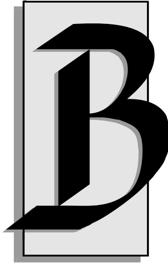

The Brookings Institution—University of Bern
Project on Internal Displacement

Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq

by

Ashraf al-Khalidi
and
Victor Tanner

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I will never believe in differences between people. I am a Sunni and my wife is a Shi‘a. I received threats to divorce her or be killed. We left Dora [a once-mixed neighborhood in Baghdad] now. My wife is staying with her family in Sha‘b [a Shi‘a neighborhood] and I am staying with my friends in Mansur [a Sunni neighborhood]. I am trying to find a different house but it's difficult now to find a place that accepts both of us in Baghdad.

A young Iraqi artist, Baghdad, June 2006

About the Authors

Ashraf al-Khalidi is the pseudonym of an Iraqi researcher and civil society activist based in Baghdad. Mr. Khalidi has worked with civil society groups from nearly all parts of Iraq since the first days that followed the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein. Despite the steady increase in violence, his contacts within Iraqi society continue to span the various sectarian divides. He has decided to publish under this pseudonym out of concern for his security.

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Synopsis

The sharp rise in sectarian attacks, abductions and killings that followed the bombing of the holy Shi'a shrine in Samarra's Golden Mosque in February 2006 has presented Iraq with an explosive problem: sectarian-induced displacement.

September figures from Iraq's Ministry of Displacement and Migration indicate that sectarian violence by Sunni and Shi'a extremists has forced circa 39,000 Iraqi families – 234,600 individuals – to flee their homes since the Samarra bombing. Many displaced have found refuge with relatives and are thought not to have registered, which means that actual figures may be far higher.

This paper builds on four weeks of field research by Iraqi researchers across the country to present a bottom-up view of the violence and the ensuing displacement. Here are some of the findings:

Leaders on both sides say they view the violence and ensuing displacement as part of historical trends. Sunni leaders see it in the light of what they perceive as the oppression of the Sunni minority by the Shi'a majority since 2003. Shi'a leaders see the violence as the continuation of the policies of Saddam Hussein and notably his attempts to create a Shi'a-free belt around Baghdad.

At the same time there is a strong yearning for law and order in Iraqi society. Many ordinary people still do not think in terms of civil war, so long as it is not neighbor against neighbor, but armed thugs attacking civilians. Yet intolerance and mistrust are spreading, especially among the youth. Street slang is violent and dehumanizing. Another worrisome issue is that the tribes on both sides seem to be growing restless – open tribal conflict between tribal groups would add an organized, popular and rural dimension to the sectarian violence.

The violence is neither spontaneous nor popular. Displaced people view the most extreme religious fronts – the Office of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) on the Shi'a side, and the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) and the Islamic Party on the Sunni side – as the main drivers of sectarian displacement. The displacement clearly helps further the political agenda of these extremist groups. The groups all share in fact common goals: to consolidate their territory, to maintain some of 'their' people in the territory of the 'other' and, in the context of a feeble government, to pose as both protector and provider.

The displacement may also play into internecine struggles within the sectarian communities. For instance, the Sadr Office is likely to benefit when poor, urban Shi'a displaced from Baghdad – people who are likely to support Sadr – settle in areas like Najaf and Kerbala, where Sadr militias are locked in struggle with SCIRI. The displaced become pawns in this bloody political fight.

There are few voices of moderation. The radical armed groups call for national unity in the same breath that they vow total war on the other side. The pleas for calm and restraint by mainstream politicians are feckless. The current government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has so far proven unable to stem the violence. The US government talks about the need to stop the violence but is unwilling to commit the political capital and troops necessary to do so. The only national leader to have consistently and powerfully spoken out against the violence and specifically against displacement is Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. But his influence seems to be waning as that of radical Shi'a groups and younger, hard-line leaders grows.

Patterns of displacement vary. The more mixed a city is, the more sectarian violence there is likely to be. Places such as north Babil, Salah ad-Din province, Mosul, Basra and especially Baghdad have been exceptionally violent. In these areas, campaigns to undermine mixed neighborhoods proceed in parallel. There tends to be less violence in areas where there is a functioning local authority – mainly the Kurdish North and the southern Shi'a towns (other than Basra).

There are several different categories of people displaced by the sectarian violence. Sunni Arabs from Shi'a majority areas is the group that has perhaps grown most dramatically since the Samarra bombing. Shi'a from majority Sunni areas have been under pressure since before the fall of the Ba'thi regime. Many Sunni and Shi'a Arabs whom the Ba'th settled, often forcibly, in the Kurdish North as part of its aggressive Arabization program either fled or were forced to leave in 2003 and 2004. Minority groups from both Sunni and Shi'a areas include Kurds, Christians, Turkmen, Sabean-Mandeans, Roma and third-country nationals, especially Palestinians. Sunni Arabs from conflict areas, though displaced by Coalition military operations, often view themselves as displaced by sectarian tensions, because they view US efforts to assert control over Sunni areas as part of a Shi'a plot to control Iraq, and specifically because the Iraqi government forces that fight alongside Coalition forces are for the most part Shi'a.

The direct reasons for the displacement are varied but all hinge on violence, fear and intimidation. They include administrative pressure, general intimidation and rumor-mongering, spikes in ambient violence, targeted threats and intimidation, and actual brutalities.

The main pattern of displacement focuses on the consolidation of territory: in essence, people flee to areas where they feel safer. Shi'a go to Shi'a areas. Sunnis go to Sunni areas. Kurds go to the northern provinces and Christians go to parts of Ninewah province. (And most of those who can leave the country do.) The result is that hard-line authorities then hold sway over 'cleansed' territories.

Other patterns of displacement exist as well: micro-displacement and nighttime displacement, daylight displacement, repeat-displacement and 'fake' displacement.

How do people cope? The majority of the displaced stay with kin, friends or simply people from the same community. Others squat in public buildings. The proportion of

the displaced in camps is estimated to be far smaller than that in host families. The displaced in camps are the worst off because of the basic shelter and poor water and sanitation conditions. For the most part, families seem to have stayed together, but an important social impact of displacement is increasing child labor.

To obtain a ration, displaced people must register with the Ministry of Trade. For a number of reasons – lack of documentation, insecurity, lack of trust in the authorities, pride – many displaced apparently do not register, especially people who can avoid the camps because they have relatives they can stay with or simply because they can afford to live without help.

The difficult living conditions trigger much anger against the government. Local authorities are acutely aware of this. A certain number of governmental and private institutions assist the displaced. Government ministries include the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, the Ministry of Trade which is responsible for the rations, the Ministry of Interior which provides the necessary documentation, and the Ministry of Education which has assisted with the registration of the children of displaced families in local schools throughout the country. Local authorities at the provincial and district level are far more effective. Every province has a displaced committee and an operations room. Sectarian agencies have moved aggressively to fill the void left by the government. These include the Sistani Office, SCIRI's Shahiid al-Mihrab organization, the Sadr Office and the related mosques on the Shi'a side, and the Association of Muslim Scholars, the Islamic Party and the related mosques on the Sunni side. The Iraqi Red Crescent is the primary national aid agency dealing with the displaced. They work mostly in the camps and collective settlements, and remain the only non-sectarian group with a real organization and countrywide presence, despite their reputation as an agency once close to the Ba'th. Local communities sometimes also support the displaced through informal committees in neighborhoods and local mosques. International assistance is minimal and also not very visible, because of the security situation.

Prospects for the future appear dim. A striking point is that most of the displaced people we talked to, across the country, Sunni and Shi'a, told us that sectarian displacement was on the increase, and chances for returning home were slim. Increasingly, they see their displacement as a reflection of deep-seated political divisions in the country.

Displaced people link return to security. It is likely that sectarian violence is causing lasting change to Iraq's social and demographic make-up. That is what the radical armed groups on both sides seek to achieve – and they are succeeding.

Introduction

A sharp rise in sectarian attacks, abductions and killings followed the bombing of the holy Shi‘a al-Askari shrine in Samarra in February 2006.

On 20 July 2006, as reported by Reuters and other Western media, a spokesman for the Iraq Ministry of Displacement and Migration declared that, in the five months since the Samarra attack, approximately 27,000 families, or 162,000 people, had registered with the Iraqi government for assistance.[1] More recent figures from the Ministry speak of nearly 39,000 families displaced – 234,000 people – since Samarra.[2] Organized bands of armed thugs are targeting people because of the community they belong to, and forcing them to flee.

But the problem did not start with the attack on Samarra. Sectarian strife had been increasing steadily since the beginning of the US occupation of Iraq. Well before 2003, violence against the Shi‘a and the Kurds was a central tenet of Ba‘thi policies. Internal displacement was a major feature of the Iraq of Saddam Hussein. Because of the Ba‘thi regime’s uniquely repressive nature, the outside world made little effort to find out what was happening inside. The US-led invasion that overthrew that regime was supposed to bring better things. Instead, displacement is again on the rise in Iraq. And again, little is known about it.

Sectarian violence is one cause of the displacement. There are others. The lack of security and basic services is one. The absence of resolution of property disputes is another: it prevents many returning refugees and internally displaced people from previous crises from going back to their original homes. Coalition military operations are another major cause of internal displacement in Iraq today – according to an internal displacement advocacy group, such operations displaced “hundreds of thousands” and “are the main cause of displacement [in Iraq] since the fall of the former Iraqi government.”[3]

But sectarian-induced displacement carries special significance. In a country as diverse as Iraq, and as large, it could take on truly appalling proportions were the situation to worsen. Also, as displacement increases and hardens, it in turn further jeopardizes the political process. Finally, the manner in which both the new Iraqi authorities and those nations who maintain significant military forces in Iraq address the problem of sectarian

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1 Rasheed, Ahmed and Alastair Macdonald, “Thousands Flee as Iraq Violence Deepens,” *Reuters*, 20 July 2006.

2 Ministry of Displacement and Migration Press Release, 21 August 2006 (http://www.iraqi-modm.org/english%20modm/press321.htm) speaks of 35,600 families displaced or 213,000 people; for September figures, see Ministry statistics cited in Wong, Edward: “It’s Moving Day, All Over Iraq,” *New York Times* (News of Week), 24 September 2006.

3 Internal Displacement Monitoring Center: “Iraq: Profile of the Internal Displacement Situation,” Norwegian Refugee Council, 23 May 2006, pp. 11 and 49; available at www.internal-displacement.org

displacement says much about their commitment to pluralism and human rights. Indeed it is an important indicator of whether Iraqis can expect a better future.

NOTE: In Iraq today, the term 'sectarian violence' is a euphemism for Shi'a-Sunni violence. The Kurds are not part of the current explosion in sectarian strife. And while past and future problems involving sectarian violence in Kurdish areas – as well as sectarian violence against Kurds in South and Central Iraq – are not to be discounted, the main source of sectarian displacement are attacks on Sunnis and Shi'a by Shi'a and Sunni radical groups respectively. Thus, the focus of this paper, which is based on both direct and remote research, is the violence between Sunni and Shi'a radical armed groups and the ensuing displacement.

How this Report was Researched

This paper was written by Ashraf al-Khalidi (the pseudonym of a Baghdad-based Iraqi researcher who wishes to remain anonymous because of concerns for his personal safety) and Victor Tanner. The report is based on research carried out in Iraq between mid-May and mid-June 2006 by a team of Iraqis including Khalidi, under Khalidi's supervision. The identity of these other Iraqi researchers will also not be made public for security reasons.

The focus of the research was to talk to Iraqis: ordinary Iraqis, displaced people, and local authorities, including members of the radical armed groups that are the main engine of sectarian displacement. But given the lack of security – for the very reasons investigated by this report – it is not possible to freely conduct field research in Iraq today. Not only can foreigners not travel around Iraq to meet with people and ask questions, but it is becoming all but impossible for Iraqis to conduct research across the harder sectarian lines.

To get around this problem, we settled on the notion of 'remote' research. In consultation with Tanner, Khalidi recruited one- and two-person teams to cover a number of towns throughout Iraq. These people are both Sunni and Shi'a, men and women, and are all personally known to Khalidi (and some to Tanner). The problem of bias of course remains, but the individuals were chosen on the basis of the trust Khalidi and Tanner placed in both their research skills and their honesty. The teams conducted interviews in Samarra, Mosul and other parts of Ninewah province, Ramadi and Falluja in Anbar province, the main towns of north Babil (Iskandariya, Latifiya, Yusifiya and Mahmudiya), Kerbala, Najaf, Hilla, Diwaniya, Samawa, Kut, Nasiriya and in many neighborhoods of Baghdad. The field teams submitted written reports to Khalidi in Baghdad.

Originally, we had also planned to cover Tikrit, Baquba, Tal Afar, Kirkuk, Musayyib, Balad and Dujeil. Unfortunately we were unable to find suitable researchers in these towns within the timeframe of this research. Basra also was high on the list of places to visit, but the increase in violence there in late May led to the trip being canceled.

People interviewed included Iraqi government officials from the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, the Ministry of Human Rights, local governments and the police; officials from the Sadr Office, the Sistani Office, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the Islamic Party, the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), the Shi'a Waqf Committee (*Diwan al-waqf ash-shi'i – waqf*, pl. *awqaaf,* is an Islamic religious endowment), and the Sunni Waqf Committee (*Diwan al-waqf as-sunni*); displaced people themselves; local residents; and non-governmental organizations, including the Iraqi Red Crescent.

Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews took place in the latter half of May and first half of June 2006.

Sectarian Violence in Iraq

Earlier field research on retribution killings in Shi'a areas, carried out in 2003-4 at the request of the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) administrator, Andrew Natsios, found that the great majority of citizens in Shi'a areas had refrained from retributive violence. The research described a strong yearning among ordinary Iraqis for law, order and due process. The resistance to sectarian violence was strong: local tribal leaders, clerics and members of the police and judiciary spoke out against violence.[4] When revenge killings occurred, they were not spontaneous. Rather they were clearly organized – the actions of local strongmen, mostly urban, who claimed allegiance to national parties but who sought to assert their power at the neighborhood level. The report warned of the potential for organized political violence in Iraq.[5]

Two and a half years later, the desire for security and justice among ordinary Iraqis remains, but prospects for law and order have dimmed. Organized violence seems now to be the norm, and radical views have taken on more strength. Ordinary people, both Sunni and Shi'a, find themselves seeking the protection of radical armed groups, even if they do not share their radical views. These armed groups in turn benefit from the violence, because their stature grows as protectors and providers.

How the violence unfolded

While sectarian violence had clearly reached a new pitch since the Samarra bombing, communal tensions have existed in Iraq for a long time. Three and a half decades of Ba'thi favor toward Sunni communities and the terrible repression of the Shi'a in the 1990s left deep scars in Iraqi society. In terms of the Shi'a-Sunni divide, Sunnis see themselves as a threatened minority, while the Shi'a see themselves as the oppressed

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[4] Tanner, Victor and Anonymous: "Revenge Killings in Iraq: Nature and Extent of the Problem," USAID, Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), Baghdad/Washington, 2004, *passim*. [On that report as well, the Iraqi colleague with whom Tanner worked wished to remain anonymous for security concerns.]

[5] Ibid., pp. 7-8 and 2 respectively.

majority. The US-led force that entered Iraq in April 2003 found bitter resentment and mistrust between the two communities. Nevertheless, there was also a broad feeling in Iraq that civil war was far from inevitable. Throughout 2003 and even into early 2004, ordinary people, especially on the Shi‘a side, continued to believe in the potential of the budding political process to bring justice and protection.

Little by little, however, violence gained ground. Serious US mismanagement of the occupation gave rise, by late 2003, to an active insurgency, mostly in Sunni strongholds. Over time, Sunni insurgents in central Iraq focused more on attacking Shi‘a as a way of creating the chaos they hoped would allow them to regain political control. Until recently, the Shi‘a, including the various militias, did not answer with serious retribution. However, as anti-Shi‘a atrocities mounted, radical Shi‘a leaders began to organize violent responses, using Sunni attacks as a pretext to ratchet up the fight. By mid-2005, Iraqi victims of execution-style killings, both Sunni and Shi‘a, were routinely discovered around the country.

In October 2005, on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan, 87 people were killed in an attack on a Shi‘a mosque in Hilla, south of Baghdad. At the same time, al-Qa‘eda in Iraq called for increased attacks and urged war against the Shi‘a. In November 2005, American soldiers discovered 173 mostly Sunni prisoners held in poor conditions in the basement of an Interior Ministry building. They had apparently been abused by the largely Shi‘a police force.

The bombing in late February 2006 of the al-Askari mosque, a holy Shi‘a shrine in Samarra, sparked a vicious cycle of killings. Immediately after the bombing, Shi‘a militiamen, most of them part of the Mahdi Army of Shi‘a cleric and strongman Muqtada al-Sadr, stormed through Baghdad and other towns assaulting Sunni mosques and slaughtering Sunni civilians. That, in turn, led to retribution by Sunni insurgents. The spasm of violence left hundreds dead and, according to press reports, may have strengthened the Mahdi Army even more.

The post-Samarra violence abated for a while as all sides – including the US – seemed to stare into the chasm before them and take stock. In April 2006, a leader of the Shi‘a Da’wa party, Nuri al-Maliki, became prime minister, vowing to address the issue of sectarian violence. But since that time, violence has resumed, reaching unprecedented levels. Car bombs and death squads – the former the weapon of choice of Sunni radicals, and the latter the modus operandi of Shi‘a militias – have taken an increasing toll on ordinary Iraqis. In July 2006, two especially brutal attacks saw squads of heavily armed gunmen storm civilian centers in broad daylight, pulling people from homes, businesses and vehicles and executing them – a shockingly new form of violence. One was the July 9 attack on the Sunni section of Jihad, in Baghdad, with 40 deaths reported. The second was in the north Babil town of Mahmudiya, where 50 Shi‘a were reported killed. These two events capture the extent to which the situation has spun out of control. Both sides act with impunity. On the one hand, Coalition and Iraqi government forces are unable to quell Sunni insurgent violence against civilians. On the other, widespread reports in

foreign media indicate that government security forces, who are largely Shi‘a, assist the Shi‘a death squads.

Views of the radical authorities

The views of hard-line political leaders are gaining ground. Each side believes his group was the initial victim of sectarian violence.

For hard-line Shi‘a leaders, the current conflict is but the latest chapter in their historical struggle against Sunni oppression.

> “The Shi‘a are being killed since the death of the prophet. In fact we can’t see any difference between the *’Amawiyeen* [the Umayyads, the first dynasty that consolidated power over the Islamic world following the murder of Imam Ali] and Saddam or the current radical Sunni leaders.”[6]

Indeed, many Shi‘a interpret the sectarian violence and ensuing displacement in the same vein as the former regime’s policies to change the demographic make-up of Iraq. They point to reports that Saddam gave land to Sunni tribes around Baghdad after the 1991 Shi‘a uprising to control the approaches to the city and ensure the safety of his regime. For them, the violence against Shi‘a in the “triangle of death” (north Babil) and in Baghdad’s western and southern approaches (Ghazaliya, Khan Dhari, Abu Ghraib, Taji, Madaen) is a continuation of that policy.

> “The [Sunni] plan is obvious for us. They want to eliminate the Shi‘a in Baghdad and Diyala so that they can establish their Taliban state in the Sunni areas.”[7]

Conversely, they justify violence against Sunnis and their forced departure from Shi‘a areas as a return to the *status quo ante*.

Hard-line Shi‘a politicians downplay the extent of anti-Sunni violence. They claim it only started in earnest after the Samarra bombing, and often refuse to acknowledge the magnitude of the killings. They even say that Sunnis are leaving Shi‘a areas voluntarily.

For hard-line Sunni Arab leaders, the very essence of the present situation is sectarian. They believe they are targeted for elimination in the ‘new’ Iraq, the creation of which many view as a plot hatched by the US and Iran – preposterous as this may sound – to replace the Hussein regime with a Shi‘a government and to jointly secure access to the oil of southern Iraq.

> “The conspiracy against the Sunnis is not only about the killings and the displacement against them. It’s the whole plan of Southern Federalism which

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[6] Interview, SCIRI official, Najaf.

[7] Interview, member of the Sadr Office, Shu‘ala (Baghdad).

> allows the Shi‘a political coalition to control the oil in the South and leaves the Sunnis isolated and poor… The Sunnis in the South are original residents there. Basra was a Sunni city for hundreds of years.”[8]

Sunnis explain that the violence started with Teheran-sponsored attacks on Sunni elites right after the war – a settling of old scores. It is true that many eminent Sunni university professors and military officers were assassinated in 2003, allegedly by the Badr Brigades, the armed wing of SCIRI. (The Mahdi Army has since assumed the role of number one enemy for the Sunni.) Sunni leaders – and here they reflect general Sunni opinion in Iraq – also assert that attacks by Coalition and Iraqi government forces on Sunni areas are in fact clear Shi‘a aggression against Sunnis, since Shi‘a make up the majority of the Iraqi Army units used in Anbar province, and US forces depend on information provided to them by the Iraqi forces.

Sunni officials acknowledge that attacks against Sunnis increased dramatically after the Samarra bombing. They also agree that it was the Mahdi Army (rather than SCIRI) who led the killings, with help, they allege, from Coalition and Iraqi government forces. It is critical to note here that Sunni officials who have engaged in the current political process (the Islamic Party and the Sunni Waqf Committee) acknowledge more readily the killings of Shi‘a in Sunni areas, though even they tend to think in terms of conspiracies:

> “We thought it would be a temporary wave of violence after the unfortunate incident in Samarra [the February 2006 bombing of the Shi‘a shrine]. But it seems now that it is an organized plan against the Sunni Arabs. This has led us to question who was really responsible for the Samarra bombing.”[9]

Groups that refuse the new system – the Association of Muslim Scholars, for instance – have for the most part long denied that any kind of aggression exists against Shi‘a communities.

How ordinary people view each other

The fact that full-scale civil war has not yet erupted between these communities bears witness to the resilience of Iraqi society in general, and especially to the forbearance of large (but not all) parts of Iraq’s Shi‘a communities.

Across the country, Sunni and Shi‘a interviewed for this research stressed that there is no civil war as long as ordinary people are not killing their neighbors. They agree that it is a war between radical extremists, and that civilians pay the price.

> “If the terrorists wear masks and the National Guard wear masks, how can normal people know who is protecting them and who is killing them?”[10]

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[8] Interview, Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) official, Mosul.

[9] Interview, Sunni Waqf Committee official, Baghdad.

[10] Interview, Sunni mosque imam, Dora (Baghdad).

Bonds that cross the sectarian divide remain within communities. For instance, interviews with Shi‘a displaced revealed that some Sunni families had sought to protect Shi‘a neighbors, and had then in turn been targeted by Sunni radicals.[11] Similar stories came from the other side: in one incident we were told about, a Sunni grocer was killed in Baghdad by Shi‘a thugs riding a van, and when his Shi‘a neighbor protested he, too, was murdered.[12]

Nevertheless, intolerance is spreading. For many Shi‘a, even those who oppose violence against Sunnis, it is acceptable to target extremists or the so-called *‘allaasa* – the snitches who chew you up (from *‘ilas*, ‘to chew’ and the related *‘allas*, ‘to talk out of the corner of one’s mouth’), the agents of the militias and armed groups who inform on others in the neighborhood.

In fact, the youth are one of the primary battlegrounds of the violence. Many young people have been targeted as alleged *‘allaasa*. Young people, who had long stayed away from sectarian violence, are becoming involved in the violence and are beginning to take sides.

The same is true with tribal structures: in a marked worsening of the social situation, various tribes across Iraq have started mobilizing for violence. Shi‘a tribes in the South are calling for revenge for relatives killed in Sunni areas.[13] Shi‘a communities in southern towns like Kerbala, Kut, Hilla and Basra view Sunni tribes that live in those areas as a source of support to the insurgents and therefore the sectarian violence. They are especially angered by the worsening violence in north Babil.[14] Conversely, Sunni tribes in north Babil have come together to defend themselves against what they say is a possible tribal attack from the south.[15] This is highly dangerous as open conflict between tribal groups would add an organized, popular and rural dimension to the problem of sectarian violence which has so far been mostly urban.

(At the same time, however, there are reports from north Babil that tribal delegations have been visiting each other across the sectarian divide in a bid to defuse the violence.[16] But this may in fact be further proof of how high tensions have risen.)

Tremendous mistrust has developed among communities, even in mixed neighborhoods. Suspicion is now no longer aimed merely as strangers and new-comers, but at neighbors, friends, even family.[17]

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[11] Interviews, Shi‘a displaced from Mosul and Falluja, interviewed in Diwaniya.

[12] Interview, local residents of Hayy al-Jaami‘a, Baghdad.

[13] Interviews, Shi‘a tribal leaders, Najaf and Nasiriya.

[14] Interview, Mahdi Army member, Ain al-Tamur (Kerbala).

[15] Interview, Islamic Party member, al-Iskandiriya (north Babil).

[16] Interviews (separate), Islamic Party official and Sadr Office official, Baghdad.

The mistrust and intolerance are also clear in the derogatory, dehumanizing terms people use to call people of the other group. In the street, Shi'a are called *shoroug*, a word traditionally used to describe certain southern tribes that carries connotations of a lack of education and morals. For Shi'a, Sunnis in general have become Wahabis, Takfiris and Salafis, referring to the more radical fringes of Sunni Islam – in essence the political moniker has extended to the ordinary citizen. The other slang word used by Shi'a to describe Sunnis is *'oujan* (singular *a'waj*, literally 'not straight').

At the political level, each group has highly insulting expressions for the other, often based on religious or historical references. Radical Sunni websites refer to Shi'a as *rawafidh* ('refusers' – those who refused the first three caliphs). Hard-line Sunni political leaders call Shi'a leaders *safawiyiin* (from the Persian Safavid dynasty, which highlights the Shi'a link to Iran). The name for radical Sunnis, and mostly used by Muqtada al-Sadr, is *nawasib* (literally 'enemies,' the enemies of the family of the prophet). Sunni leaders refer to the 'Black Militia,' meaning the Mahdi Army. On the street level, Sunni slang for the Mahdi Army (*jeish al-Mahdi* in Arabic) is *al-jeish al-wardi* – the Pink Army – in reference to pink hallucinogenic tablets, implying that its members are drug-addled thugs.

Radical armed groups drive sectarian displacement

The violence is neither spontaneous nor popular – radical armed groups are the main drivers of sectarian displacement in Iraq.

Displaced people view the most extreme religious fronts – the Office of Muqtada al-Sadr and the SCIRI on the Shi'a side, and the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) and the Islamic Party on the Sunni side – as the main culprits. Muqtada al-Sadr and Harith al-Dhari (the general secretary of the AMS) both speak of national unity. They even once enjoyed a cooperative relationship, especially in spring and summer 2004 when Muqtada's Mahdi Army rose up against Coalition forces. But it is clear that the major sectarian displacement campaigns are taking place in the areas they control (see below). And in an ominous development, some reports indicate that large swathes of the Mahdi Army now escape Muqtada's control, and are wreaking their violence in a manner that suits the agendas of local 'commanders.'[18]

Both sides use sectarian violence as a device to bolster their power and legitimacy. They are both seeking to consolidate their power for the long haul. The first rule is to impose order on one's own community. It is for instance unimaginable to speak out against Muqtada al-Sadr in Shu'ala or Sadr City, or against the insurgents (or the former regime, for that matter) in Falluja or Samarra, regardless of who one is.

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[17] See the powerful article on the Baghdad neighborhood of Tobji by Sudarsan Raghavan: "Distrust Breaks the Bonds of a Baghdad Neighborhood," *Washington Post*, 27 September 2006.

[18] Tavernise, Sabrina: "Cleric Said to Lose Reins Over Part of Iraqi Militia," *New York Times*, 28 September 2006; the report is based on a Coalition intelligence assessment.

Muqtada's initial moves against other Shi'a clerics and his alliance with the AMS damaged his popularity in many Shi'a circles. After the bombing of the Samarra shrine, the Mahdi Army sought popularity by organizing retaliatory violence against Sunnis. Governmental forces in poor Shi'a areas of Baghdad under the control of the Sadr Office are no counter-weight to this violence: they are either affiliated with the Sadr Office or afraid of the Mahdi Army, or both.

A new Sunni group has appeared, the Omar Brigades. It is a clear Sunni response to the Badr Brigades and the Mahdi Army (all names carry strong religious significance for both groups). The Omar Brigades enjoy strong sympathy among the population. One of the more notorious Shi'a street leaders goes by the name of Abu Diri' (shield). Many Shi'a we talked to consider him a hero.[19] (Interestingly, a member of military security notorious for his crimes against the Shi'a prisoners after the 1991 uprising used the same name.) Another violent Shi'a leader from Shu'ala is Abu Muqtada.

On the Sunni side, the AMS of Harith Suleiman al-Dhari first cast itself as an anti-occupation insurgency. But their language has since changed, and they now say their main enemy is the radical Shi'a – and all Shi'a by extension. Al-Dhari is the paramount tribal and religious leader in Sunni-dominated western Baghdad. Many Shi'a families in Khan Dhari sought his protection – which he promised – but at present these areas are all but cleared of Shi'a.

There are many parallels between the radical armed groups on both sides. Both seek to sow violence in areas where inter-communal relations remain good. Al-Washash, for instance, is a poor, mixed area near the upscale Baghdad neighborhood of Mansur, where relations between Sunni and Shi'a have remained good and radical sides from neither side hold sway. But in recent months many young people, both Shi'a and Sunni, have been killed by armed men. Several local residents told of a KIA van that was caught when residents set road blocks and check points. The people in the van confessed that they had been paid to kill young people from both sides.[20] Of course this story remains unconfirmed, but what is important is that people believe it to be true.

Both sides also use mosques for military operations, and both sides target the other community's mosques. For instance, many Sunni mosques in the South (every southern town has at least one and often several Sunni mosques) were attacked in retaliation for the attacks on the Samarra shrine. In another example, a car bomb exploded as it was being prepared inside the Abd al-Qadir al Jailani shrine complex (the Qadiriya *madrasa* and mosque, one of the most important Sunni places of worship in Iraq), in al-Rusafa in east Baghdad. One of the bombers was a police major, and the Ministry of Interior issued a statement about the incident.[21]

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[19] Ibid. (the *Times* articles spell his name Abu Dera).

[20] Interview with a mixed group of young people from the al-Washash (Baghdad).

[21] Statement nr.181, Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, 8 May 2006.

Iraqi security forces are heavily implicated in the violence against Sunnis. It is both widely reported and accepted that the Shi'a-run Ministry of Interior is deeply infiltrated by Shi'a militias and that Shi'a death squads often operate in police uniforms.[22] In Basra, there are rumors about a black Toyota sedan, known locally as *batta* (duck) that is used in attacks against Sunnis. A Basra resident told us that many people in Basra say that this *batta* is often seen at SCIRI offices or around police stations.[23] According to the *New York Times*, the term *batta* has become synonymous with the assassinations taking place.[24]

Even if they are not directly involved in the violence, the police are often powerless. One local resident recounted an incident in the Sha'b area of Baghdad, where he lives, where a group of armed men set up a mortar. They showed the police their Mahdi Army ID cards and the police stepped aside. After that, the men fired three mortar rounds towards the Abu Hanifa mosque in Adhamiya, the largest and most revered Sunni shrine in Baghdad.[25]

The brutality and the cruelty of the killings are hard to imagine. As is often the case with ethnic cleansing, it is clear that whoever is behind the violence wants displaced people to relinquish all thought of ever returning home. Our interviews brought stories of raped women, beheaded children and burned bodies. In Hilla, one man told of having lost 13 members of his family in Latifiya.[26] In Basra, many of the bodies found bear signs of torture with electric drills and broken bottles.[27] In east Baghdad, a man's body was found beheaded, with a dog's head sewn on it in its place.[28] Many Iraqis feel a new level of ferociousness has been reached. Whether or not it is, again what is important is that people believe it to be true.

The displaced: pawns in the political game

It is clear that the displacement helps further the political agenda of the radical groups on both sides. Given the central government's inability to defend people before they are attacked and forced to flee, or care for them after they have moved, the armed groups become both protectors and providers in the eyes of their people.

> "We [the Sadr Office] haven't seen anything from the Iraqi government to solve the problem of the displaced. We are doing our best to help them and

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[22] For a current overview of the problem, see Wong, Edward and Paul von Zielbauer: "Iraq Stumbling in Bid to Purge its Rogue Police," *New York Times*, 17 September 2006.

[23] Phone interview, Basra resident.

[24] Tavernise, Sabrina and Qais Mizher: "Iraq's Premier Seeks to Control A City in Chaos," *New York Times*, 1 June 2006.

[25] Interview with members of a local civil society organization, Baghdad; the incident allegedly took place in April 2006.

[26] Interview, Shi'a displaced person from north Babil, interviewed in Hilla.

[27] Interview with Sunni displaced from Basra, interviewed in Baghdad.

[28] Interview, Mahdi Army member, Sadr City, Baghdad.

> we promise we will protect them and will try to send them back to their home areas."[29]

The offer of protection and assistance helps the radical armed groups consolidate their political position – even if they do not always deliver.

Displacement movements may also play into internecine struggles within the sectarian groups. For instance, the Sadr Office is likely to benefit when poor, urban Shi'a displaced from Baghdad – people who are likely to support Sadr – settle in areas like Najaf and Kerbala where the Sadr Office is locked in struggle with SCIRI. The displaced then become pawns in the struggle. In Kerbala, Sadr supporters from Baghdad are taking over public and even some private land, with local residents claiming they aren't even true displaced. In Samawa (Muthanna province) the SCIRI governor promised the displaced he would distribute land east of the town (where there is already a camp); the Sadr Office claims this is mere SCIRI propaganda and says that it gave assistance to the displaced without any help from the local authorities.[30] In Diwaniya (Qadisiya province), a place where tension is high between Muqtada and SCIRI, displaced persons complained of the many police searches, allegedly done for their security but most likely to better control them.

Interestingly, however, when queried, people say that economic gain – for instance access to real estate at depressed prices, or the control of businesses or markets – is not a key factor in the radical groups' efforts to displace people. It is more a useful by-product of the violence than one of its driving motivations.

The question arises, then, whether radical groups in Iraq sometimes apply pressure on 'their' people to leave mixed areas or areas controlled by the opposing side and rally their 'territory' – in a bid to consolidate sectarian separation, increase the population under their direct control or simply reduce every-day interaction between communities. Groups seeking to undermine pluralistic societies have engaged in such practices in other parts of the world. In Bosnia for instance, following the Dayton peace accords, hard line Bosnian Serb authorities forced tens of thousands of fellow Serbs to leave the suburbs of Sarajevo they controlled before handing these areas over to the Bosnian Croat Federation (as required by the peace accord). In Iraq on the contrary, radical groups encourage members of their own sect to *stay* in contested areas, promising to protect them – even if they cannot. Mahdi Army officials said many times that one of their goals is to protect the Shi'a families especially in Baghdad.[31] For example, the Sunni fronts distribute flyers with information on how to pass for a Shi'a if caught by Shi'a militants – for instance by memorizing the names of the Shi'a imams, installing ring-tones based on Shi'a religious songs (*husayniyyat*) on mobile phones, or even changing one's name.[32]

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[29] Interview, Sadr Office official, Samawa.

[30] Interviews, local officials from the Sadr Office and local authorities, Samawa.

[31] Interviews, Mahdi Army officials, Sadr City (Baghdad) and Kerbala.

[32] Interviews, Islamic Party officials, al-Iskandariya (north Babil) and Baghdad.

One of the reasons the radical groups want their people to stay in the 'other's' territory is that they want to maintain a political presence wherever they can and secure a popular base there. Sunni political groups for instance are especially anxious to keep a presence in Basra, both because of the oil reserves in the south and because they worry that Shi'a federalism will relegate them to poor areas like Anbar, and the arid west in general. Also, both sides want to maintain as strong a presence in the capital as possible.

Few voices of moderation

There are few real voices of moderation. The radical armed groups call for national unity in the same breath that they vow total war on the other side. The pleas for calm and restraint by mainstream politicians are feckless. The current government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has so far proven unable to stem the violence. The Bush administration talks about the need to stop the violence but is unwilling to commit the troops and political capital necessary to do so.

The only national leader to have consistently and powerfully spoken out against the violence – and specifically against displacement – is Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. In past years, the Sistani Office has issued a number of statements, or *bayaanaat* (sing. *bayaan*) and responses to queries (*istiftaa'aat*, or fatwas) speaking out against sectarian violence. On 12 April 2005, he said (speaking to the Shi'a) that the Sunnis "are not your brothers, they are yourselves."[33] On 23 July 2004, Sistani spoke out against the attacks on Christian churches. In statements and fatwas issued on 25 September 2005, 22 February 2006 and 18 July 2006 he repeatedly condemned the violence as orchestrated by those he said want to divide and destroy Iraq. In the July 2006 statement, he spoke out against "sectarian chaos" (*fitna taa'ifiyya*), the "mutual violence" (*'onf mutaqaabil*) and "campaigns of forced displacement" (*hamlaat at-tahjiir al-qasri*).[34] The day before, Sistani had told a delegation of Shi'a from Baghdad, who were asking for permission to defend themselves against sectarian attacks, that "Iraqis cannot be terrorists."[35]

Two facts make Sistani's statements powerful. First, his following is strong among everyday Iraqis. Second, his moderation is recognized and well-established, unlike that of the armed radical groups who also call for Iraqi unity, but whose actions bespeak the contrary. Sistani is heralded as a voice of reason, at least among many Shi'a. A slogan popular among Shi'a these days proclaims "You [the Sunnis] are lucky because of Sistani" (*bikum bakhit bis-seyyid as-Sistani*). In interviews, traditional Shi'a leaders told us that Sistani's injunctions against sectarian violence were the only reason for their

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[33] *Al-Hayat*, 12 April 2005, http://www.daralhayat.com/arab_news/levant_news/04-2005/Item-20050411-33157272-c0a8-10ed-001a-141156b1468c/story.html.

[34] Sistani's statements can be found on his website at http://www.sistani.org/messages/, in several languages. The Arabic site is more accurate and up-to-date than the English or French. The statements quoted are dated, respectively, 5 Jumada al-thani 1425, 21 Sha'ban 1426, 23 Muharram 1427 and 22 Jumada ath-thani 1427. The quotes come from the latter.

[35] http://sistani.org/html/ara/news/?id=331.

restraint."[36] Nevertheless, Sistani's influence on the level of violence seems to be waning as that of radical Shi'a groups and younger and hard-line leaders grows.

Hot Spots of Violence and Displacement

Sectarian violence in Iraq and the ensuing displacement are, for the most part, urban phenomena, because cities are where different communities have mingled and lived together. All Iraqi cities are subject to some degree of sectarian violence. There is of course some variation.

Mixed areas

The more mixed an area is, the more sectarian violence there is likely to be. Baghdad, Mosul, the towns of Salah ad-Din province (Balad, Dujeil, Samarra), some towns of Diyala province (Baquba, Muqdadiya), the towns of northern Babil (Latifiya, Yusifiya, Mahmudiya) and Basra are thus cities where there is both high violence and high levels of sectarian-induced displacement. One exception seems to be Kirkuk, where tension is high between the city's Turkmen, Arab and Kurdish communities, and where significant political violence has taken place, but displacement levels there, at least according to our information, do not match those in other mixed cities, perhaps because of the strong political and military influence of the Kurdish parties. (The situation seems to be different, however, outside Kirkuk: some reports speak of the forced displacement, from areas under Kurdish control, of large numbers of Arabs whom the Saddam Hussein had settled in the North, sometimes forcibly.[37])

Sectarian harassment in the areas both immediately north and south of Baghdad started earlier than in other places – Samarra, Tikrit and other towns of Salah ad-Din province, as well as Ba'quba in Diyala province, to the north, and Yusifiya, Latifiya, Mahmudiya, Iskandariya (the so-called Triangle of Death of north Babil) to the south.

In Salah ad-Din province, most of the internally displaced are Sunnis who have arrived from other parts of Iraq since 2003, with a strong spike after the Samarra bombing (February 2006). They stay in the towns of Tikrit, Samarra, Siniyya, and al-Dur. A number of Shi'a have fled Sunni areas in Salah ad-Din and Diyala, finding refuge in the predominantly Shi'a towns of Balad and Dujail.[38]

North Babil is a strategically important area because it lies on the border between the Sunnis to the west and the Shi'a to the south. The urban centers are Shi'a, while the Sunnis tend to live on more rural areas. There are some displaced Sunnis from the South who mostly stay with their tribal kin, except for the football stadium camp in Mahmudiya

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[36] Interviews, Shi'a tribal leaders, Najaf and Nasiriya.

[37] For more on the displacement of Arabs from the Kurdish North, including sources, see the "Categories" section below.

[38] The town of Balad and Dujail are mostly Shi'a, while the outlying areas are mostly Sunni.

which is a displaced persons camp. Anti-Shi‘a violence has been especially horrific in north Babil as the Shi‘a have begun to retaliate in kind, and the tribal situation is tense.

Progressively, the violence has gained Baghdad. It is a miniature Iraq – all the country's diverse communities are represented in the capital. Some areas are majority Shi‘a, and others are Sunni. The center of Baghdad is mixed. Inhabitants believe, and events clearly indicate, that there are organized campaigns on both sides to create closed Sunni and Shi‘a areas, with radical groups on both sides blaming the other for the violence – while denying they are engaging in it. The Sunnis face harassment and aggression to leave Shu‘ala, Sha‘b, Sadr City and the areas with Shi‘a majorities (eastern Baghdad in general). Kadhimiya, an old Shi‘a neighborhood with a strong cosmopolitan feel on the western bank of the Euphrates, is now completely devoid of Sunnis. Sunni shops and businesses are all closed.

In recent months, the situation for Shi‘a in Baghdad's Sunni neighborhoods has grown almost as bad as in north Babil. Shi‘a are being forced from Ghazaliya, Khan Dhari, Abu Ghraib, Taji, Madaen (Salman Pak), Dura and the areas with a Sunni majority (western and southern Baghdad in general). These two waves of violence are now heading towards the center – the mixed neighborhoods along the Tigris River – and many people from both sides are now being targeted in the same neighborhood: al-Washash, Saidiya, Hay al-‘Amil.

Mosul, another mixed town, has also witnessed high levels of displacement, both as a place where the violence takes place, and as a destination of refuge. The city's large Kurdish and Christian communities have come under fierce attack from Sunni radical groups. The western side of town reportedly used to have a majority of Kurds and Christians (Hay Adan, Hay al-Karama, al-Bakr). Many of these families have now left, though some Christians are still arriving from Baghdad, especially in Karama. At the same time, Mosul has witnessed an influx of Sunni Arab displaced from Baghdad, Diyala, Salah ad-Din and Basra provinces, especially since the Samarra bombing. And Christian villages around Mosul have seen large numbers of Christians arrive from Baghdad and Basra. Local people agree that while the influx of Christians has remained steady, that of Sunnis is on the increase.[39]

Basra, finally, though overwhelmingly Shi‘a, has a long history as a port and cosmopolitan trading center, and as such had a strong presence of other groups, including Sunni Arabs, Kurds and Christians. These communities have long been under attack by the city's vicious Shi‘a militias.[40]

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[39] Interviews, local residents and authorities, Mosul.

[40] See the remarkable opinion piece published by freelance reporter Steven Vincent: "Switched Off In Basra, " *New York Times*, 31 July 2005. Vincent was working on organized crime and political violence in post-war Basra. He was murdered in Basra shortly after this article was published.

The presence of governance structures

Towns where there is some form of government at the local level witness less sectarian violence.

The main three towns in the North – Erbil, Sulaymania and Dohuk – enjoy some measure of stability as a result of functioning local governments and security forces, though the overwhelming majority of the residents in these towns are of course Kurdish. Recent press reports describe how the Kurdish provinces have become a destination of choice for Christians, Shi'a and Sunnis fleeing the violence in other parts of the country, including, paradoxically, former regime officials fleeing anti-Ba'th sentiment elsewhere.[41] According to these reports, the Kurdish authorities are concerned by the potentially destabilizing effect of large numbers of non-Kurds settling in their areas. Some local Kurds are fearful that the newcomers will bring with them the violence they fled further south, while others are simply not keen to see Arabs make a return to the area.

There have, however, also been reports of large numbers of Arabs fleeing the Kurdish North where they had been settled as part of the Ba'th's anti-Kurdish campaigns, as well as reports on the abuse of Christians and other minorities by Kurdish authorities and police.[42]

In the South, too, there are areas where the presence and effectiveness of local government are stronger than elsewhere in Iraq. As a result, there is less sectarian violence in towns such as Kerbala, Diwaniya (Qadisiya province) and Samawa (Muthanna province). Granted, these places are predominantly Shi'a, with few Sunnis to target. Nevertheless, the violence in places like Kerbala and Najaf is either highly political – the struggle between SCIRI and Muqtada al-Sadr's forces – or purely terrorist in nature, for instance the recent attacks against Iranian pilgrims.[43] The few Sunnis present are not actively targeted the way they are, say, in Baghdad's hard-line Shi'a neighborhoods. There are instances of wealthy Sunni families from Baghdad who have sought refuge in these areas, for instance living in rented accommodations in Kerbala. Some Sunni businessmen continue to do business in these areas.

Likewise, the areas where there are some working government institutions tend also to be the ones where the displaced are least neglected in terms of the assistance they receive.

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[41] See IRIN: "Iraq: Kurdish Government to Build Camps for IDPs," UN Integrated Regional Information Network, 29 August 2006, and Wong, Edward: "Iraqi Arabs See Unlikely Haven with Old Foes," *New York Times*, 2 September 2006. We did not visit the Kurdish areas for this research.

[42] See the section below on Arabs displaced from Kurdish areas.

[43] One bomb attack in early July killed 12 Iranian pilgrims near the Shi'a shrine in Kufa, just east of Najaf (BBC, 6 July 2006: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5152930.stm).

Towns that are no longer mixed

There are areas in Iraq where there is little sectarian violence for the simple reason that there are few communities left to expel. This is of course the case in most if not all of Anbar province: any Shi‘a family living in Anbar today is an exception, even an anomaly. Shi‘a cannot travel to Anbar, nor can they travel through Anbar – which means that the land routes to Jordan and Syria are totally forbidden to them. Many have been killed. The killings started with taxi- and lorry-drivers, then Shi‘a officials and personalities, and now all Shi‘a are targeted. Today, there are reported to be informal transfer points in the western sections of Baghdad where people can change vehicles, and merchandise are exchanged, or loaded from one lorry to another – so that persons and goods traveling west can do so with a Sunni vehicle and driver, and those traveling out of Anbar can proceed in a Shi‘a vehicle.

Other areas that were inhabited by one community only (such as Sadr City) or are becoming so (such as a number of formerly mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad) are subject to violence by outsiders. But this violence does not aim to displace people in those places as much as it seeks to whip up sectarian violence and spread insecurity, which may in turn lead to displacement. That is the reason there have been many anti-Shi‘a attacks (bombings, murders, kidnappings) in the Shi‘a neighborhoods of Baghdad.

Some areas that had been calm have become more volatile because of the surrounding insecurity. In Kut (Wasit province) for instance, where much of the violence since 2003 had been directed against Coalition forces or between SCIRI and Muqtada al-Sadr rather than against Sunni communities, there has been a spate of anti-Sunni violence because of massacres of Shi‘a in Madaen, a town northwest of Kut near Baghdad, and the scores of headless corpses that reportedly floated down the Tigris.[44]

Numbers

This research did not focus on numbers *per se;* several things, however, can be said:

- The only official numbers come from the Ministry of Trade, which manages the country’s rations. Displaced people must register for their rations – and most do, even those who are not living in camps. Based on Ministry of Trade figures, the Ministry of Displacement and Migration announced that, at the beginning of June, 27,000 families, or 162,000 people, had registered for assistance since the Samarra bombing on 22 February.[45] In September, the Ministry of Displacement

[44] Interview, SCIRI member, Kut.

[45] As reported in the international press on 20 and 21 July 2006 – see for example *Reuters* and the *New York Times*.

and Migration was reported to have said that 234,000 people had been forced to flee since Samarra.[46]

- These Ministry of Trade figures, however, may seriously underestimate the overall problem of displacement. Many displaced people do not register for rations, some because they lack the necessary documents, others because they have not done so yet or do not plan to. On the other hand, the figures do not specify the cause of displacement – sectarian violence, Coalition or Iraqi military operations, returning refugees who cannot regain their original homes. Thus, not all Ministry of Trade registered displacement can be ascribed to sectarian violence: included in the numbers released for people who have registered are thousands of people displaced by US military operations in Anbar (see above).

- The aid agencies working with displaced populations – especially the Iraqi Red Crescent, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and a handful of other international groups – deal mostly with the high-risk populations: those in camps (tents) or squatting in public buildings. This is only one portion of the overall caseload, and their estimates reflect this.

- Its focus on camps notwithstanding, IOM stated in a September 2006 report that its monitors had "assessed and report[ed] 29,559 families or 177,354 individuals displaced in Iraq since 22 February 2006," with the following break-down per province.[47]

Province	*Families*	*Individuals*
Anbar	5,177	31,062
Babylon	2,079	12,474
Baghdad	4,083	24,498
Basrah	768	4,608
Diyala	2,302	13,812
Kerbala	1,581	9,486
Missan	1,684	10,104
Muthanna	686	4,116
Najaf	1,610	9,660
Ninewah	1,521	9,126
Qadissiya	1,332	7,992
Salah ad-Din	1,873	11,238
Tameem	440	2,640
Thi-Qar	1,820	10,920
Wassit	2,603	15,618
Total	**29,559**	**177,354**

[46] Wong, Edward: "It's Moving Day, All Over Iraq," *New York Times*, 24 September 2006.

[47] International Organization for Migration: "Emergency Assessment: Displacement Due to Recent Violence (post 22 Feb[ruary] 2006), Central and Southern 15 Governorates," 25 September 2006 (on file with the Authors). These figures presumably also include some people who were displaced for reasons other than sectarian violence.

- It is important to remember that all numbers for internally displaced people in Iraq are politicized, especially those put out by the political parties.

For the sake of comparison, the number of Iraqis who left their country "since 2005" for Syria and Jordan, as refugees, has been estimated by one refugee rights organization at 650,000.[48] But one should bear in mind, on the one hand, that these numbers cover all those who left Iraq, whether because of sectarian violence or not, and on the other, that current estimates of the internally displaced in Iraq likely underestimate the extent of the problem.

Categories of People Displaced by Sectarian Violence

There are several different categories of people displaced by the sectarian violence.

Sunni Arabs from Shi'a areas

This is the group that has perhaps grown most dramatically since the Samarra bombing, and the vicious anti-Sunni reprisal attacks that followed it. Interestingly, harassment and violence against Sunnis in the Shi'a areas of Baghdad such as Sadr City, Shu'ala and Sha'b seem to be greater than in most of the southern cities – with the notable exception of Basra. A number of those interviewed suggested that the reason for this is the domination of the Mahdi Army in these areas.

Shi'a from Sunni areas

Historically there have been small Shi'a minorities who lived permanently in the major Sunni cities – merchants, shop-keepers, small businessmen, artisans and government employees. In addition, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, large numbers of rural Shi'a have moved to Sunni areas, including many neighborhoods of Baghdad, to work in farming, fishing and especially construction. These areas were favored by successive Iraqi governments and many enjoyed dynamic local economies. (Moreover, following the US invasion, some Shi'a Ba'thists and followers of the former regime sought refuge in Sunni areas.) In interviews, many ordinary Shi'a stressed that the harassment against them not only started early after the end of the war, but also that it was a continuation of the patterns of abuse of the 1990s.

In addition to the push factor – the violence threatening them – there is also a pull factor that explains why many Shi'a are now moving to Shi'a areas from Sunni strongholds: economic opportunity. Just as they had originally moved to these Sunni areas in search of jobs, they are now moving to the South and especially the middle Euphrates region

[48] US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, press release, Washington DC, 14 June 2006 (http://www.refugees.org/newsroomsub.aspx?id=1622). A total of 889,000 Iraqis moved abroad as refugees since 2003.

because there is some economic activity there due to the (relative) stability and the pilgrim-based shrine economy.

Arabs (Sunni and Shi'a) and other minorities from Kurdish areas

In the 1990s, the regime of Saddam Hussein initiated an aggressive anti-Kurdish Arabization campaign that relocated, often forcibly, tens of thousands of Arabs, both Sunni and Shi'a, to Kurdish areas in northern and northeastern Iraq (the figures remain unclear and could be far higher).[49] After the fall of the regime, many of these settlers were reported to have fled back to the Center and South, or were forced out by Kurdish authorities or the Peshmerga. While Kurdish groups exerted pressure and intimidation, and there were some acts of violence, there was nothing like the current Sunni-Shi'a violence. In 2004, Human Rights Watch reported that "the majority of the displaced Arab families" it had interviewed had left the North before the arrival of Kurdish fighters because of Coalition bombing, the proximity of frontlines, fears of revenge by Kurds and "in many cases the remarkable recognition that the land they lived on did not truly belong to them." Human Rights Watch also reported that Kurdish leaders were committed to reversing Arabization, but worked to prevent mass retaliation and violence, and that the organization was "not aware of a single massacre committed against Arab settlers by returning Kurds or other minorities."[50]

It is hard to know how many of these Arab displaced there are. The figure of 100,000 Arab displaced recurs, appearing in a 2003 UN report citing NGO surveys, then in a 2004 *New York Times* story citing US officials and most recently in an August 2006 opinion piece in the *Washington Post*.[51] Reports by IOM mention Arab families displaced from the North into the neighboring provinces of Tameem, Diyala and especially Ninewah and Salah ad-Din – and also Thi-Qar in the South.[52]

We encountered Arab displaced from Kurdish areas in almost all the cities we visited. Most of them were forced to move directly after the war – long before most of the displaced from the Sunni-Shi'a violence. Many of the Arab displaced returned back to their original towns and tribes, but some still occupy deserted governmental buildings or military compounds. Many have built houses on land that is not theirs – the government seems powerless to remove them. Not all live in their home areas: we met displaced in

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[49] Fawcett, John and Victor Tanner: "The Internally Displaced People of Iraq," the Brookings Institution, Washington, October 2002, pp.11-13 (http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/IDP/articles/iraqreport.pdf). The most comprehensive study is that of Nouri Talabany, *The Arabization of the Kirkuk Region*, Kurdistan Studies press, Uppsala, Sweden 2001.

[50] Human Rights Watch: "Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq," August 2004, pp. 3-4 and 28.

[51] UN Office for the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq (UNOHCI): "Iraq Crisis Update," 10 October 2003 (http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/7f62a7c29012a5bc49256dc900277ddc); Filkins, Dexter: "Northern Iraq; Kurds Advancing to Reclaim Land in Northern Iraq," *New York Times*, 20 June 2004; Byman, Daniel and Kenneth Pollack: "Iraq Runneth Over: What Next?," *Washington Post*, 20 August 2006 (this last piece gives no source).

[52] Phase II Iraq internal displacement monitoring reports, available at www.iom.org.

Najaf, Kerbala, Hilla, Kut, and Baghdad who were originally from Nasiriya and Amara and the Marshes. A smaller number of these displaced arrived more recently and have yet to adjust – some live with displaced from the Shi‘a-Sunni violence. Displaced who owned land and houses in the North want to go back, but they appear to know they will not be welcome, unlike other Arabs who are moving North.

The problem of the Arab expellees from the Kurdish areas, while potentially considerable in scope, remains a carry-over from the abuses of the previous regime, and is therefore different in nature from the issue of the Sunni-Shi‘a sectarian displaced, which is new, more widespread, and more violent.

There are also reports by Assyrian advocacy groups of abuse and discrimination of Assyrian and other non-Muslim minority populations at the hands of Kurdish authorities and security forces.[53]

Minority groups from both Sunni and Shi‘a areas

A number of minorities have been targeted in both Sunni- and Shi‘a-dominated areas.

Iraqi Christians have been targeted by Shi‘a radicals in Basra, by both Sunni and Shi‘a groups in Shi‘a, Sunni and mixed neighborhoods of Baghdad, and by Sunnis in Mosul and other areas in northeastern Iraq. In the run-up to the invasion, there were concerns in the West that Iraqi Christians would be targeted because of what many Iraqis perceived as their cozy relationship with the Ba‘thi regime. In fact, they are under attack from radical Sunni movements and Sunni insurgent groups who view them as allies of the occupying forces, or simply want to deal a blow to the concept of inter-communal harmony – and also because many liquor stores in Baghdad and Basra are, or were, Christian-owned. Following a spate of church bombings in August and November 2004, many Christians left Baghdad for Ninewah province. Christian families were also told that their daughters should wear the *hijab*. In the Shi‘a areas of Baghdad, the main suspect in the anti-Christian violence is the Mahdi Army. Attacks in Mosul town forced many Christians to move to the nearby Christian villages of Al-Kush, Taluskuf, Bighdida, and Birtilla. A few Christian families were displaced twice, in Baghdad and then in Mosul.[54]

The *Sabean-Mandean* community have been targeted both in Baghdad (mostly by Sunni radical groups) and in Basra (by Shi‘a). Some have found a refuge with the Sabean community in Nasiriya. For one Iraqi observer, this was proof that the broader problem of sectarian violence in Iraq is not a community-driven issue between Shi‘a and Sunnis, but rather an organized effort to target all ‘other’ communities, whoever they may be – in this case, the Sabeans.

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[53] See for example press releases from the Assyrian International News Agency (www.aina.org) such as, among others, “Kurds Block Assyrians, Shabaks From Police Force in North Iraq” (24 June 2006, http://www.aina.org/releases/20060624123753.htm)

[54] Interviews, residents and local authorities, Mosul and nearby Christian villages.

> "This problem is not about Shi'a or Sunnis. It's a conflict that outsiders started in Iraq. The Sabi'i Mindais [Sabean-Mandeans] are not Sunni nor Shi'a, but they are still being forced, by different people, to leave Baghdad and Basra and come here to Nasiriya."[55]

Many *Shi'a Turkmen* left their home areas in and around Mosul and Tal Afar (Ninewah) for Najaf and especially Kerbala, towns they were long familiar with from religious visits. They have faced even harsher violence than other internally displaced.[56]

The *Roma* are another group targeted in the sectarian violence. They came under attack soon after the fall of the regime in both Sunni and Shi'a areas – in fact, violence against Roma settlements were among the first recorded post-invasion sectarian incidents, but only few Coalition officials paid attention because they are such a small community in Iraq.[57] Many Iraqis consider that the Ba'thi regime favored the Roma, but people interviewed then said that plain prejudice is in fact a driving factor in the violence against them, notably the belief that the Roma community lives off prostitution and alcohol trading. Many Roma currently live in the former military camps of al-Rasheed in eastern Baghdad and Abu Ghraib, on the western outskirts of the town.

Baghdad and Basra Kurds, who have lived in that city for generations, have been targeted by both groups for being either Sunni or Shi'a (the majority of Kurds are Sunni, but there are also sizeable Kurdish Shi'a communities, such as the Fa'ili Kurds). Numerous Kurds have also been forced to flee Mosul, though here the focus seems to be on their Kurdish identity, as Mosul Kurds are for the most part Sunni and they are being driven out by Sunni extremist groups.

Finally, *third-country nationals*, especially Palestinians, have been targeted (mostly by Shi'a gunmen) in Baghdad districts such as Hurriya because of their alleged ties to the former regime. Palestinians are also overwhelmingly Sunni. Human Rights Watch has reported numerous attacks and threats against Palestinians since the Samarra bombing.[58]

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[55] Interview, Communist party official, Nasiriya. The Iraqi Communist Party was historically one of the most vibrant communist parties in the Arab world before being decimated by Saddam Hussein's security agencies. Today, Communist Party members are often regarded as among the more reasonable actors on the current political scene and – perhaps because of that – are again under attack in the new Iraq, especially in Basra where the Party has a long tradition.

[56] Interviews, local residents (Mosul and Kerbala) and Shi'a Turkmen displaced from Tal Afar (Kerbala). It should be noted that Turkmen in Kurdish controlled areas in the North, especially Kirkuk, have experienced harassment and some violence, see Human Rights Watch: "Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq" August 2004, pp. 54-5; and Fainaru, Steve and Anthony Shadid, "Kurdish Officials Sanction Abductions in Kirkuk," *Washington Post,* 15 June 2005.

[57] Note for the Record on abuses of Roma communities around Baghdad presented to the US Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) by the USAID/OTI Abuse Prevention Unit, Baghdad, June 2003 (on file with the Authors). The memo was prepared at the behest of Mike Hess, a senior ORHA official, whose experience in Kosova in 1999-2000 had led him to be especially concerned about abuses against Roma.

[58] Human Rights Watch: "Nowhere to Flee: The Perilous Situation of Palestinians in Iraq," September 2006, pp. 24-28.

The organization also recently said it has obtained a flyer by a radical Shi'a group called the al-Bayt Revenge Brigades that states that "there is no place for Palestinians in the Iraq of Ali, Hassan and Hussein."[59]

Sudanese are another group of concern. There were large numbers of Sudanese in Iraq, guest-workers, but also students and petty traders who ended up stranded by the war. Many have no way of getting home, and some come from areas that are hard to return to, such as the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile and especially Darfur. Traditionally, Sudanese have been welcome in Iraq and well-liked, and previous research indicated that they did not seem to be targeted.[60] But reports of alleged attacks against Sudanese raise concerns that the violence may be catching up with them, especially in the Mahdi Army-dominated areas of Baghdad (Sudanese Muslims are Sunni). For instance, one international aid agency reported in early 2006 that 28 Sudanese families "displaced due to religious and ethnic tension" were living in "a temporary camp in Anbar."[61]

Sunni Arabs from conflict areas

Sunni Arabs from conflict areas are families who left their home areas in Sunni strongholds because of the continuous fighting between insurgents and US forces, or because of military offensives by US and Iraqi government forces. They usually move to calmer Sunni areas, to Baghdad or to the Kurdish North. Most of these displaced say they intend to go back to their original places after the military situation calms down. As noted earlier, the fighting is a major cause of internal displacement in Iraq, and at least one advocacy group on internal displacement issues says it could be the most important current cause of displacement in Iraq.[62]

The conflict area Sunni Arabs are a borderline category as far as sectarian displacement goes: Coalition military operations, not sectarian strife, are the cause of their displacement. But what is striking is that many Sunni Arab war-displaced actually view themselves as displaced by sectarian tensions, for two reasons. First, they view US efforts to assert control over Sunni areas as part of a Shi'a plot to control Iraq. Second, and more specifically, Iraqi government forces that fight alongside Coalition forces are for the most part Shi'a.

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[59] Human Rights Watch: "Iraq: Palestinians Targeted With Death Threats" (press release), 6 October 2006. Shi'a sometimes refer to themselves as *ahl al-bayt* (people of the house [of the prophet]) because they believe that, upon the death of prophet Mohammed, the caliphate should have passed through his cousin Ali and the latter's two sons Hussein and Hassan ("shi'a" is an abbreviation for *shi'at 'Ali*, or partisans of Ali).

[60] Tanner, Victor and Anonymous: "Revenge Killings in Iraq: Nature and Extent of the Problem," USAID, Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), Baghdad/Washington, 2004, p. 7.

[61] International Organization for Migration (IOM): "Anbar Phase II Monitoring [of internally displaced] October 2005 – January 2006," (http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/idpReports/Anbar%20Phase%20II%20IDP%20Report.pdf#search=%22%22phase%20II%20monitoring%22%20anbar%20IOM%22) – the report gives no further details.

[62] Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), see note 3 above.

(It should be noted that numerous Shi'a residents of Najaf and surrounding areas were also displaced in the violent clashes between US forces and the al-Mahdi army in 2004. Most of these people were, however, able to return to their homes soon after the fighting; unlike Sunni war-displaced, they did not see themselves as sectarian displaced, but rather as people displaced by clashes between outsiders -- the Americans and the al-Sadr forces, because few al-Mahdi army combatants were from Najaf town.)

Conditions of Departure

The direct reasons for the displacement are varied but all hinge around violence, fear and intimidation.

General (as opposed to personal) intimidation and rumor-mongering

This often takes the form of threatening graffiti. In Sunni strongholds, an often-viewed graffiti is "No Shi'a after today" (*la shi'a ba'd al-yawm*). This ominous expression is especially threatening because it was often scribbled on the tanks of Iraqi armor units during the Ba'thi regime's ferocious repression of Shi'a areas following the Shi'a uprising of 1991.[63] In Basra, a common graffiti declares that the Sunni must leave the city after July; one interviewee explained this, in somewhat puzzling fashion, as saying that Sunnis were to leave after the end of the school year.[64]

Rumor plays an important role in people's decision to flee. Every Iraqi will explain that rumors control the street: more attention is often paid to rumor than to any kind of media, local or international. All Iraqi media outlets are partisan, or at least they are considered as such by the people. Al-Iraqiya, the official state TV station, is considered to be a Shi'a station by many Sunnis and as such is distrusted. This matters because rumors are an important factor in driving displacement. Several people interviewed pointed out that occasional rumors of the authorities organizing a forced return of displaced to Baghdad neighborhoods have led people who are displaced nearby to seek refuge further afield.

The stories of the violence are so pervasive – it is probable that there are few Iraqis who do not know someone who has been a victim of violence – that for some people, just living in a given neighborhood or carrying a certain name is enough to want to leave.

> "I was targeted because my name was Omar. The Mahdi Army is arranging a campaign in Baghdad to kill people with such Sunni names. I know many people who are using different names to avoid the killing or who have two

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[63] Makiya, Kanan: *Cruelty and Silence – War, Tyranny, Uprising, and the Arab World*, W.W.Norton and Co., New York, 1993, p. 96.

[64] Interviews, Sunni displaced from Basra, interviewed in Baghdad.

> IDs. My Shi'a friends advised me to change my name to Ammar, but I preferred to leave."[65]

Increases in violence

In situations of forced displacement and ethnic cleansing, there is always a moment when the targeted communities realize that the threat of violence is real and that there is no resisting it. Once this happens, the pace of displacement increases as less effort is required to convince the victims that they need to flee. That point was reached long ago in Iraq. People believe that the worst can happen, and any local uptick in the violence – killings, abductions, threats – is a clear trigger for displacement.

Violence against leading members of the community, another key component of ethnic cleansing campaigns, is common. In Basra, for instance, Sunni clerics and university professors have been prime targets of kidnapping and assassination campaigns. In some cases the violence is so egregious that its impact goes beyond the local and becomes country-wide, like the bloody Mahdi Army retribution in Baghdad following the Samarra shrine bombing, or the recent brutal attack on the market of Mahmudiya, thought to have been carried out by Sunni insurgents.

Targeted threats and intimidation

Often admonitions, threats and hints are delivered personally. This can include 'advice' from a friend or neighbor ("this is not a good place for you now," "I was at a meeting and I heard your name mentioned," "someone told me to tell you that you should move your family away"), obviously delivered with varying degrees of sincerity. Another frequent occurrence are threatening letters, notes, flyers or pamphlets delivered to individual households, usually at night (the authors have a copy of a Shi'a such letter, delivered by the Mahdi army in Baghdad in June). In Iskandariya (north Babil), people interviewed described how Shi'a residents would periodically find their names and associated threats on banknotes that were circulating in the local market.[66]

Another vehicle for delivering threats are phone calls and text messages on mobile phones – these are particularly unnerving when one is targeted by name because it means the caller knows things about you such as your phone number. There has been a rash of such threats in universities.[67]

More threatening yet is a personal message delivered by gunmen, usually masked, who come to a house to tell people to leave. Many people interviewed for this research, both displaced and residents, say they knew who the masked men were, despite the disguise.

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[65] Interview, young Sunni displaced, Mosul. See also: Wong, Edward: "To Stay Alive, Iraqis Change Their Names," *New York Times*, 6 September 2006.

[66] Interviews, Shi'a displaced persons, Hilla.

[67] Interviews, students at the College of Fine Arts, Baghdad.

Finally, the ultimate message is actual violence – the abduction, mistreatment or murder of one or more family members. Sometimes this happens after prior threats and warnings have gone unheeded. Sometimes, murder is the first threat. In the course of this research, at least 10 Shi'a displaced were interviewed who had lost more than one member of their family in this manner.

Administrative displacement

Some Sunni displaced interviewed think that the Shi'a-dominated government is encouraging the Sunni exodus from Shi'a areas through the administrative manipulation of government jobs and benefits. For instance, a Sunni teacher from Basra told how he and 12 other teachers had been transferred north even though there was not staff to cover for them in their Basra school. He was given no reason. Other ways include harassment by the (mostly Shi'a) police, including the arrest of Sunni citizens who are only released if they agree to leave the area.[68] Such claims ring true as hard-line parties like SCIRI *are* the government in cities like Najaf and Basra. They can do as they want: for instance they can have a chief of police changed without orders from Baghdad, let alone transfer low-level employees.

Other Patterns of Displacement

In Iraq, the main pattern of displacement focuses on the consolidation of territory: in essence, people flee to areas where they feel safer. Shi'a go to Shi'a areas. Sunnis go to Sunni areas. Kurds go to the northern provinces and Christians go to parts of Ninewah province. (And most of those who can leave the country do.) The result is that hard-line authorities then hold sway over cleansed territories.

Other patterns of displacement exist as well.

Micro-displacement and nighttime displacement

Many people, especially in Baghdad and Basra, have not moved away from their homes yet, either because the violence has not reached them, or because they do not have the money necessary or do not want to leave their job, or because of their children's schools, or because they take care of aging relatives. Some people simply refuse to leave the place they have always lived in. These people try to adjust their lives as best they can to ensure some measure of security. One of the things some people do is to sleep in different places so as to avoid a pattern.

Daylight displacement

Not everyone has moved, of course, but the great majority of people no longer lead their normal lives. Parents no longer go to their usual work. Children no longer go to their

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[68] Interviews, Sunni displaced from Basra, Baghdad.

usual school. People shop in different markets, take different routes on different means of transport, and so on. All this because of fear of sectarian attacks. This may not be displacement *per se*, but it is a form of pre-displacement: one fears that a far greater proportion of the population could suddenly become displaced were the situation to grow just a little bit worse.

Repeat-displacement

According to our interviews, very few people among those displaced by sectarian violence have had to move a second time. Generally, they seek and find safety at their destination – their community's strongholds. (People displaced by military operations, on the other hand, are far more likely to be displaced repeatedly.) Some repeat displacement has occurred around government-supported return operations which encouraged people to go home to their original areas – for instance in Iskandariya (north Babil) and Tal Afar (Ninewah) – but many of them left again.

'Fake' displacement

There are reports in several southern cities, but especially in Kerbala, of people pretending to be displaced and building houses on governmental land and sometimes even on the land of local people. Some genuine displaced families have resorted to this because of the high prices of properties and rent. The 'fake' displaced are often supporters of the radical Shi'a groups, especially of Muqtada al-Sadr, and are resented by local residents.[69]

How Do People Cope?

The majority of the displaced stay with kin, with friends or simply with people from the same community they come from. Others squat in public buildings like schools and abandoned military camps. It is estimated that the proportion of the displaced in camps is far smaller than that in host families. In early June, a report from IOM estimated the number of displaced families in camps at around 200, based on visits by IOM partners to "every camp known to currently exist in Iraq."[70] At the end of August, monitors for an IOM follow-up assessment "found the situation in the camps had remained unchanged from the June 1 report. There are very few IDPs who [elect] to stay in camps due to lack of infrastructure (no electricity, water), increased insecurity, and because it is contradictory to Iraqi culture (which focuses on family and its support for family members, and [where] living in such close quarters with strangers is not accepted)."[71]

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[69] Interview, local residents, Kerbala.

[70] International Organization for Migration: "IDC Camp Assessment Report - Iraq," 1 June 2006: pp. 1-2 (on file with the Authors).

[71] E-mail correspondence to the Authors from Dana Graber, Monitoring and Reintegration Officer, IOM Iraq IDP program, 27 September 2006.

The displaced in camps are the worst off because of the basic nature of these settlements and especially because of the poor water and sanitation conditions that lead to high levels of waterborne disease. This is especially clear with the many middle Euphrates people who fled Baghdad and north Babil and who have found shelter with their fellow tribesmen in Najaf, Kerbala and other middle Euphrates towns – they are far better off than the people who remain in camps.

Most of the collective camps started as unorganized squatter settlements. In Kut, displaced people occupy the deserted military camps and some parks. The same situation prevails in east Baghdad. In Diwaniya, displaced families have settled in an abandoned amusement park eight kilometers from the city. In Kerbala, displaced people from Tal Afar live in a former hotel, the Kerbala Tourism Hotel, that was used and abandoned by Polish Coalition troops, as well as in a school in Ain al-Tamur, some 80 kilometers from Kerbala city. In Najaf, numerous displaced live in the old cemeteries that ring the town; some also occupy governmental buildings. In Falluja, displaced people live in a number of schools and also in a soccer field. In most of the provinces, the government and the Red Crescent are building camps for the displaced.

For the most part, families seem to have stayed together. This may be a factor of the poor economy – were jobs to materialize in greater numbers, men might start migrating to them. But as things stand today, the only jobs are in secure areas, where people tend to go anyway – the South and the Kurdish North.

One important social impact of displacement seems to be increasing child labor. In the course of this research, many children selling things in the street and begging were visible in Sadr City and Kerbala. In Samawa, a local human rights organization recently wrote a report to the governor on the topic.[72] It should be noted, however, that the phenomenon does not only concern the children of displaced families – child labor has been on the rise across Iraq since the international sanction regime came into effect in the 1990s.[73]

To obtain a ration, displaced people must register with the Ministry of Trade, through municipal authorities. At first, they did not need any form of documentation do to so. Subsequently, as numbers grew and with it rumors that some of the displaced were terrorists in disguise, authorities demanded some proof of displacement in order to register. Such proof could be one of several documents: a death certificate showing that relatives had been victims of violence; a rental lease or house deed for a property in another place that is subject to sectarian strife (for instance a Shi‘a person with a lease from west Baghdad, or a Sunni person with a deed from Basra); or a permission from the Ministry of Interior to move family goods between towns, which is a requirement at police check-points. For a number of reasons – lack of documentation, insecurity, lack of trust in the authorities – many displaced apparently do not register, especially people who

[72] Interview, local human rights organization staff, Samawa.

[73] IRIN: “Iraq: NGO Warns of Rising Rates of Child Labour,” UN Integrated Regional Information Network, 15 June 2006.

can avoid the camps because they have relatives they can stay with or simply because they can afford to live without help. According to both observers and people interviewed, pride often plays a role in that decision.

The difficult living conditions trigger much anger against the government, on both sides. Displaced people are angry that the government provides neither security nor basic services. These views mirror those of the population at large, as it, too, suffers from insecurity and poor social infrastructure. Displaced people have demonstrated against the authorities in the southern towns of Diwaniya (around February 2006), Kut and Samawa.[74]

Local authorities are acutely aware of this. They have worked with national authorities to streamline the food ration system, and especially to accelerate the transfer of the ration from the place of origin to the place of displacement. Some displaced report progress, while others continue to say they receive no ration. Levels of unemployment among the displaced are very high, and for those who are unemployed, receive no ration and live in camps (as opposed to with a host family), life is very hard. Those who left property behind will normally try to rent it to someone from the other community whom they trust, but will often have to do so at a discount.

A certain number of governmental and private institutions assist the displaced.

- Government ministries include the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, which works with national aid agencies such as the Iraqi Red Crescent; the Ministry of Trade which is responsible for the rations; and the Ministry of Interior which provides the necessary documentation.[75] Having said that, the central government is weak, ineffective, corrupt and largely divided along sectarian lines. Other than the Ministry of Trade, the role of national-level ministries in the everyday life of the displaced is minimal, with the partial exception of the Ministry of Education which has assisted with the registration of the children of displaced families in local schools throughout the country.

- Local authorities at the provincial and district level are far more effective. Every province has a displaced committee (*lajnat muhajjarin*), normally chaired by the deputy governor of the province and an operations room (*ghurfat 'amaliyat*) to deal with local issues such as registration, shelter and employment. In some provinces, there are operations rooms in smaller towns: in Kerbala province, for instance, there are such centers in Ain al-Tamur, Aun, Tuairiij and Kerbala town. The effectiveness of these institutions is uneven. In more stable areas, where some form of public administration exists and government agents can at least

[74] Interviews, deputy governor in Diwaniya (Qadisiya province) and local human rights organization staff in Kut and Samawa, respectively.

[75] The Arabic name of the ministry is *wazaarat al-muhajjariin wal-muhaajiriin* – this translates literally as "Ministry of Displaced and Migrants" (the two words are close in Arabic), which is the name on the ministry website (http://www.iraqi-modm.org/index.htm).

organize themselves and move around, the level of assistance to the displaced is higher – for instance in towns like Kerbala, Najaf, Samawa and Hilla.

- Sectarian agencies include the Sistani Office, SCIRI's Shahiid al-Mihrab organization, the Sadr Office and the related mosques on the Shi'a side, and the Association of Muslim Scholars, the Islamic Party and the related mosques on the Sunni side. Most of these groups are radical in their outlook (with the exception of the Sistani Office), and are aggressive in their aid. In Najaf, for instance, the clerical offices of all four grand ayatollahs, SCIRI's Shahiid al-Mihrab and the Sadr Office are all providing assistance (the Sadr Office through some of the city's major mosques, such as al-Kufa and al-Zahraa.). In Kerbala, a room has been set up in Imam Husayn's shrine where people can make donations for the displaced. In Salah ad-Din province, the Association of Muslim Scholars, the Islamic Party and the al-Israa' Islamic Association are all vying to support the displaced.

- The Iraqi Red Crescent is the primary national aid agency dealing with the displaced. They work mostly in the camps and collective settlements. Many Shi'a distrust the Red Crescent because they identify it with the former regime – it was considered a very Ba'thi non-governmental organization – but it remains the only non-sectarian group with a real organization and a country-wide presence.

- Local communities sometimes also support the displaced through informal committees in neighborhoods and local mosques. In Mosul for instance, families in the Karama neighborhood formed a local committee to help displaced people in their area. In the Christian villages around Mosul, local churches organized to assist Christian displaced families from Baghdad and Mosul.[76] In Falluja and Samarra, clerics and local mosques – many of them are affiliated with radical Sunni groups – have organized assistance for Sunni displaced families. In Samarra, local merchants have organized assistance, while in Falluja, the Anbar Council of Tribal Leaders (*majlis shuyuukh 'ashaa'ir al-Anbar*) and students from Anbar University are trying to assist.[77] Throughout southern Iraq, the plight of the displaced seems very important to local people. Even people displaced by previous wars did not enjoy such sympathy.

- International assistance is, in the greater scheme of things, minimal and also not very visible, because of the security situation. IOM provides assistance to the camps, and is coordinating the elaboration of guidelines that appear thought-through. The International Committee of the Red Cross also provides some assistance to the camps, through the Iraqi Red Crescent. A small number of international NGOs continue to work in various parts of the country, especially the North. USAID reports its Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has provided monies to assist IDPs to IOM ($20 million only for IDP activities), the

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[76] Interviews, local residents, Mosul.

[77] Interviews, residents and local officials, Falluja and Samarra.

> International Medical Corps, CARE, Save the Children (US), the International Rescue Committee, International Relief and Development and Mercy Corps (but it is unclear when these monies were received in the 2003-2006 period or what exactly they went to as "IDP" is often one activity listed among others per recipient).[78]

Displaced persons, both Shi'a and Sunni, consider, albeit for different reasons, the central government to be thoroughly ineffective. "The government cannot protect itself, how could we believe it could protect us?"[79] Shi'a tend to see the government as powerless. They often say that the Americans are the real rulers of Iraq but are, in their eyes, anti-Shi'a out of dislike for Iran and because of the influence of Sunni-dominated countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt. On the Sunni side, mistrust of the Iraqi government is even greater: Sunnis see the government as a US- and Iran-backed Shi'a entity with powerless Sunni faces. Local authorities and local police are far more accepted than national authorities or the national guard.

Prospects for the Future

The sectarian violence between Shi'a and Sunni has grown dramatically in Iraq in recent months – the politically motivated work of radical armed groups on both sides. The dehumanization of the 'other' community is evident from the targeted killings, organized terror, and systematic eviction campaigns. The violence in Iraq is in fact reminiscent, on both sides, of the dynamics of sectarian violence and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the Great Lakes of Central Africa, the Caucasus, Sudan and other great human rights disasters of the past 15 years. But the violence is neither spontaneous nor popular in nature. It is a war waged by armed groups against the other side's civilians. What has changed, however, is that Shi'a restraint, so conspicuous throughout 2004 and much of 2005, diminished dramatically following the Samarra attack.

Radical groups on both sides benefit from both the violence and the displacement. They consolidate their territory, pose as the protectors of their people and act to supply assistance to the displaced which the government is most often incapable of organizing. Tracking the numbers of displaced and assisting them have become highly politicized.

The violence and displacement are essentially an urban phenomenon. Overall numbers remain unclear because of the unreliability of the registration process. But most people believe that the official government of Iraq figures understate the problem, as many displaced people live with kin and have not registered with the authorities.

Many more people are teetering on the edge of displacement in Baghdad and Basra and the mixed areas of north Babil, Diyala and Salah ad-Din, where violence is extreme.

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[78] US Agency for International Development: "USAID/Iraq Bi-Weekly Update," 25 September 2006 (http://www.usaid.gov/iraq/updates/sep06/iraq_fs42_092506.pdf).

[79] Interview, Shi'a displaced person, Sadr City (Baghdad).

These people have not moved yet, and they are trying their best to adapt to the insecurity by changing their patterns of life. But should the situation worsen just a little bit, whole populations could suddenly be on the move.

Prospects for the future appear dim. Most of the displaced people we talked to, across the country, Sunni and Shi‘a, told us that sectarian displacement was on the rise. The recent escalation in sectarian violence and displacement is real, but people see it as the continuation of past trends. Shi‘a point to Ba‘thi policies in the early 1990s to ensure a Sunni belt around Baghdad. Sunnis say it is part of a broader Shi‘a plan to take over Iraq and relegate them to the position of a powerless minority. Displaced people – and other Iraqis – do not view their displacement as a transitory phenomenon, one that an improvement in security conditions could overcome. Increasingly they see their displacement as a reflection of deep-seated political divisions in the country.

Prospects for return are dim. Displaced people link return to security. But the current scope of violence makes return impossible.[80] People’s plans for return depend of course on the type of violence they have witnessed – and many have witnessed extreme violence. Some people who own property or businesses or have jobs to return to may want to go back, but no one believes this will happen soon. Poorer displaced, people who worked in menial jobs and rented accommodation, are often seeking to build anew in their area of displacement. It is likely that sectarian violence is causing lasting change to Iraq’s social and demographic make-up.

That is what the radical armed groups on both sides seek to achieve – and they are succeeding.

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[80] A June 2006 IOM document states that “most [displaced] perceive their displacement as quasi-permanent” (International Organization for Migration: “Guidance Note: Housing and Assisting the Newly Displaced and Their Communities (draft),” 6 June 2006, p. 6 – on file with the Authors).