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## Expatriates give insight into Hussein regime

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Two former citizens of Iraq who fled the country in the 1980s gave a fascinating description of life under the Saddam Hussein regime in an Oakland University forum entitled "FOCUS: Iraq from the Inside." The event, which took place April 2 in the Oakland Center Gold Rooms, was held before an audience comprised mostly of students.

The speakers were Gazi George, a local scientist and Oakland Township resident who held a top position in the Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission, and Sharky Haddad, a local author and former Iraqi citizen. Both spoke of the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein against Iraqi citizens, the concealment of weapons of mass destruction, and the military actions of the United States and Britain.

"This is not an invasion of Iraq, but a liberation of Iraq," George said. "I want the younger generation to know that (Hussein) is a criminal and will not hold back. What President Bush has done is honorable. Bush does not want to be on the receiving end of an atrocity from Hussein, and he wants to liberate 20 million Iraqis. We lost control over Iraq during the Clinton administration, and we would have lost control of the Middle East had we not pursued this war. I feel the war is justified because I want to have a free Iraq."

Haddad and his family fled Baghdad in the late 1970s after his father, who had worked for the Chrysler Corporation in Saudi Arabia for nine years, was suddenly picked up and interrogated by the Iraq secret police.

"Iraq had boycotted American vehicles in the late 1970s," said Haddad, who contributed a chapter to the recently published book "Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream." "My father drove a Chrysler vehicle, and the police stopped him and took him to a secret jail where they questioned him about his 'motives' and what 'organizations' he belonged to. We couldn't investigate what happened to him, but after three days he returned looking very shabby, tired and stressed. 'We're going to sell everything we own and get out of Baghdad,' he said. Within six months we had emigrated to Michigan."

George obtained his Ph.D. in chemistry in 1976 from the University of Lancaster, England. He returned to Iraq with his British wife that year to work as a nuclear scientist. He later became director of the nuclear waste management and radiation protection departments and worked directly under Hussein.

"Money was an incentive to taking those positions. I didn't know I was going to work for a tyrant and criminal," said George, who met Hussein on two occasions. "He (Hussein) has penetrating eyes, as if he could see right through you. Most of the time, even if you are in the same room, he does not even acknowledge that you exist. The second time I met him we had to sterilize our hands so that we could not pass on any germs to Saddam."

George said he first became aware of Hussein's ulterior motives when Iraqi police took him to a secret chamber in Baghdad that contained highly radioactive syringes and radioactive steel cages used for torture. George was to advise the authorities on how to handle the radioactive material, but not disclose any information about what he saw.

"It was one of the most horrible things I've ever seen," George said. "I thought, 'If they do this to regular Iraqi citizens, what would they do to me if I speak against them?'"

Among the projects George worked on for Hussein were creating Plutonium 239 with French reactors – materials that could be used to build an atomic bomb.

"I knew what this was about," George said. "I refused to be part of Hussein's regime but could not make it public. In 1980, I was informed that the war with Iran was going to begin and my job was to secure the reactors. I knew then that I had to think about leaving Iraq. I sent my family to live in the U.S. But I had to trick them into letting me leave by having my sister send papers from a doctor friend saying that I had cancer and had to be treated in Europe."

George fled Iraq for Jordan, then Germany, England and Scotland before arriving in the United States in 1985. The Iraqi authorities tagged him as an Israeli spy before sentencing him to death in absentia. Before arriving in the United States, George said he was eventually tracked down by the Iraqi secret police wherever he went.

"I've been on the run for nearly 25 years," George said. "When President Bush was telling the world how evil Hussein is, I don't think he got through. Hussein's main objective always was to build nuclear bombs to rule the Arab world. A lot of the revenues from Iraq are used to make chemical and biological agents. He has the weapons and will use them on anybody. I know there are 10,000 barrels of Anthrax that he failed to report to U.N. inspectors.

"A person like this is not only a threat to Iraq, but also the rest of the world."

After giving initial remarks, both speakers answered questions from the attendees. When asked about anti-war sentiments in the United States, Haddad pointed out that, of all the anti- or pro-war demonstrations around the country, no rallies have been held in the local Chaldean community, which numbers more than 100,000.

"The majority of the Chaldean population wants Hussein removed or killed," Haddad said. "Most of them are recent immigrants who know how dangerous it is to speak out against the Baath Party. I decided 10 years ago to become more vocal and not sit on my hands."

Haddad also addressed a question about possible political unrest in Iraq following the end of the war.

"The issue is so complex – look at how many people you have to please," Haddad said. "There are Shiite Muslims, who are more supportive of Iran. Then you need to please the communist party that exists there. Then there are the Kurds. There are over 20 million of them, and they are the only ethnic group in the world without a country. Then you have to please the surrounding countries, many of which are ruled by dictators themselves. The issue is so complicated it really is a big concern to me."

Several students who attended the forum were of Iraqi descent and were very interested in the insight both speakers provided.

"I thought the forum was very informative and presented Arab-Americans in a positive light," said senior biology major Rana Toma, who is Chaldean. "I learned things I didn't know. I haven't heard anyone speak about the building of bombs in such detail rather than generalizations. I have been anti-war because I don't believe in fighting. But my views have changed slightly. The speakers presented a convincing argument that Hussein should be taken out of power."

Junior sociology major Michelle Abro said her parents fled Iraq in the early 1970s.

"The information that was presented here supported a lot of the things my parents told me about Hussein and Iraq," Abro said. "Basically, because we're Christian, they were discriminated against and came here for the American dream. The details about the weapons and chemicals weren't surprising to me, but validated what we've heard in the media. I still support the troops and feel that this action against Hussein is necessary."

An additional forum dealing with the conflict in Iraq will be held Thursday, April 10. The specific topic is yet to be determined. For more information, contact the **Center for Student Activities** at (248) 370-2400 or [csa@oakland.edu](mailto:csa@oakland.edu).

#### SUMMARY

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