

Trump administration's immigration raids target persecuted Iraqi nationals

By Nick Barrickman
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More than 200 members of persecuted Iraqi religious and ethnic national minority groups were swept up by Trump administration deportation squads last weekend, as United States authorities conducted raids throughout the country.

The plan to deport hundreds of Kurds and Chaldeans to Iraq, a country which is an active war zone, expresses the brutality, hypocrisy and criminality of the Trump administration. The administration has seized hundreds of persecuted Iraqis on the pretext of minor scrapes with the law, in some instances dating back decades. According to the *Guardian*, over half of the total number of Iraqis arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were Chaldean Christians from the metro Detroit area.

Elsewhere in the country, ICE sweeps in Nashville, Tennessee took as many as 40 ethnic Kurds to detention centers in preparation for deportation back to Iraq, their country of origin.

“This is a deliberate attack on the Chaldean Catholic Assyrian community of Detroit by the administration,” Detroit lawyer Wisam Naoum said of the raids in an angry post on social media. “They waited until Sunday when our community would be going to church and gathering with their families and have rounded up to 40–60 community members,”

Drost Kokoye, the Kurdish founder of the American Muslim Advisory Council, stated that a hotline set up by the agency to field calls from terrified Muslim families in Nashville had been “buzzing” every morning from 6–9 a.m., the times when ICE agents are most active. Nashville hosts the largest Kurdish population in the United States.

In an official statement, ICE officials declared “the agency recently arrested a number of Iraqi nationals, all of whom had criminal convictions for crimes including

homicide, rape, aggravated assault, kidnapping, burglary, drug trafficking, robbery, sex assault, weapons violations and other offenses.” It further claimed, “Each of these individuals received full and fair immigration proceedings, after which a federal immigration judge found them ineligible for any form of relief under U.S. law and ordered them removed.”

The raids conducted against these persecuted religious and ethnic minorities are of a piece with the Trump administration's larger crackdown on immigrants and undocumented workers in the United States. Presenting such attacks on minorities and democratic rights as a plan to protect and place “America first,” the Trump administration has seized more than 40,000 immigrants during his first months in office.

Previously, the government of Iraq did not accept deportations from the United States due to Trump's enacting a travel ban on seven majority-Muslim countries, including Iraq, earlier this year. That order was struck down as unconstitutional in a federal court after thousands of legal immigrants were detained at airports and mass protests threatened to destabilize the Trump presidency. In March, Trump re-imposed the ban, but removed Iraq from the list of countries subject to the order.

That decree was struck down on in a US appeals court on Monday, and Trump has announced that it will be appealed in the Supreme Court for final judgment. While the travel ban awaits a final decision, the deportations will no doubt continue.

Demonstrating the Trump administration's endless hypocrisy, no more than five months ago Trump, defending his executive decree banning travel from Muslim nations, tweeted “Christians in the Middle-East have been executed in large numbers. We cannot allow

this horror to continue!”

Those representing the Iraqis seized by ICE have warned that they face a “death sentence” if they are returned to the country. The Islamic State insurgency that has ravaged parts of Iraq has declared Christian groups to be their “favorite prey.”

“You committed a crime 30 years ago, when you were 19, 20—now you have to pay again for that mistake,” Shoki “Steve” Konja told the *Guardian*, after his brother, Najah, was arrested due to having a drug-related crime on his record from nearly 30 years ago. “The government of Iraq cannot protect and defend its own citizens—let alone a bunch of Christians coming from the US.” Konja stated.

Detroit holds the largest concentration of Chaldean Christians outside of Iraq. The persecuted religious minority once numbered as many as 1.5 million in its native country before the 1991 US-instigated Gulf War, when many were forced to emigrate. After the constant imperialist bombardment of the country and 2003 US invasion and occupation, with their stoking up of ethnic and sectarian conflicts, the current number of Christians living in Iraq is less than 200,000. Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities have been targeted by the Islamic State and other sectarian militias operating in the region.

Trump’s immigration policies, while more aggressive and unrestrained than those of the Obama administration, build upon the methods of his predecessor. Obama, the “deporter-in-chief,” deported 2.7 million undocumented immigrants during his time in office, accelerating the assault on immigrants which has now been qualitatively increased by Trump.

In 2011, Obama drastically reduced the number of Iraqi refugees allowed to enter the United States, supposedly in the name of keeping “terrorists” out of the country. In 2014, after nearly half of Iraq was overrun by the Islamic State, the US removed officials in charge of resettling Iraqis in the US, leaving many of them in limbo as their communities were overrun by ISIS militants.

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