

## **Getting Ready to Go Suggested Packing List Updated March 2011**

### **Clothing**

The type of personal clothing you should take is dependent upon your duty location in Iraq and your position. We suggest you contact someone in the office where you will be working, since they can give you the best information in this area. As a general rule, we suggest you take comfortable, casual clothing and at least one business suit for wear at certain meetings or if you have to travel outside Iraq in conjunction with your duties. For many, the daily “uniform” for civilians is dress casual—Docker-type trousers and an open-collar shirt for men and the equivalent for women. However, as normalization continues, more and more officers wear the same clothing as they would at any other Embassy or in Washington, D.C. Military personnel normally wear their Service utility uniform (DCU/BDU). If you are a swimmer, bring your suit for the indoor pool. There are two fully equipped gyms on the Embassy compound as well as tennis courts and a sports field so work-out clothing and running shoes may be useful. You might also want to bring a Halloween costume and/or ball attire for special events.

From November through March it can get very chilly (30’s F) in Iraq at night and rain is not uncommon. Temperatures in the summer frequently reach 120 degrees. Because of the size of the compound (105 acres), consider bringing comfortable walking shoes.

Some clothing, personal items and snack foods are available at the various PXes throughout Iraq. There is a medium-size PX on the Embassy Compound.

### **Personal Items to carry or ship**

- \_\_\_ Make sure you carry your CAC and State ID Cards
- \_\_\_ Toilet articles for travel (shampoo, toothpaste, razors, etc.)
- \_\_\_ Face cream or moisturizers, Chap Sticks, skin cream, Vaseline, etc. (the air is very dry)
- \_\_\_ Your favorite makeup and nail polish
- \_\_\_ Adequate amount of US currency -- \$300 in USD should work. Credit cards are accepted at PX and hotels in Amman-Kuwait. Bring a check book (you can cash up to \$500/day at the bank or cashier in the Embassy).
- \_\_\_ Small LED flashlight is very helpful. Many use Inova micro lights and clip them to their ID lanyards.
- \_\_\_ Alarm clock (many use their issued or personal cell phone)
- \_\_\_ Several band aids are always good to have when you travel
- \_\_\_ Small sewing kit for travel or you can purchase one at the PX when you arrive
- \_\_\_ Padlock(s) - small combination locks work well for bags and backpacks
- \_\_\_ Waterless hand sanitizer
- \_\_\_ Prescription medicine – at least a 6 month supply
- \_\_\_ Medication for travel (allergies, diarrhea, headaches, vitamins, eye drops)
- \_\_\_ Small scissors and nail clippers
- \_\_\_ Several pairs of sunglasses - ballistic rated ones are very popular

- \_\_\_ Extra prescription eyeglasses or contact lens (the environment is very dusty and can irritate contact lens)
- \_\_\_ Pocketknife (Leatherman tool / Swiss Army knife)
- \_\_\_ Daypack for laptop or personal items
- \_\_\_ Lanyard to hold IDs—pouch-style recommended
- \_\_\_ Camera (optional but recommended)
- \_\_\_ Flip-flops for use in shared bathing facilities
- \_\_\_ Baskets or small bag to carry toiletries for shared bath facilities
- \_\_\_ Laptop (with DVD player to watch movies), (free wired (cat5) internet access is available in rooms/free WiFi at Embassy food court)
- \_\_\_ MP3 Player and headphones
- \_\_\_ Earplugs
- \_\_\_ Sleeping mask
- \_\_\_ Warm coat/Jacket, gloves for winter and/or travel
- \_\_\_ Sweaters (a/c can make offices chilly in summer)
- \_\_\_ Umbrella and rain gear, including boots

**Other items to consider shipping:**

Your own linens & pillow (those the Embassy provides are adequate, but many prefer their own)  
 Mattress pad  
 Posters and small personal items to make your apartment or CHU more “homey”  
 Wii or PlayStation

## **Additional Items to Consider in Preparation for Iraq**

### **Absence Makes the Paperwork More of a Headache**

Some minor chores/tasks may be more difficult simply because an employee spouse is not immediately available to access accounts/authorize actions. When you can get together, you don't want to have to worry too much about clarifying issues regarding accounts, signatures, etc. Prior to your departure for duty, you will want to arrange as much as is possible in the way of auto pay accounts/allotments so that regular bills can be processed quickly and efficiently. Many banks have secure on-line bank access to pay bills.

### **Power of Attorney**

It is advisable to sign this before departure so that spouse/significant other/parent can process any documents that need a signature. Check with your bank/ financial planner/attorney. Talk to your health care provider/attorney for assistance with a medical power of attorney.

### **Investing Danger and Hardship Pay**

As investment counselors say, paying yourself is as important as paying your bills (they mean pay to a savings/investment plan, not toward that shiny red sports car). You may wish to establish a special account with which to have a special allotment/auto payment made. That will allow the nest egg you are putting away for a college fund, home purchase or other item to accumulate without being touched to cover routine expenses or to cover the big-ticket personal costs that can come with R&R and other travel. Discuss this with your financial planner.

**Multiple accounts** (Credit card or checking/ATM) One possibility is to reserve an account for Iraq use only. It is easier to identify problems (overcharges, identity theft, etc.) if only one person is using an account and using the charges/account in one part of the world. However, many banks offer on-line services so it is easier to monitor your accounts.

### **Taxes**

Filing taxes can be a challenge from Iraq. Only post allowance (COLA) is tax exempt—hardship and danger pay are not. Danger and differential pay may push you into a higher bracket. If you underpay, you can get hit with substantial penalties. It is best to increase payments, be it via reduced exemptions, a percentage increase or an increased payment amount, or some combination thereof. Federal and California sites are below—nearly all states now can at least provide forms and instructions on the Internet. Go over last year's returns with your spouse so that preparation is familiar to both parties.

Main IRS site: <http://www.irs.gov/>

Forms: <http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/lists/0,,id=97817,00.html>

Main CA site: <http://www.taxes.ca.gov/>

Forms: <http://www.ftb.ca.gov/forms/index.html>

### **Medical insurance**

Bring your account card; be sure that the employee is not required to authorize care/costs for child. Check restrictions that may apply if in a war zone.

**Life Insurance**

USAA's policies do not increase for those serving in a war zone. Other policies may suspend coverage while in a war zone. It is important to check.

**Long-term Disability insurance**

Not many people use this otherwise, but it is worth considering for Iraq service.

**Renter's/Homeowner's Insurance**

Whether a single officer who is putting everything in storage, or someone with family being left behind, don't leave home without it. You want to protect your goods from loss/damage, and you want to protect yourself and family from ruinous lawsuits.

**Privacy**

U.S. Government email has no assurance of privacy (and commercial email accounts are vulnerable to hackers). People who have to live apart, with one or both in a restrictive environment, sometimes establish their own shorthand/code to say yes/no/maybe/talk to Uncle John about it, etc.

**Phone Cards**

A Pre-paid phone card may be pretty handy to have when you travel, but be sure to check the expiry dates of the card. Places like Radio Shack sell cards that show expiry dates somewhere on the cards. Cards bought from newsstands and the like sometimes don't, and you won't know that the card has a short life until you first access the account number and password. Phone cards are available at most PX locations. For those traveling with their personal cell phones, international roaming charges can be expensive but it is nice to have your cell phone when you return for R&R.

**Frequent Flyer Accounts**

Be sure to establish them with each airline (and be aware of code share flights that may count towards a primary account.) Have the account numbers with you.

**Driver's Licenses and Other Limited Validity Documents**

It is best to try and arrange early renewal of such documents rather than to try and obtain replacements of expired documents. Many states now permit renewal on-line. Check before you depart.

**Performance Evaluations**

If you think it is a bother to put together comments for EER season under ordinary circumstances, think what it will be like under difficult, high-stress conditions. It is best to think of a way to record accomplishments/activities so that you don't have to rely solely upon your memory (be aware of security concerns, though).

**Being There for Your Family While You are Actually Far Away**

Something that has been used over the years is to get a collection of birthday, anniversary and other sorts of cards, give them personal salutations and a signature (before you leave), and leave them with someone who can put them in the mail for you or hand-deliver to the recipient as a way to let the home folks know you care, even though you are very far away. Embassy Baghdad has an APO. It takes about a week for letter mail and packages can take longer. Many use Skype or other VOIP services like Vonage to stay in touch with family and friends using the free internet service in the apartments and food court.

**Small Digital Cameras**

Many employees will have access to their own commercial email accounts and being able to send pictures to the home folks could prove helpful. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** You will have to be sure you comply with restrictions on bandwidth/access/downloaded data/sensitive images/information, but a few digital pictures back home could prove welcome. You must have a Photo Badge to take photos outside on the NEC. Complete photo guidelines and a badge can be obtained from the RSO window located in Annex I.