SECURITY, DISPLACEMENT AND IRAQ: A DEADLY COMBINATION

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Executive Summary

Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, millions of Iraqis have been forced to flee their homes. They have fled from coalition military operations, widespread sectarian violence, and fear. Today there are around 2 million Iraqis displaced inside their country and another 2 million displaced beyond the national borders, the bulk of them in Syria and Jordan. As the security situation continues to deteriorate inside Iraq, human displacement escalates to levels unparalleled in the region since the Palestinian displacement nearly sixty years ago.

Humanitarian assistance to Iraqis has become one of the largest and most complex humanitarian operations in the world. The international aid community has tried to draw international attention to the often-desperate plight of the war's victims and to mobilize international assistance to respond to their needs. But their discussions are largely outside the attention span of those writing from the perspective of national security who, when they have paid attention at all to Iraq's displaced, have tended to talk in terms of the need to "contain" the spillover of Iraq's problems in the region and to prevent the de-stabilization of the region by the presence of refugees. The two communities are largely speaking past one another and rarely engage each other in discussing the links between security and humanitarian issues. Nowhere in the world are these linkages more important than in the present humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

This study examines the relationship between security and displacement in Iraq by first exploring implications of the large-scale displacement on Iraq's domestic security. It then considers the impact of the external displacement on the security of two of Iraq's neighbors: Jordan and Syria. For Iraq, national security is compromised by both refugee flows and internal displacement. The exodus of Iraq's professionals has led to severe brain drain, hitting the health, education, and government sectors particularly hard. This will have serious implications for Iraq's ability to rebuild the country when the violence decreases. Internal displacement is resulting in ethnic and sectarian homogenization of the country, and displaced communities are increasingly vulnerable to violence, kidnappings, and control by militias. Displacement is both a consequence and a cause of sectarian polarization in the country. Jordan and Syria now face internal security threats related to the immense economic burden of hosting the Iraqi populations, new sectarian demographics, tension among host and refugee populations as well as across sectarian divides, the potential of increased regime opposition, and the possibility that refugees will be recruited into armed militias if humanitarian assistance isn't sufficient to meet their needs.

At the regional level, there are now multiple and overlapping displacements in the Middle East, and the Iraq emergency must be examined within this context. The long-standing Palestinian refugee crisis impacts the behavior of refugees and host states alike. There are also potential impacts on the Sunni-Shi'a relationship and, in the case that neighboring states become destabilized, the balance of power throughout the region.

The study concludes with a discussion of the implications of this impact for US foreign policy. Specific recommendations for the US government include the following:

- *Put humanitarian issues on the US agenda for Iraq*
- *Play a leadership role in mobilizing more humanitarian assistance for Iraq's war-affected civilian population, internally displaced persons and Iraqi refugees living in neighboring countries.*
- *Appoint a Humanitarian Czar for Iraq*
- *Make protection a priority.*
- *Work with the UN*
- *Plan for the long-term*
- *Engage with Syria*

The paper argues that humanitarian assistance to Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees is in the interest of security – as well as a compassionate response to people who have lost almost everything.

In the mainstream public debates over the Iraq war, there has been little discussion of the humanitarian consequences of the conflict: the large number of civilian victims, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). This may be because the victims are largely invisible to Western media. Inside Iraq, efforts to count the number of Iraqi civilians who have been killed or wounded have been difficult and often disparaged.[1] The nightly newscasts in the US highlight the number of casualties among US troops, but rarely the number of Iraqis killed or maimed, except for occasional reports of death tolls at the hands of suicide bombers. Both those internally displaced and refugees who have sought protection in neighboring countries are living in urban areas, often with family and friends, rather than in camps. There seems to be a general perception that because the Iraqis are not massed together in visible refugee camps that they are surviving on their own and not a cause for international concern.

While largely absent from mainstream media coverage of the war, the needs of Iraqis displaced by the war are a major concern of the humanitarian community. In fact, humanitarian assistance to Iraqis has become one of the largest and most complex humanitarian operations in the world. Humanitarian organizations, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and many international NGOs have tried to draw international attention to the often-desperate plight of the war's victims and to mobilize international assistance to respond to their needs. But their discussions are largely outside the attention span of those writing from the perspective of national security who, when they have paid attention at all to Iraq's displaced, have tended to talk in terms of the need to "contain" the spillover of Iraq's problems in the region and to prevent the de-stabilization of the region by the presence of refugees.[2] The two communities are largely speaking past one another and rarely engage each other in discussing the links between security and humanitarian issues. Nowhere in the world are these linkages more important than in the present humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

This study examines the relationship between security and displacement in Iraq by looking at the security implications for Iraq of the wide-scale displacement of its population and then by considering its impact of this displacement on the security of two of Iraq's neighbors: Jordan and Syria. This is followed by consideration of the regional impact of Iraq's displaced populations and by a discussion of the implications of this impact for US foreign policy. The study concludes with the argument that humanitarian

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[1] For example, the studies conducted by John Hopkins School of Public Health and Al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad (Les Roberts, Riyadh Lafta, Richard Garfield, Jamal Khudhairi, Gilbert Burnham, "Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey," *The Lancet* vol. 364, no. 9448, 20 November 2004; Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy, and Les Roberts, "Mortality after the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey," *The Lancet* vol. 368, no. 9545, 11 October 2006.) were widely denigrated and their results dismissed as improbable. Public criticism has come from, among others, President G. W. Bush, U.S. Gen. George Casey, and Iraqi government spokesman Ali Dabbagh (Anna Badkhen, "Critics say 600,000 Iraqi dead doesn't tally but pollsters defend methods used in Johns Hopkins study," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 October 2006).
[2] Byman, Daniel L. and Kenneth M. Pollack. "Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War," Analysis Paper , no. 11, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution, January 2007.

assistance to Iraqi IDPs and refugees is in the interest of security – as well as a compassionate response to people who have lost almost everything.

There is a risk in drawing the linkages between security implications and refugee and IDP populations. Specifically, there is a very real danger of 'securitizing' a humanitarian and human rights issue. Humanitarianism itself has come under siege in recent years with its bedrock principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity threatened by those who see humanitarian assistance as a tool of foreign and military policy. There are fears that drawing attention to refugees and IDPs in terms of security will play into anti-Arab xenophobia in the West and that innocent Iraqis will be seen primarily as potential terrorists rather than as individuals with rights and needs. Researchers have warned against employing the concept of 'security' in discussions on refugees for precisely this reason.[3] As one scholar points out, once the link is made between conflict-induced refugee flows and threats to international peace, it is a small mental step to envisioning the displaced persons themselves as the threat.[4] By focusing on the security implications of refugees and IDPs, there is a danger of 'blaming the victims' for the violence which displaced them.

While affirming that the basic human rights of refugees and IDPs must be upheld, including the right to assistance, it is also important to recognize that governments have legitimate security concerns about the presence of large numbers of refugees and IDPs in their countries. Humanitarian and human rights organizations need to be aware of these concerns and to respond in a manner which both holds governments accountable for protecting the rights of those displaced by violence and which minimizes threats to their national security. Humanitarian response does not take place in a political vacuum; in a situation as volatile as the Iraqi war, the security dimension of displacement simply cannot be ignored. Understanding the security concerns of governments and other actors is important to enable a more effective humanitarian response. This analysis seeks to contribute to the debate by examining the potential connections in Iraq between security concerns and refugee and IDP flows.

Traditional understandings of security and refugees/IDPs

Over the last twenty years there has been an emerging consensus that refugee movements have political consequences and that they can be a security concern for both the governments of the countries of origin and of the host countries.[5] While there is a substantial literature on the security dimensions of refugee movements, there has been virtually no published work on the national security implications of internally displaced

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[3] Finn Stepputat, "Refugees, Security and Development: Current Experiences and Strategies of Protection and Assistance in the 'Region of Origin,'" Danish Institute for International Studies, Working Paper 2004/11.

[4] Goodwin-Gill in Finn Stepputat, "Refugees, Security and Development: Current Experiences and Strategies of Protection and Assistance in the 'Region of Origin,'" Danish Institute for International Studies, Working Paper 2004/11.

[5] See for example, Elizabeth G. Ferris, ed. Refugees and World Politics, New York: Praeger, 1985. Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan, Refugees and International Relations, Oxford: Oxford University press, 1990. Myron Weiner, ed., International Migration and Security, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1993.

persons. Given the fact that there are many more IDPs than refugees (25 million conflict-induced IDPs in 2007 in comparison with 13.9 million refugees),[6] this is an important gap.[7] While there are very important differences in security concerns arising from refugee situations and internal displacement, the literature on refugees directs our attention to the following questions:

- To what extent are people being displaced in furtherance of political and military objectives of conflicting parties?
- What are the policies of host communities/countries towards IDPs and refugees and how do these reflect security concerns?
- What is the impact of IDPs and refugees on the political, social and economic situation of the host communities/countries?
- What is the impact of internal displacement and refugee movements on relationships between the government and neighboring countries?
- To what extent are IDPs and refugees actors in the conflict which displaced them?
- What is the effect on national security of humanitarian assistance to IDPs and refugees?

Our analysis now examines these questions by looking first at internally displaced persons inside Iraq and then at Iraqi refugees living in Jordan and Syria – the two countries which are presently hosting the largest number of Iraqi refugees.[8]

Iraq, IDPs and national security

The US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 did not produce an immediate flow of refugees.[9] In fact, although the humanitarian community had engaged in significant contingency planning for massive refugee movements, these plans were not used. Rather, some 325,000 Iraqi refugees returned to their country between 2003 and 2006. Around 1 million Iraqis who had been internally displaced under the Saddam Hussein regime remained displaced after the military action.[10] However, spontaneous returns did take place following the collapse of the Iraqi regime, especially among Kurds returning to the Kirkuk and Tameem areas. The returns were disorganized and not facilitated, taking place under the Coalition Provisional Authority's 'stay put' policy. Property disputes were common. In some instances, this prevented Kurds (and Turkmen and others) from reclaiming their houses. At the same time, tens of thousands of Arabs living in formerly

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[6]IDMC, Global Overview 2006;
http://www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Investigate/Publications_&_Archives/WRS_Archives/2007/Key%20Statistics.pdf
[7] The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement is currently undertaking a study of security and internal displacement which uses both national security and human security as conceptual frameworks for looking at IDPs and security in Afghanistan and Iraq.
[8] The term 'refugees' is used here although the governments hosting the largest numbers of Iraqis do not consider them to be refugees.
[9] There were, however, substantial numbers of IDPs who fled to other areas of the country because they feared war and bombing; however, they rapidly returned with the quick US victory.
[10] John Fawcett and Victor Tanner, "The Internally Displaced People of Iraq," The Brookings Institution-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement at The Brookings Institution. An Occasional Paper, October 2002.

Kurdish homes were displaced by returning IDPs and forced to return south. Many returnees to Kirkuk came back to find their property was destroyed and had to set up tents near their former homes.[11] Shi'a who had fled to Iran or other parts of the country also began to return, as did Marsh Arabs.

At least 2 million Iraqis have fled the country since 2003 and over 2 million have been displaced within Iraq's borders.[12] Approximately 1 in 7 Iraqis has been forcibly uprooted and reports are that this displacement is intensifying.[13] People are leaving their homes because of sectarian violence, coalition military operations, general insecurity, and above all, fear. Since the bombing of the al-Askari Mosque in February 2006, sectarian violence has become the leading cause of displacement.[14] This displacement has further contributed to the sectarian polarization in the country as people are being forced from mixed communities to single-sect ones. "[I]n 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."[15]

Displacement is not just an accidental by-product of the conflict. As we have seen in other parts of the world, displacement itself has become an objective in the military struggle – a way of consolidating territorial and political control.[16] The fact that 2 million Iraqis have been internally displaced by the war has a direct consequence on the Iraqi military and central government. As Anthony Cordesman writes, "power in Iraq is becoming steadily more fragmented and local" and is "making a weak central government steadily weaker."[17] The internal displacement of Iraqis is a direct consequence of sectarian violence and, at the same time, a factor contributing to the sectarian polarization. The sectarian geography of Iraq is changing as a result of the displacement, with likely long-term consequences for the country.

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[11] Refugees International (RI), 17 March 2003, Refugees International urges UN Secretary General to designate UNHCR to respond to internally displaced in Iraq; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 22 October 2003, UNHCR's operation in Iraq update 22 Oct 2003; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 12 August 2004, Country of Origin Information – Iraq; United Nations Security Council (UN SC), 5 December 2003, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 24 of resolution 1483 (2003) and paragraph 12 of resolution 1511 (2003); David Romano "Whose House is this Anyway?: IDP and Refugee Return Policies in Post-Saddam Iraq," Journal of Refugee Studies. 18.4 (2005): 430-453

[12] UNHCR: "Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq," April 2007, p. 6. The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) "Iraq Displacement 2007 Midyear Review" puts the total number of IDPs at almost 2.2 million. http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/2007%20Iraq%20Displacement%20Mid-Year%20Review.pdf

[13] See for example, UNHCR Iraq Situation Response (July 2007) http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=46a4a5522 which provides projections for Dec. 2007

[14] Ashraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner, "Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq," Occasional Paper, Brookings Institution-University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement, October 2006.

[15] Ibid., p. 29.

[16] There have been many news reports on this. See for example, Ned Parker and Ali Hamdani, "How Violence is Forging a Brutal Divide in Baghdad," *The Times* (UK), 14 December 2006. "Sunni Arabs Flock to Falluja to Escape Baghdad Violence," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 2007.

[17] See Martin Sieff, "Eye on Iraq: Facing Realities – Part 2," Middle East Times, 11 July 2007. http://www.metimes.com/storyview.php?StoryID=20070711-040408-9792r

People who are displaced within Iraq have sought refuge with family and friends in sectarian-friendly areas, but this welcome is wearing thin and reports are that 10 of Iraq's 18 governorates are restricting the entry of more internally displaced persons.[18] The arrival of new IDPs creates resentment as prices increase and public services are strained. Most of the current violence occurs in towns and cities, which serve as battlegrounds for coalition forces fighting insurgents, and are the primary site of sectarian violence. Internal displacement, therefore, is largely urban. Iraqis are fleeing urban areas for other urban areas, often more than once. About 80% of the displaced come from Baghdad.[19] While most of Iraq's governorates have established some camps for IDPs, they tend to be in remote areas or lack basic services. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates, however, that only 1 percent of all IDPs live in camps.[20] Iraqis resist living in camps because of the lack of privacy, close family ties, and perhaps also because of the historic association of camps with long-standing Palestinian camps in the region. There are more cases of IDPs building improvised housing on vacant public lands, or taking over or squatting in abandoned buildings and military bases. Squatter buildings often lack basic utilities and are vulnerable to violent attacks.[21] Others who have been forced from mixed areas are ushered into the vacated homes of displaced families by militants intent on 'homogenizing' neighborhoods. There are also reports of 'house-swapping,' sometimes facilitated by real estate agents who arrange for Shi'a and Sunni families to exchange homes.[22]

The displacement of Iraqis is taking place in a context of high unemployment, decreased access to basic food rations, and declining standards of living. A majority of Iraqis do not have access to clean water or basic sanitation.[23] Shortages of electricity in some parts of the country cause serious hardships. Transportation has become difficult as a result of the war; it's dangerous for people to go to work when they have jobs and it's difficult for businesses to keep going because of difficulties in supplies. Crime, banditry, looting, and kidnapping have all increased, indications of the fraying social fabric. While there are certainly regional differences within the country, war -- as we have seen in many other conflicts -- exacts a heavy economic and social cost.

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[18] Our researchers report that "[M]ost southern governorates (Basra, Muthanna, Dhi-Qar, Kerbala and Babylon) have restricted the entry of displaced people who do not have relatives in the governorate, do not belong to local tribes or do not have kin with whom they can live. Babylon makes an exception only for professionals, and Kerbala for displaced who have money. Muthanna is reportedly paying non-local displaced to leave the governorate. These moves reflect the displaced overload in the South, with overcrowded schools, strained basic services and rising rental prices." Ashraf al-Khalidi, Sophia Hoffman, and Victor Tanner, "Iraqi Refugees in the Syria Arab Republic: A Field-Based Snapshot," The Brookings Institution – University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement at The Brookings Institution. An Occasional Paper, June 2007.

[19] International Medical Corps, "Humanitarian Crisis Deepens in Iraq, - Assessment Conducted by International Medical Corps" p. 3.
http://www.imcworldwide.org.uk/documents/Final%20IMC%20Iraq%20study%20press%20release.pdf

[20] IOM: "Emergency Needs Assessment," 17 May 2007.

[21] IRCO, Disaster Management Department: "Report on IDPs in Iraq," 7 March 2007.

[22] IRIN, "Iraq: Sunni, Shia Families Swap Homes in Bid to Remain Safe," 4 July 2007.; Stephanie Taylor, "Many Iraqis Abandoning Homes for Safety," PBS Online NewsHour, 5 March 2007.; Larry Kaplow, "Rising Numbers of Displaced Iraqis Foment Violence, Social Problems," Cox News Service, 4 February 2007.

[23] Oxfam, NCCI, "Rising to the Humanitarian Challenge in Iraq," Briefing Paper, July 2007.

This has clear implications for families and friends who are hosting IDPs. Their resources are stretched by the presence of the displaced in their communities. As the number of IDPs increases, so too does pressure to establish more camps for them. While it is easier to provide public services in camp settings, there are very real security concerns about establishing camps on a large scale. If large camps were to be established, it is likely that they would be organized along sectarian lines, making them clear targets for attack by armed militias of other sectarian groups. Moreover, given the high unemployment and poverty rates in Iraq, large camps could become accessible places for recruitment of young men and children into militias. They could become yet more 'territories' to be claimed on behalf of the militias and thus increase the already horrific violence in the country. It is likely that the militias would take on the administration of the camps, controlling food distribution and access to services. As we have seen in other camp settings, relief items can be used to support militant groups.[24] The humanitarian community has generally taken the position that camps should be avoided at all costs, but there are increasingly few safe places for the displaced to go.

A focus on national security also directs our attention to the role of humanitarian assistance in the conflict. The terrible security situation in Iraq has made it nearly impossible for international aid organizations to conduct their work. Most agencies moved their international staff out of Iraq after the 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad. Assistance provided by coalition military and civilian forces is often viewed with suspicion. International and local humanitarian workers alike have been targeted by armed militias. Local staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working valiantly, often from their homes, to assist needy Iraqis but their ability to move around the communities they serve is increasingly restricted.[25] The NGO Coordinating Committee in Iraq reports that humanitarian efforts are also hindered by politicized funding and overly bureaucratic distribution systems.[26] Local mosques are reportedly providing assistance to needy people in their communities.[27] There is a very real danger that the vacuum in humanitarian assistance will be filled by armed militias who provide relief as a way of increasing their control over territory.[28] When hospitals or clinics are controlled by a particular sectarian group, it makes it difficult for people from other groups to access medical care there.[29]

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[24] See for example, Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, Sword & Salve: Confronting new Wars and Humanitarian Crises. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers, 2006, pp. 103-111. For an example of the way in which militants have used distribution of water as a way of extortion, see www.iraqslogger.com/index.php/post/3834/Militants_Use_Water_as_Weapon.

[25] See for example, "Iraq: Aid work becoming more risky in Baghdad," IRIN, 22 August 2007. http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/5d3472e807f9397c54bc4c1978e690d0.htm

[26] NCCI: Weekly Highlight 26 Apr 2007: Editorial. See also, NCCI officials quoted in UN-IRIN: "Bombs and Bureaucracy Behind Missing Medicines," 22 May 2007.

[27] Greg Hansen, "Coming to Terms with the Humanitarian Imperative in Iraq," Humanitarian Agenda 2015 Briefing Paper, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, January 2007.

[28] Wong, Edward and Damien Cave, "Baghdad District Is a Model, but Only for Shiites," *New York Times*, 22 May 2007. UN-IRIN, "Iraq: Fighters Fill Humanitarian Vacuum," 14 February 2007. UN-IRIN, "Iraq: Armed Groups Occupying Hospitals and Kidnapping Doctors," 13 February 2007.

[29] Cave, Damien, "In Baghdad, Sectarian Lines Too Deadly to Cross," *The New York Times*, 4 March 2007.

This analysis suggests that internal displacement in Iraq has major consequences for the country's national security. Given the trends in sectarian-induced displacement, the very survival of Iraq as a nation-state is threatened. If people live in increasingly 'homogenized' communities, pressure will grow for partition; in fact, it seems likely that partition is already underway though its chances of being formally ratified by Iraqi authorities or accepted by Iraq's neighbors is unlikely.[30]

Security Concerns of IDPs for Iraq and its Neighbors

The harsh realities facing Iraqi civilians, including those who have been displaced from their homes, have led over 2 million Iraqis to seek refuge across the country's borders. All of Iraq's neighbors have an interest in ensuring that Iraqi's internally displaced persons do not become externally displaced persons. If millions of Iraqi IDPs were to seek safety in other countries, this would increase instability in the region, as outlined further below. In fact, some analysts have suggested that in the interests of containing the spillover from the Iraq war, IDPs should be prevented from leaving the country through the construction of large IDP camps near Iraq's borders.[31]

For most governments of countries of origin, the exodus of refugees is both a sign of weakness -- as evidence that the state has failed in its most fundamental responsibility to protect its citizens – but also a means of decreasing the pressure on the government during a time of conflict. In effect, the government doesn't have to worry about protecting and assisting those of its war-affected population who have crossed an international border and can concentrate (theoretically at least) on those who remain. In the case of Iraq, however, external displacement is seen as the most public political failure of the regime and its policies. By extension, of course, the presence of two million refugees in neighboring countries is a clear indication that US policies are failing. Moreover, given the fact that many of those who have left the country are from Iraq's professional class, the refugee exodus has meant even greater hardship for those who remain. The recent Oxfam/NCCI report, for example, estimates that 40 percent of the country's professional class has left the country since 2003 and cites the Iraqi Medical Association's report that 50% of the 34,000 doctors registered in 2003 have left the country.[32] When Iraqis cannot get medical care or send their children to school in their country, they are more likely to try to leave the country where those services can be provided.

The impact of refugee movements on Iraq's long-term future will be substantial, particularly if – as is likely – the situations become protracted. Without security in the

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[30] Edwards, Joseph P. and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "The Case for Soft Partition in Iraq," Analysis Paper, no. 12, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution., June 2007.

[31] Byman, Daniel L. and Kenneth M. Pollack. "Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War," Analysis Paper , no. 11, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution, January 2007.

[32] Rising to the Humanitarian Challenge in Iraq, Oxfam and NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq, July 2007, pps. 15, 12.

country, it is unlikely that Iraq's professionals will return in significant numbers. Among the refugees, these are the people who are most likely to have the means, will, and capacities to remain outside their country. As one UNHCR official noted, the ones who have left Iraq are its 2 million best and brightest."[33] Even if conditions were to stabilize in the next six months (which is highly unlikely), this loss of human capital would severely hinder the ability of Iraqis to rebuild their country and to reconstruct social and economic institutions. This would have implications as well for a continued coalition presence to undertake the tasks that would normally be seen as the responsibility of nationals – from providing medical care and teaching students to repairing damaged power lines and organizing elections. Although there are cases where the United Nations has been able to provide the necessary oversight in post-conflict situations, Iraq poses particular difficulties because the UN is closely associated with Coalition forces which could lead again to its being attacked as well as the organization's past reputation in the country as a result of the 8 years of sanctions and the Oil for Food scandals.

In August 2007, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution to expand the mandate of UN operations in Iraq. Of particular concern for this study, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is asked to "promote, support, and facilitate, in coordination with the Government of Iraq: the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance and the safe, orderly, and voluntary return, as appropriate, of refugees and displaced persons."[34] The UN will face many challenges in delivering humanitarian assistance and in eventually coordinating the return of refugees and IDPs, including security, access and staff presence in Iraq. While the return of refugees and IDPs will be an important factor in Iraq's recovery, this will depend more on the security situation inside the country than on the availability of UN support for return.

<u>Iraqi refugees, security, and host countries</u>

In the region, only Iran, Egypt, and Yemen are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention which means that Iraqis living in most neighboring states are not considered refugees with the rights and responsibilities entailed by this status. In fact, no government in the region – or probably anywhere – welcomes the arrival of Iraqis fleeing the conflict in their country. Host governments are concerned about the possible spillover of conflicts and the possibility of long-term presence of refugees exacerbating social problems. The reactions to the Iraqi refugees are deeply conditioned by the region's experience with Palestinian refugees over the past 59 years. It is noteworthy that throughout the current emergency, neither Jordan nor Syria facilitated the movement of Palestinian Iraqis into their countries; rather they were confined to small camps in the virtual 'no-man's land' between borders. The memory of Palestinian refugee camps in Arab consciousness is undoubtedly a factor in the urban settlement pattern of Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria. Urban refugees – like urban IDPs – are less visible than those living in camps.

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[33] Cited in Amira El Ahl, Volkhard Windfuhr and Bernhard Zand, "Iraq's Elite Fleeing in Droves, <u>Der Spiegel</u>, Monday 20 August 2007.
[34] UN Security Council Resolution 1770, 10 August 2007.
http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9095.doc.htm

Of Iraq's neighbors, only Syria continues to allow Iraqis to enter its territory and this with the clear understanding that their presence will not be tolerated indefinitely. Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt all face economic and social pressures to restrict the admittance of Iraqis. Present estimates are that 750,000 Iraqis are living in Jordan and that around 1.5 million are living in Syria. In both countries, there are reports of rising prices for basic necessities and of over-stretched public services. In both countries, there is growing popular resentment of the presence of the Iraqis and reports of exploitation of Iraqi labor and of increasing prostitution by desperate Iraqi women.[35] There are reports that in both Jordan and Syria, Iraqi refugees are growing resentful of the host states for not doing more. They say that Iraq was generous to Arab workers and now won't repay the favor. While Jordan has largely closed its border to Iraqis, the Syrian government has allowed the Iraqis to enter as visitors or guests.

Unlike refugees in many other parts of the world, the Iraqis who came to Syria and especially to Jordan did not arrive penniless. Particularly in the initial months following the US-led invasion, the wealthy left early, buying up apartments and real estates. As the demographics of the refugee flow changed and increasing numbers of poorer people began to arrive – and as the savings of those arriving earlier dissipated – the presence of the Iraqis in Syria and Jordan are placing increasing stress on public services. In Jordan especially, there are concerns about the strain the Iraqis place on already limited water supplies. And there is a concern that Syrian policies will harden as the stock of available housing decreases.

Jordan[36]

Jordan has historically been a sanctuary to the region's displaced, and is by far the largest recipient of Palestinian refugees.[37] In fact, Palestinian refugees and descendents of refugees make up the bulk of the Jordanian population (around 70%).[38] This has challenged Jordan's national identity as "East Bank" Jordanians are now a minority. Jordan suffered a bloody civil war often referred to as "Black September" in 1970 in which the Jordanian army attacked the Palestinian refugee community (including the Palestinian Liberation Organization [PLO] headquarters), killing many civilians. This was the result of King Hussein's perception that the PLO had created a state within a state, and was threatening the sovereignty and safety of the kingdom (especially after the PLO and Israel began cross-border attacks involving Jordanian territory).[39] Although there is significant overlap today, tension remains between the two communities as

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[35] See for example, the recent report of Amnesty International on Iraqis in Syria. http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE140362007

[36] With particular thanks to Kim Stoltz for her contributions to this section.

[37] Terry M. Rempel, "Who are Palestinian Refugees?" Forced Migration Review 26 (September 2006).; Géraldine Chatelard, "Jordan: A Refugee Haven," Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute, July 2004.

[38] Due to political sensitivities, there has been no formal census and estimates are wide-ranging, from 55%-80% of the population. However, almost all sources put the figure at higher than 50%.

[39] See Peter Mansfield, "Jordan and Palestine," in The Shaping of an Arab Statesman: Sharif Abd al-Hamid Sharaf and the Modern Arab World, ed. Patrick Seale. London, Melbourne, New York: Quartet Books, 1983; Laurie Brand, Palestinians In the Arab World: Institution Building and the Search for State. New York, Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Palestinian-Jordanians are concentrated in urban areas, and often attain higher levels of education. They tend to dominate the economic sector while "East Bank" Jordanians tend to have disproportionately high representation in the parliament, as well as the military, police, and security sectors.[40]

King Abdullah II's government has sponsored several initiatives including the "We Are All Jordan" forum and the "Jordan First" campaign – a national initiative aimed at closing the gap between communities, promoting national unity (through a collective, national, civic identity), and, according to some citizens, asserting that Jordan's national interests must be prioritized over those of Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon. Despite the kingdom's historic role as a sanctuary for not only Arabs, but also Chechens and Circassians, among others, domestic security remains a non-negotiable priority. As King Abdullah stated in an interview with Asharq Al Awsat, "There are red lines that everyone is aware of. These concern our national unity and security and the strength of our internal front."[41] Given this assertion, the kingdom's eventual decision to close the borders is not altogether surprising.

In addition to the large Palestinian population, the presence of 750,000 Iraqis in Jordan, a country of only six million people, means that the kingdom now contains the largest refugee population per capita in the world.[42] This phenomenon is likely to have significant consequences for domestic politics and security. Jordan kept its borders open long enough to permit the entrance of large numbers of foreigners despite its relative poverty and severe lack of natural resources, most notably water.[43] The recent spike in population has in fact hindered the state's capacity to deliver water to the population.[44] Aside from the threat to economic security this poses, such burdens heighten the possibility of increased tension between Iraqis and Jordanians inside the Kingdom. Furthermore, it creates grievances among the host population which could lead to public criticism of the Jordanian government and increased support for opposition parties.

Another issue in the relations between Iraqis and Jordanians is the Shi'a factor. Iran's growing influence on certain Iraqi Shi'i politicians has made the Jordanian authorities

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[40] See for example Brent E. Sasley, "Changes and Continuities in Jordanian Foreign Policy." Middle East Review of International Affairs. vol. 6, no.1 March 2002. For further explanation of this trend as part of an intentional "Jordanization" campaign, see Joseph Massad, Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan. New York, Chirchester: Columbia University Press, 2001.

[41] His Majesty King Abdullah II Interview with Asharq Al Awsat Editor-in-Chief Tariq Al-Homayed, 23 Jordan 2007. http://www.jordanembassyus.org/hmka01232007.htm

[42] John Holmes, "A Rising Refugee Crisis," International Herald Tribune, 31 July 2007. http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/07/31/opinion/edholmes.php

[43] According to USAID and Euro-Med Partnership strategy papers on Jordan, the country is among the ten poorest in the world in terms of water resources. The water shortage constitutes a major obstacle to economic development and is exacerbated by Jordan's already-high population growth rate. See USAID/Jordan Strategy: 2004-2009, "USAID Mission to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Strategic Direction of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Program Gateway to the Future 2004-2009," October 2003 and Euro-Med Partnership – Jordan, Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006 http://www.deljor.cec.eu.int/en/eu_and_jordan/PR/csp_nip.pdf.

[44] Nathan Hodson, "Iraqi Refugees in Jordan; Cause for Concern in a Pivotal State," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Research Notes no. 13, April 2007.

(and its general public) more distrustful of Shi'i Iraqis. King Abdullah's highly-publicized statement warning of an emerging "Shi'ite Crescent" prior to Iraq's first elections was not well-received by predominantly- Shi'i parties in the Iraqi government.[45] Abdullah has since retreated from this statement, noting that he intended to use the word in a political sense and not a sectarian one. His more recent statements caution against sectarian labels and divisions which could destabilize the region.[46] This backpedaling no doubt stems in part from the potential security implications of the growing religious diversity within Jordan itself, as Shi'a now constitute around 26%[47] of the Iraq refugees in the Kingdom. Furthermore, the Kingdom finds itself in the unexpected position of sharing a common security threat with the Shi'a-dominated Iraqi government – al-Qaeda and other militant Islamist groups. The two governments recently agreed to share intelligence for the purpose of combating this common threat.[48]

Accompanying fears of domestic strife are more acute fears of Islamic militancy, especially of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups coming out of Iraq. The August 2005 rocket attacks on two US warships in Aqaba Bay and the Amman hotel bombings less than three months later proved that Jordanian security forces are not invincible.[49] Local NGOs are reporting that some Iraqi refugees there are moving into the poor, marginalized neighborhoods of Jordan, including Zarqa.[50] Since the start of the war in Iraq, the Eastern suburb of Zarqa has been known in the media as "a cradle of Islamic militancy" and "a breeding ground for would-be jihadists".[51] Hometown of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former (now deceased) leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Zarqa has long been called a hotbed of radicalism. The movement of Iraqi Sunnis into this area exacerbates an already tense security situation.

Not only do refugee movements into Zarqa threaten to contribute to Islamic militancy, they also imperil the sectarian calm. The Islamist community in Zarqa has been associated with domestic opposition for some time, but since the Iraq war has become increasingly anti-American and anti-Shi'a.. One local Imam expressed the hostility toward the Shi'a community as follows: "They have traditions that are un-Islamic and

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[45] Robin Wright and Peter Baker. "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election from Iran – Leaders Warn Against Forming Religious State," The Washington Post, 8 December 2004.

[46] In an interview with Asharq Al Awsat's Editor in Chief, Tariq al-Homayed, King Abdullah states, "If we are to seek what is good for our umma and secure a bright and prosperous future for its people, all Muslims, Sunni and Shi'a, must build on what unites them…Jordan hopes to avert religious and sectarian differences which could serve the political agenda of any other country. This would bring destruction to our region and threaten global security." His Majesty King Abdullah II Interview with Asharq Al Awsat Editor-in-Chief Tariq Al-Homayed, 23 Jordan 2007. http://www.jordanembassyus.org/hmka01232007.htm

[47] UNHCR, "Iraq Situation Map," July 2007. http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/LPAA-75TP82?OpenDocument.

[48] Suleiman al-Khalidi, "Jordan, Iraq Agree to Boost Fight against al Qaeda," Reuters Alertnet, 15 August 2007.

[49] Ibid.

[50] E-mail correspondence with NGO representative, 14 August 2007.

[51] Souad Mekhennet and Michael Moss, "The Making of Martyrs, the Training of Terrorists," International Herald Tribune, 3 May 2007 and in "In Jihadist Haven, a Goal: To Kill and Die in Iraq," The New York Times, 4 May 2007, A.1.

they hate Sunnis."[52] This dangerous rhetoric comes at a time when the predominantly-Sunni state is hosting a substantial number of Shi'i refugees.

In the longer term, the potential for unrest or even civil war in Jordan is not insignificant if the presence of Iraqis in the country becomes protracted or if the Iraqis in any way challenge the sovereignty or territorial integrity of the state. The king has clearly expressed his position on this issue: "the important thing is that whoever lives on Jordanian soil must respect the laws and regulations of this country and preserve its security and stability. That includes the Iraqis living in Jordan. I want to stress, again, that while we foster our historic relations with Iraqis, whether in Iraq or those living among us (their number exceeds 700,000), we will never allow Jordan to become a staging ground for initiating problems within Iraq."[53]

Syria
Syria has long prided itself on its commitment to Arab unity and solidarity, as manifest in its welcome of nearly 200,000 Lebanese fleeing the Israeli attacks in the summer of 2006.[54] And in contrast to the political and diplomatic scene, in the humanitarian world, Syria is the clear hero of the Iraqi displacement tragedy. Syria's generous response to the Iraqi refugees may stem from its commitment to Arab unity, but undoubtedly has political underpinnings as well. Because of Syria's ubiquitous internal security apparatus, Syria is probably better able to control the movement of Iraqis within the country than in other neighboring states. The Syrians are also well-equipped to monitor and control any sort of political or sectarian-oriented opposition.

While the government continues to admit Iraqis on a daily basis, the Syrian public's resentment toward the Iraqi population seems to be growing, and could deteriorate into conflict between the refugees and host population. The subsidized Syrian economy is buckling under the pressure of as many as 1.5 million additional people and many are worried that the country's infrastructure will not be able to sustain the government's generosity for much longer. Adding to local hostilities is the perception among some Syrians that Iraqis are bringing crime and prostitution across the border. (Indeed the press has documented a trend among impoverished refugee families of pushing their daughters into prostitution.[55]) There is the possibility that this tension between the 'host' and 'guest' populations could lead to domestic unrest. This tension also has the potential to bring a substantial increase in public opposition to the regime later on. Either scenario poses unsettling challenges for President Bashar al-Assad.

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[52] Souad Mekhennet and Michael Moss, "In Jihadist Haven, a Goal: To Kill and Die in Iraq," The New York Times, 4 May 2007, A.1.

[53] His Majesty King Abdullah II Interview with Asharq Al Awsat Editor-in-Chief Tariq Al-Homayed, 23 Jordan 2007. http://www.jordanembassyus.org/hmka01232007.htm

[54] Yazan Neme, "Lebanese Families Fleeing Conflict Seek Refuge at a Camp in Syria," UNICEF, 7 August 2006.

[55] See for example, Katherine Zoepf, "Desperate Iraqi Refugees Turn to Sex Trade in Syria," The New York Times, 29 May 2007.; Nihal Hassan, "'50,000 Iraqi Refugees Forced into Prostitution," The Independent, 24 June 2007.; Amnesty International, "Iraq - The situation of Iraqi refugees in Syria," 26 July 2007. http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE140362007

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US officials have long believed that Ba'thist resistance groups have operated out of Syria and there are reports that the 'surge' has led some militant groups to seek shelter in neighboring countries.[56] Moreover, Damascus fears that Iraqis will bring sectarian rivalries and even sectarian violence with them into Syria. Citizens do not want to be drawn into these battles, and the regime does not want to see sectarianism erupt throughout Syria. Despite the country's close relationship with Lebanon and its hosting of war refugees, it has so far been able to avoid confessional competition at home. According to Professor Juan Cole, the entrance of large number of Shi'a from Iraq has created apprehension among Syrian Sunnis.[57] Furthermore, reports in the Syrian press accuse Iraqi Shi'a of proselytizing in Sunni villages.[58] As of July 2007, Shi'a make up about 24% of the Iraqi refugees in Syria.[59]

In spite of the fears that the Iraqi refugees might bring their sectarian rivalries with them, this is not a group which is ripe for radicalization. On the contrary, there are reports that many refugees in Syria are consciously trying to distance themselves from overtly sectarian groups. As a Sunni man from Anbar told interviewers in Syria, "I don't think any reasonable person will look here for sectarianism. We ran away because of it. There is no harassment here."[60]

Syria's secular regime also worries about the threat of Islamist political parties gaining ground. This is a constant concern, but it is heightened by new economic challenges and the possibility that the refugee population could contribute to these existing movements. The elections in Iraq, and specifically the success of Islamist parties, created unease with nearly every regime in the region. Political Islam's growing popularity inside Syria's borders may pose an enhanced threat to the regime,[61] but one that is part of a historical security concern. The late Hafez al-Assad massacred thousands of people in Hama in 1982 in order to expel the Muslim Brotherhood from the country.[62] Therefore, an influx of politically active, Islamist-oriented Iraqis could again threaten (or be perceived to threaten) the secular establishment and Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian rule.

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[56] See the discussion in Ashraf al-Khalidi et al, "Iraqi Refugees," June 2007, p. 15.
[57] Juan Cole in Aida Akl, "Exodus from Iraq: The Refugee Problem," Voice of America, GlobalSecurity.org, 12 February 2007. http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2007/02/iraq-070212-voa06.htm
[58] Ibid.
[59] (Christians constitute another 20% while Sunnis are estimated to represent the largest group, about 50%.) UNHCR, "Iraq Situation Map," July 2007. http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/LPAA-75TP82?OpenDocument.
[60] Ashraf al-Khalidi, et al, "Iraqi Refugees" June 2007, p. 27.
[61] The extent to which Islamists pose a serious threat to the regime is debated. See for example Carsten Wieland, "Bashar al-Asad's Agenda for 2007: Is Syria Part of the Problem or part of the Solution in the Middle East," Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, Online Articles, http://ccas.georgetown.edu/research-articles.cfm?id=440; International Crisis Group, "Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges," ICG Middle East Report N°24, 11 February 2004.
[62] International Crisis Group, "Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges," ICG Middle East Report N°24, 11 February 2004.

The political developments involving Iraq's Kurdish population are yet another potential hazard for Syrian security.[63] The increasing autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan and the election of an Iraqi Kurdish president represent a power shift that Damascus does not want to see duplicated inside Syria. The regime views Syrian Kurds (around 10% of its population) with suspicion, and at times has even considered them a fifth column. This stigma remains despite the absence of autonomy appeals throughout nearly the entire community.[64] Kurds in Syria are subjected to multiple forms of official discrimination, and thus hold valid grievances against the regime.[65] Any increase in the Kurdish population via refugee flows from Iraq in particular may be seen as a potential catalyst for inciting Kurdish nationalism (i.e. separatism). Until recently, there were very small numbers of Kurdish refugees leaving Iraq due to the relative stability of the northern provinces as well as the perception that Kurds are treated poorly by the Syrian government. Field research has shown a jump in these numbers as of April and May 2007. This increasing number of Kurdish Iraqi refugees, according to the Iraqis in Syria, is associated with "tensions between Turkey and the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Mas'ud Barzani, over the presence of PKK forces (Turkish Kurdish insurgents) in northern Iraq, and fears among Iraqi Kurds of a Turkish intervention."[66]

Regional Security and Displacement

Refugee warriors?
A number of authors have focused on the concept of 'refugee warriors' in which refugee communities engage in warfare for political objectives – such as overthrowing the regime of the country from which they left or seeking to secure a separate state.[67] Given the chaos and the high level of violence inside Iraq, it is difficult to see the actions of refugees outside the country as significantly worsening the situation on the ground inside Iraq. However, the situation could change if militia groups inside Syria and Jordan became more active and more successful in their recruitment of militia members willing and able to continue the struggle inside Iraq. They could well become more successful in these recruitment efforts if the situation turned into a long stalemate and assistance to

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[63] Mona Yacoubian, "Syria's Relations with Iraq," United States Institute of Peace Briefing, April 2007. According to the briefing, "Damascus remains wary of Iraq sectarianism (particularly Kurdish separatism) and would prefer

[64] International Crisis Group notes that there is one major exception, but it is among a party in exile – the Western Kurdistan Association. This group calls for complete independence from Syria as part of a larger Kurdistan (International Crisis Group, "Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges," ICG Middle East Report N°24, 11 February 2004.)

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ashraf al-Khalidi, Sophia Hoffman, and Victor Tanner, "Iraqi Refugees in the Syria Arab Republic: A Field-Based Snapshot," The Brookings Institution – University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement at The Brookings Institution. An Occasional Paper, June 2007, p. 11.

[67] See for example, Aristide Zolberg, Astri Suhrke and Sergio Aguayo, Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. Gil Loescher, Refugee Movements and International Security, Adelphi paper 268, London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992. Howard Adelman, "Why Refugee Warriors are Threats," Journal of Conflict Studies, vol. 18, no. 1 (1998), Karen Jacobsen, ed. "Security in Refugee Populated Areas", special issue of Refugee Studies Quarterly, vol. 19, no. 1, (2000). Also see, UNHCR, "The Security, Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Refugee Camps and Settlements: Operationalizing the 'ladder of options,' Doc. EC/50/SC/INF.4, 27 June 2000.

meet their basic human needs was not available. The Iraqi population in Syria and Jordan is not ripe for radicalization; in fact, as noted above, the evidence suggests that Iraqis are reluctant to become involved with sectarian groups as sectarian conflict was the main cause of their displacement. But when there is no other means of survival, it is more likely that the refugees would be receptive to joining groups which offered an income for them and their families.

Should funding and support from other governments for militias in Jordan and Syria (such as Iranian funding of Shi'a militias) materialize, militia forces based in those countries could become 'refugee warriors' capable of 'spoiling' any moves toward increased stability in Iraq. If the militias became strong enough, they would have the potential of provoking a crackdown on their activities by the host governments which would cause serious civilian casualties. In a worst case scenario, they could destabilize or undermine the governments of neighboring countries. The presence of active warriors among the refugees in neighboring countries would have clear implications for the region as a whole and could be supported by those forces who do not desire a strong and stable Iraq.

Humanitarian assistance and security concerns.
At present, humanitarian assistance for Iraqis in Jordan and Syria is increasing and the humanitarian community is gearing up to try to meet the basic needs of the Iraqis. But funding has been inadequate for multilateral efforts and especially for bilateral support to Jordan and even more especially, for Syria.[68] Such assistance is needed on humanitarian grounds to respond to people who have fled their homes. But humanitarian assistance is also important for security reasons.

If the refugees do not receive sufficient support from the host governments and the international community, there is a very real danger that political actors will seek to fill the gap. It may be useful to remember that both Hezbollah and Hamas derive much of their popular legitimacy from the fact that they created effective social support systems to help needy people when the governments were unable to do so. The fact that militias are providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons inside Iraq is an indication that this possibility is not far-fetched although both the Jordanian and Syrian governments are monitoring the activities of the militias in their countries closely. It is in the international community's interest to ensure that the Iraqi refugees receive adequate assistance. There are also reports that the lack of aid is also driving small return flows of refugees back into Iraq. As families become more impoverished, they send the young men back home in order to recover cash and other family possessions[69] where they are more susceptible to violence. For refugees in Jordan, the lack of resources could mean their moving to impoverished neighborhoods like Zarqa, known for their radical politico-religious orientation, thus creating a security threat to the host state.

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[68] Refugees International, "Joint NGO Statement on Iraqi Refugee Needs," 25 July 2007. http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/10124/
[69] E-mail correspondence from NGO, 14 August 2007.

When host governments are concerned about security threats associated with refugees, they tend to respond by deporting the refugees. There are reports that this is now happening in both Jordan and Lebanon. Deporting refugees back to Iraq is likely to increase the number of internally displaced persons in the country as it is likely that the refugees are afraid to return to their homes and likely to put their lives in jeopardy given the continued violence. It is in everyone's interest to ensure that refugees receive enough assistance – from recognized international and national organizations – so that they don't turn to crime or political violence to support themselves.

Regional Security and Displacement

This analysis has focused on the impact of Iraqi displacement on Iraq and two of its neighbors hosting over 2 million Iraqi refugees. But the impact of displacement is also being felt by other countries, such as Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. UNHCR estimates that there are around 40,000 Iraqis in Lebanon, 80-100,000 in Egypt, and 200,000 in the Gulf (including Saudi Arabia).[70]

Displacement of Iraqis also may have an impact on issues such as the Palestine-Israel conflict and the region's natural resources – both oil and water. Displacement in Iraq which is both a cause and a consequence of Sunni-Shi'a tensions, will have an impact on sectarian relationships throughout the region. The success of Shi'i political parties in Iraq is no longer the only concern of neighboring states that increasingly absorb and share Iraq's religious diversity. The alarmist rhetoric of a rising regional Shi'i power may be giving way to more moderate calls for peaceful coexistence as regimes realize the potential danger in inciting sectarian tensions among their diversifying domestic populations. As noted above, Iraqi displacement will have an impact on the country's ability to re-build and could well change the 'balance of power' within the region. There are countries in the region which want a weak Iraq, particularly Iran, and thus may have an interest in the continuing displacement.

Finally, the parallels between the present Iraqi displacement and the displacement of Palestinians almost sixty years ago are much in the minds of people in the region. Displacement from the war in Iraq constitutes the largest displacement in the region since the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. The memory of *al-Naqba* (the catastrophe) in the Arab consciousness has impacted the decisions of the displaced (to avoid camps at all costs) and reactions of host states (instilling a certain sense of duty but also extreme caution and self-preservation). It has affected the language used to discuss the emergency, as neither host states nor the displaced Iraqis wish to see the displacement as a "refugee" crisis since to be a refugee is to be Palestinian. There is a clear relationship between the long-standing restrictive treatment of Palestinians by the Lebanese government and the restrictive policies it is currently implementing vis-à-vis Iraqis. Palestinians themselves, those long-displaced in Iraq, were among the first to be turned away at every border.

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[70] UNHCR, "Iraq Situation Map," July 2007. http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/LPAA-75TP82?OpenDocument.

If the war continues for years and the displacement of Iraqis becomes protracted, it is likely that the presence of the Iraqi diaspora will have political consequences for many years. There may come a time when governments in the region begin large-scale involuntary deportations of Iraqis back to Iraq, even if the war continues.

Drawing the implications

War and humanitarianism go hand in hand.[71] As is well-known, decisions made in support of military objectives have humanitarian consequences. And as we have seen many times, the humanitarian situation on the ground can drive the military response. In Bosnia, for example, it was the suffering of civilians, particularly in the siege of Sarajevo, that led to the decision by NATO to launch its bombing campaign. The humanitarian consequences of the war in Iraq will have political, economic, and military repercussions throughout the Middle East for years to come.

While the solutions to Iraq's displacement lie in the restoration of stability and security, there are measures that can be implemented now which could protect and assist vulnerable people inside Iraq, mitigate the possible negative security consequences of displacement, and lay the groundwork for an eventual return of refugees and IDPs to their communities. Specifically, the US government should:

1. *Put humanitarian issues on the US agenda for Iraq.*
As this study has argued, responding to humanitarian needs of Iraqi civilians affected by the violence is not just a question of compassion or charity, but fundamentally affects security – security for Iraq, for the countries in the region, and for the United States. Too often, discussions of US policy in Iraq ignore the effects of the war on Iraq's civilian population. These discussions seem to be based on the assumption that 'collateral damage' in wars is inevitable – and marginal to the great issues of military and strategic policy. But Iraq's IDPs and refugees will have an impact on security in the region and policy-makers need to factor that into their thinking now. The political, strategic, and military dynamic of the Middle East was inexorably transformed by the Palestinian exodus of 1948. The US government needs to be considering the long-term effects of a large Iraqi diaspora in the region now and it needs to engage with the humanitarian community to discuss these issues. There is much more common ground than either the policy strategists or the humanitarians seem to recognize.

2. *Play a leadership role in mobilizing more humanitarian assistance for Iraq's war-affected civilian population, internally displaced persons and Iraqi refugees living in neighboring countries.*

The role of the international community, and particularly of the United States, to respond to both internally and externally displaced Iraqis is crucial. While it is far from certain that providing more humanitarian assistance within Iraq would result in less internal

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[71] See for example: Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, Sword & Salve: Confronting new Wars and Humanitarian Crises. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers, 2006.

displacement, such assistance would alleviate civilian hardship and perhaps result in fewer refugees leaving the country. Research conducted by the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement on Iraqis in Syria[72] revealed that many left Iraq because they could not get medical care. An Iraqi man reported, for example, that he feared that his pregnant wife would be unable to get to a clinic for the delivery and so they moved to Syria. Another reported that the lack of drugs to treat a family member's cancer was his motivation for leaving the country. More support should be given to UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which are providing humanitarian assistance inside Iraq and which could prevent people from leaving their homes. Operating in an incredibly dangerous context, several hundred international and Iraqi organizations are assisting people to remain in their communities. Not only should these NGOs receive more assistance, but donors need to be much more flexible than usual in understanding that while plans may have to change, alternative ways of working can be used.

While the US government responded quickly to provide about 30 percent of UNHCR's July 2007 Iraq appeal, other international organizations – such as the International Organization for Migration – and NGOs are having difficulty raising funds to support their programmatic work inside Iraq. The US government should move rapidly to provide the needed funds for humanitarian assistance inside Iraq.

The governments hosting large numbers of refugees – particularly in Syria and Jordan – need additional humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance to Iraqis living in neighboring countries could well make the difference in determining what the future role of the Iraqi refugees will be. International humanitarian assistance, delivered by established UN and non-governmental agencies, can make it less likely that the militias are able to recruit desperate refugees into their cause and less likely that the economic and social tensions arising in Jordan and Syria could de-stabilize those governments.

The nature of the assistance is important as well. Camps should be avoided at all costs; support should be given to communities and families to maintain the present dispersion of Iraqis in urban areas. Education for Iraqi children and youth is critical. Not only is it desperately desired by Iraqi parents, but it provides alternative activities for young people who might otherwise turn to crime or militias. Education's role in 'keeping hope alive' also has a security dimension; when young people are preparing for the future, they are less likely to do things to jeopardize that future. Desperate people do desperate things.

Although largely symbolic in nature, the US should increase the number of Iraqi refugees accepted for resettlement in the US and move rapidly to overcome the bureaucratic roadblocks which are slowing down the processing of Iraqi refugees. The importance of symbolic action should not be underestimated. When the US accepts only a handful of Iraqi refugees, it sends a signal that the US doesn't want them living in our country which in turn validates the exclusionary policies of most governments in the region and in

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[72] Ashraf al-Khalidi, Sophia Hoffmann and Victor Tanner, "Iraqi Refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic: A Field-Based Snapshot," Occasional Paper, Brookings Institution-University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement, June 2007.

Europe where the number of Iraqi asylum-seekers has never been higher. To demonstrate its solidarity with countries hosting far more refugees, the US should agree to resettle many more Iraqi refugees – and should take the necessary steps to ensure that refugees move more quickly.

3. To signal the importance the US places on the humanitarian situation in Iraq, President Bush should name a Humanitarian Czar for Iraq who is mandated to work with government agencies to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided, that policies are coherent and consistent, that the movement of Iraqi refugees isn't stonewalled by bureaucratic impediments.

This is not business as usual. And the Humanitarian Czar should have the clout to cut through standard ways of doing thing. This individual should be well-respected in both the humanitarian and foreign policy communities and should have the authority to make things happen. While President Bush has named an Iraq War Czar, Lt. General Douglas Lute, the appointment of an Iraq Humanitarian Czar would demonstrate a commitment to responding to the needs of the civilian victims of the war.

4. Make protection a priority.

The Iraqis who have already been displaced need to be protected. The Representative of the Secretary-General (RSG) on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Walter Kälin, has noted the importance of ensuring that displaced Iraqis have access to food rations, that governorates allow desperate people to enter their territories temporarily and that host communities and families should be supported. Presently, there are reports that many displaced Iraqis, particularly women heads of households, are unable to access the Public Distribution System through which regular food rations are given to Iraqis. Sometimes, they are expected to return to their communities – from which they fled – in order to change the address on their ration cards. This bureaucratic requirement – which is a life and death issue for many Iraqis -- should be immediately resolved. Another common problem facing IDPs is the lack of documentation – school certificates to enable them to register children in other school districts, or marriage certificates which allow women to access food distribution. The Iraqi government, with support from the Humanitarian Czar should immediately resolve the impasse. There is a dearth of adequate housing for Iraqis displaced in many parts of the country. As noted above, there are serious security and cultural concerns about housing Iraqi IDPs in camps. The cost of providing building materials to displaced Iraqis would not be unreasonable and would enable them to live in more security – something in short supply in Iraq these days. Such assistance should be provided.

It is the responsibility of the national Iraqi authorities to protect the people displaced within their borders and provide them with the basic necessities mentioned above – food, safe housing, and education. But the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration is a relatively young and weak ministry which needs support and capacity-building. While USAID has made a priority of building the capacity of Iraqi ministries, its efforts have

not yielded the necessary results in the Ministry of Displacement and Migration. The Iraq Humanitarian Czar should make this a priority in his or her work.

5. Work multilaterally

With the passage of UN Resolution 1770, there are new possibilities for expanded UN engagement with the humanitarian issues inside Iraq. The US government needs the United Nations and should support the UN's efforts while recognizing that in order to be effective, the UN needs to be perceived as a neutral and impartial player. This is a tall order for the UN in Iraq. Not only does it live with the legacy of weapons inspections, sanctions, and scandals around Oil for Food, but it relies on the Multinational Coalition forces for its security. Security for humanitarian work may well be the Achilles heel of UN efforts to play a more active role in Iraq. When UN staff arrive in communities accompanied by US or MNF-I forces, their neutrality is immediately compromised. It is in US interests that UN agencies operate independently and that they are perceived as independent actors. If the US sees the UN as its agent or ally, the UN will not be able to act effectively. The US needs to give the UN its humanitarian space and to distance itself from UN operations.

6. Plan for the long-term

It may seem crazy to talk about Iraq's long-term situation when the humanitarian community is struggling now to respond to the plight of Iraq's four million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). And in fact, much more work is needed to plan for the worsening humanitarian situation which is coming. US agencies, UN organizations, and NGOs all need to be planning for a likely future humanitarian emergency that makes the present horrific situation pale by comparison.

But we also need to be thinking long-term. Experience has shown, time and again, that measures put into place during acute emergencies have long-term consequences for displaced populations. The US military has been roundly criticized for its failure to plan adequately for the post-intervention period; the humanitarian community has an opportunity – and a responsibility -- to do better. If actions are not taken now to prepare for post-conflict needs, we will suffer the effects of Iraq's humanitarian nightmare for years and decades to come.

Measures should be introduced now to facilitate the eventual return of Iraqis to their communities. UNHCR should coordinate a small planning unit with other humanitarian and development agencies to begin thinking about alternative scenarios for the return of refugees and IDPs when conditions permit. Although this is unlikely to occur in the next year or two, people need to be thinking about how to phase in the return, identifying the obstacles, and calculating the support required to sustain the effort. Not only would this reassure host governments in the region, but the involvement of development actors, such as the UN Development Program could avoid transitional problems later on.

One of the greatest obstacles to the return of refugees and especially IDPs is the issue of property restitution or compensation. Twelve years after the Dayton peace agreement, there are still 500,000 Bosnian refugees and IDPs for whom return is difficult. Property issues have turned out to be incredibly complex. Two steps could be taken now in Iraq which would make the return process smoother in the future: the government should stress that all rights to property will be upheld and that those who are currently displaced will not be penalized for being away from their homes. Secondly, the government should implement a mechanism for displaced Iraqis to register their properties now in the expectation of having them returned in the future. The government has already developed a way for Iraqis to do this, but it needs to be publicized in the Iraqi displaced communities and the government needs to make sure that it is implemented in practice.

6. Engage with Syria

From the humanitarian perspective, the nightmare scenario is that security will continue to deteriorate in Iraq, displacement will increase, and that Syria will close its border with Iraq. This would have both catastrophic implications for security in Iraq and would create a humanitarian emergency within the country that could not be dealt with as the war intensifies. Syria, therefore, needs to be supported, encouraged, and funded to keep this escape hatch open. While the US has good reasons for not wanting to engage with Syria on particular issues – such as its role in supporting Lebanese Hezbollah– there are very good reasons for the US government to meet with Syria to discuss humanitarian issues. The US and Syria have a common interest in wanting to prevent the 1.5 million Iraqis in Syria from de-stabilizing the region – this could serve as an opening for negotiations on other issues.

The officials who direct US military and foreign policy don't usually talk much about refugees and IDPs – they leave humanitarian response to the humanitarian agencies. While humanitarian agencies are indeed the best-placed to respond to human need, there are clear security issues at stake. If Syria closes its border to Iraqis and the level of desperation and despair rises inside Iraq, the bloodbath will be appalling and long-lasting. If the Iraqis living in exile in the Middle East are unable to return for years, it is likely that they will be a de-stabilizing force in the region. The impact of their presence – particularly if they lose the hope of return – will rival that of the Palestinian diaspora these past 59 years.