

Local interpreters at U.S. bases throughout Iraq are threatening to resign if their American contractor, Global Linguistic Solutions insists on turning over their personal information to Iraqi authorities.

On Dec. 23, GLS informed local interpreters that the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), due to go into effect on Jan. 1, required them to withhold 20 percent of the pay of local interpreters for taxes and social security. They also insisted that the interpreters provide detailed personal information on themselves and their family members that would be turned over to the Ministry of Finance.

What may sound sensible on the face of it -- an emerging nation seeking to institute an income-tax system -- is not so simple. The Ministry of Finance is currently headed by Bayan Jabr, the former Minister of the Interior, whom many allege sanctioned the death squads that targeted Sunnis.

In 2005, American Gen. Karl Horst discovered a hidden bunker with 160 prisoners, most of them Sunni, who had been tortured and held captive by Jabr's forces. Most interpreters working for U.S. forces are Sunni and are understandably reluctant to turn over personal information to a man they believe seeks their elimination.

Amelia Templeton of Human Rights First takes the interpreters' fears of retaliation seriously. Speaking of links between politicians and militia groups, she says, "One of the most troubling things about Iraq is the degree of impunity it has granted for crimes committed between 2005 and early 2007. Justice and accountability have fallen by the wayside."

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