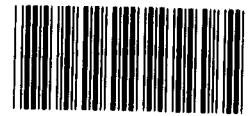


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Refugee-Related Issues in
Turkey and the Soviet Union

Statement of
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Foreign Economic Assistance Issues
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Before the Subcommittee on Immigration,
Refugees and International Law
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives



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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today at your request to discuss the situation concerning displaced Iraqis and others in Turkey and U.S. efforts to assist in their support and resettlement. I will also briefly discuss the status of U.S. refugee processing in the Soviet Union.

My remarks are drawn from several recently completed reviews of relief efforts related to the war in the Persian Gulf,¹ a U.S.-funded project for Bulgarian refugees in Turkey (during which we updated information from earlier efforts), and a follow-up review early this year on the processing of Soviet refugees.²

IRAQIS IN TURKEY

There were about 38,000 displaced Iraqis in Turkey at the end of August 1991 who were receiving shelter and assistance from the Turkish government. The majority were Kurds, but that number includes other ethnic groups such as Assyrians and Turkomans. Turkish government and U.S. Embassy officials in Ankara were unable

¹Persian Gulf Crisis: Humanitarian Relief Provided to Evacuees From Kuwait and Iraq (GAO/NSIAD-91-160), March 1991.

²Soviet Refugees: Processing and Admittance to the United States Has Improved (GAO/NSIAD-91-245), July 1991.

to provide us a breakdown of the population by ethnic group; however, we were able to determine that the number included:

- 27,000 Kurds driven out of Iraq as a result of poison gas attacks in 1988.
- 5,000 Iraqis who sought refuge in Turkey in August and September 1990, during the Persian Gulf crisis.
- 4,100 Iraqi Kurds and others who fled northern Iraq for the Turkish border in April 1991 to escape Iraqi military attacks, and
- 2,000 Iraqi military deserters.

According to high level Turkish government officials, the Turkish government is not obligated under its UN treaty commitments, to recognize non-Europeans as refugees. Accordingly, they emphasized that Turkey does not consider displaced Iraqis, or any other non-Europeans in Turkey, to have refugee status.³ Despite this, Turkey

³According to Turkish government officials, Turkey, a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, subscribes to the Convention's "European" (as contrasted with the "Universal") option with respect to the definition of refugees, meaning that Turkey is obligated to recognize as refugees only those fleeing from events in Europe who otherwise meet refugee eligibility criteria.

has continued to provide assistance and shelter to these groups. Let me elaborate briefly on each of these refugee groups in Turkey.

1988 Iraqis

An estimated 60,000 Kurds fled Iraq in 1988. Approximately 27,000 Kurds still remain. The others have either returned to Iraq or resettled elsewhere. The U.S. government had planned to begin admitting up to 3,000 of them into the United States in January 1991, with admissions to occur during fiscal year 1991, but the Persian Gulf Crisis delayed the processing.

Processing resumed in August 1991, for the 803 available candidates at the camp in Diyarbakir, Turkey. Of the 748 interviewed (55 failed to appear) 729 were approved for admission and 19 were denied admission to the United States. About 200 of the approved candidates were expected to travel to the United States before September 30, 1991. The remainder are expected to travel during fiscal year 1992, according to Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and State Department officials.

Eleven northern Iraqi families, totalling 55 persons, who worked with Operation Provide Comfort officials during the relief effort and were therefore fearful of returning to Iraq, were interviewed in Ankara, Turkey and approved for entry as refugees. They are expected to arrive in this country before September 30, 1991.

The Kurds in camps at Mush and Mardin were denied permission by the Turkish government, for security reasons, to travel to Diyarbakir for interviews. Those candidates in Mush and Mardin may also enter the United States during fiscal year 1992, if they can be interviewed and approved within the next several months.

A Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs official informed us that three other countries (Canada, the Netherlands and Australia) are each expected to admit 500 to 600 Kurds, with Finland possibly taking an additional 200. He said that with the U.S. taking the lead in resettling this Kurdish group, the effort may gain momentum and result ultimately in a solution to the situation.

Gulf Crisis Evacuees

Approximately 8,000 Iraqis fled to Turkey in the fall of 1990 as the Persian Gulf crisis developed. About 5,000 remain there, with the remainder having returned to Iraq. They reside primarily in the cities of Kayseri, Van and Sivas in central and eastern Turkey. The Turkish government continues to provide shelter and assistance to this group. So far there have been no international offers of assistance in resettling this population.

Northern Iraqis

About 4,100 northern Iraqis, primarily Kurds, (of the estimated 452,000 who massed along the border in April 1991) remained in Turkey as of the end of August 1991. They were sheltered at a temporary accommodation center at Silopi, Turkey, near the Iraqi border. This group had been returning to Iraq at a rate of about 100-200 per day, as of the end of August, and Turkish officials expected that this trend would continue.

Iraqi Military Deserters

Turkey is providing shelter to approximately 2,000 Iraqi military deserters under international treaty provisions. Turkish government officials informed us that they are adhering strictly to their treaty obligations in caring for the Iraqi soldiers. The soldiers are currently under control of civilian Turkish authorities and are being consolidated at Silopi.

OTHER REFUGEE-RELATED CONCERNS IN TURKEY

While the focus of this hearing is on refugee admissions to the United States, I would like to briefly mention a couple of other refugee-related matters with which the Turkish government has had to contend over the past few years. The Turkish government has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in housing, food and other assistance to over 320,000 Bulgarian Ethnic Turks who fled into

Turkey in May and June 1989.⁴ Because they were Europeans, the Bulgarians were granted refugee status. Also, because they were Ethnic Turks, the Turkish government granted them almost automatic citizenship status. In November 1989, the United States contributed \$10 million to assist the government in assimilating this group of people into Turkish society. These funds support a vocational training and job placement program designed to train and provide employment for 10,500 unskilled Bulgarian Ethnic Turks, and to find jobs for 25,000 others. The program is scheduled to conclude in June 1992.

While we were in Turkey, a Ministry for Foreign Affairs official commented on the presence of a large number of displaced Iranians in their country. Over the last decade or so, largely as a result of the Iran-Iraq war, an estimated 3 to 4 million displaced Iranians have entered Turkey seeking refuge, and perhaps 500,000 to 1 million remain as aliens, with an estimated 200,000 in Istanbul alone. They view the Iranians' presence as a serious and taxing problem for the government.

SOVIET REFUGEE PROCESSING

Now let me turn to the issue of U.S. processing of Soviet refugees. Section 599D of the Foreign Operations Appropriation Act for 1990

⁴About 220,000 Bulgarian Ethnic Turks remain in Turkey, the others returned to Bulgaria.

(P.L. 101-167), as amended, requires the executive branch, in part, to establish refugee processing categories for Jews, Evangelical Christians, Ukrainian Catholics and Ukrainian Orthodox Church members and give members of those categories an enhanced opportunity to qualify for refugee status.

In July 1991 we reported that overall the system for processing Soviet refugees in Moscow appears to be efficient and working well. Refugee processing facilities at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow had been expanded, and the refugee processing unit had been adequately staffed. Also the Washington Processing Center, an integral element of the processing procedure, was fully operational and had expanded its processing capabilities. We estimated that overseas processing costs for Soviet refugees would be about \$68.5 million less in fiscal year 1991 than the cost to process a similar number of refugees in fiscal year 1990. This was due to the centralization of processing in Moscow, rather than processing Soviet refugee applicants in Rome, as had been the case earlier.

The INS applicant adjudication process appeared to have been applied consistently to all applicants. However, INS was not adjudicating category members' refugee claims in accordance with its established processing guidance, which required that category applicants, in order to establish a credible basis for fear of persecution, must assert an accumulation of discriminatory or prejudicial actions against them. We found that INS officers in

Moscow were granting refugee status to category members based on an applicant's assertions of a single, even minor, incident of discrimination or prejudicial action at any time during his or her life. INS officers in Moscow expressed the opinion that the adjudication process under Section 599D had become a rubber stamping operation, with few denials.

We recommended that INS ensure conformity with established processing guidance in Moscow by either requiring that its officers in Moscow comply with existing guidance or modify existing guidance to more nearly reflect actual practice while remaining consistent with section 599D. To date, INS has not officially responded to our recommendation.

We found that it was unlikely that the fiscal year 1991 Soviet refugee admissions target of 50,000 would be met. A shortfall of 10,000 to 15,000 refugees was expected. The anticipated shortfall was due primarily to refugees' inability to obtain Soviet government exit permission. Soviet emigration legislation enacted in May 1991, and a bilateral U.S.-Soviet arrangement then being pursued, may eventually reduce most emigration problems, but not during this fiscal year. I should note that our review was completed before the recent events in the Soviet Union, and it is too early to tell how those events will affect the refugee situation.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. Mr. Martin and I would be pleased to respond to any questions you and other members of the Subcommittee may have.