



**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE OFFICE OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS**



Appearances

For Government: Daniel O'Reilly, Esq., Department Counsel
For Applicant: *Pro se*

07/10/2025

Decision

LOUGHREAN, Edward W., Administrative Judge:

Applicant mitigated the foreign influence security concerns. Eligibility for access to classified information is granted.

Statement of the Case

On August 27, 2024, the Department of Defense (DoD) issued a Statement of Reasons (SOR) to Applicant detailing security concerns under Guideline B (foreign influence). Applicant responded to the SOR on September 22, 2024, and requested a hearing before an administrative judge. The case was assigned to another administrative judge on April 10, 2025, and reassigned to me on May 20, 2025. The hearing was convened as scheduled on May 20, 2025.

Evidence

Government Exhibits (GE) 1 and 2 were admitted in evidence without objection. Applicant testified and submitted Applicant's Exhibits (AE) A through E, which were admitted without objection.

Department Counsel requested that I take administrative notice of certain facts about Iraq. Without objection, I have taken administrative notice of the facts contained in the request. The facts are summarized in the written request and will not be repeated verbatim in this decision. Of particular note is the significant threat of terrorism and ongoing human rights problems in Iraq.

Findings of Fact

Applicant is a 54-year-old prospective employee of a defense contractor. He is applying for a security clearance for the first time. He will be hired if he receives a security clearance. He has the equivalent of a bachelor's degree from an Iraqi university. He married in 2001 and divorced in 2013. He married his current wife in 2014. He has an adult child from his first marriage. (Transcript (Tr.) at 20-21, 31, 50-51; GE 1)

Applicant was born in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He worked under dangerous conditions in Iraq as a linguist in support of the U.S. mission from 2003 to 2004. He was trusted with sensitive information beyond what was provided to most linguists. Because of his work, he was eligible for a special immigrant visa. He immigrated to the United States in 2011 with his first wife and child. He became a U.S. citizen in 2019. He has passively retained his Iraqi citizenship. He has not used his Iraqi passport since he became a U.S. citizen, and it is expired. His child is a dual U.S. and Iraqi citizen who is about to start teaching in the United States. His ex-wife also lives in the United States. (Tr. at 18, 21-30, 64-67, 74-75; Applicant's response to SOR; GE 1, 2; AE C, D)

Applicant returned to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 2014 and married his wife. They lived at his father's home while he worked for a media company. His application for his wife to immigrate to the United States was approved. He returned to the United States with his wife in 2016. He continued to work for the same Kurdish media company in the United States from 2016 to 2020. His job brought him in contact with senior leaders of the Kurdistan Regional Government. His wife became a naturalized U.S. citizen while maintaining her Iraqi citizenship. She has applied to a U.S. university to attend graduate school. His parents-in-law are citizens and residents of Iraq. (Tr. at 20-21, 29-38, 62-63; GE 1, 2)

Applicant's mother is deceased. His father and stepmother are citizens and residents of Iraq in the Kurdistan Region. His father is a retired businessman. (Tr. at 54-55, 58-59; Applicant's response to SOR; GE 1, 2)

Applicant has siblings who are citizens and residents of Iraq and siblings who are citizens and residents of the United Kingdom (UK), while also holding dual Iraqi citizenship. One brother, who has UK citizenship, worked for the Kurdistan Regional Government in the UK. He is now a senior official in the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. (Tr. at 40-47, 56; Applicant's response to SOR; GE 1, 2)

Applicant has three other siblings who are citizens and residents of Iraq in the Kurdistan Region. Two of his siblings work in education. One is a teacher and the other

is a clerk. One of his sisters does not work outside the home. Two other siblings are UK citizens and residents. Neither are associated with the Iraqi government or the Kurdistan Regional Government. (Tr. at 53-58; Applicant's response to SOR; GE 1, 2)

Applicant took his son to visit Iraq in 2024. He and his wife have semi-regular to regular contact with their family in the UK and Iraq. He used to own property in Iraq, but it went to his ex-wife in the divorce. (Tr. at 45, 68)

Applicant dreamt of coming to the United States and the freedoms in this country since he was a youth. He is proud of his service to the U.S. military in Iraq and how he helped keep his unit safe. He is also proud that he is now an American. He pledged his undivided allegiance and loyalty to the United States, which he considers his home. He credibly testified that his family in Iraq could not be used to coerce or intimidate him into revealing classified information and that he would report to security any attempt to do so. He would temporarily return to Iraq if it were part of his job for a defense contractor, but he does not intend to ever return to live there. (Tr. at 17-19, 45-49, 52-53, 68-70, 73-75)

Applicant submitted documents and letters attesting to his strong moral character and outstanding performance of duties, including letters from U.S. military personnel attesting to his outstanding service and value to the mission. Members of his U.S. military unit in Iraq have maintained contact with him more than 20 years later. He is praised for his intelligence, work ethic, dedication, diligence, professionalism, loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity. (AE A-E)

Policies

This case is adjudicated under Executive Order (EO) 10865, *Safeguarding Classified Information within Industry* (February 20, 1960), as amended; DOD Directive 5220.6, *Defense Industrial Personnel Security Clearance Review Program* (January 2, 1992), as amended (Directive); and the adjudicative guidelines (AG), which became effective on June 8, 2017.

When evaluating an applicant's suitability for a security clearance, the administrative judge must consider the adjudicative guidelines. In addition to brief introductory explanations for each guideline, the adjudicative guidelines list potentially disqualifying conditions and mitigating conditions, which are to be used in evaluating an applicant's eligibility for access to classified information.

These guidelines are not inflexible rules of law. Instead, recognizing the complexities of human behavior, administrative judges apply the guidelines in conjunction with the factors listed in the adjudicative process. The administrative judge's overarching adjudicative goal is a fair, impartial, and commonsense decision. According to AG ¶ 2(c), the entire process is a conscientious scrutiny of a number of variables known as the "whole-person concept." The administrative judge must consider all available, reliable information about the person, past and present, favorable and unfavorable, in making a decision.

The protection of the national security is the paramount consideration. AG ¶ 2(b) requires that “[a]ny doubt concerning personnel being considered for national security eligibility will be resolved in favor of the national security.”

Under Directive ¶ E3.1.14, the Government must present evidence to establish controverted facts alleged in the SOR. Under Directive ¶ E3.1.15, the applicant is responsible for presenting “witnesses and other evidence to rebut, explain, extenuate, or mitigate facts admitted by the applicant or proven by Department Counsel.” The applicant has the ultimate burden of persuasion to obtain a favorable security decision.

A person who seeks access to classified information enters into a fiduciary relationship with the Government predicated upon trust and confidence. This relationship transcends normal duty hours and endures throughout off-duty hours. The Government reposes a high degree of trust and confidence in individuals to whom it grants access to classified information. Decisions include, by necessity, consideration of the possible risk the applicant may deliberately or inadvertently fail to safeguard classified information. Such decisions entail a certain degree of legally permissible extrapolation of potential, rather than actual, risk of compromise of classified information.

Section 7 of EO 10865 provides that adverse decisions shall be “in terms of the national interest and shall in no sense be a determination as to the loyalty of the applicant concerned.” See also EO 12968, Section 3.1(b) (listing multiple prerequisites for access to classified or sensitive information).

Analysis

Guideline B, Foreign Influence

The security concern for foreign influence is set out in AG ¶ 6:

Foreign contacts and interests, including, but not limited to, business, financial, and property interests, are a national security concern if they result in divided allegiance. They may also be a national security concern if they create circumstances in which the individual may be manipulated or induced to help a foreign person, group, organization, or government in a way inconsistent with U.S. interests or otherwise made vulnerable to pressure or coercion by any foreign interest. Assessment of foreign contacts and interests should consider the country in which the foreign contact or interest is located, including, but not limited to, considerations such as whether it is known to target U.S. citizens to obtain classified or sensitive information or is associated with a risk of terrorism.

The guideline notes several conditions that could raise security concerns under AG ¶ 7. The following are potentially applicable in this case:

- (a) contact, regardless of method, with a foreign family member, business or professional associate, friend, or other person who is a citizen of or resident in a foreign country if that contact creates a heightened risk of foreign exploitation, inducement, manipulation, pressure, or coercion;
- (b) connections to a foreign person, group, government, or country that create a potential conflict of interest between the individual's obligation to protect classified or sensitive information or technology and the individual's desire to help a foreign person, group, or country by providing that information or technology; and
- (e) shared living quarters with a person or persons, regardless of citizenship status, if that relationship creates a heightened risk of foreign inducement, manipulation, pressure, or coercion.

Applicant has multiple family members who are citizens of Iraq. Many of them are also residents of Iraq, including a sibling who is a senior official in the Kurdistan Regional Government. The potential for terrorist violence against U.S. interests and citizens remains high in Iraq, and it continues to have human rights problems. Applicant's connections to his family create a potential conflict of interest and a heightened risk of foreign exploitation, inducement, manipulation, pressure, and coercion. The above disqualifying conditions have been raised by the evidence.

Conditions that could mitigate foreign influence security concerns are provided under AG ¶ 8. The following is potentially applicable:

- (b) there is no conflict of interest, either because the individual's sense of loyalty or obligation to the foreign person, or allegiance to the group, government, or country is so minimal, or the individual has such deep and longstanding relationships and loyalties in the United States, that the individual can be expected to resolve any conflict of interest in favor of the U.S. interest.

I considered the totality of Applicant's ties to Iraq. The nature of a nation's government, its relationship with the United States, and its human rights record are relevant in assessing the likelihood that an applicant's family members are vulnerable to government coercion. The risk of coercion, persuasion, or duress is significantly greater if the foreign country has an authoritarian government, a family member is associated with or dependent upon the government, the country is known to conduct intelligence operations against the United States, or the foreign country is associated with a risk of terrorism.

Applicant is a loyal U.S. citizen who worked overseas under dangerous conditions in support of the U.S. national defense. He credibly testified that his family in Iraq could not be used to coerce or intimidate him into revealing classified information. The Appeal Board has stated that such a statement, standing alone, is of limited value, unless there is record evidence that the applicant has acted in a similar manner in the

past in comparable circumstances, or that the applicant has a previous track record of complying with security regulations and procedures in the context of dangerous, high-risk circumstances in which he made a significant contribution to the national security. See, e.g., ISCR Case 07-06030 at 3-4 (App. Bd. June 19, 2008). In ISCR Case No. 05-03846 at 6 (App. Bd. Nov. 14, 2006), the Appeal Board discussed this issue as follows:

As a general rule, Judges are not required to assign an applicant's prior history of complying with security procedures and regulations significant probative value for the purposes of refuting, mitigating, or extenuating the security concerns raised by that applicant's more immediate disqualifying conduct or circumstances. See, e.g., ISCR Case No. 01-03357 at 4 (App. Bd. Dec. 13, 2005); ISCR Case No. 02-10113 at 5 (App. Bd. Mar. 25, 2005); ISCR Case No. 03-10955 at 2-3 (App. Bd. May 30, 2006). However, the Board has recognized an exception to that general rule in Guideline B cases, where the applicant has established by credible, independent evidence that his compliance with security procedures and regulations occurred in the context of dangerous, high-risk circumstances in which the applicant had made a significant contribution to the national security. See, e.g., ISCR Case No. 04-12363 at 2 (App. Bd. July 14, 2006). The presence of such circumstances can give credibility to an applicant's assertion that he can be relied upon to recognize, resist, and report a foreign power's attempts at coercion or exploitation.

I find that Applicant can be expected to resolve any potential conflict of interest in favor of the United States. AG ¶ 8(b) is applicable.

Whole-Person Concept

Under the whole-person concept, the administrative judge must evaluate an applicant's eligibility for a security clearance by considering the totality of the applicant's conduct and all relevant circumstances. The administrative judge should consider the nine adjudicative process factors listed at AG ¶ 2(d):

- (1) The nature, extent, and seriousness of the conduct; (2) the circumstances surrounding the conduct, to include knowledgeable participation; (3) the frequency and recency of the conduct; (4) the individual's age and maturity at the time of the conduct; (5) the extent to which participation is voluntary; (6) the presence or absence of rehabilitation and other permanent behavioral changes; (7) the motivation for the conduct; (8) the potential for pressure, coercion, exploitation, or duress; and (9) the likelihood of continuation or recurrence.

Under AG ¶ 2(c), the ultimate determination of whether to grant eligibility for a security clearance must be an overall commonsense judgment based upon careful consideration of the guidelines and the whole-person concept. I have incorporated my comments under Guideline B in my whole-person analysis. I also considered Applicant's

favorable character evidence and his work overseas under dangerous conditions in support of the U.S. military.

Overall, the record evidence leaves me without questions or doubts about Applicant's eligibility and suitability for a security clearance. I conclude Applicant mitigated the foreign influence security concerns.

Formal Findings

Formal findings for or against Applicant on the allegations set forth in the SOR, as required by section E3.1.25 of Enclosure 3 of the Directive, are:

Paragraph 1, Guideline B: For Applicant

Subparagraphs 1.a-1.h: For Applicant

Conclusion

It is clearly consistent with the national interest to grant Applicant eligibility for a security clearance. Eligibility for access to classified information is granted.

Edward W. Loughran
Administrative Judge