



# **Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: A Deepening Humanitarian Crisis?**

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## Summary

Some aspects of the humanitarian crisis many feared would take place in March 2003 with the initial military operation in Iraq unfolded later as a result of the ongoing insurgency and sectarian violence. It is estimated that in total (including those displaced prior to the war) there may be as many as 2 million Iraqi refugees who have fled to Jordan, Syria, and other neighboring states, and approximately 2.7 million Iraqis who have been displaced within Iraq itself.

Between 2004-2007, the violence and insecurity resulting from the ongoing sectarian strife, terrorism, and insurgency in Iraq produced substantial civilian displacement in different parts of the country. There are continued concerns about the absorptive capacity of neighboring countries, whether they can provide adequately for the populations that have moved across borders, and the impact of refugee flows on stability in general. Many of Iraq's neighbors fear that they are being overwhelmed by refugees who have fled over Iraq's borders. While there is clear evidence of limited improvement in Iraq—decreasing violence, reduced levels of displacement, and some returns in a few governorates—the situation in general remains fragile and requires sustained attention. UNHCR estimates that the number of Iraqis displaced within Iraq who need food and shelter exceeds 1 million people.

This report provides an analysis of the current crisis, including an overview of the conditions for those displaced in Iraq and the refugee situations in Syria, Jordan, and elsewhere. It also provides information on the U.S. and international response and examines refugee resettlement options in the United States. Aspects of this crisis that may be of particular interest to the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress include a focus on an immediate response (providing humanitarian relief funding), examining resettlement policies, and developing a strategy to manage the displaced, particularly within Iraq. This report will be updated as events warrant. For more information on Iraq, see CRS Report RL31339, *Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security*, by Kenneth Katzman, and CRS Report RL33793, *Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy*, coordinated by Christopher M. Blanchard.

## Contents

Overview .....	1
Displacement Within Iraq.....	2
Profile of Displacement .....	3
Immediate Consequences of Displacement .....	4
Iraqi Government Response to IDPs.....	4
Iraqi Refugees in Neighboring Countries.....	5
Overview .....	5
A Profile of the Displaced.....	6
U.S. and International Assistance.....	7
International Response.....	7
U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).....	7
U.N. Humanitarian Operations .....	8
Donor Contributions and Coordination: International Compact for Iraq.....	9
Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq .....	9
Humanitarian Appeals.....	9
Resettlement.....	10
U.S. Humanitarian Response .....	11
Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration .....	11
Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.....	11
U.S. Humanitarian Assistance.....	11
FY2008 and FY2009 Supplemental Appropriations.....	12
Congressional Action.....	12
FY2009 Regular Appropriations Request and Congressional Action.....	13
U.S. Refugee Program and Iraqi Refugees.....	13
Congressional Action .....	15
Issues for Congress.....	16
Voluntary Returns to Iraq .....	16
Forcible Returns .....	16
Capacity of the Iraqi Government.....	16
Provincial Elections .....	17
Increased International Funding.....	17
U.S. Humanitarian Response in Iraq.....	17
Competing Aid and Budget Priorities .....	18
Links to Broader Iraq Policy .....	18

## Tables

Table 1. Inside Iraq: Profile of Estimated Populations of Concern .....	4
Table 2. Inside Iraq: Estimated Displacement Totals Over Time .....	4
Table 3. Iraqi Refugees in Neighboring Countries .....	6
Table A-1. Refugees in Iraq, Prior to 2003.....	19
Table A-2. Iraqi Refugees Returning to Iraq, 2002-2006 .....	19

Table A-3. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq ..... 19

## **Appendixes**

Appendix. Iraq’s History of Displacement ..... 19

## **Contacts**

Author Contact Information ..... 20

## Overview

Many experts consider national reconciliation the key to halting sectarian warfare and the displacement of Iraqis from their homes. While some experts agree that Iraq's major communities remain sharply divided over their relative positions in the power structure, in 2008 the Bush Administration reportedly attributed signs of movement on political reconciliation and a reduction in the level of violence to the impact of the 2007 troop surge. The reduced violence has, at the very least, ensured that the displacement problem did not worsen any further in 2008 and there are possibly small signs of improvement. If movement toward political reconciliation as a result of the January 2009 elections takes hold, this could create also conditions for decreasing the current rates of displacement and could increase the desire of the international community to address the refugee and displaced persons issue. Most experts believe that reconciliation would also enhance capacity in Iraq's ministries responsible for security, basic services, and providing assistance to those displaced Iraqis.

The insecurity resulting from ongoing violence in Iraq continues to have a marked impact on civilian displacement in various parts of the country. This was particularly the case beginning in early 2006, when sectarian violence accelerated an already developing pattern of population displacement and emigration. The numbers of displaced Iraqis are very fluid and vary by source. For example, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society estimates of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) exceeded those published in a January 2008 report by the Migration Policy Institute, which states that there were close to 4.5 million displaced Iraqis (2.2 refugees and 2.3 IDPs). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)<sup>1</sup> now estimates close to 4.7 million Iraqis are currently displaced from their homes, including roughly 2.7 million inside Iraq and 2 million refugees who have fled Iraq, mostly to neighboring Jordan and Syria.<sup>2</sup>

When the displacement crisis accelerated in 2006, UNHCR observed that the humanitarian crisis many feared would take place in March 2003 as a result of the war then began to occur. "The massive displacement has emerged quietly and without fanfare but the numbers affected are in excess of what many agencies had predicted in 2003."<sup>3</sup> Then, as now, there were also concerns about the absorptive capacity of neighboring countries, whether they could provide adequately for the populations moving across borders, and the potential impact of refugee flows on stability in the region. The Iraq situation is one of the largest population displacement crises worldwide. As

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR is the U.N. agency dedicated to the protection of refugees and other populations displaced by conflict, famine, and natural disasters. It provides legal protections, implements long-term solutions, and coordinates emergency humanitarian relief for refugees and other displaced persons. In Iraq, UNHCR is the lead on protection and shelter. "Refugee" as defined under the *1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, is a person who is outside his or her country and who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. "Returnee" is a refugee who returns to his or her home country; and "IDP" is a person who has not crossed an international border but remains displaced inside his or her own country. UNHCR considers all categories part of "Populations of Concern."

<sup>2</sup> See also International Organization for Migration, "IOM Emergency Needs Assessments Post February 2006 Displacement in Iraq 1 January 2009 Monthly Report." All displacement figures must be taken as estimates due to insufficient data. Monitoring and registration are incomplete because of poor security, a lack of access to some areas, and ongoing movement of possibly thousands of people per day.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, "Update on the Iraq Situation," November 2006. See also CRS Report RL31814, *Potential Humanitarian Issues in Post-War Iraq: An Overview for Congress*, by Rhoda Margesson. Also, "Iraq Stands on Brink of Civil War, 'Violence Seems Out of Control,'" Special Representative Tells Security Council, SC/8895, December 11, 2006.

the situation continues, higher food and fuel prices and decreasing subsidies are limiting the ability of aid agencies to provide assistance.

It is estimated that 1.2 million Iraqis were displaced before 2006, 1.5 million Iraqis were displaced between 2006 and 2007, and less than 1% have been displaced in 2008. While there are some reports of limited improvements—decreasing violence, reduced levels of displacement, and some returns in a few governorates—the situation in general remains serious and requires sustained attention.<sup>4</sup> UNHCR estimates that the number of Iraqi IDPs who need food and shelter exceeds 1 million people.<sup>5</sup>

The figures on population displacement illustrate the challenges ahead. As the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress considers various policy options toward Iraq, the impact of this level of displacement—which is the largest in the Middle East since 1948—cannot be overestimated in terms of its impact on regional stability and the potential for humanitarian suffering. Experts suggest that what is badly needed—and quickly—is the development of a robust response on the part of the international community that provides and funds humanitarian relief; conducts a close examination of resettlement policies and options in third countries; develops a strategy to manage the displaced, particularly within Iraq; and implements increased funding to host countries and aid agencies outside Iraq.<sup>6</sup>

## Displacement Within Iraq

Displacement within Iraq has usually been the result of sectarian conflict and general armed violence, local criminal activity, coalition military operations, and fighting among militias and insurgents. Direct personal threats, abductions, assassinations, and death threats remain commonplace, although less so than in 2007. Religious belief, political or tribal affiliation, and association with U.S. forces or Iraqi authorities can also make someone a target for violence. All of these activities continue to create an atmosphere of generalized fear for many ordinary Iraqis. Within Iraq, the current conditions clearly bear the mark of sectarian polarization and “cleansing” in neighborhoods formerly of mixed religious orientation that took place during 2006 and 2007. In recent studies, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that IDPs tended to be from mixed neighborhoods and displaced to homogenous ones. The movement occurred predominantly in and between urban areas—with more than 70% fleeing Baghdad.<sup>7</sup> At least 10 of the 18 Iraqi provinces have now tried to place entry restrictions on their internal borders to Iraqis displaced from elsewhere in the country.

Overall living standards within Iraq have declined sharply since 2003. Human development indicators—access to health care, social services, education, employment—have fractured under

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, International Rescue Committee, “Uprooted Iraqis: An Urgent Crisis,” December 2007; Refugees International, “Uprooted and Unstable: Meeting Urgent Humanitarian Needs in Iraq,” April 2008; Amnesty International, “Iraq—Rhetoric and Reality: The Iraqi Refugee Crisis,” June 2008; International Organization for Migration, “Iraq Displacement 2007 Year in Review,” January 2008.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, “Internal Displacement in Iraq,” April 8, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> See also Elizabeth Ferris, *Security, Displacement and Iraq: A Deadly Combination*, the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, August 27, 2007; and Carlos Pascual, *The United Nations in Iraq*, Foreign Policy at Brookings, Policy Paper No. 3, September 2007.

<sup>7</sup> International Organization for Migration, “Iraq Displacement 2007 Year in Review,” January 2008.

the current circumstances and affected wider social networks in Iraqi society. Limited assistance activities and access by the international community have made implementation of tangible, long-term policy objectives difficult. Within many areas in Iraq, conditions are deteriorating and, for those already displaced, are becoming more permanent problems. Many who cannot secure protection or assistance could soon find themselves in the same situation. According to some estimates, Iraq's population is 26.8 million, this means that nearly approximately 17% of the population may be displaced.

There are many patterns of displacement, some that have their origins decades ago, but have now evolved into a new phase—for example, the approximately 300,000 refugees who were in Iran before the 2003 war, then returned to Iraq, and now are believed to have been displaced again, this time within Iraq. Others were refugees from other countries in the region who fled to Iraq and are now on the move again within its borders. Saddam Hussein's brutal regime left a legacy of displacement, as his regime forcibly displaced Iraqi Shiites and Kurds in order to control territory, terrorize the population, and fight insurrection. Some experts estimate as many as 1.5 million may have been displaced over the three decades of his regime.

## **Profile of Displacement**

There have been no reliable census data on Iraq's ethnic and sectarian makeup for decades. Iraq's population represents a number of ethnic groups and religions. In general throughout Iraq, patterns have shown that Shiites have moved from the center to the south; Sunnis from the south to the upper center; Christians fled to Ninevah Province and Kurds ended up within Diyala or Tamim/Kirkuk Provinces.<sup>8</sup> Palestinians in Iraq (who numbered close to 34,000 before the war and are mostly Sunni) have been particularly vulnerable to reprisal attacks by Shiites as they received preferential treatment from Saddam Hussein. Many have been killed, and others have been displaced again. An unknown number of Palestinians remain in Iraq. The United Nations estimates that roughly 3,000 Palestinian refugees live in refugee camps on the Iraqi-Syrian border. Reportedly the living conditions urgently need to be addressed. Some progress has been made on resettling some of the Palestinians in Canada, Brazil, Chile, and Sudan.<sup>9</sup>

Those Iraqis who have worked with the U.S. government, the new Iraqi government, or international organizations have been particularly targeted.<sup>10</sup> In addition, there are vulnerable groups within these categories of displaced including the elderly, sick, pregnant women, and children. (See "U.S. Refugee Program and Iraqi Refugees" section later in this report.)

Most of those displaced have moved in with family and friends who live in areas where one sect overwhelmingly predominates. When this is not possible they go to public facilities, such as schools and factories (some people are squatting in damaged or abandoned property, such as mosques) and in much smaller numbers, to camps set up by the Iraqi Red Crescent Society or

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. In addition, another account of displacement is provided by Al-Khalidid and Tanner, who define several categories of those displaced, including Sunni Arabs from Shi'a areas; Shi'a from Sunni areas; Arabs (both Shi'a and Sunni) and other minorities from Kurdish areas; and minority groups from both Sunni and Shi'a areas. These include Iraqi Christians, Sabean-Mandeans, Shi'a Turkmen, the Roma, Baghdad and Basra Kurds, and third country nationals, including Palestinians and Iranian Kurds. See Ashraf al-Khalidid and Victor Tanner, "Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq," October 2006.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, "UNHCR Concerned About Situation of Palestinians on Iraq Border," March 18, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, "Humanitarian Issues and Politics in Iraq," February 14, 2007.

Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM). Repeat-displacement, which means moving a second time, or repeatedly, most commonly applies to those displaced by military operations.<sup>11</sup>

Daily behavior by those who are displaced or living in fear for their lives may also vary to avoid establishing any predictable pattern: Micro and nighttime displacement means that a person is living in his or her home, but sleeping elsewhere. Daylight displacement involves shifting routines, routes, and activities. And fake displacement are those who pretend to be displaced and build homes on government land or the land of locals.<sup>12</sup>

## Immediate Consequences of Displacement

There are many consequences to displacement. In the short term, the IOM reports examine the deterioration of basic humanitarian needs and services, not only from displacement itself, but due to lack of employment and a huge economic decline throughout the country. Needs expressed by displaced Iraqis include food, water and sanitation, fuel and electricity, shelter, health care, and education. This level of displacement has increased competition for limited resources and continues to place huge burdens on host communities, which in turn has had an impact as communities reach their saturation point.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1. Inside Iraq: Profile of Estimated Populations of Concern**

Refugees in Iraq (Palestinian, Syrian, Iranian, Turkish, Sudanese, many further displaced in Iraq)	50,000 +
Returnees (mainly from Iran; many further displaced in Iraq)	300,000
Stateless (Bedouins, etc.)	130,000

**Source:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

**Table 2. Inside Iraq: Estimated Displacement Totals Over Time**

IDPs (old caseload, prior to 2003)	1,200,000
IDPs (since Feb 2006)	1,500,000
Total	2,700,000

**Source:** UNHCR.

## Iraqi Government Response to IDPs

Iraqi government ministries providing assistance to the displaced include the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), the Ministry of Trade, which is in charge of the allocation of food rations, the Ministry of Interior, which provides documentation for services such as registration for food rations, and the Ministry of Education, which is in charge of registering school children, many of whom have been displaced and need to be enrolled in local schools.

<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Displaced and Migration, Information Department, is preparing a report on basic statistics of post-February 2006 Internally Displaced Persons in cooperation with the IOM, Iraq Mission in Amman.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Khalidid and Tanner.

<sup>13</sup> International Organization for Migration, "Iraq Displacement 2006 Year in Review," January 2007 and "Iraq Displacement 2007 Mid-Year Review," July 2007; and "Iraq Displacement 2007 Year in Review," January 2008 and January 2009.



Support of the displaced in the provinces is usually handled by a committee and is considered more effective. There are also informal committees set up in local communities and in mosques. As a national aid agency that has been largely viewed as non-sectarian, the Iraqi Red Crescent assists the displaced throughout the country through its 18 branches.

There have been concerns by Iraq's neighbors, the United States, and other donor countries that the Iraqi government is not doing enough to assist with its displaced citizens. At a conference in Sweden in late May 2008, the Maliki government made a pledge of \$195 million to assist the displaced.<sup>14</sup> The International Compact with Iraq annual report states that in addition to \$25 million transferred to Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan to support Iraqi refugees, the government of Iraq has allocated \$195 million to support voluntary returnees and for emergency costs and housing rehabilitation.<sup>15</sup>

The United States, UNHCR, and other international partners are working with the government of Iraq to assess what policies and programs are in place to accommodate returns and what will be required once conditions permit voluntary returns to begin. In the meantime, some experts believe that the sectarian groups have tried not only to consolidate territory, but also to fill the gap as "protector and provider" in the provision of services the government cannot fulfill for the displaced.<sup>16</sup> Relatively few international humanitarian organizations are working in Iraq because of the unstable security situation. There are 32 humanitarian international NGOs with programs in Iraq (some operating through implementing partners). Those that are there keep a very low profile. Between March 2003 and June 2008, it was reported that 94 aid workers were killed, 86 kidnaped, 245 injured, and 24 arrested.<sup>17</sup>

## **Iraqi Refugees in Neighboring Countries<sup>18</sup>**

### **Overview**

Since 2003, Iraq's neighbors have willingly or unwillingly absorbed approximately 2 million refugees fleeing violence and instability in their home country. Jordan and Syria have been the primary destination for the displaced, and by all accounts, both countries have been stretched thin in trying to provide adequate services for largely unwanted refugee populations. Although the plight of many Iraqis refugees is difficult but not dire, there is much concern that the situation could deteriorate over time if the existing refugee populations remain for a prolonged period or if new waves of refugees flood Iraq's neighbors.

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<sup>14</sup> Reuters Foundation, "U.S. Says Iraq Should Promote Refugees' Return," June 3, 2008; U.S. Department of State, "Update on IDP and USAID Mission Activities in Iraq," June 27, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> *The International Compact with Iraq: A New Beginning, Annual Review, May 2007-April 2008*, June 16, 2008. See also Security Council SC/9415, *Under-Secretary-General, In Briefing on Iraq, Warns Security Council Against Complacency, Stresses Need for Trust Across Community Lines*, August 6, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Khalidid and Tanner, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance, "Iraq Humanitarian Assistance Report," June 18, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> This section was written by Jeremy M. Sharp, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division.

Beyond the dire humanitarian consequences of scattering nearly 10% of Iraq's pre-war population into neighboring countries lie the long-term impact of this large scale displacement on the geopolitics of the Middle East. Many Iraqis have indicated that they will never return home, raising questions over their future status in their new homes. Will Iraq's neighbors move toward integrating refugees into the citizenry at large? Or, will Iraqis be treated as second-class citizens and form a permanent underclass similar to the situation of Palestinian refugees? Will Iraqis become politically active in their host countries and form diaspora organizations? Or, will they be barred from politics altogether driving the most extreme elements to pursue radical causes? Will sectarian violence spill over from Iraq into neighboring states, bringing an added element of instability into an already volatile region?

### **A Profile of the Displaced**

Of those who have fled Iraq, various reports indicate that many refugees were from Iraq's now decimated middle class. Numerous interviews of Iraqi refugees conducted outside Iraq have revealed that Iraqi professionals who fled the country were the least sectarian elements in society, and many fled to escape both the general threat of sectarian violence and the specific threat of kidnapping, which has become a common criminal enterprise conducted by insurgents and organized gangs.

**Table 3. Iraqi Refugees in Neighboring Countries**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Refugee Estimates</b>
Syria	1,200,000-1,500,000
Jordan	400,000-500,000
Gulf States	200,000
Egypt	70,000
Iran	57,000
Lebanon	40,000
Turkey	10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,977,000-2,377,000 (est.)<sup>a</sup></b>

**Source:** UNHCR

a. Refugee figures should be considered estimates. UNHCR has been short of funding, staff and resources, and therefore unable to process all refugee documentation and adequately monitor borders. It is relying on host governments to record refugee inflows.

Unlike other refugee crises in war-torn areas, the status of Iraqi refugees in neighboring states is more difficult to discern. At present, there are no makeshift tent cities for the homeless and destitute, though aid agencies did construct such facilities in 2003 in anticipation of a refugee crisis that did not materialize. While Iraqis refugees are far from being assimilated into their host country, they have blended into urban areas, settling into cities like Amman and Damascus. Many Iraqis who fled the country before/after the U.S. invasion had some temporary means of supporting themselves either through their personal savings or remittances from relatives abroad. Wealthy Ba'th party members and supporters of the Saddam Hussein regime who fled to Jordan

in 2003 were dubbed “Mercedes refugees” by the diplomatic community and the press.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, aid workers assert that the newer waves of Iraqis who crossed the border are progressively poorer than their predecessors and prioritizing those most in need of assistance has become more critical. Aid workers note that because the Iraqi refugee population has blended into urban areas, they are harder to identify, document, and assist.

There are many challenges that face Iraqi refugees living abroad. Aside from the social isolation that accompanies their separation from family and tribe, Iraqis may face discrimination and disdain from citizens who view them as competition for jobs and access to strained social welfare services. Unemployment was already high in Syria and Jordan before the Iraqis’ arrival, and both countries bar them from legally working during their stay. Access to affordable healthcare is difficult for most refugees without significant personal savings, forcing many new arrivals to turn to international aid agencies. Some estimate that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children are not attending public school while in exile. According to one aid worker, “We are finding that a lot of participants in the youth programs we’re running—a very high number, sometimes up to 30 percent per class—are illiterate or close to illiterate.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon are not state parties to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 Protocol, which makes UNHCR’s role more difficult, as the term “refugee” and the protection mandates recognized under international law are not formally recognized in these countries.<sup>21</sup>

## **U.S. and International Assistance**

### **International Response**

#### **U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)**

Despite the devastating bombing of its Baghdad compound five years ago in August 2003, the United Nations has been a central actor in helping to address Iraq’s humanitarian situation and has taken on a growing role in political reconciliation and economic reconstruction. The United Nations also has a significant role in addressing the problem of displaced Iraqis.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), established by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1500, was adopted on August 14, 2003.<sup>22</sup> The United Nations Country Team—composed of 16 U.N. agencies and programs involved in Iraq—is coordinated by UNAMI<sup>23</sup> and works with international and local staff. The U.N. Operation in Iraq is divided into clusters, including the following:

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. policymakers assert that some senior ex-Ba’th party members residing in Syria have provided material and logistic support to the Sunni-led insurgency in Iraq.

<sup>20</sup> “Illiteracy Increasing among Iraq’s Refugee Children,” *McClatchy Newspapers*, December 12, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> UNHCR currently operates in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon under a Memorandum of Understanding that binds UNHCR to resettle every person it determines is a refugee. For background information, see UNHCR, *Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees*, March 12, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq (SRSG) Staffan de Mistura is the head of UNAMI.

<sup>23</sup> For the complete list of U.N. organizations involved in Iraq, see <http://www.uniraq.org/aboutus/unct.asp>.

- Agriculture, Food Security, Environment/Natural Resources Management.
- Education and Culture.
- Governance and Human Development.
- Health and Nutrition.
- Infrastructure Rehabilitation.
- Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Durable Solutions.
- Support to the Electoral Process.

Cross-cutting issues include security, human rights, gender, environment, and employment generation.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1830 (2008), approved August 7, 2008, extended UNAMI's mandate another year and called on the United Nations to expand its role in assisting Iraq.<sup>24</sup> The United Nations has been largely responsible for providing assistance and guidance to promote the democratization of Iraq, including support to the transitional government and the Iraqi Electoral Commission. On governance issues, UNAMI is expected to continue to focus on promoting political reconciliation, providing election assistance, and monitoring human rights practices and humanitarian affairs. In addition, it is extensively involved in assisting with the constitution review process, which is not yet complete. UNAMI also played a major role in helping organize recent provincial elections. In addition, it has been involved in efforts to try to resolve the Kurdish claim to Kirkuk and other cities in the north and was instrumental in persuading the Kurds to accept a delay in a referendum (to incorporate Kirkuk into the Kurdistan regional government-controlled area). The referendum has been postponed several times and there is currently no target date for when it will be rescheduled.

After the 2003 bombing of UNAMI headquarters in Baghdad, a centralized coordination point for humanitarian activities was established in Amman, Jordan, and most other U.N. activities were either curtailed or conducted by international staff from Jordan, using Iraqi nationals to implement programs within Iraq. In the past year, as security has improved, the United Nations has enhanced its staffing and presence in Iraq.

## **U.N. Humanitarian Operations**

In coordination with the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), UNHCR is the focal point for the United Nations' Cluster Approach on refugees and IDPs. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) serves as deputy coordinator. In addition to UNAMI, other partners include U.N. Operations (UNOPS), the World Food Program (WFP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), U.N. Habitat, and the World Health Organization (WHO). In neighboring countries, UNHCR works with the U.N. country teams.

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<sup>24</sup> Previous U.N. Security Council Resolutions to extend the mandate of UNAMI include S/RES 1546 (2004); S/RES 1557 (2004) S/RES 1619 (2005); S/RES 1700 (2006) and S/RES 1770 (2007).

## **Donor Contributions and Coordination: International Compact for Iraq**

In response to a continuing U.S. effort to encourage greater levels of donor contributions, on July 27, 2006, the U.N. and government of Iraq launched an International Compact for Iraq. Under this initiative, participating donor countries have pledged funds and, in return, the government of Iraq has promised a five-year program of specific reforms and actions leading to long-term economic and political development.<sup>25</sup> The Compact was finalized at a donor meeting held in Egypt on May 3, 2007, attended by more than 60 countries. The First Anniversary Ministerial Review of the International Compact with Iraq was held in Stockholm, Sweden, on May 29, 2008. The first annual review of progress makes a brief reference to the vulnerability of IDPs and ongoing discussions with neighboring countries about assistance to Iraqi refugees.

On August 13, 2008, the United Nations and the government of Iraq signed a three-year agreement to support the achievement of the goals outlined in the International Compact with Iraq. The cooperation agreement outlines a strategy that will focus mostly on reconstruction, development, and humanitarian needs. It will be funded by the government of Iraq and other funds that draw on international support, including the U.N. Development Group Iraqi Trust Fund and the U.N. Humanitarian Appeal for Iraq.

## **Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq**

An international conference on Iraqi displacement took place in Geneva, Switzerland on April 17-18, 2007. The conference approved a Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq, which was developed by the United Nations and partners, and emphasized the importance of coordination and expansion of humanitarian assistance activities inside Iraq. Donor contributions from other governments and intergovernmental entities have also been forthcoming, particularly towards the emergency U.N. and other humanitarian appeals, but some consider the response to be inadequate.<sup>26</sup> At the donor's conference, the Iraqi government pledged \$25 million to assist Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries.<sup>27</sup> Payment of \$15 million was made to Syria and \$2 million to Lebanon. Jordan did not accept direct payment, and instead the money was recently contributed to UNHCR for its refugee program in Jordan. As mentioned earlier in this report, the Iraqi government is also reported to have pledged \$195 million to assist displaced Iraqis.

## **Humanitarian Appeals**

UNHCR's Iraq budget in 2003 was approximately \$150 million to deal with possibly 600,000 refugees. In 2006, its Iraq budget was \$29 million (although not fully funded) until January 31, 2007, when it submitted its 2007 supplementary appeal for \$60 million. This appeal was increased to \$123.7 million in July 2007. In addition, UNHCR and the United Nation's Childrens

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<sup>25</sup> The bulk of U.N. economic development assistance is provided through the U.N. Development Group (UNDG) Iraq Trust Fund (UNDG-ITF), and one half of a multi-donor facility (the other part managed by the World Bank), the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI). A wide range of U.N. development organizations implement projects, which are developed in close coordination with the government of Iraq, and provide technical and related assistance in eight sectors.

<sup>26</sup> For one analysis of the response by the international community, see Amnesty International, *Millions in Flight: The Iraqi Refugee Crisis*, September 24, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> See Chairman's Summary, International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Inside Iraq and in Neighboring Countries, Geneva, April 17-18, 2007.

Fund (UNICEF) put forward a Joint Education appeal of \$129 million to enroll 150,000 Iraqi children in Jordanian and Syrian schools. A U.N. interagency appeal of nearly \$85 million to improve health care access for displaced Iraqis in neighboring countries was submitted on September 18, 2007.<sup>28</sup> UNHCR's 2008 appeal was for \$261 million.<sup>29</sup> The Expanded Humanitarian Response (ERF) provides flexible funding for emergency response mainly to bridge gaps between sectors.<sup>30</sup> UNHCR and ERF provide selected examples of humanitarian appeals.

According to UNOCHA for 2009, the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) for Iraq and the Region is for \$547.3 million in total reflecting a coordinated approach between the UN and NGOs operating in Iraq and neighboring countries to help Iraqi IDPs and refugees. The appeal is divided in two parts. Under Pillar I, \$192.3 million is requested to help the most vulnerable IDPs in Iraq and the reintegration of returnees. Under Pillar II, \$355 million is requested to support Iraqi refugees living in host countries.<sup>31</sup>

## **Resettlement**

Resettlement applications from Iraqi refugees have increased in Europe. Sweden saw a fourfold increase in applications in 2007. As countries determine their resettlement policies with regard to Iraqi refugees, it will be possible to compare these with U.S. policy decisions on the issue. UNHCR has over 300 staff working on its Iraq operation, registering refugees in countries neighboring Iraq, with some of the most vulnerable referred to resettlement countries including the United States, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Brazil.

In order to offer protection and assistance to Iraqi refugees, and to identify the most vulnerable, UNHCR developed ten categories of risk, which include "victims of detention or severe trauma or torture; women at risk; those with medical conditions and disabilities who cannot access treatment; dependants of refugees residing in resettlement countries; older persons at risk; unaccompanied or separated children; high profile cases; those who fled as a result of their association with foreign entities such as the MNF; stateless persons; and those who are members of minority groups who have been targeted owing to their religious or ethnic background." Those considered the most vulnerable may then be referred for resettlement in a third country.<sup>32</sup>

UNHCR met with the main resettlement countries in Geneva, Switzerland, in February 2008, and an agreement was reached to form a Core Group on Iraqi Resettlement that meets periodically in both the field and at headquarters to exchange information and make decisions on policy, technical, and other issues requiring action.

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<sup>28</sup> Joint Appeal by UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, Health Sector Appeal, *Meeting the Needs of Iraqis Displaced in Neighboring Countries*, September 18, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR, "UNHCR Faces Funding Shortfall for Iraq Operation," May 9, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> UNOCHA, "Iraq: NGO Micro Grant Expanded Humanitarian Response Fund Bulletin No. 8," May 31, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> The Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) is the humanitarian sector's main tool for coordination, strategic planning and programming. See <https://www.reliefweb.int/fts> for details on the CAP for Iraq and the region.

<sup>32</sup> See Statement by United Nations High Commission for Refugees Assistant High Commissioner for Operations Judy Cheng-Hopkins, Migration Policy Institute Briefing, September 18, 2007.

## **U.S. Humanitarian Response<sup>33</sup>**

According to the State Department, the U.S. government has provided more than \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance to displaced Iraqis and other vulnerable populations since 2003.<sup>34</sup> Most requests from the Bush Administration and congressional action have come through emergency supplemental appropriations. After the bombing of the Shiite Muslim Al-Askariya shrine in February 2006, sectarian violence in Iraq accelerated an already developing pattern of population displacement. The funding numbers reflect the increased humanitarian needs on the ground.

### **Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration**

The State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) at the State Department is providing assistance to refugees mostly through implementing partners, including UNHCR and other U.N. agencies, and international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). Iraqi refugees include those displaced to other countries as well as small groups displaced at the border.

### **Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance**

The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is providing assistance focused on IDPs and the host communities inside Iraq. Since March 2003, OFDA has continued its aid program at various levels.

OFDA has five implementing partners that work mostly with local agencies, in part because of the security situation and limited access in Iraq. OFDA is continuing its work with host communities, a number of which are feeling the strain and finding it hard to cope with the extra burden of the increasing numbers. OFDA's strategy has been to support the host to help meet their needs and so they in turn can maintain their capacity for helping IDPs. Activities include provision of emergency relief supplies, water systems, and infrastructure rehabilitation in host communities, support for emergency and mobile medical teams, and small-scale livelihood projects. It also works with the MoDM on information management coordination and capacity building.<sup>35</sup> There are a wide range of skills and capacities in the NGO community. The NGO Coordinating Committee in Iraq is made up of mostly European NGOs, but it does not consult with the U.S. government. Interaction, the U.S.-based umbrella organization for American NGOs, also has an Iraq working group.

### **U.S. Humanitarian Assistance**

In FY2007, the total amount obligated for humanitarian assistance through PRM and OFDA was \$171 million, which included \$37 million to UNHCR's appeal and \$39 million to the UNHCR/UNICEF Joint Education Appeal. Estimates of the overall 2008 humanitarian needs

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<sup>33</sup> See CRS Report RL33769, *International Crises and Disasters: U.S. Humanitarian Assistance, Budget Trends, and Issues for Congress*, by Rhoda Margesson.

<sup>34</sup> United States Department of State, "U.S. Humanitarian Assistance for Refugees and Internally Displaced Iraqis," April 15, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> For more information, see U.S. Department of State, "Update on IDP and USAID Mission Activities in Iraq," June 27, 2008.

increased considerably. In FY2008, PRM provided \$175.4 million (or more than 65%)<sup>36</sup> toward UNHCR's appeal and made contributions to other international organizations. According to the State Department, the United States pledged or contributed a total of \$398.3 million in humanitarian assistance for displaced Iraqis in FY2008.<sup>37</sup> The FY2009 regular budget request did not include funding for Iraqi refugees or IDPs.

### **FY2008 and FY2009 Supplemental Appropriations**

The Administration's FY2008 supplemental request, as amended in October 2007, asked for \$230 million for Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) for anticipated and unanticipated refugee and migration emergencies, of which \$195 million was requested for humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees. In the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161), \$200 million was appropriated for MRA (of which \$149.3 was obligated for Iraqi refugees.) The remaining \$30 million (of the original \$230 million request) became part of the Administration's second FY2008 supplemental request.

On May 2, 2008, the Administration requested \$191 million in the FY2009 supplemental MRA funding, which included \$141 million for Iraqi refugees.

The Administration's second FY2008 supplemental request did not include funding for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account.<sup>38</sup> The Administration requested \$45 million in its FY2009 supplemental request.

### **Congressional Action**

The final version of the FY2008/2009 supplemental appropriations bill, H.R. 2642 (P.L. 110-252) was signed on June 30, 2008 (it was approved by the House on June 19 and by the Senate on June 26, 2008.) For the FY2008 supplemental, it provided \$315 million for MRA, which was \$285 million above the request, to meet global refugee needs worldwide, including for Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and the region, and for IDPs in Iraq. These funds may also be used to support the admissions costs of Iraqi refugees and other requirements of the Iraqi refugee program. The expanded statement accompanying the bill raised concerns about the level of resources the government of Iraq has so far dedicated to assisting Iraqi refugees and IDPs. The final June 30 version of the bill provided \$350 million for MRA in the FY2009 supplemental, nearly 50% more than requested, to respond to urgent humanitarian and refugee admissions requirements, including assistance for refugees from Iraq.

For FY2008, the June 30-enacted version of H.R. 2642 included \$220 million for IDA for urgent humanitarian crises worldwide, including countries affected by the ongoing food crisis, but did not specify an amount for Iraq. For FY2009, the bill included \$200 million for IDA for ongoing humanitarian needs worldwide and specified that some of these funds may be allocated to assist IDPs in Iraq and be used in response to the international food crisis.

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<sup>36</sup> The United States typically funds 25-30 percent of U.N. appeals.

<sup>37</sup> United States Department of State, "U.S. Government Reaches Record for Iraqi Refugee Admissions and Humanitarian Assistance in Fiscal Year 2008, October 2, 2008. See also, United States Department of State, "Latest Figures on Iraqi Refugee Admissions and Humanitarian Aid," June 3, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> In the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161), \$110 million was appropriated for the emergency humanitarian assistance, with \$80 million for Iraq.



## **FY2009 Regular Appropriations Request and Congressional Action**

On February 4, 2008, the Bush Administration submitted its FY2009 regular appropriations request. It did not include funding for Iraqi refugees or IDPs. On September 30, 2008, FY2009 regular appropriations funding was provided under the terms of a continuing resolution (H.R. 2638/P.L. 110-329) that allows foreign aid spending at the level provided in the FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161). The resolution expires on March 6, 2009. Thus far in FY2009, PRM has obligated an additional \$3.03 million in FY2008 Supplemental carryover to NGOs for programs for Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria.

## **U.S. Refugee Program and Iraqi Refugees<sup>39</sup>**

The admission of refugees to the United States and their resettlement here are authorized by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended.<sup>40</sup> Under the INA, a *refugee* is typically a person who is outside his or her country and who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

The Department of State (DOS) handles overseas processing of refugees, which is conducted through a system of three priorities for admission. Priority One (P-1) covers compelling protection cases and individuals for whom no durable solution exists, who are referred to the U.S. refugee program by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a U.S. embassy, or a designated nongovernmental organization (NGO). Iraqis, like all nationalities, are eligible for P-1 processing.

Priority Two (P-2) covers groups of special humanitarian concern to the United States. It includes specific groups within certain nationalities, clans, or ethnic groups. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008<sup>41</sup> specifies certain groups of Iraqis that are to be processed under Priority Two. These new Priority Two groups include Iraqis who are or were employed by the U.S. government in Iraq; Iraqis who are or were employed in Iraq by either a media or nongovernmental organization headquartered in the United States, or an entity closely associated with the U.S. mission in Iraq that has received U.S. government funding; and Iraqis who are members of a persecuted religious or minority group and have close family members in the United States. The FY2008 National Defense Authorization Act directs the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, to establish in-country refugee processing mechanisms for these Iraqi refugees.

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<sup>39</sup> This section was written by Andorra Bruno, Specialist in Immigration Policy, Domestic Social Policy Division.

<sup>40</sup> Act of June 27, 1952, ch. 477; 8 U.S.C. 1101 *et seq.* The Refugee Act (P.L. 96-212, March 17, 1980) amended the INA to establish procedures for the admission of refugees to the United States. For additional information on the U.S. refugee program, see CRS Report RL31269, *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy*, by Andorra Bruno.

<sup>41</sup> P.L. 110-181, January 28, 2008. The Iraqi refugee and special immigrant provisions in P.L. 110-181 are similar to those in the stand-alone Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act (S. 1651) and in the Senate-passed version of an earlier FY2008 National Defense Authorization bill (H.R. 1585).

Priority Three (P-3) comprises family reunification cases involving spouses, unmarried children under age 21, and parents of persons who were admitted to the United States as refugees or granted asylum. Iraqis are among the nationalities eligible for P-3 processing in FY2009.<sup>42</sup>

All refugee applicants are checked through DOS's Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS).<sup>43</sup> In addition, DOS must obtain a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) from the Federal Bureau of Investigation on certain applicants. In the SAO process, additional databases are checked for information on the individual. Iraqi refugees are subject to enhanced security screening procedures established by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Individuals who are preliminarily determined to qualify for a processing priority are presented to DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for an in-person interview. USCIS makes determinations about whether individuals are eligible for refugee status and are otherwise admissible to the United States.

Each year, the President submits a report to Congress, known as the *consultation document*, which contains the Administration's proposed refugee ceiling and regional allocations for the upcoming fiscal year. Following congressional consultations on the proposal, the President issues a Presidential Determination setting the refugee numbers for that year. The FY2009 worldwide refugee ceiling is 80,000. It includes 75,000 admissions numbers allocated among the regions of the world and an unallocated reserve of 5,000 numbers that can be used if, and where, a need for additional refugee slots develops. The FY2009 allocation for the Near East/South Asia region, which includes Iraq, is 37,000. According to the FY2009 consultation document, this allocation includes vulnerable Iraqis, Bhutanese, and Iranians, and Afghans.<sup>44</sup> Admissions of Iraqi refugees to the United States totaled 198 in FY2005, 202 in FY2006, 1,608 in FY2007, and 13,823 in FY2008.<sup>45</sup> According to a January 2009 State Department report, it is the Administration's goal to admit at least 17,000 Iraqi refugees in FY2009.<sup>46</sup>

Beyond the formal refugee program, other immigration mechanisms have been established to facilitate the admission to the United States of Iraqis who have worked for or been closely associated with the U.S. government, including the U.S. military. Provisions enacted in 2006 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2006, as subsequently amended,<sup>47</sup> authorize DHS to grant legal permanent resident status as *special immigrants* to certain nationals of Iraq and Afghanistan who have worked directly with the U.S. Armed Forces, or under Chief of Mission authority, as translators or interpreters, and their spouses and children. This program was capped at 500 aliens (excluding spouses and children) for FY2007 and FY2008, and is capped at 50 aliens (excluding spouses and children) for FY2009 and subsequent years. In FY2008, 1,142 special immigrant visas were issued under this program.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The P-3 program stopped accepting applications from all nationalities in October 2008 due to indications of high levels of fraud. A revised P-3 program is under discussion.

<sup>43</sup> CLASS contains records on people ineligible to receive visas, including individuals who are suspected or known terrorists and their associates or who are associated with suspected or known terrorist organizations.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2008: Report to the Congress*, p. 51.

<sup>45</sup> Data from U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, *Iraq Status Report*, January 22, 2009, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/115535.pdf> (hereafter cited as *Iraq Status Report*, January 2009).

<sup>47</sup> P.L. 109-163, January 6, 2006; P.L. 110-28, May 25, 2007; P.L. 110-36, June 15, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> *Iraq Status Report*, January 2009.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, in addition to making changes to the refugee program discussed above, broadens DHS's authority to provide special immigrant status to certain nationals of Iraq. It also grants the Secretary of State the authority to provide such status in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security. Under this law, as amended,<sup>49</sup> Iraqi nationals are eligible for special immigrant status if they are or were employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Iraq on or after March 20, 2003, for not less than one year; provided documented valuable service to the U.S. government; and have experienced "an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of the alien's employment by the United States government." This special immigrant program is capped at 5,000 principal aliens (excluding spouses and children) each year from FY2008 through FY2012. The National Defense Authorization Act requires the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, to establish or use existing refugee processing mechanisms in Iraq and elsewhere in the region for processing Iraqis under the new special immigrant program. Furthermore, the law makes Iraqi special immigrants eligible for the same resettlement assistance, entitlement programs, and other benefits as refugees for up to eight months. In FY2008, 705 special immigrant visas were issued under this program.<sup>50</sup>

## **Congressional Action**

The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress held hearings pertaining to Iraqi refugees and IDPs and the resettlement of Iraqi refugees in the United States, and a number of related bills were introduced. Legislation enacted by the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress with provisions on Iraqi refugees and IDPs included the following:

P.L. 110-28 (H.R. 2206), U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007, May 25, 2007.

P.L. 110-36 (S. 1104), A bill to increase the number of Iraqi and Afghani translators and interpreters who may be admitted to the United States as special immigrants, June 15, 2007.

P.L. 110-161 (H.R. 2764), Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, December 26, 2007.

P.L. 110-181 (H.R. 4986), National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, January 28, 2008.

P.L. 110-242 (S. 2829), A bill to make technical corrections to section 1244 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, June 3, 2008.

Legislation before the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress focused on Iraqi refugees includes the following:

H.R. 578, *Iraqi Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Security Act of 2009* (Hastings). Introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and to the House Committee on the Judiciary on 1/15/2009.

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<sup>49</sup> P.L. 110-181, as amended by P.L. 110-242, June 3, 2008.

<sup>50</sup> *Iraq Status Report*, January 2009.

## Issues for Congress

### Voluntary Returns to Iraq

Some argue that the returns (mainly by refugees) to Iraq in late 2007 were due to improved security. Others contend that it was more about politics and pressure felt by the Iraqi government to demonstrate progress and sustain confidence in reduced violence and by the United States to show the critical and positive impact of the troop surge. UNHCR stated at the time that it did not consider current conditions in Iraq to be conducive for a voluntary returns program due primarily to concerns about security and protection for returnees and the lack of capacity on the ground to implement a returns program. Reports indicate up to 70% of those who returned to Baghdad could not resettle in their own homes, either because someone else was living there or because the ethnic composition of the neighborhood made it unsafe.

With increased security and reduced violence, returns continue to increase throughout Iraq, especially in Baghdad, IDPs continue to experience harsh living conditions as many cannot fulfill simple needs such as potable water, safe and clean shelter, food and sanitation. Many homes have been destroyed and infrastructure is in disrepair. Basic public services are in need of rehabilitation. Moreover, returnees have no access to employment. Although the Iraqi MoDM was offering some assistance to IDPs in the last quarter of 2008, some experts do not believe it has the resources and competency to be effective and that preparation and coordination mechanisms need to be put in place for potential large-scale returns.

### Forcible Returns

It has been reported that some Iraqis have been forced to return to Iraq. For example, Iraqis arrested in Lebanon were given the option of “voluntary deportation,” and could choose to either stay in jail or return to Iraq.<sup>51</sup> Reportedly, countries in Europe have sent Iraqis back, mainly to the Kurdish-controlled north, which has been regarded by some as sufficiently stable for returns.<sup>52</sup> However, while UNHCR and others in the humanitarian community view Iraq as currently inhospitable to a returns program, the problem highlights the difficult balance countries need to strike in being open to asylum seekers, fulfilling their obligations, and helping those who want to resettle in third countries with consideration of the particular status of those applying, the resources within the country’s communities, and the need for burdensharing between states on overall resettlement programs.

### Capacity of the Iraqi Government

Some of Iraq’s neighbors have quietly expressed their displeasure over a perceived lack of support from the Iraqi government for its own citizens who have fled abroad. Some officials and aid workers have asserted that Iraq’s \$25 million pledge in 2007 (and delays in payment of this pledge until mid 2008) to assist Iraqi refugees in neighboring states was an indication of the Maliki government’s unwillingness to seriously assist its own people. Other experts believe that

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<sup>51</sup> Migration Policy Institute, *The Iraqi Refugee Crisis: The Need for Action*, January 2008

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International, “Iraq—Rhetoric and Reality: The Iraqi Refugee Crisis,” June 2008. P. 28-30.

there may be a sectarian dimension to the majority Shiite Iraqi government's behavior; over 60% of Iraqis in Jordan and Syria are Sunni Muslims.<sup>53</sup> In the June 2008 FY2008 and FY2009 emergency supplemental, Congress raised concerns about the level of resources the government of Iraq has so far dedicated to assisting Iraqi refugees and IDPs. Other experts have suggested that the MoDM lacks capacity on the ground and its ability to respond to the displacement crisis must be addressed.

## **Provincial Elections**

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), steps were taken to ensure IDPs were able to participate in voting at the provincial elections on January 31, 2009, either in the province of origin or at special polling centers (with the equivalent of an absentee ballot) in the province in which they were displaced. Provisions were not made for Iraqi refugees, which represent close to 10% of the population, to vote. Experts believe that results from the elections will also influence the decisions of IDPs to return home.

## **Increased International Funding**

UNHCR and other experts say that more international aid in the form of contributions and program development is required for host countries, domestic NGOs, and for organizations providing assistance, such as UNHCR. It is often difficult for international NGOs to register in these countries, and greater access needs to be negotiated. UNHCR is short of funds and cannot provide adequate assistance or protection to Iraqi refugees.

In its findings, the Iraq Study Group (ISG) refers specifically to the dramatic increase in population displacement that could cause further destabilization both in Iraq and the region and contribute to a humanitarian crisis. Specifically the ISG suggests that the United States should "take the lead in funding assistance requests from the UNHCR, and other humanitarian agencies." (Recommendation 66).<sup>54</sup> Some argue that bringing pressure to bear on other donors to participate in these relief efforts, either by funding UNHCR's current supplemental appeal for Iraqi refugees or by providing bilateral funding to host countries with specific allocations to Iraqi refugees, could make a measurable difference in the humanitarian situation developing on the ground.

## **U.S. Humanitarian Response in Iraq**

Determining the immediate steps the United States can take with regard to Iraqi IDPs in particular (and in a more general sense to the Iraqi refugees) and how other international partners could be involved may prove to be critical in the next phase of the U.S. Iraq strategy. Iraq's internal population displacement appears to have created a humanitarian crisis that may be beyond the current capacity on the ground. Difficult decisions lie ahead including identifying who should be in charge of any comprehensive relief effort, bringing together key players, and working out a coordination strategy. Whether or not the MoDM has the resources and competence to be effective remains to be seen in the long term, but in the immediate circumstance, it is reportedly

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<sup>53</sup> See, "Iraqis in Jordan: Their Numbers and Characteristics," Norwegian Research Institute Fafo. In Syria, UNHCR estimates that 67% of registered Iraqi refugees are Sunni Muslims.

<sup>54</sup> The Iraq Study Group Report, p. 58.

overwhelmed. It is not clear what role the U.S. military might play in the humanitarian response on a local level in Iraq and whether the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) may be an immediate resource to consider.

## **Competing Aid and Budget Priorities**

Amid efforts to tackle rising U.S. budget deficits by, among other measures, slowing or reducing discretionary spending or finding the resources to sustain U.S. aid pledges may be difficult. When disasters require immediate emergency relief, the Administration may fund pledges by depleting most worldwide disaster contingency accounts. In order to respond to future humanitarian crises, however, these resources would need to be replenished. If not replenished, U.S. capacity to respond to other emergencies could be curtailed. Donor fatigue is also an issue, with some experts concerned about funding priorities and the ongoing need for resources for other disaster areas.

In the case of Iraq, with a humanitarian crisis at hand, the question of whether sufficient funds have been requested by the Administration for a potential crisis remains. Some are also concerned about whether the U.S. government should continue to fund the humanitarian needs of displaced Iraqis through supplemental appropriations. With a likely budgetary gap at hand, some believe the United States has a greater responsibility to lead the way on committing funds to address the needs of Iraqi refugees and IDPs. They argue that if the United States increased its funding and resettlement numbers, this would encourage other countries in the region, and more broadly in the international community, to do the same. For broader political reasons, finding a balance on burdensharing with the international community may be unique in the Iraq context.

## **Links to Broader Iraq Policy**

With respect to the possible repatriation of Iraqi refugees, the refugee admissions report to Congress states: “It is hoped that significant numbers of Iraqi refugees located throughout the Middle East and Europe will soon be able to return home, although the security situation will remain an important consideration in repatriation.”<sup>55</sup> While reduced violence is likely to enable more returns, it is not clear whether there are policy implications for refugee resettlement at present, and whether, when viewed as a temporary situation, the obligation by the United States to resettle Iraqi refugees becomes less pressing. In addition, there is some concern that if, among those determined to be most vulnerable and in need, proportionally more Christian Iraqis are resettled in the United States than Muslim Iraqis, this could contribute to the perception of preference granted to groups of one religion over another.

The question of granting preference to vulnerable Iraqis and Iraqis who are at risk because they have worked for, or been closely associated with, the U.S. government, including the U.S. military, may also have unforeseen consequences. Some have questioned whether it may create resentment among Iraqis seeking resettling who do not qualify for preferential treatment. Others have asked whether Iraqis will see “collaboration” with the United States as a means to resettle in the United States and therefore will be eager to take advantage of any opportunity to do so.

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<sup>55</sup> *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2007: Report to the Congress*, p. 40.

## Appendix. Iraq's History of Displacement<sup>56</sup>

**Table A-1. Refugees in Iraq, Prior to 2003**

Country of Origin	Number
Palestinians	up to 22,500
Iranian Ahwazi	2,460
Sudanese	142
Syrian Arabs	681
Iranian	10,606
Turkish	15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>51,389</b>

**Table A-2. Iraq Refugees Returning to Iraq, 2002-2006**

Year	Number
2002	1,142
2003	50,524
2004	191,645
2005	55,267
2006	401
<b>Total</b>	<b>298,979</b>

**Table A-3. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq**

IDPs (old caseload, prior to 2003)	1,200,000
IDPs (since February 2006)	1,500,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,700,000</b>

<sup>56</sup> Data from UNHCR, "Update on the Iraq Situation," November 2006 and telephone conversation with USAID, OFDA, March 21, 2007; and discussions with OFDA and UNHCR August 2008.

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