

Op-Docs

‘Forgotten in Iraq’

By BETH MURPHY

Published: December 5, 2012

As an American, as a journalist and simply as a person who tries to maintain some moral clarity in my life, I felt compelled in this Op-Doc video to tell the story of the workers in [Iraq](#) whose lives have been endangered or destroyed because of their loyalty to the United States.

I serve on the board of the International Institute of New England, an organization that helps settle refugees in the Boston area. In early 2007, we heard that our organization would soon be aiding a flood of [Iraqi refugees](#). Many would be men and women who had worked directly for the United States government while we were at war in their country. They were Iraqis who threw their lot in with the Americans, serving as translators and guides, administrative staff members and procurement experts. But as the conflict dragged on, radical militias began to target the Iraqi workers and their families.

Very few of these Iraqi allies were receiving any help from the United States. In Boston, a trickle of refugees arrived, but not the flood we had imagined — and most had no United States affiliation. In Washington a group of politicians, including [Barack Obama](#), then a very eloquent presidential candidate, campaigned for “keeping faith” with the Iraqis who kept faith with us. I hoped, as did many Iraqi workers whose lives were in danger, that an Obama presidency would usher in an airlift rescue for America’s Iraqi employees. Britain and Denmark, among other allies, had already offered their own Iraqi workers a path to safety. President Bill Clinton demonstrated in 1996 that something like this could be done, when he ordered an airlift of 6,600 Iraqi Kurds to Guam for processing to be resettled in the United States.

Unfortunately, neither a dramatic airlift nor a steady wave of relief was in the cards. In the five years since this crisis first came into my life, I’ve documented the extraordinary efforts of Kirk Johnson, a former [U.S.A.I.D.](#) employee, as he champions the causes of his former co-workers in Iraq and their peers. Despite Mr. Johnson’s efforts, there have been far too few resolutions to the stories of persecution and hostility toward our government’s Iraqi allies. Without firm, committed guidance

from the president who once spoke so powerfully on their behalf, I am deeply concerned that many of these men and women will remain in danger.