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## In Iraq, Kidnapping for Ransom Increasing

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BAGHDAD—For two days they held her inside a car with a tarp thrown over it. Sometimes, a woman would come and yell at her not to make noise. She refused the food they gave her, fearing it was poisoned, so they let her go hungry.

Meanwhile, her mother sobbed and screamed at her father to pay whatever the kidnapers wanted, that the little girl's life, that an end to whatever she was suffering, was worth any amount of money.

Finally, on the third day, her father concluded negotiations with the kidnapers, and \$25,000 was paid. Twelve-year-old Russul was put in a taxi and driven to a restaurant, where her family retrieved her. When she got home, her mother kissed her over and over.

### NOT MAKING NEWS

Russul's kidnapping did not make news here. Against the backdrop of war, the crime went largely unnoticed outside her family. And hundreds of Iraqi families have quietly suffered through similar ordeals in recent months as kidnapping for ransom has become increasingly popular on the country's lawless streets.

"We did not see these kinds of crimes before the war," said Lt. Col. Muayad al Musawi, a kidnapping investigator. "We would have cases of a husband coming in to say his wife took his kids, but nothing like this."

The crime has become so common, the national police recently set up a kidnapping directorate, the first special

investigations unit created in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was toppled.

### A LOOK AT NUMBERS

Approximately 200 foreigners have been kidnapped across the country since the war began almost two years ago, according to news reports. Meanwhile, police know of 130 Iraqis who have been snatched in the eastern half of Baghdad in the past six months. And they say most families never report the crimes, fearing the hostage will be harmed if the police get involved.

Russul was snatched on the street, just a block from her house, by a man who jumped out of a taxi.

"I was screaming so he hit me in the mouth," she said. "I sat down on the ground, but he picked me up and put me in the car. He pushed me onto the floor under his feet so no one would see me."

Russul's father, the owner of a large import company, allowed the little girl to be interviewed about the ordeal on the condition their family name not be used. He has three other children he fears for.

Criminal gangs are increasingly targeting children of wealthy Iraqis, police say.

Musawi said the first targets were people who had robbed banks and looted government offices in the immediate aftermath of the invasion.

"Everyone in their neighborhoods knew they had a lot of money," he said. "But once they ran out of people who had looted, they turned to businessmen, then professionals, now anyone with some money."

"Recently we have been hearing that people who sell their house are being targeted because it's known they have money."

Maj. General Tarak al Baldawi, who runs the Interior Ministry's major crimes section, blames the kidnappings on Saddam Hussein, because he opened the jails right before the invasion and because he trained his security forces to kidnap dissidents.

### HUSSEIN BLAMED

"These are rapists, murderers, smugglers, very bad criminals" Baldawi said, flipping through an eight-inch high stack of green and white computer paper with the names of the worst 20,000 released criminals, the ones who were serving life sentences.

"And you have the employees who worked for the previous security apparatus. They are unemployed because their agencies were disassembled. They're still doing the same thing they used to do for the regime, but for money now."

