



Egypt Ambassador to Iraq Kidnapped, Source Says

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BAGHDAD, Iraq (CNN) -- Egypt's ambassador to Iraq has been kidnapped in Baghdad, according to a source in the Egyptian Embassy there.

The source said Ihab al-Sherif was abducted near his home on Saturday.

The Egyptian Embassy was sealed off by security forces.

The ambassador had just arrived in Iraq in June and was the first to represent an Arab country in post-war Iraq.

Al-Sherif had not yet formally presented his credentials to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

Last July, the Lions of God Brigades in Iraq abducted Momdoh Kotb, Egypt's third-highest ranking diplomat in the country, but released him after less than a week.

High-level sources in Baghdad told CNN that the Egyptians had paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in ransom to win his release, something Egyptian officials in Cairo and Washington vehemently denied.

U.S. and Iraqi officials strongly discourage paying ransom -- or acquiescing to kidnapers' demands in any way -- for fear it will inspire insurgents to use the tactic more frequently.

Meanwhile, U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales arrived in Baghdad Sunday on a surprise visit, officials at the U.S. Embassy confirmed.

The officials said Gonzales would meet with staff members of the Department of Justice in Iraq and other U.S. officials.

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