

Advancing Access to the Law in Iraq

“Our goal is to ultimately provide access to Iraqi judges and lawyers to advance the rule of law in Iraq. The ability to rely on easily accessible laws and rules will create uniform access to precedence where there was none before.”

Lieutenant Colonel William Osburn,
Deputy Director, LAOTF

Situation:

In an increasingly digital world, it is hard to imagine relying on hard-to-access paper versions of laws to enforce order and compliance. However, that’s exactly how Iraqi laws and penal codes were housed. Judges often relied on their own knowledge and the counsel of others to reach a decision without referring to the text of the law.

To make Iraqi laws more accessible, and to help ensure that legal decisions were based upon the current laws of Iraq, the U.S. military decided to create a legal database that would house electronic versions of Iraqi laws.

The Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I) and the Law and Order Task Force (LAOTF), which is comprised of attorneys, paralegals, and criminal investigators who train, mentor, and assist Iraqi police and judges to strengthen the rule of law, turned to LexisNexis for help making this a reality.

Solution:

LexisNexis worked with the U.S. State Department, the LAOTF, and the office of the U.S. Army Judge Advocates General (JAG) to create an electronic, searchable database containing Iraq’s Civil Code and current laws.

The project – to build the database and make the documents searchable – was expected to take several months, but through extraordinary effort the task was completed in just 40 days.

The database contains the English translations of a wide array of legal documents, including:

- Iraq’s Constitution and Constitutional amendments
- *Iraqi Legal Gazettes* from 1970 to 1989
- Iraqi laws in English from 1982 to 2001
- Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) memos, regulations, and orders since 2001

LexisNexis supplied the technology and labor to create the database at no charge and is currently providing access to the database at no charge. In the future, LexisNexis will provide access to the documents for a fee.

About Digital Asset Management

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About LexisNexis

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When compiling the documents into the database, LexisNexis organized and profiled the documents using indexing and relevance searching. Using these documents, LexisNexis created a database which can be searched by key word, source, type, and date.

Database users have access to the text of the law and the ability to view the original documents.

LexisNexis will host and maintain the server, search engine, and documents until end of 2008, when the U.S.-led Coalition is expected to reach an agreement with the Iraqi government where this solution will be ultimately housed.

Benefits:

The database is currently being used by U.S. State Department and LAOTF members, including the U.S. Army JAG.

This solution represents an important step in creating a consistent and transparent record of Iraqi laws and a court system that operates on precedence. Electronic research has the potential to streamline courts procedures and ensure rulings are based on the actual text of the law.

“Electronic research will streamline court procedures and ensure rulings are based on the actual, up-to-date text of the law,” said Lieutenant Colonel William Osburn, Deputy Director, LAOTF. “Our goal is to ultimately provide access to Iraqi judges and lawyers to advance the rule of law in Iraq. The ability to rely on easily accessible laws and rules will create uniform access to precedence where there was none before.”

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