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## Foreigners, possibly Americans, missing in Iraq

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SULAIMANIYA, Iraq (Reuters) - Three foreign nationals believed to be U.S. citizens disappeared close to northern Iraq's border with Iran, Iraqi security officials said Friday, but U.S. officials could not confirm the report.

Qadr Hamajan, a senior security official in Sulaimaniya, said four tourists had arrived in the Kurdish city 260 km (160 miles) northeast of Baghdad, from Arbil, the capital of Iraq's largely autonomous Kurdish region, Wednesday.

Thursday, three of the group went on to the Ahmed Awa tourist resort, known for its waterfalls, some 150 km east of Sulaimaniya, near the Iranian border. The fourth member of the group was ill and remained in Sulaimaniya.

Hamajan said he believed the travellers may have stumbled into Iranian territory.

"They phoned their friend in Sulaimaniya and told him 'We are in trouble and are being held by soldiers who are not speaking Kurdish or Arabic'," Hamajan said.

One of the group was believed to be an Arabic speaker.

Police Colonel Anwar Haj Omar of the Halabja police force in northern Iraq confirmed the details, adding that the group had no bodyguards and no interpreter and was last seen at about 11 p.m. Thursday at the resort.

There is no clear border marker between Iran and Iraq at Ahmed Awa.

Officials at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad could not immediately confirm or deny the report.

In Washington, a senior official in the administration of President Barack Obama said late on Friday the embassy was aware of the report and was investigating.

"We are using all available means to determine the facts of the case," the official said. "We take all detention cases very seriously."

(Reporting by Sherko Raouf and Shama Aqrabi, additional reporting by Jeff Mason in Washington; writing by Mohammed Abbas; editing by Todd Eastham)

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