

**THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION**

**IRAQI DISPLACEMENT: PROSPECTS FOR RETURNS  
AND RESETTLEMENT**

**Washington, D.C.**

**Friday, August 22, 2008**

ANDERSON COURT REPORTING  
706 Duke Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

PARTICIPANTS:

**Moderator**

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON  
Senior Fellow, The Bookings Institution

**Panelists**

ELIZABETH FERRIS  
Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement

KIRK W. JOHNSON  
Executive Director, The List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies

\* \* \* \* \*

## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone. I'm Mike O'Hanlon from Brookings, and delighted to have you all here for an event on Iraq's displaced populations -- the more than 4 million people who have been driven from their homes and wound up either abroad or in other parts of Iraq in the course of the last five years. And, of course, that comes on top of several hundred thousand who had already been displaced during the Saddam era.

It's a huge humanitarian issue, it's a huge strategic issue, and it's a question of moral responsibility for the United States in regard especially to those Iraqis who have bravely worked with us.

And so we're delighted to have two panelists today who have very important perspectives on this problem, and we look forward to their presentations, and then to your questions.

I'm going to say just a brief word of introduction, and then I've asked Meena Ahamed, who is a longstanding Brookings friend and council member, and works also with our board of trustees, and has been very supportive of Kirk Johnson with the List Project, to say a couple of words about him.

But first, just by way of general background, Kirk has started a project, as I mentioned, called the List Project, because it's a list of Iraqis, either at home and displaced or abroad in refugee status -- typically not in the United States, but still in the region -- who have worked with us, worked with Americans, with AID, with State, with military personnel, as translators, as other aides, and thereby become jeopardized in

one way or another because of the association with the United States. And their lives have been at some risk for one reason or another, to one degree or another.

And Kirk's goal has been, with this project, to try to help protect these people by asking the United States to do its part to offer them the chance to come here if they wish. And, again, Nina will say a couple more words about this project in a moment.

Elizabeth Ferris is my colleague here at Brookings in the Foreign Policy Studies Program. She's also co-director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, so she has an expertise in refugee and, especially, internally displaced persons issues around the world. This is a project we're delighted to have here at Brookings. It's sort of a quasi-official or unofficial but important affiliated part of the U.N. system. As you know, the U.N. doesn't really have a proper agency for dealing with internally displaced the way that it does with refugees. So Elizabeth, working here and through an organization in Bern, do a great deal, not only as scholars here at Brookings but, as helpers of the broader U.N. system in addressing the plight of so many millions around the world who are displaced within their own countries -- and about 2.8 million of whom are displaced within Iraq specifically.

And I'll probably, as moderator, occasionally add a word or two thinking about the strategic implications of Iraq's displaced for stability in that country.

So that's the basic game plan for this morning. But before we go on, I'm going to trade places here briefly with Meena, who wants to say a few more words about Kirk Johnson and his project."

MS. AHAMED: Well, thank you, Brookings, for letting us come here today and speak to you all about what I think is a really critical issue. And thank you both for being here with us.

I met Kirk, I think, a year ago, and I heard about this project. And I was actually quite struck by the fact that the United States -- who could not possibly perform their job overseas in the military in Iraq with the translators, without the help of Iraqis -- were actually not doing anything to help those that are now in danger there because of their work with us. I think we have a job to do here. It's an election year. And I hope that all of you are going to join me in somehow giving this wonderful, unique young man some help.

George Packer, who you all may now, who writes for the New Yorker has sort of paid a great tribute to him. He wrote a play called The Trade, which ran in New York for many months. And I think his centerpiece was the man who was helping Iraqi refugees, and it was modeled on Kirk. So if you haven't had a chance to see that play, I would go on some websites and check it out, and demand that it come to Washington where some of the politicians can see it, as well.

I won't go on any more, but I will say that we have two Iraqi refugees in the audience with us who have been helped by Kirk. We cannot reveal their identities because they have families who are still in Iraq, but maybe they will be able to contribute in some way if there is a question that we can address to them without displaying who they are.

And, with that, I will turn it over to Mike. And thank you all for your support and for coming.

MR. O'HANLON: We're going to begin with Elizabeth, who will speak partly from the paper she's just finished -- which you can find out front if you haven't already -- on the state of Iraq's displaced populations.

Elizabeth.

MS. FERRIS: Thanks, Mike. And thanks to all of you for coming.

I think it's very encouraging to see that issues around refugees and displaced people are beginning to rise a little higher on the political agenda. A year ago, when many of us -- in the humanitarian community, at least -- were quite concerned about the increasing scale of displacement, it seemed hard to get the attention, if you will, of those working on broader Iraqi issues.

I'd like to do a couple of things in my short 15 minutes of presentation -- first, to give just a little overview of what we know about Iraqi displaced and refugee situations, and then turn to the question of solutions, with a particular focus on return: what will it take for Iraqis to go back, and what are the consequences or potential consequences if they don't return?

And then Kirk will talk about resettlement, which is traditionally a third solution for refugee situations -- and some of the particular challenges that poses, particularly for those who've been involved with U.S. forces in the region.

Iraq has a long history of displacement. It didn't start with the U.S. invasion in 2003. In fact, for many years displacement was used as an instrument of state policy -- particularly in the north, but throughout the country, groups that were not of a particular interest or concern to Saddam Hussein would be expelled. For example, some 250,000 Kurds were expelled over the course of many years from the northern part of the

country. And some of what we see today, and some of the complexities around displacement are, in fact, the legacy of the Saddam Hussein regime.

Today, there are close to 5 million people who've been displaced, including those who were displaced under Saddam Hussein. As Mike said, about 2.8 million inside Iraq, maybe 2.2 million in the neighboring countries. The numbers are uncertain. And, frankly, this is characteristic of a lot of refugee and IDP -- or internally displaced person -- situations, where it's hard to know exactly how many people are displaced.

It's particularly difficult in the context of Iraqi displacement because people are not living in camps, where international agencies can go around with clipboards and count people and register people and have a pretty good idea of how many people there are -- whether both inside Iraq and in neighboring countries, they're living dispersed among the population -- the world's largest urban caseload, both for internally displaced people and for refugees.

If you look at the patterns of displacement after March 2003, it's probably an oversimplification, but also probably true, to say that those who had the means and those who had the connections went first and went further. Now, there were people who fled to Jordan, primarily, in the initial months following occupation, included former supporters of Saddam Hussein, but also people who felt that life was becoming unsustainable, if you will -- the wealthy, the middle class, many went first.

Later patterns of displacement tended to be those who were poorer, with more limited resources, fewer connections. And those who tended to leave the country tended to have more resources than those who stayed behind.

Minorities were disproportionately represented among the displaced -- both internally displaced and, particularly, refugees. There's some evidence that more secular individuals tended to leave rather than to stay.

Brain-drain has been a constant concern around Iraqi displacement for the past five years. In particular, if you look at statistics around the number of doctors and engineers and trained civil servants, and lawyers and computer programmers, a large proportion of Iraq's trained middle class has, in fact, gone into exile. As a UNHCR official says 2.2 million of Iraq's best and brightest, with implications, as well for the future of Iraq.

If you look at patterns of violence within Iraq a lot of attention has focused on sectarian violence. And most of those who are refugees in neighboring countries say that they left because of direct threats to their life -- some 90 percent -- rather than generalized patterns of violence. But certainly over the course of the past couple of years, we've seen a reduction in some kinds of violence -- particularly as a result of the surge and the Sons of Iraq, and the Muktada Al Sadr truce, and so on.

But violence continues, in terms of a fragmentation of groups who were involved, kidnappings of people, kidnaping for ransom -- and some very interesting links being drawn being economic motivations of some of the patterns of both violence and displacement. People leave, their homes are seized, taken over, rents are collected, channeled to different groups. It's a complicated picture.

The pace of displacement has slowed within the past year. Fewer people are leaving their homes. It may be because sectarian cleansing has been effective in some



parts of the country. It may be because security has improved in some parts of the country.

Most of those displaced are from Baghdad. Most of the internally displaced remain within greater Baghdad. And some of the improvements in security there seem to be paying off.

But according to the Internal Organization for Migration, which compiles the best information, based on regular surveys of internally displaced persons, for those who are displaced, conditions are getting worse. Access to rations, to medical care, to clear water, to education and so forth -- and, most of all, to employment -- are very difficult for those who are displaced.

You know, those are the kind of things that don't make headlines. What makes headlines are 100,000 people leaving a month. But the gradual impoverishment of people who are displaced within the country -- and certainly, in neighboring countries, as well, as testified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees -- is a growing concern and may, in fact, play a role in terms of returns.

For those who are displaced within the country -- did my mic just go off?

SPEAKER: (off mike)

MS. FERRIS: Can you hear me okay? Okay.

For those displaced within the country, humanitarian access is very difficult -- it may be the most difficult country in the world, in terms of being able to access people who are in need. And I think that we need to pay tribute to the many brave Iraqi non-governmental organizations, often working outside of their homes, or sometimes outside of their cars, to provide assistance to

those who are displaced and don't have access to what is traditionally the situation in many other countries.

According to IOM, about 100,000 Iraqis have returned so far. Most of those have come from internal displacement rather than from countries of refuge -- surrounding countries, if you will.

About half of the men who've returned have work. About 98 percent of women-headed households are unemployed -- again, not a surprising issue, but certainly a cause for concern, when they're devising humanitarian assistance programs or looking at long-term security issues.

There is a political motivation for return. Some of you may have seen news releases this week and last week, I believe, when al-Maliki went to Egypt to personally escort refugees back to Iraq as a sign that things were really improving and just great. And certainly there is an impetus for the U.S. government, as well, to show that when refugees come back, when displacees return, it's a sign of normalcy, a sign of success, both of the Iraqi political system, but also of U.S. policy.

I'm going to argue these aren't just humanitarian issues, these are very much security issues related to the future of Iraq -- and, indeed, I would argue, to the region.

If you look at solutions -- which is what we're talking about today -- for the displaced, according to human rights law, refugee law, people have the right to decide to return. Return should be voluntary. It should be informed. And people should have a choice.

It isn't a choice when people return from Syria because they cannot survive, when their daughters turn to prostitution to support the family, when kids aren't in

school. It isn't a choice when your alternatives are go back to Iraq or stay here in an unbearable situation.

It's also not just about security. People return when things are safe, when life is secure. But also they return in order to access public services.

Some of the research we did earlier in Syria showed that many of those left because of violence, but many left because there is a lack of health care, a lack of chemotherapy for cancer patients, a lack of drugs for long-term, chronic conditions. We talked to couples who left because it was time to give birth and they didn't trust that they could even get to a health center.

So the establishment of public services is fundamental to the return of large numbers of both IDPs and refugees.

And here I want to signal the importance of the return of professionals, the return of doctors. According to some estimates, between 30 and 40 percent of all doctors in Iraq have left the country. And it becomes kind of a circular thing. People don't go back because of the lack of health care. The medical profession doesn't go back because of the lack of security. It's difficult to establish that security and sense of normalcy until, in fact, larger numbers of people return.

And I note that here the Iraqi government has become offering incentives, particularly to the medical establishment, to return to the country, although so far indications are that not many have taken them up on that.

Just to note what would be required for a comprehensive policy for returns that respects basic human rights standards.

First of all, it is the Iraq policy. And I note that last month Iraq came up with a policy on displacements which is a good policy. It respects most of the basic human rights norms. It incorporates the guiding principles on internal displacement. But as we've seen in many countries, it really depends on how it's implemented.

So a policy is needed. Good planning is needed.

And here it's really important to look at the pace of returns. Looking at other situations of displacement, if people return all at once, perhaps because they're forced out, perhaps because they think things have suddenly changed over night, if people come back too soon, the demands that they place on the system can be quite destabilizing. So planning for the pace of returns.

We know that internally displaced persons usually return first, before refugees. We know that those who are closer usually return sooner than those who are more distant.

But planning -- what are the needs? What are the needs for housing? And, above all, employment? Employment, of course, a major problem in Iraq for the general population, but particularly for displaced who may have lost property.

Mechanisms to provide for the return or compensation if property are essential. And we've seen that the commission set up with property disputes during the Saddam Hussein regime has been a very slow process. It's been very laborious, very legalistic, if you will. Only a small percentage of those claims have even entered the system.

But the need to set up a system that's an administrative one, rather than tying up the courts for years or for decades would be a good step.

Property compensation mechanisms aren't enough. They have to be enforced. You know, nobody likes kicking people out of their homes. Nobody likes kicking people out of their homes, even if they've only been there for a few months or a few years. But there, the role of the Iraqi police is critical -- and I would argue certainly the Iraqi police, and not the U.S. military, in terms of resolving property disputes.

In order to keep up or to maintain a pace of return that the system can handle, it's essential to assure that refugees in the region are adequately assisted. It's important to assure that European governments, in particular, don't begin to think, "Aha. I few refugees have gone home -- " -- less than 1 percent, mind you— " -- and therefore we can begin to deport all of those Iraqis who have sought asylum in our country." That, too, could be a destabilizing factor.

The role of resettlement, Kirk will talk about. But particularly for vulnerable groups who might find it difficult, or who are terrified at the prospect of returning to Iraq, voting rights are bound to be a big issue in the coming year. According to current Iraqi procedures, people who are internally displaced are able to vote in their communities are origin. But this, too, raises questions.

If somebody's been displaced for a while in one part of the country, maybe they won't go back to their community of origin. Should they have a say in how that community is governed? Should they be allowed to vote in the area in which they're displaced? And there, too, you run into both sectarian and political problems with the possibility of that happening.

So far, according to the information we have -- and perhaps someone from the Iraqi Embassy should comment -- there's no provision for those outside the country to

register to vote, or absentee ballots. And what the implications for the legitimacy of elections if one out of 10, or even one out of five potential voters is unable to participate in the electoral process because of displacement?

Finally, let me just close with a few questions. And that is, you know, what will Iraq look like if the returns don't take place -- particularly the skilled middle class? What are the possibilities for a secure and stable and functioning country, with adequate provision of services to its citizens if they don't return?

What are the consequences if they return in a way that cements the sectarian division, or sectarian cleansing that's gone on in the past? So far, the evidence is that people are returning to areas where their sect is in a majority. Minority returns are very small. And the return of minorities -- whether Christians or other groups, (inaudible) -- have been virtually nonexistent.

What are the implications for Iraq if the minorities don't come back? What kind of society will it be? Can their rights, in fact, be protected by the government?

It think this is very much tied up with the identity of Iraq and, I guess, now the post-2011 period.

There is evidence that the Iraq government has tried to reverse sectarian cleansing in cases, encouraging people to return to areas where they'll be a minority, providing compensation.

You know, and there I think we get to a question that comes up a lot in talking about solutions for Iraq's displaced, and that's the balance, if you will, or the gap between developing policies or solutions that are good for Iraq but may be terrible for the individual.

Many people have said, "Oh, you know, Iraqis should not be resettled. Iraq needs them to rebuild its future." And yet the elements of individual choice that's guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is such that to force people to return to situations where their lives are in danger or, in fact, that they don't want to go, is also not a solution.

So, with those cheerful question, I'll turn to Kirk.

Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: That is the perfect way to finish, of course, because I think what Kirk's project is about is giving these roughly 1,300 Iraqis who are now on his list the choice to make up their own minds about whether the peril they might face would be such that they want to leave Iraq or return.

Kirk, I should have also mentioned earlier, was an AID worker in Falluja and Baghdad in 2005. So he saw -- this was -- as the situation, of course, was deteriorating, Al Qaeda in Iraq and other extremist groups were becoming very entrenched, those who worked with the United States were increasingly at peril. So he saw this very up close and personal, which gives the project its genesis and its motivation, and the passion with which I look forward to hearing you speak now.

MR. JOHNSON: Can you all hear me?

Thank you for coming. The last talk I gave a couple weeks ago, there were three people that came. So you're boosting my spirits a little bit.

I feel, at the outset, before I get into my story and the List, that I should maybe distance myself. For any of you that saw the play -- George is always groaning about

this -- but, I mean, I'm naive in a number of ways. But the play that Meena talked about, I never thought that I was as naive as I was depicted in there.

(Laughter.)

So -- only to say that if it does come to Washington, take the Bill Prescott character with a grain of salt.

As Mike mentioned, my introduction into this issue was almost coincidental. I worked in Iraq throughout 2005. And because I was the only person at AID at the time in Iraq that had a degree in really some studies, and that spoke Arabic, I was in this unique position to befriend the roughly hundred Iraqis that USAID was hiring at that time, or were in the employ of USAID.

Throughout that year, we lost more than one Iraqi on our staff to assassination, and other to death threats. So the idea that an affiliation with the U.S. government is lethal only recently is kind of a trope. I mean, this has been going on for years now. And there's still -- I'm sad to say, there's still not any expeditious way to help these Iraqis.

When I came back from USAID, I was -- and from Iraq, I mean -- I was sort of suffering from these feelings of doubt that the year that I spent there, I didn't know if I had contributed anything positive, or if I had done anything to leave an impact. And I started getting all of these e-mails from my Iraqi colleagues who had been identified by these "chewers," which is the term for these militia members that hang outside of the Green Zone with cameras, with cell phone cameras, and their sole function is to "chew" the Iraqis who are helping the Americans -- to identify them and target them for assassination.



And a close friend of mine who had been helping us implement a \$130 million education program for USAID came out of the Green Zone one day. Someone from his neighborhood spotted him. And the next day he came home and found the severed head of his dog on his front steps with a note pinned to it saying that his head would be next.

After three years of honorable service -- and he was frequently commended, with these certificates and things like that from USAID -- he brought the death threat letter to the agency and asked for help, because he was obviously worried. And the best thing that they could offer him was one-month unpaid leave, at which point they were going to give his job to somebody else. So, in effect, they fired him -- although there's a bureaucratic euphemism for it.

So he gathered what he could and with his wife fled to the Gulf, and wrote to me for help. And I had no idea how refugee resettlement worked, but I sort of foolishly thought that if I just wrote an op ed about this guy's case -- about an Iraqi who was running for his life because he helped the Americans and now had a target on his back - - that there must be some process that USAID didn't know about that just needed to be activated to help him, and then he would be swiftly resettled to the U.S.

What ended up happening as a result of that op ed was not that he was swiftly resettled, but that I started hearing from scores of my colleagues from AID who had suffered similar fates and were now writing to me asking for help. And I quickly realized I was in over my head, and thought maybe if I just put these on an Excel sheet and I go dump them on the State Department -- some of whom are here today -- that, you know, this would be the end of my work with this, and State would now have the full names,

family members, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, location, the scans of their ID badges that get them into the Green Zone every day, copies of their security clearances. And these are -- the Iraqis that have helped us are the most documented refugees on the face of the planet, many of whom have background clearances from our own intelligence agencies. It's not that we don't know who these people are.

In February 2007 -- and I'm kind of groaning that it's been this long -- I gave the first list of my former colleagues, roughly 50 names, to State, and still not really understanding how the process worked, but asked them what they would do. I received word from them that they would be submitted for prioritization, through the traditional refugee resettlement process.

The list, since then, has now grown to, I think we're at over 1,300 names now, and we're getting new Iraqis writing to us by the hour at this point. It became very clear at the beginning that I wouldn't be able to help all these people myself, and so the project basically formed out of partnerships with three top law firms- Holland & Knight, Chris Nugent, who's based in D.C., Eric Blinderman, who served in Iraq with the Department of Justice, who's at Proskauer Rose, and Mayer Brown. And so those three firms have collectively pooled almost 200 attorneys. And I think we're -- what? -- well over 10,000 pro bono hours now.

So we have a situation where every Iraqi that writes to us that can substantiate their affiliation with the U.S. government or its contractors, will have a lawyer to help shepherd, or help them navigate this incredibly complicated process.

In the 18 months or so that the list has been going to the government, we've managed now to see roughly 150 Iraqis off of the list make it into the U.S. It's really

thrilling to see these people arrive, but we've had weeks with, you know, where there are between 100 and 150 Iraqis in the region writing to us.

What I think -- you know, where I think this issue, which I initially thought was just sort of a side issue, and I think now reflects some of the great choices that we have in front of us as a country, what the notion of what resettling Iraqis to the United States presents is: how do we address the difficulties that we face in Iraq over the last five years, and how do we confront a -- I think -- a somewhat Manichaeian approach to the world, where we have to veer away from this with-us-or-against-us approach and recognize that the Iraqis who have helped us merit or warrant resettlement in the United States.

The reason why this process has been taking so long, it's because there's no investment from the White House. You have one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world, and the President of the United States has still not uttered a syllable about this issue -- much less what we owe the Iraqis who are running for their lives because they've helped us.

Over the last year-and-a-half there have been a series of steps by the State Department -- who, it should be fairly noted, are only one player in the resettlement process. The Department of Homeland Security is the second actor, and they're frequently not brought into the debate.

But the traditional defense against this is that we cannot swiftly resettle these Iraqis because we may let in a terrorist. Or we need these Iraqis -- as Elizabeth mentioned -- we need these Iraqis to stay by in Iraq and stay there to rebuild their country.

Now, I spent a lot of my time there combating the brain-drain and seeing what we could do to confront what was a reality in 2005. And I'm not prepared to consign at least the 1,300 people on my list, to some fate because what we think is a preferred state in Iraq -- that these Iraqis who are stigmatized in Iraq, and their own government doesn't want to hire them because they've helped us, that they somehow not receive any helping hand from us doesn't seem to me morally or strategically tenable.

I think this also bumps up against some very obvious questions here, namely that if we are seen to be abandoning those Iraqis, however slowly -- those Iraqis who have helped us -- if we turn our backs on them, I kind of wonder how we anticipate winning any new hearts and minds in the region, when these are the Iraqis who came and signed up and worked for us from the beginning. They loved America and, in many cases, they signed up because they wanted to try to make a better Iraq. But as a consequence, they're being killed because they helped us.

I think the military has understood this. They understand that there are obvious strategic implications, that no one's going to want to come and interpret for them if it's just a death warrant and you don't get any help on the other end of that death threat.

The one final note -- and then I'll just end it, because I always like hearing questions. I've heard myself speak way too much over the last two years on this -- but would be to call to our recollection a couple of precedents that I would recommend we work off of, specifically with respect to my list, and to implement the legislation that is being stymied by bureaucratic delays.

There was, we called it, the Kennedy legislation that's intended to let in 5,000 U.S.-affiliated Iraqis into the United States every year, but they're nowhere close to

reaching that number this year. And there's not any real indication that we're going to be posting those numbers next year.

In 1996 there was a failed coup in the north of Iraq, and there were thousands of Iraqis who were seen to be U.S.-affiliated. And President Clinton at the time surveyed the scene, and the traditional resettlement process, and said this isn't going to work quickly enough. And he ordered "Operation Pacific Haven," that airlifted out, in a matter of a couple weeks, 7,000 Iraqis, flew them for expedited process into our military base in Guam. The average processing time was 90 days. Those Iraqis are now American citizens, many of whom have participated and contributed to our efforts in Iraq. And the military, the generals that ran it, have -- I mean, there are quotes at the time that they hope that this serves as a model for future humanitarian efforts.

We did the same thing a couple of years later with ethnic Albanians, 14,000, I think, through Fort Dix. And our greatest allies in Iraq, the Brits, are airlifting out, every couple weeks, their Iraqi staff. The Danes have already done so. The Polish contingent has already issued, just this past week, announced their plan. And they are using airplanes and they are bringing them to military bases for processing there.

And there's absolutely no reason that this option is not available to us as a country -- short of the fact that we have a President who won't address it.

And so another reason why I'm in town today is that we're bringing together this coalition of think tanks on the left, center and right, and veterans' organizations, to rally around an action plan that will be presented to both Senators Obama and McCain, that basically, as their chief recommendation, says: we need to put these people on airplanes. We need to fly them to a base where the medical teams that are so hard to

assemble inside Iraq to do processing, or in neighboring countries, where every capacity we have will be on our own base, and we can start cranking these numbers up.

On that, I'll just end it there.

But thanks again for coming.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic presentation. Very moving story.

I hope we'll continue to ask questions of each other as we go forward. But why don't we immediately go to you for your questions or comments for the panelists.

Yes, sir -- there, in the blue shirt. Please wait for the microphone, and identify yourself, if you don't mind.

MR. RUBEN: My name is James Ruben. I'm visiting from New York City. I want to thank you both for the work that you're doing, and thank Brookings for the seminar.

What kind of pressure, if any, is being put on companies -- the first example that you gave, that you found out, was that USAID would not give this employee any kind of help at all. So even today, two years later, KBR, Haliburton, people like that, are just denying their employees, sometimes, that they even had been employees, so that they couldn't get help.

What kind of pressure is being put on these companies, as private companies, to help with the evacuee situation?

Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON: The simple answer is, not enough. I think that so much of the attention so far has been directed at the State Department and at Homeland Security. But, you know, there are -- these Iraqis worked, as you mentioned, for companies like Bechtel, Parsons, who all received significant contracts through AID and others to work

on the reconstruction. In fact, the largest number of U.S.-affiliated Iraqis are not direct hires for USAID or State, but actually for contractors, or with Titan L-3, which is the main contractor to provide interpreters for the military.

To give an example of some of the practices that we've seen, we've come across Iraqis who are injured, interpreters who have lost limbs, or been severely wounded IEDs or complex attacks while interpreting for our Marines and soldiers. They flee the country, to Jordan and other countries, and we know that Titan and AIG, which the U.S. taxpayers funded to provide insurance on all the Iraq contracts, are offering buyout packages for \$10,000 and \$20,000 for an Iraqi who lost a leg, who needs money immediately because they're not allowed to work in the region. But then, consequently, they have no obligations anymore, under their contracts. And in many cases we know that buyouts are happening at lower amounts.

You know, we have now a lot of Iraqis off of our list who worked for these companies, who are here in the U.S. And they are -- they're in need of as much help as they can get. And we're trying to sort of foster a grassroots component to the project, where there are folks across the States who are forming chapters and adopting or sponsoring these Iraqis.

And one of the things that, in theory, when we get the time and wherewithal to do it, we want to start approaching these companies to see if there's -- I mean, ideally, what we'd like to see is some kind of fund set up that goes directly towards their former employees who are now here or in the region. I just haven't personally had the time to get into it.

MR. O'HANLON: Yes, ma'am.

SR. CAMPBELL: I'm Sister Simone Campbell, the executive director of NETWORK, and National Catholic Social Justice Lobby. And in January I was in Syria and Lebanon to see the Iraqi situation. And I have two questions -- one for you, Elizabeth, and one also for you, Mark.

The issue of concern to us was seeing the extent of divided families, where some family members would stay in Iraq to try to earn money for the part of the family that fled. And we saw significant deterioration in family relationships, and the capacity to move back and forth- and, additionally, added stress and increasing domestic violence as a result of what we assumed was post traumatic stress disorder, or -- I don't know if it clinically raised to that, but certainly as a result of the traumas experienced.

So I'm wondering if you could comment on that, and the whole issue of resettlement in that regard.

And then with regard to the folks on your list, I'm so glad you're doing that work. It's really important work. But I think the surprise to me was sort of the regional political consequence of us, in the U.S., focusing on the Iraqis who helped us, creates problems with governments' allowing in interviewers and U.S. personnel to help process just those who've helped the U.S. Because we experienced in Syria a grave concern that the U.S. was only interested, only had self-interest, and wasn't really interested in meeting the UNHCR criteria for refugees.

So while I affirm the work that you're doing is critical and morally responsible, I'm extremely concerned how we put it forward as a nation, as national policy, in order to facilitate, one, accomplishing your goal, but really to responding to the most needed -- the folks that most need refugee status, the most vulnerable.



And I'm wondering if you've thought about it, or if there could be some comments about the broader geopolitical reality of this work.

Thank you.

MS. FERRIS: Thanks. Maybe I'll begin. Thanks for your question.

I mean, basically, the borders between Iraq and the surrounding countries for would-be refugees are closed. I mean, there are few exceptions for trade and academics and so on. But with the closing particularly the Syrian border in October, it left many families divided.

You know, refugees and IDPs have amazing coping skills. And to leave a relative behind to collect the pensions, or a food ration, in order to provide it to a family leaving in exile was a survival strategy that functioned.

But when the border became much less permeable, in fact, many families were divided. And, you know, like refugees anywhere, I mean, that is the main concern. "How are people doing back home?" Also, for many of the refugees who have been resettled or other statuses in the U.S., "How are people doing back home? Can we see them?" -- and in terms of the criteria.

The surveys that exist show very high rates of depression and traumatic experiences with Iraqis. Indeed, they're the highest I've ever seen. They're higher than those of the Kosovar Albanians, for example, or Rwandans -- although surveys are always a bit iffy in these situations. But the number who fled because they experience violence, the number of kinds who witnessed somebody being killed, is amazingly high, with obvious effects.

The fact that they're not allowed to work means that in many cases families send children out to work, because they're less likely to be picked up, detained, deported and so on.

I'll let Kirk respond to your question about the U.S. -- except to note that some of our research I've done in Syria showed that association with the U.S. was, indeed, a reason for people being persecuted, but it was much broader than having worked for the U.S. I mean, we had cases where a woman said, "You know, my little waived to U.S. troops as they came in the neighborhood, and we immediately were threatened." Or, "My husband sold furniture to Americans."

I mean, the association with Americans puts people at risk, but particularly those who've been formally employed and are seen as having supported the war effort.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, and you start to get into what I think is an unpleasant endeavor of figuring out how many -- what has to happen to a refugee, how many things have to happen to a refugee before they warrant resettlement. I mean, the Iraqis on our list do not want to go back. They do not feel that they can go back. Some of whom have gone back have received new death threats or have had family members killed. So, to me, in that regard, in my opinion, and looking at our national interests, which I can't separate my efforts from, we have a clear obligation to start with them. But I also think that they fall in through a number of other categories of vulnerable refugees.

On the Syria note, Syria has constantly come up as the spoiler on this issue. And with respect, I think -- I oftentimes -- I mean, this is my cynicism here, but I think Syria looks for any way to say no to us that they can. I think a major concern, or a major reason why you've not seen a lot more processing in Syria is not because they think

that they're going to focus strictly on the Americans. If you looked at our programs in the other countries, and if you look at the actually of ratio of U.S.-affiliated refugees coming into the U.S., versus those who were, you know, widows or others, I think it would be borne out that we're not simply focused on our own people.

I think the main reason why you don't see more processing going on there is they don't want NGOs going in -- Western NGOs going in -- and from this is what Syrians have told me and what others that go to the region have told me -- they don't want people snooping on any human rights abuses. They have a -- they want to keep it as closed a country as possible. And when you have our current Syria policy that we have, where there's not a lot of room for negotiation, when there's not a lot of talks happening -- I mean, we have Ambassador Foley, who's the czar on this issue, who I think has been working admirably to try to navigate and pry open some space in Syria. But I think sometimes these are canards that are thrown out, I mean, where there's, you know, we look for any reason we can to not allow the processing, or to not ambitiously process.

For those of you who haven't been following this closely, in 2007, for example, our entire program in Syria shut down for months. I think it was almost seven months, because the Department of Homeland Security, the agents that do the interviews for DHS couldn't get stamps in their passports, they couldn't get visas into Damascus. And so the few people that were going and finishing the process, to do the final interviews, couldn't get there. And so, I mean, we still have people in Syria that have been waiting now for two, two-and-a-half years, and they're barely through any part of the process at this point. It's very worrisome.

And now they're considering going back to Iraq because they're running out of their funds, as Elizabeth mentioned, or there's this in-country processing now that they feel they can get a better show there.

MR. O'HANLON: Can I just clarify one thing for my own understanding?

Just to put this in context, how many of the Iraqi refugees coming to the United States are from your list, versus the overall number who are coming in -- which is itself, of course, quite modest.

But can you remind us of the relative numbers there?

MR. JOHNSON: I can only speak from the prism of my list, which is the most comprehensive list that exists of Iraqis who have helped us.

We've managed to see around 150 Iraqis come in -- that's including families. So if you were to remove family and just look at principals, it's more on the order of 50 or 60 principals.

I don't think, to my knowledge -- and maybe -- our friend from State was here, can weigh in. But I haven't seen any breakdown of the numbers that are coming in that are U.S. affiliated, versus the broader number. And I also haven't seen a breakdown -- I know at least through a lot of 2007, a lot of the numbers, a lot of the Iraqis that were coming in were pre-war cases, Iraqis who had fled before the invasion and, you know, years later were finally getting sort of flushed through the pipeline as our program and pressure to process more Iraqis increased.

I don't know if that answers your —

MR. O'HANLON: Almost. But the last piece is the total number that are coming, the total number of Iraqi refugees coming into the United States per year right now is three or four thousand?

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah -- well, the goal is 12,000 this year. And they're on track to meet that. That's not 12,000 U.S.-affiliated. And then there are, in addition to the 12,000, there's this legislation that mandates an additional 5,000 a year for the next five years, but they're not going to hit that number.

MS. FERRIS: Yes, as of the end of July, I think about 8,800 had been processed and resettled, and more in the pipeline.

But basically the process for resettlement is that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has the list of criteria, including association with the U.S., but also other kinds of vulnerability: women-headed households, and people with particular disabilities who are referred for resettlement.

But, you know, 12,000 is very small, considering the total number of refugees in the region.

MR. JOHNSON: But, I mean, by comparison, there's a -- Sweden has let in -- which had no role in the war, has let in, I think, around 20,000 or 30,000 Iraqis so far. And we have a lot of our former colleagues that are in Sweden now.

MR. O'HANLON: Phoebe.

MS. Marr: Phebe Marr, I work a lot on Iraq, specialist on Iraq. Let me just make a comment and then throw out a couple of questions for people, including Mike.

While I think all of the immediate humanitarian concerns are clear and should be a concern, one of the things that I think sometimes gets missed in these discussions are

the long-term implications of this kind of problem. Because, ultimately, the real solution is to settle down and improve Iraq -- the problem which, you know, created these refugees in the first place.

And I wonder if some of you could address some of the long-term strategic implications, leaving a large number of especially middle class families who are alienated, dissatisfied -- especially their children -- in countries like Syria and Jordan, brings to mind immediately a kind of long-term strategic vulnerability for them, for us, for everybody in the region, which is worrisome.

The extent to which these displaced people have re-segmented Iraq worries me - - particularly in upcoming elections. One of the problems to start with, people living in only Sunni and Shiia areas, where they used to live in mixed areas.

I'm curious how many kind of mixed areas are, you know, still left. Together with minorities who are leaving, it's making Iraq a much narrower country.

So while I don't think we can or should be compelling people to go back, many people would like to go back, under circumstances in which their security, normalcy, something that looks a little better. For example, the brain-drain is horrendous. I just heard today, and I've before, the numbers of young people that the Iraq government is sending out to study -- that really this means reeducating a whole new generation of Iraqis, which is going to take an enormously long time, to produce doctors, experienced professionals and so on.

So this, too, means that it's going to delay putting Iraq back together.

So it seems to me that some resettlement, at least, is worth working on, putting a lot of effort and time and energy on.

So I'd like to hear a little bit more about what's being done to begin to help with this -- especially the IDPs. What is the U.N. doing? What about these rich Gulf states, if I may put it that way? They have a lot of money, and I don't see a lot of it coming to solve this issue.

What is the Iraqi government doing, especially in terms of political will, to sort of help out in this problem? And I would like to hear Mike, too, on some of the strategic implications on this. What could we do to help on this?

MS. FERRIS: Maybe I could begin first with your question in terms of the long-term consequences if the refugees don't return. And, again, they're not recognized as refugees by neighboring countries, but rather treated as guests or visitors and so on.

But, you know, the specter that hangs over discussion of Iraqi displacement in the region is the Palestinian experience where, you know, what was once seen as a humanitarian emergency with a temporary solution has lasted for almost 60 years. Well, I guess it is 60 years this year. And the implications of that have meant that discussions about local integration of Iraqis in the countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Jordan are very difficult -- politically, almost impossible. They're seen as temporary. They will go home, and so forth.

But what happens if they don't? I mean, who are the people who are least likely to return? How will they be contributing to the countries of asylum?

We know, we've seen evidence, that people who are unemployed and desperate in those countries are more susceptible to recruitment by insurgent groups -- perhaps for political reasons, but also because it's cash. And feeding your families is always the priority. So I think that the potential for that group to eventually become a destabilizing

force is there -- although it's always difficult to blame the victims, if you will, to see those who are fleeing violence as somehow being a security threat.

And I also want to say a word about the importance of youth. I mean, Iraq is a very young population, youth are its future. If you look at the state of universities in Iraq, the number of professors who have fled, again it's this circular thing: in order to rebuild this generation, you need educational capacity, which you don't get until people come back. And, there again, the brain-drain thing.

And, finally, a word about the U.N.'s response. You know, in most countries of the world the U.N. is seen as kind of an impartial, credible being. But in Iraq it's particularly difficult. Those long years of sanctions, the oil-for-food scandal. The weapons inspections. The perception that U.N. officials were lining their pockets with Iraqi money has meant that the U.N. starts out in a difficult position. Given its lack of access and delivery of goods on the ground, it's an even worse position.

All of the -- most of the U.N. humanitarian agencies are putting more expatriate staff in Iraq, but they stay in the Green Zone, where they have to give 28 days' notice to be able to go out and see IDPs. To restore the credibility of the U.N. means being able to deliver.

Iraq is different as well, because Iraq is not a poor country. Iraq has lots of resources, and billions of revenues that could be used. And it's been, perhaps, reluctant to use them, although in the last couple of months we've seen Iraqi contributions to the U.N. -- \$40 million for feeding programs, food assistance programs, and assistance to neighboring countries -- although the perception is that Iraq could be doing much more with those funds. But maybe for some of the strategic issues there are others.



MR. JOHNSON: Go ahead. I just have a couple points on the neighboring countries and these rich Gulf states.

And I should -- correct me if I'm wrong, but I remember there were reports last year that Saudi Arabia was committing \$7 billion to create a fence along its borders. I don't know if that is still in play, but it's not the most welcoming message.

Jordan still is like a vault to get into, and a number of cases we're hearing of Iraqis being told that unless you can deposit x-number of tens of thousands of dollars in a Jordanian bank account, you can't get it.

In terms of what happens to these Iraqis, I mean one of the most depressing consequences that I never thought of that I was hearing a lot of on my last trip in Jordan was this atrophy of their skills that they were -- I mean, they were working, there was a dentist that I met who was working for, I mean, peanuts basically because he couldn't -- he was basically working black-market dental care just to keep his skills active. Other Iraqis were ashamed to try to speak English to the journalist that was with me because they were -- their skills had sort of weakened over the last couple years.

And that, to me, is one of the most tragic brain drains to consider.

MR. O'HANLON: I'll say a couple of words, Phebe, first.

One is, you had a question about what's the fraction of the population had lived in interspersed areas originally were still living in such mixed zones. And Kirk and Elizabeth may have other estimates than mine, but Ed Joseph and I did a very back-of-the-envelope calculation last year, and we estimated that somewhere in the range of 12 to 14 million Iraqis had originally lived in intermixed areas prior to the U.S.-led invasion. And so if about 4-1/2 million who've been displaced out of that 12 million, we think the

majority still live in intermixed areas -- which, of course, underscores the stakes that you refer to of trying to build a stable, multi-sectarian Iraq, because otherwise there's the potential for another round of ethnic and sectarian cleansing at a comparable scale to what's already happened.

In terms of what policy needs to be adopted by the Iraqi government -- and I'm no expert on this, but Elizabeth and I took a stab at trying to at least sketch out some of the ideas in an op ed yesterday. And we sort of had, I guess, you know, within the construct of three main areas -- security, politics and economics -- we had a suggestion in each area.

On security, clearly the Iraqi police are going to need to be protecting people as they try to go back, but we think the U.S. is going to have a role in essentially backstopping them. Because, of course, the police in particular are not yet trusted enough by the population to be non-sectarian. So that's one more argument, in my mind, in favor of being a little patient in our expectations of how fast we can downsize American forces. That would be point number one.

Point number two: Elizabeth mentioned earlier, on the issue of politics and law, how do you decide who should get back a home? Now, in theory, Iraqi law, as Elizabeth has taught me, leans towards the original owner getting back the home. But, of course, if it's been a period of years since they were there, and you have disputed documentation about who originally owned the place, you may need some kind of a mechanism, not only to decide who's going to get the house -- the squatter or the original owner, and you sometimes don't know who's who -- but to compensate the loser in the adjudication process. It's not just a question of who's right, it's a question of

how do you defuse the anger of whoever is deemed to have been wrong, or deemed to have not deserved to stay in that home.

And so this leads to the economics piece of our proposal, which is to essentially create housing vouchers for people who have been displaced. And this is where also, by the way, if you're worried about scamming and corruption, this is where we can use our biometric concepts nicely. Because if you want 10,000 bucks from the Iraqi to go build a new home, you're going to have to enter in your fingerprints and your iris scan, and you only get that once.

And so, yes, there's still the potential for some gaming. But when Iraq's sitting on \$50 or \$70 billion in oil surplus, that's not the greatest risk in the world that this system would be slightly exploited -- as long as it can't become a system for constant corruption that people continue to exploit.

And, by the way, if you were to create a housing-voucher concept so that people, when they came back to Iraq, or came back to their original region could either get their home or financial compensation, you could spark at least a mini construction boom, which is exactly the sort of thing that Iraq needs to reduce unemployment, since the main way in which unemployment has been reduced so far is more government jobs. And that only goes so far.

So those are the initial thoughts that we had in the op ed. And I think the main point to conclude with is the Iraqi government's going to need some help, just from friends and colleagues -- not from the United States government, per se, but from the broader U.N. and international community -- of thinking through some options here.

Because they're going to need to be creative, since the existing legal system is overtaxed in its ability to perform on this front.

Meena.

MS. AHAMED: I just wanted to make a comment about the neighboring states.

I think that initially, Syria and Jordan had both opened their borders and allowed the Iraqis to come in, and were warm and welcoming in Muslim brotherhood, et cetera. But I think when they began to realize that this whole exercise was going to take a lot longer, and that there wasn't an end in sight, I think it made them pretty panicky. Because given what the Palestinians have done, in terms of the population balance in Jordan, I think, and Lebanon, everyone's very nervous in the region, I imagine, of having, you know, 3 million Iraqis coming in to destabilizing their population, and what that would mean for the future -- especially if the war doesn't end, and they become sort of semi-permanent people, you know, who've integrated into the population.

So I think it's all very well to point fingers at, you know, Syria and Jordan. And certainly, Syria has not been helpful.

But I think we have to also be aware of the dynamics that are playing out in the region, and the fears that these people very legitimately have of being able to repatriate the people from their countries. So I just wanted to mention that, and to have everyone bear that in mind.

And if you could just answer one last question about recently there was a New York Times, it carried this piece about the government making a big push to letting Iraqi refugees in. And so a lot of people thought that, oh, the problem's solved.

And could you just comment about the reality of that?

MR. O'HANLON: Kirk?

MR. JOHNSON: There was a front-page piece in the times, I think two weeks ago, about this, mainly focusing on in-country processing, which is -- which was mandated by the Kennedy legislation, that -- our policy prior to that legislation said that if you want help, you have to first become a refugee, because we can't do anything for you while you're still there.

And as the borders started to close up because, as Meena mentioned, a lot of these countries were just overwhelmed by the numbers coming in, Iraqis were finding it harder and harder to actually get out.

There's a team of State Department people that are working feverishly in the Green Zone to try to carry out this implementation, and they have started sort of broadcasting or publicizing the existence of this program, and they're building up a queue.

But, to me, I mean, when my -- first of all, we don't know how serious, or how frequent DHS is going to be sending their folks to the Green Zone to do the processing. I know at least at the beginning, the logistical hurdles of getting an Iraqi into the center of the U.S. occupation, into the Embassy, was not an easy feat.

But, for me, I sort of feel like, for all of the valiant efforts of those foreign service officers that are there, we have much more desirable options that are available to us, that some people within the State Department are trying to put forward, such as using LSI, the military base in Kuwait, to fly, using the military flights that fly regularly between Baghdad airport and the bases, to just do the processing there.

When those options exist, and when there are so many immediate, historical precedents that are almost screaming in your face, it's sort of -- to me, I get frustrated when you -- we're trying to create these incredibly complicate and labyrinthine bureaucratic processes that, frankly, could be bypassed, a lot of those hurdles, if we had Presidential buy-in, and a willingness, and an investment on this issue, to use a base, still do the processing where Iraqis could be kept safe. And, you know, in terms of resettlement, Americans could be kept safe from any potential bad apples.

MS. FERRIS: Yes. Overall, I would think all of the U.N. agencies and international NGOs, and most of the Iraqi NGOs are saying it's not time yet for people to return. It's still too dangerous. Wait some time until things settle down.

Surveys by UNHCR of refugees in the region reveal that only 4 percent plan to return.

You know, that being said, you know, Iraqis want to go back. I mean, they want to go back to their country -- but in a situation where there is stability, peace, possibilities and so on.

We've mentioned some of the difficulties with Syria but, you know, Syria's been the unsung hero on the humanitarian level, to allow so many people to come. And the response has been very generous.

Now it's true -- just as those of you who've had relatives come and stay with you for awhile, that welcome runs thin after a while. And certainly, it's been some time. But the generosity of both Syria and Jordan is to be commended. I mean, the U.S., with all of its resources, 12,000 a year -- maybe -- Syria, a million, for how long?

And I think that we need to recognize the tremendous contributions these countries have made -- not in a naive way. There are always political interests involved, as way. But it certainly is something to be recognized.

MR. O'HANLON: Yes, ma'am.

MS. OMAR: Thank you so much. My name's Nina Omar, I'm from the Iraqi Embassy.

I just wanted to share a story with you. Thank you so much for both talks.

Kirk, you mentioned about the 7,000 Iraqis, the Kurds who have been moved to this place in the United States back in 1996. I am one of these people.

And, surprisingly, 12 years after, I handle refugee portfolio at the Iraqi Embassy. And from this perspective, I can tell you how important this project that's being done helped all these Iraqis to move in that difficult time, to be re-placed, this placed in the United States, and how these -- most of these Iraqis went back to Iraq. And some of them being part of the government, they work in private sectors, just to go back and visit their families.

You know, I know many of them. I can give you names and share with you many families that none of them hesitated on second to go back and, you know, to be part of the development that's happening in Iraq.

So I hope that the United States considers this project again. That's in one side.

And the reason I shared with you this story, because also I hear a lot from my American friends, officials, that one of the worries that the United States government afraid of is they bring all these Iraqis here, they won't go back. Iraqis will go back. Most

of them, they look after their country, they want to go back. They want to be in their land.

But I think it's the interest of the United States to bring those Iraqis here, with the unique relationship that we have now, for both countries to let those Iraqis to be in touch with Americans here, to learn from each other, to learn what's the United States about. And, you know, to learn in their schools and to make this relationship for a better future for both countries.

I think, my personal view about that, it's better than to let them go to other countries that they can end up in the hands of people that they will send them back to Iraq as what we heard from the two ladies that explode themselves, you know. And, you know, we will face many issues like that if we do not know where are these Iraqis going.

So thank you very much.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. I'm going to start taking two questions at a time. We've got about 15 minutes to go, and I want to work backward in the audience, as well.

So we've got, right here in the third row. And then after that, in the sixth row. And then we'll have our panelists respond.

MS. AL-SOZE: Well, my name is Nada Al-Soze, and I wanted to raise awareness to a certain program that addresses the educational -- some of the educational needs. I direct the project of the Iraq Scholar Rescue Project for the Institute of International Education.



It would be -- it was a year, yesterday, on the life of this wonderful program. Our initiative addresses the needs of Iraqi scholars, whether in the diaspora, or those who are still in Iraq facing threats and very risky, uncertain situation.

We help them to find fellowship opportunities, mainly in the Middle East, North Africa region -- MENA -- and there are some very rare exceptions, to bring them to the United States or to the U.K.

We want to invest in the intellectual capital of Iraq, which is going to be needed, and would still be needed. And, also, we need to try to find some like, you know, opportunities for the Iraqi students to find additional resources.

So we are launching the E-Learning Program, where the first step is going to be to document the legacy of those Iraqi scholars, and to put it on a website so that the Iraqi students back home can access this wonderful resource.

Throughout the last year we were able to help 66 Iraqi scholars and academics find fellowship opportunities through our network of colleges that we work with in the MENA. The biggest cluster of our programs is in, like, you know, working with Jordanian universities and universities in Egypt, Qatar, Bahrain. And we directly pay the scholars, so we are always looking only for a host offer from the academic institutions in that region.

The next step is trying to address the needs -- and that's the question -- the needs of the Iraqi college-age students. Though this might not look very pressing need, but it's going to be a pressing need for Iraq, and for those scholars, so that these scholars can give their knowledge and can extend that wonderful level of their expertise

to their students, and to the countries where they are hosted, through the generosity of countries where they are hosted.

So, my question: are there any steps taken through partnership with, like, you know, host institutions in those countries, or to establish any universities in exile?

MR. O'HANLON: We'll take one more question before we have a response.

Yes, please?

MS. SCHNELLER: Hi, my name is Rachel Schneller. I served a tour in Iraq as a Foreign Service Officer with the State Department in 2005-2006. During that time, I wasn't in the Green Zone, I was in Basra. And I had about 10 to 12 employees working directly for us. Two of them were killed. Most of the rest of them received direct threats.

But, as was mentioned before, it wasn't just that. It was the contractors who would drive in the trucks to deliver the laundry or the food or pick up the trash. Many of them were killed. I don't know their names, and I don't think any of us ever will. The Iraqi man who came in to sell cigarettes and candy and little knickknacks, he was shot in the neck. His son was killed. A woman who worked for the Danes on our compound was followed home, and her father was killed.

I think the broader implications of our presence in Iraq are things that many of us don't hear about. And they're things that will live with me for the rest of my life.

When I returned to the United States and continued, like Kirk, to receive many, many pleas for help from the Iraqis that I had gotten to know and respect -- and reached out within my own department to find ways to help them, it was definitely quite an uphill feat. But there were ways to go about it.

In -- oh -- I think it was the fall of 2007, I was asked to do an interview with the New York Times, and agreed to do that. The consequence for doing that was being pulled aside by my supervisors in the State Department and warned that going ahead with this interview would have severe implications for my career -- but I went ahead with it anyway.

Ironically, now that I'm on leave-without-pay, one of these nice bureaucratic euphemisms, as a direct result of some of the work that I've been doing, I'm now a little more free to speak about what's going on.

One of the things that I continue to think about -- as everyone here has spoken out -- is that what I saw happening in Iraq, in Basra in particular, was, you know, when I got there in 2005, the region was predominantly Shiia, but with a roughly 20 percent Sunni population, and about 5 percent Christian population. By the time I left, the Christian population had been virtually eradicated, and there were less than 10 percent of the population of Sunni.

The Sunni who had left, some of them had left the country. Others simply moved to other parts of the country that were Sunni majority. The Iraqis that I knew who were leaving, who were becoming internally displaced, were moving to areas where they felt safe, where they were the majority.

And so even though they may not show up on anybody's screen as internally displaced, because they moved in with a cousin or a distant family member, and are still technically with the family, the end result is basically a homogenization of the country, where regions that were more mixed before 2003, are now virtually all Sunni and all Shiia. Even in cities like Baghdad that were more mixed, you have basically walled-off

areas where Shiia populations live. In places in Basra that were more mixed and more tolerant before, you won't be able to find a Christian, you'll be hard pressed to find a Sunni anymore.

And I don't see that trend reversing. And I think that when you look at what will happen to the country overall, I would be very interested in hearing an Iraqi perspective on this -- and the two of your perspectives, as well.

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: I think I will take one more, since we are getting close to the end. And then maybe we'll wrap up.

Any questions in the middle part of the room? Anyone else have a question?

Right here. And then we'll wrap up.

MS. FELDMAN: Hi, my name is Jessica Feldman. I work for International Relief and Development.

And just a point, kind of bringing out something that you said: Iraq is so tribal, how do we know that the number of people that we have estimated as being displaced is correct? Especially since people do move in with family members, or just move, in general.

MR. O'HANLON: So why don't, Liz, final comments, and answers to any of these questions, and then the same for Kirk, please.

MS. FERRIS: Sure.

First, on the last question, I think the answer is that we use the best estimates we have, that includes people who've been displaced living with family members, or occupying public buildings.

But the reality is, is that given the situation in Iraq, it's hard to know. I mean, it could be off by a factor of 20, 25 percent or more. But that's just true in a lot of different displaced situations.

In terms of the question about university students, I think it's fair to say that the U.N. and other international and national NGOs are really struggling to meet basic needs. And often, university education is not seen as a basic need. You know, you try to meet primary education and provide food and health care.

UNHCR's budget in the surrounding countries is only half funded this year. You know, and what are the priorities? To get water to people, or arrange opportunities for university education? And yet the long-term future of Iraq may depend on particularly working with the young people.

I might just say that we've been working for the past seven or eight months with a team of Iraqi researchers -- Shiia, Sunni, Kurds and so forth -- on the situation of internally displaced people. And we've all been struck: in the six or seven months, every one of those researchers has had a family member who's been killed, who's been kidnaped, children who've been threatened. I mean, the level of violence isn't just an issue of numbers and statistics, but it's real, live human beings whose lives are jeopardized by the insecurity and violence -- for which, hopefully, there will someday be solutions.

MR. JOHNSON: Just to make a quick note, in response to your question, Nada, about the schools, I think that there's a project called the "Iraq Student Project," which is very young right now. But I think that they've bene communicating with universities

throughout the States here to try to get tuition waivers for Iraqis who are student age to come here. But the problem is just getting them here.

I think they -- I think I read somewhere that they just got their first —

SPEAKER: (off mike)

MR. JOHNSON: -- yeah, throughout the region. I don't know that it's just Damascus or not.

The points that Rachel brought up, the foreign service officer who was in Basra, to me underscore what a strange situation we find ourselves in, that the question of what to do for an Iraqi who is highly educated, who woke up every morning to try to help the U.S. succeed in its objectives in Iraq, to not be able to give them a life raft, or to create a bureaucratic life raft that takes a year to a year-and-a-half to access, and we're still dealing with Iraqis who are trying, in their third year, their ninth, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> interview.

If this is the best that our nation is capable of in addressing what I think is one of the few bi-partisan, universally recognized moral and strategic imperatives that the war in Iraq has presented -- if the best we can do is, you know, celebrate when we hit 12,000, and we can't even bring over the people on our list, which now weighs, I think, over a hundred pounds of documentation from American soldiers and Marines who are vouching for these people -- I think it's a sad indictment on where we are as a nation.

I mean, I think our superpower status ought to account for something today that should be able to move us beyond finding excuses not to implement this. And punishing valiant foreign service officers who are trying to help other, you know, State Department staffers and AID staffers, and put these people on an airplane and save them. Short of that, I mean, I don't know where we are as a nation and where we're headed, if these

kinds of people, if we see them as the terrorists, these people who, themselves, are fleeing terrorists, I don't know how we'll ever get our senses back. We've just become blind in the world.

MR. O'HANLON: That's a very powerful way to conclude.

I guess we'll have just one quick last thought, because we have a couple minutes left.

MS. CREEL: Yes, hi. I'm Liz Creel, also with IRD. I have a question on the advocacy side.

The Kennedy and the companion legislation on the House side, I know that there are a lot of efforts to move it. You know, Congress is going to move into its next session and everything will be stalled until, you know, the next President's elected.

But just out of curiosity, what would be your suggestion for helping to advance, you know, those initiatives? And do you think that that legislation, in its present form, is the best vehicle, you know, for accomplishing at least a short-term positive objective?

MR. JOHNSON: I sort of -- sometimes I feel like I need to go back and watch that cartoon we watched in school on how a bill becomes a law. Because we have legislation that was sponsored by a broad bi-partisan coalition of Senators, that made it through the House, that went to the desk of the President of the United States, that was signed into law and is not resulting in any speedy resettlement of these Iraqis.

So I must be missing something here. Because whatever -- I mean, I think that the folks who worked on that legislation worked their tails off, but it's not -- I mean, in my opinion, and maybe I'm just being stubborn here, it doesn't put these people on a plane and just bring them to a base. And I know I keep harping on that.

But in the end, it's been met with lawyering by the agencies that are looking for loopholes, for reasons to implement later, like "is it this fiscal year or next fiscal year?" And in the end, I think that this well-intentioned piece of legislation has not fully translated into the benefits that it intended, I think.

MS. FERRIS: I just want one closing comment.

I think one of the problems with U.S. policy has been to see that it's business as usual -- whether it's business as usual in terms of what is complicated and lengthy resettlement processing, business as usual in terms of the U.S. always funds 25 to 30 percent of international appeals.

But given the situation and the U.S. role in this, it isn't business as usual. And I think we should be arguing both for expedited resettlement processing, change the -- the U.S. can work quickly, as happened in the case of Guam and earlier, in 1991, with the whole protected area up around Kurdis — we can move quickly and it isn't business as usual.

And we need to recognize that. And I hope that either current or future Presidential leadership will play a crucial role in inspiring the country to do what it should be doing.

MR. JOHNSON: And just one final point, for context.

After Vietnam, in '75, Congress appropriated over \$500 million to help the Vietnamese refugees. And there's nothing close to that, even adjusted for current, you know, values.

MR. O'HANLON: Please join me in thanking Kirk and Elizabeth.

(Applause)



\* \* \* \* \*

ANDERSON COURT REPORTING  
706 Duke Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

**CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC**

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

Notary Public # 351998

in and for the  
Commonwealth of Virginia  
My Commission Expires:  
November 30, 2008