. "If they're from the neighborhood, that certainly speeds everything we're doing in that neighborhood."

### **Exiles with local knowledge**

For the Army Colonel who helped establish the system for delivering food and aid through the main Iraqi port of Umm Qasr, this local knowledge was critical.

"The Free Iraqi Forces ... contribution has just been invaluable. In my case, the folks that are with me are from this area; they have family, they know

the people, and have really been critical in establishing the trust with the local people that we really were here to help them, and to identify the people that we needed to work with to get distribution back up and going," Col. Dave Blackledge said April 4.

Although there are few Free Iraqi Force soldiers on the ground, Kern stressed he stressed that, "everywhere you see a U.S. Army or a U.S. Marine Corps unit, that's where we have some of our Free Iraqi Force soldiers. They're there in ones and twos."

One example of what the FIF soldiers have done is in Umm Qasr, where they assisted in reorganizing the local government.

### **Working with local officials**

"We use our FIF members with us in conversations [with local officials]. There's a functioning city council here in Umm Qasr, and our folks have sat down with that city council, talked to them and said, 'You folks select the people to be the policemen,'" Kern said. "The policemen before we entered the town have all left. And like every town, it needs policemen for law and order, and all of the issues that any town in any country would have. So we think we're probably going to have a police force here of about 40 people."

Kern told reporters that the FIF troops have been received warmly by local Iraqis.

"The people are very supportive, because they're uniformed differently from us, they're not wearing the same uniform that an American soldier wears. And we did that on purpose. And they have a very distinctive patch that says FIF. And we have them explain who they are, why they're here: to help liberate the people of Iraq," Kern explained.

### **Free Iraqi Fighting Forces**

But these troops with the so-called civil affairs units, military groups who focus on rebuilding local communities after the fighting has ended, are not the only exiles working in Iraq.

A second group, the Free Iraqi Fighting Forces, also goes by the acronym FIF, but performs a very different task in Iraq.

Several hundred of these soldiers were trained in Hungary by U.S. Army Special Forces to fight with coalition troops on the ground in Iraq.

The Free Iraqi Fighters, as they are also called, are made up of Iraqi exiles between the ages of 18 and 55 who had been living in the United States, Canada and Western Europe.

These soldiers, some of them working with exile leader **Ahmad Chalabi**, have moved into towns in southern Iraq to restore order and fight any Saddam supporters still dug in.

In addition to these two different FIF groups, still other Iraqis have returned as independent translators and guides for the media and military.

But for all of those who have returned, they have told reporters it is to free Iraq and rebuild their nation.

"I'd been in the United States eight years, and right now I return to my country... with the FIF," Habib Ali, a FIF soldier working to rebuild Umm Qasr. "And I'm very, very glad because my country is right now [one] of freedom... because Saddam Hussein is done, is over."

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## **Vocabulary**

**exile** – (n.) **1 a** : the state or a period of forced absence from one's country or home **b** : the state or a period of voluntary absence from one's country or home

**2** : a person who is in exile

**Ahmad Chalabi** – (n.) head of a key opposition group, the Iraqi National Congress. For more on Chalabi see the key players section of Online NewsHour at:

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle\\_east/iraq/war/player8.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/iraq/war/player8.html)