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Employees of Russian company held hostage in Iraq released

By Hamza Hendawi
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Eight employees of a Russian energy company seized by masked gunmen who broke into their house in Baghdad were released unharmed Tuesday after less than a day in captivity, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Dozens of foreigners from at least 12 countries have reportedly been kidnapped in recent days. Nine Americans were missing, including a Mississippi man whose abductors have threatened to kill him.

The abduction of the five Ukrainians and three Russians at their residence Monday appeared to be a new tactic by kidnapers. All the past kidnappings have come on the roads, with civilians whisked away after their vehicles come under attack.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said that no one had claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and no demands were known to have been made prior to the release of the captives. The men work for the Russian energy company Interenergoserbis, which is restoring a power plant near Baghdad.

"As a result of the efforts made during the past hours by the Russian side, all the specialists of Interenergoserbis who were abducted on the evening of April 12 have been released," the ministry said in a statement.

It said the captives had returned to their residence in Baghdad and none had been hurt. Ukraine has 1,600 troops helping keep security in southern Iraq. Russia has none and opposed the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq last year.

Yakovenko noted the U.S.-led coalition was responsible for maintaining security in Iraq.

"Abductions of foreign citizens in Iraq have resulted from a sharp escalation of tensions in the country, for the security of which the coalition authorities are now responsible," he said.

The U.S. military said two American soldiers and seven employees of U.S. contractor

Kellogg, Brown & Root were missing in Iraq. They disappeared after their convoy was ambushed Friday near Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad.

Only one, Thomas Hamill, a 43-year-old truck driver from Mississippi, is known to have been abducted. His captors have threatened to kill and mutilate him unless U.S. troops ended their assault on the city of Fallujah. The deadline passed Sunday with no word on his fate.

The U.S. Department of Defense identified the two missing soldiers as Sgt. Elmer C. Krause, 40, of Greensboro, N.C., and Pfc. Keith M. Maupin, 20, of Batavia, Ohio. Both were assigned to the Army Reserves 724th Transportation Company, Bartonville, Ill.

Seven Chinese men abducted by gunmen in the city of Fallujah, west of Baghdad, were freed late Monday, the Chinese government said. A brief Foreign Ministry statement from Beijing said the men were released to an Iraqi religious group who passed them on to diplomats. "Their health and spirits are good," the statement said.

The seven had entered Iraq from Jordan on Saturday and were captured the next day, China's Foreign Ministry said.

China hasn't contributed troops to the U.S.-led military force in Iraq and it was unclear why the seven were there. The official Xinhua News Agency described them as villagers who went to the Middle East on their own from a Chinese region with a tradition of sending migrants abroad to work. State television said they didn't work for China's government or a state company.

In Tokyo, optimism faded Monday that three Japanese civilians abducted last week would be released quickly after a top government spokesman suggested authorities were no longer confident of their safety.

The Japanese hostages were being held by a previously unknown group calling itself "Mujahedeen Brigades," which demands Japan pull its troops out of Iraq within 30 days or it would burn them alive.

Koizumi has staunchly refused to consider the withdrawal, and the deadline came with no word on their fate.

Also Monday, a member of the appointed Governing Council said at least 12 foreign hostages have been released. Abdul-Hamid did not disclose the nationalities of the hostages or where they were held.

However, a member of the office reached later said a number of those released were unclear.

Earlier, Muthanna, spokesman for the Clerics Committee, said insurgents had released hostages of various nationalities, including Turkish, Pakistani, and he and Abdul-Hamid were referring to the hostages, or if the Chinese were included in that group.

The nine were truck drivers for supply convoys, which have come under heavy attack in recent days by the western and southern outskirts of Baghdad.

Eight of the nine freed hostages appeared in a video broadcast Sunday on Al-Jazeera. The eight included two Turks, a Pakistani, a Nepalese, a Filipino and an Indian. The identity of the ninth hostage was not immediately known.

Thailand and New Zealand said forces in Iraq had been confined to their bases because of increasing unrest, and governments said they were mulling ways to bring them home ahead of schedule.

Thailand's 443-member contingent of soldiers is scheduled to stay in Iraq in September. New Zealand has 60 army engineers in the southern city of Basra.

Abductions of foreign citizens in Iraq have resulted from a sharp escalation of tensions in the country.

— Alexander Yakovenko
Foreign Ministry spokesman

NEWS IN BRIEF

Man facing extradition on murder charges commits suicide

PARIS (AP) — A New Jersey man who fled France after allegedly killing his lover in the United States committed suicide by hanging himself with a bedsheet from a drainage pipe in his French jail cell, his lawyer said Tuesday.

Paul Eduardovich Goldman, 39, a naturalized U.S. citizen, killed himself Sunday afternoon in prison in the suburbs of Grenoble, in the French Alps, even though he was under suicide watch, said attorney Arnold Levy-Soussan.

"He hanged himself with a sheet in his cell," the lawyer told The Associated Press. Goldman already tried to commit suicide at the start of his incarceration in January. So he was classified among detainees under special surveillance.

"I don't understand because he was not supposed to be left alone and to be under constant surveillance. But that wasn't the case. I think the authorities made a big mistake. That is what I said," said Levy-Soussan.

Davis

Continued from page 1

Wohlgemuth emerged as the candidate who will represent the Republican party for the District 17 race against Chet Edwards, D-Texas, in the November general elections.

Wohlgemuth received 17,010 votes (54 percent) and Snyder received 14,494 votes (46 percent).

Wohlgemuth said she is the best candidate for District 17 because she represents the views and values of the district.

"I believe that people will see that I have had a record of proven conservative leadership, and Edwards does not reflect those conservative values, which is evident in his liberal voting record," Wohlgemuth said.

Snyder said she would have represented District 17 well due to her conservative values, and that she saw herself as a problem solver, unlike Wohlgemuth.

"I am a problem solver, not a politician, and I am a conservative that represents the views and values of District 17," Snyder said.

Wohlgemuth said that as one of the largest employers in the district, the success of A&M is an important issue to concentrate on, and that the plan to appropriate money to improve Highway 21 is proof of her efforts to bring businesses to the Brazos Valley.

"Bringing businesses to the Brazos Valley will be advantageous not only to the area but Texas A&M as well," Wohlgemuth said.

Edwards said he is looking forward to the campaign for the District 17 race in November against Wohlgemuth.

"I congratulate Wohlgemuth for winning the election, though I believe her negative attacks have helped jumpstart our campaign," Edwards said.

Edwards said his general campaign will begin Wednesday in Brazos County at Savannah's Porch at 5:30 p.m.

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