

Iraqi Refugees and the US Response

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Introduction

The War in Iraq has seen unexpected consequences with many Iraqi refugees, as defined by the 1951 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugee as

“a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country”.

The number of internally displaced Iraqis (IDP) continues also to increase at the time of writing.¹ They go mainly, legally and illegally, to neighboring Arab countries, especially Jordan and Syria. Relatively few post 2003 Iraqis asylum-seekers have received refugee status in European countries. Even fewer are given refugee status in the USA. For the lucky Iraqis who escape Iraq to fellow Arab countries, life is not much easier. Jordan and Syria are simply under too much stress to function regularly. To assist these countries, more aid money is needed. The USA ought to lead this effort for it will benefit Iraqis and the USA interests in keeping the Middle East stable and also will appease domestic constituencies. Above all, US aid will help provide Iraqi refugees with the basic essentials (i.e. food, water, shelter, and even education) until they can safely return home.

This paper explores a few questions regarding the US response to the Iraqi refugee crisis in light of little or no scholarly publications. It contributes to the analysis of what is and what can happen to the growing number of Iraqi refugees, in particular, the US response to them.² It is divided into six parts. **First**, what is the situation of Iraqi refugees in the Arab world? Second, what changes have occurred to make the US fearful

¹ UNHCR. *The Iraq Situation*. <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq.html>. And United Nations "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugee." *UNHCR*. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home?page=protect&id=3c0762ea4>.

² To analyze the US response, this paper examines mostly newspaper articles and US Government officials' testimony. Facts and figures change rapidly and vary depending on the source. The most credible sources available for figures are used.

of taking in a new wave of immigrants, as compared to that of the post-Vietnam war with Vietnamese Boat People? Third, what is the state of Iraqi refugees in the US? Forth, will Iraqis want to resettle in the US, or rather stay in a familiar culture until it is safe to return home? Fifth, what is the US doing to fund agencies dealing with this crisis, what could they do? Sixth, what ought the US response to the Iraqi refugees crisis be, despite domestic political pressures? In light of situational changes in the US, a normative approach is important to point policy makers in the right direction to better Iraqi refugees' lives. In the end, considering Iraqi refugees as fellow human beings first will be best for the refugees themselves, Arab host countries and the US. Here it is argued a proper US response to the Iraqi refugee crisis is twofold: it would see an increase allotment of Iraqis granted refugee status in the US and more importantly, it should dramatically increase funding for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Syrian and Jordanian governments to be better equip them to provide for Iraqi refugees in the region.

The main actors here are the UNHCR, the Syrian and Jordanian Governments and the Bureau for Population Refugees and Migration (PRM) in the US State Department. UNHCR has the international mandate for all refugee issues; PRM receives applications for resettlement in the USA from the UNHCR. It is important to note Jordan and Syria are not signatories of the 1951 or 1967 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf>, visited 8 May 2008). Neither UNHCR, the USA nor other third country embassies accept asylum applications inside Iraq.

The US is working with the UNHCR as an extension of its own power in the region. This needs to change. The USA is providing earmarked funding to humanitarian agencies in the region.

It is not seem to be treating the UNHCR as an independent international institution with the international mandate. However to functionally operate in times of crisis, the UNHCR needs funding from individual donor countries, especially from the USA, EU and Japan. Without adequate funding during such crisis, UNHCR will be unable to provide the required assistance to cover all the needs of Iraqi refugees in the region and IDPs within the country.

For example, if there were emergencies tomorrow in Cuba or Iran, the UNHCR would need emergency funding for which it would forward requests directly or indirectly to the US authorities, usually the U.S. State Department, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM). This may go against the 'normative grain', but it takes into account the realities facing this particular issue. It should be remembered that the USA began the war and has the said objective of spreading liberty, freedom and democracy to Iraq. By admitting as many Iraqi refugees as Vietnamese after the Vietnam War, it would be admitting that their policies towards Iraq are falling.

The Situation of Iraqi Refugees

Arab World

The Iraq war has created an estimated 4.4 million Iraqi refugees since the US-led invasion in March 2003. The violence within Iraq is extreme, ranging from roadside bombings to kidnapping, to rapping and torture. Hannah Arendt, a political philosopher,

describes violence as a “natural instrument” with the aim of accomplishing certain goals.³ In Iraq, the violence is aimed for power over another group, control over a particular part of the territory and revenge against past treatment and current occupation by coalition troops. Of the three major regions, Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, the first two are most violent, and the third being most stable. Unconventional urban warfare between Sunni and Shia for control of various neighborhoods of Baghdad and other cities is displacing Iraqis from their homes. The majority of displaced Iraqis are not insurgents or terrorist, they are simply trying to live their life. Iraqis fleeing violence have two choices: go elsewhere in Iraq or leave the country.

The first option is fleeing internally within Iraq. Iraqis fleeing violence because their neighborhood becomes violent can re-locate to family or friends homes elsewhere in Iraq. This option is viable only if the family has enough money to travel and if their destination is in a relatively safe area, such as the Mosul region. These internally displaced Iraqis may have to move again if violence spreads to their new location. Relocating can become a constant and expensive endeavor. UNHCR reports there is an estimated 2.2 million internally displaced Iraqis.⁴

Another option for Iraqis is to flee the country. This is not as simple as it sounds. Buying a plain ticket is not simple. Baghdad International Airport is only serviced by a few airlines and cities, with Royal Jordanian being the main carrier. Departing flights go only to Dubai, Beirut and Amman and some internal flights.⁵ One-way flights to these cities can cost upwards of \$1,000. If an Iraqi is able to obtain a ticket out of Iraq, they still need a valid passport and a visa and to get to the airport. Getting to Baghdad

³, Hannah Arendt. *Crisis of the Republic: Lying in Politics, Civil Disobedience, On Violence and Thoughts on Politics and Revolution*. Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brace, 1972. 103-185

⁴ UNHCR. *The Iraq Situation*. <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq.html>.

⁵ "Iraq starts Baghdad-Basra flights." *BBC*, 5 June 2005.

International Airport requires driving down the most dangerous road in Iraq, due to frequent roadside bombings.⁶

The majority of Iraqis leaving the country choose to cross into Jordan and Syria via land, rather than flying. Jordan and Syria, located to the north and west of Iraq are the largest destinations of Iraqi refugees. UNHCR estimates 1.4 million refugees in Syria and 750,000 in Jordan.⁷ The most popular method to get into these countries is hiring collective taxis and buses. The average bus ride from Baghdad to Sayyida Zeinab in Damascus is \$20. The average taxi to Jordan and Syria is \$100-\$150, depending on the road and security situation.⁸ There is an estimated 20,000 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, 80,000 in Egypt, and 200,000 in the Gulf, with the first two not allowing Iraqis to legally work.⁹

Humanitarian Issues in Jordan and Syria

The humanitarian crisis in these countries is growing, first because of lack of humanitarian aid and secondly because of lack of employment. In Jordan, lucky Iraqi men can become day laborers for \$7 for 14 hours of work. Women have fewer options, with 50,000 Iraqi women becoming prostitutes.¹⁰ Lack of legal ability to work, and jobs generally, compounded by less than adequate welfare assistance for Iraqis in these

⁶ Spinner, Jackie. "Easy Sailing Along Once-Perilous Road To Baghdad Airport." *Washington Post*, 4 November 2005.

⁷ UNHCR. *The Iraq Situation*

⁸ al-Khalidi, Ashraf, Sophia Hoffmann, and Victor Tanner. "Iraqi Refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic: A Field-Based Snapshot." *University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement* June (2007).

⁹ Statistics on Displaced Iraqis around the World. " *UNHCR* September (2007).

¹⁰ Hassan, Nihal. "'50,000 Iraqi refugees' forced into prostitution." *The Independent*, 24 June 2007.

countries make dancing and prostitution very attractive. Women partaking in these activities can earn up to 10 times what a factory or housemaid position might pay per day. Human rights groups worry about these growing trends because Iraqi women going into this trade are, on average, younger.¹¹

Iraqis in these countries live off their savings. This also is becoming problematic due to the increasing number of Iraqis in these countries driving up the cost of living. On 1 October 2007, Syria closed its borders to Iraqis due to these increasing social and economic pressures arising from the Iraqis, now estimated at roughly 10 percent of the total population.¹² Jordan also began restricting Iraqi men age 17-35 from entering the country. Iraqi refugees make up more than 10 percent of Jordan's population, a country already populated by a majority of Palestinian refugees.¹³

US Admittance

From 2003-2006, 466 Iraqis were given refugee status in the US. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Assistant Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey said "'People ask, 'Why weren't there more? Until last year, we were resettling people back to Iraq. People wanted to go home.'"¹⁴

The US fiscal year (FY) goal for 2007 was to admit 7,000 Iraqi Refugees.¹⁵ At close of FY07, only 1,608 actually were admitted. The vast majority were submitted by

¹¹ "Among desperate Iraqi refugees, prostitution a growing problem." *International Herald Tribune*, 23 October 2007.

¹² Johnson, Larry . "Syria sinking in flood of refugees from Iraq." *Seattle Post*, 7 December 2007, .

¹³ "US, Jordan, Syria Must Open Doors to Iraq Refugees." *Human Rights Watch* , 16 January 2007, .

¹⁴ Boustany, Nora, and Joshua Partlow. "U.S. Agrees To Resettle Refugees From Iraq." *Washington Post*, 17 February 2007, .

¹⁵ "UN welcomes US Iraq refugee plan." *BBC*, 15 February 2007.

UNHCR. 98 were Iraqis formerly employed by US forces in Iraq. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) admitted former US employed translators and their families, total 820. From this FY total, 660 came from Turkey, 537 from Jordan, 242 from Syria, 67 from Lebanon, 28 from Egypt and 74 from the Gulf countries.¹⁶ All referred Iraqis to the US meet the definition of a refugee, including those victims of torture and detention, at risk of deportation from Jordan and Syria and orphaned children. Despite this, over 5,000 were left in limbo until FY08.¹⁷

The US goal for FY08 is to resettle 12,000 Iraqis in the US. January's total was 375. Five months into FY08, the US resettled 1,876 Iraqis refugees or about 375 per month. This will require just over 1,000 per month to attain the set goal.¹⁸ In comparing past monthly totals, meeting this goal seems unattainable.

Progress? US Plans for FY08 and Hopes for the Future

Comparing FY07 to FY08, the same trends are seen. For the first seven months of 2007, only 69 Iraqis were admitted. PRM says the low numbers admitted is because DHS was slow in processing refugee clearance and admission paperwork. However, DHS say they received no applications.¹⁹ For the end of FY07, the two agencies working

¹⁶ Life Line for Iraqi Refugees. Human Rights First.
http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/asylum/lifeline/pages.asp?country=iq&id=19&misc1=overview_admissions.

¹⁷ Life Line for Iraqi Refugees, Human Rights First.

¹⁸ Ackerman, Gary. "'Neglected Responsibilities: The U.S. Response to the Iraqi Refugee Crisis'." United States House of Representatives, 11 March 2008, .

¹⁹ Ironically, this confusion and misunderstanding between government agencies was a key reason the events of 9/11 occurred. The establishment of DHS was to solve these types of issues. It can be argued without such intra-government confusion 9/11 may not have occurred in the first place and there would have been no pretext for invading Iraq, which caused the refugee crisis in the first place.

together and admitted 1,608 (average of 303 per month) and more cooperation is foreseen for FY08.²⁰

Senior Coordinator on Iraqi Refugee Issues, Ambassador James Foley testified before Congress to address these issues, especially PRM ability to admit more Iraqis into the US.²¹ From his testimony, it seems the US is better prepared to meet its FY08 goal. According to Foley, this is only the second year the US is participating in the alleviation this crisis, explaining the less than 500 Iraqis admitted as refugees in FY04, 05, and 06 combined.²² According to Foley, US agencies tend to quicken processing towards the end of a FY. He cites that in fact, “over the last decade or two, we’ve admitted several thousand refugee arrivals per month in an number of cases involving Burmese, Somali, Liberian, Russian, and Kosovo Refugees. And we’re going to do it this time with the Iraqi case load”.²³ In the two most effected countries, Jordan and Syria, the US is increasing its capacity for processing refugees. On 1 May 2007, PMR opened a new processing center in Amman. After Ellen Sauerbrey, visited Syria to work on agreements between the two countries to work together in providing for its over 1.4 million Iraqis, a refugee processing center is on the agenda.²⁴

As for the interagency differences, Foley says each agency has different mandates and perspective of this crisis and that cooperation between PRM and DHS has been

²⁰ "US admits more Iraqi refugees but pace still slow." *Reuters*, 1 March 2008, .

²¹ "Briefing on Developments in the Iraqi Refugee and Special Immigrant Visa (SVI) Admission Programs." (by Ambassador Foley), *US State Department*, 4 February 2008, .

²² Hines, Cragg. "A Modest Proposal: Make War Hawks See to Refugees." *Houston Chronicle*, 12 May 2007, .

²³ Briefing on Developments, Foley

²⁴ Briefing on Developments, Foley

“excellent”.²⁵ While the US response has been less than adequate so far, Foley says US involvement is the last step in a very long process that is beyond control of any US agency. All steps must be complete before the US even has access to refugees.

Ambassador Foley correctly points out other steps required before the US becomes involved. While the US may seem omnipotent to some, it does not have the international mandate for refugee issues and must work within host government regulations. For example, once a refugee registers with UNHCR, many do not know if they will be accepted, especially if they leave a particular area in search of employment in other parts of the country, all the while their case is processed in the area they registered. Many variables affect the successful processing of a refugee into a new host country.

Aside from formally and legally becoming a refugee in the USA, some Iraqis are illegally smuggling themselves across the Mexican border into the US. A *New York Times* article in early March 2007 shares the story of four Iraqis’ experiences in there journey to the US. Assad, Nabras, Nader and Ammar trekked from Iraq to Turkey and into Greece, mostly through rural areas. They bought flights to Spain, then Brazil, Guatemala and finally Mexico where they then joined the thousands of Mexicans illegally crossing the Rio Grand into the US. When a US Boarder Control Officer stopped Assad, he had to clarify to the officer that “I’m not one of those people,” he continued, “I am Iraqi”.²⁶ This incident highlights the change of opinion many US citizens have of immigrants, especially since 9/11. These four Iraqis had the financial means of buying these flights and paying smugglers, most do not.

²⁵ Briefing on Developments, Foley

²⁶ Swarns, Rachel L. "Against Odds, Iraqi Refugees Reach U.S." *New York Times*, 11 March 2007

Immigration: The Growing Xenophobia of America

This section briefly explores Americas increasing xenophobia. It is based on two issues: foreigners seen as “terrorists” and as a reaction to globalization. These two issues strike at the heart of US politics, from local to federal. Politicians understand their constituents’ fears, but even though these trends will hurt the US in the long run, politicians only think of the next election.

“They are all Terrorists”

A growing fear of foreigners is a main reason the US admittance rate of Iraqis is low. Many Americans, and certainly the Bush Administration, view Iraqis, as well as anyone Arab or Middle Eastern looking, as terrorists. This view sees these foreigners with only one goal: destroying the American way of life. A *Newsweek* poll taken mid June 2007 found 41 percent of Americans answering “Yes” to the question "Do you think Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq was directly involved in planning, financing, or carrying out the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001?"²⁷ Four years after the Bush Administrations’ said reasons for the preemption in Iraq were proven false, this startling number of uninformed shows the high level of American ignorance of international affairs. Many Americans do not follow international affairs because it simply does not affect them. These are the same voting citizens electing government officials that do deal with the international community and who are elected to represent their constituents’ opinions and views. Perhaps this percentage of Americans simply does not have the time to read international news because they are preoccupied keeping employed.

²⁷ Miller, Mark. "Newsweek’s Global Literacy Project." *Newsweek*, June 2007.

Outsourcing as Cause of American Xenophobia

US workers fear the outsourcing of their job. They fear even more a foreigner replacing them for a lower starting wage. This is most clearly seen at any “Information Park” where numerous computer engineering firms and soft and hardware companies are located. There is a fast growing number of Indians replacing seasoned American workers because they are willing to start a lower salary. If this is concerning American computer engineers, a highly skilled job requiring high levels of education, lower skilled Americans have even less of chance of retaining their job. Auto manufacturing plants and other assembly plants have relocated to developing economies where labor laws are less stringent and averages wages are much lower than in the US. Fearful Americans know this and demand their politicians do something to secure their job, exemplified best by Mitt Romney and Barack Obama’s speeches in Michigan and Ohio during the US Presidential Primary. Romney says he will bring auto production back to Detroit and Obama promised to safeguard America jobs from the effects of NAFTA.²⁸ This short-term outlook on the world is having a great impact on the US granting hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees in the US as seen after the Vietnam War.

Comparison: Vietnam & Iraq

The numbers of Iraqi refugees allowed on to US soil is staggeringly low, especially if compared to the Vietnam War.²⁹ The Vietnam War was also a war the US did not know how to get itself out of. Eventually it simply pulled its last troops out in a

²⁸ Obama, Barack. "Obama's Speech on the Economy and NAFTA ." Speech in Lorain, Ohio, 24 February 2008.

²⁹ Laird, Melvin. "Iraq: Learning the Lessons of Vietnam." *Foreign Affairs* (2005).

dramatic scene in April 1975, when the last US personnel were air lifted out of Saigon before the North Vietnamese troops reached the US Embassy. During the war no Vietnamese were allowed into the US as refugees. In the 1980s, 245,000 were allowed in. This population grew to 614,000 through the 1990s and is currently hovering around the 1.5 million mark.³⁰ In November 2007, President Bush became only the second US President to visit Vietnam. While there, he marveled at the countryside and saw great potential in the country as he announced he would pressure Congress to pass a Bill with the aim of normalizing relations between the two countries.³¹ When in Hanoi, Bush even sat in the capital building under a large painting of Ho Chi Minh, the communist leader who is credited with defeating the more dominant US military in the 1960s and 1970s. One local veteran of the Vietnamese war of liberation from the French and the US, said, despite being weaker militarily in both instances, the commitment to keep fighting eventually outlasted the domestic pressures of the occupying powers, forcing withdrawal. Bush's visit exemplifies the importance of patience. The two countries will soon normalize trade and political relations.

While the Vietnam War is similar to the US-led War in Iraq, the post-war situation will look very different. For both Wars, the US had no way of leaving the country while saving face. In Vietnam, leaving would mean a Communist victory and a failure of the containment policy. It would mean the US military was less capable than fractious guerrilla armies in Vietnam. The Iraq War has many of the same characteristics. The US has vastly superior military power over any conventional Iraqi Army. But asymmetric warfare, also seen in Vietnam, is even more wide-spread in Iraq. These

³⁰ SEASRAC. "South East Asia Resource Action Center." *Vietnamese Refugees*.

<http://www.searac.org/vietref.html>

³¹ Fletcher, Michael A. "Bush, in Vietnam, Says Change Takes Time." *Washington Post*, 7 November 2006, .

tactics are not easily counter by traditional military tactics. In Vietnam, guerrillas used surprise attacks to kill as many US soldier as possible. In Iraq, roadside bombs go off under military vehicles, killing or severely injuring those inside. There is no way of knowing definitely who is placing the roadside bombs, but more importantly, there is no 'return address' and no face to the enemy. It is clear that Iraqis opposed to US occupation or US 'victory' in Iraq have the same mindset as the Vietnamese, that simply holding out longer than the more powerful enemy will prevail.

While the wars themselves are similar, the situation is different. In Vietnam, the US rational for being there was to contain Communism. The rational behind the Iraq war keeps changing. It began as means of riding Saddam Hussein of his hidden Weapons of Mass Destruction. Then it was to liberate Iraq of Saddam Hussein. Now it is to both spread democracy and to secure regional stability as a means of limiting Iran's influence in the Middle East. A major issue is that many American also equate Iraqis, who are the same ethnicity as the Saudi and Egyptian hijackers of those four airplanes on that infamous morning of 11 September 2001, as terrorists. This is due to ignorance by many Americans of the Middle East, its history, politics and religion but exemplified by American policy "experts" of the region learning there was two main denominations of Islam only after the War in Iraq was becoming a quagmire. These situational differences have a great influence on US policies regarding refugees from these two countries.

State of Iraqi Refugees in the US

What happens to the lucky Iraqis granted refugee status in the US? First, they are dispersed randomly throughout the US. The largest Arab communities in the US are in New York City and Dearborn Michigan. Iraqis have also been placed in Boise, Idaho, northern Virginia and Cape Coral Florida, among others. National Public Radio (NPR) conducted interviews with Iraqi refugees resettled in the US with different views of their situations. Data in this section comes from a set of NPR interviews.³²³³ It also must be noted most Iraqis do not want reporters using their real name out of fear of reprisal against family or friends still in Iraq.

The most optimistic Iraqi interviewed resettled himself, wife and two young girls in Boise where there is a small community of Iraqi families. The Iraqi says Boise is a good location to raise his two daughters. Because of this, he says he will not return to Iraq. Another case is a 31-year-old Iraqi refugee, Bajad, living in Cape Coral, Florida, who cannot find employment. He holds an engineering degree from a school in Iraq, but has only been offered one job in housekeeping at a local hotel for \$7 per hour. He says he needs to lower expectations in order to survive, despite his qualifications and service to America in Iraq as a translator.

Bajad and others came to the US with great expectations. He has been disappointed so far. One NGO assisting Iraqi refugees like Bajad is Upwardly Global, who help Iraqis market themselves for employment in the US and also help them contact family and friends in Iraq. Through Upwardly Global help, he has contacted friends in Iraq. He is now considering returning to Iraq for work. Another similar case is Salaam,

³² Ludden, Jennifer. "Iraqi Refugees Struggle to Build a Life in the U.S." *National Public Radio*, 8 February 2008.

³³ "Iraqi Refugee Discusses Relocation to Boise." *National Public Radio*, 10 July 2007.

relocated to northern Virginia. He worked for the US Embassy in a Public Affairs Office in Iraq and now can only find employment as a stock boy at a Barnes and Noble Bookstore. Unfortunately he lost this job because the US government did not process his case quickly enough. When he was considering putting his life in danger to work for the US in Iraq, he was told a job with the US government was a career, but is disappointed about how fast the US relieves itself of its responsibility to former employees. He too is considering taking a contract job back in Iraq because his Government assistance (rent and food aid) will run out in a few months. Without taking a contract job, he will not have the means to support his family or repay the US government for his family's \$3,000 plane tickets to the US. Salaam is a lucky former Iraqi employed by the US. Many former employees are given a Special Immigration status with no food or rent aid while trying to establish themselves in their new home.

In these cases the Iraqis speak English, many do not. Under PRM policy, refugees have 180 days of assistance before they are independent, including learning English. This is an incredibly fast time to learn an entirely new language while trying to become accustomed to a new culture and surroundings. In areas like Dearborn, New York or Boise (despite being small) already established Iraqis and other Arabs can be of assistance in many ways, especially in translation.

Normative and Strategic: US Aid to UNHCR, Jordan and Syria

By providing adequate funding for UNHCR, Iraqi refugees will have more proper shelters, food, clothing and other basic essentials they currently do not receive. The statement *Meeting the Health Needs of Iraqis Displaced in Neighboring Countries* issued

jointly by UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, who coordinate health services support in Jordan, Syria and Egypt, requested “US\$ 84,833,647 million to provide support to national efforts aimed at improving access to health care for displaced Iraqis”.³⁴ This request is still unfulfilled. The US normally funds 25 percent of the UNHCR. Refugee International, a refugee non-governmental agency and US congressmen recommend an increase in aid because of the dire situation. Some US policy makers want Iraqi oil revenue to pay for these costs.³⁵ Others want military money shifted to aid IDPs and refugees. Of the \$60 million requested as additional funding by UNHCR, the US pledged 18 percent of this amount, more than its average 25 percent. For FY07, UNHCR received \$152 million for Iraqi refugees, or roughly \$30 per Iraqi in the Middle East. The request for FY08 is \$261 million. Refugee International indicated that even this amount is not enough to meet the needs of Iraqis.

One of the major problems is lack of staff. US Ambassador Crocker wrote to Secretary Rice informing her there was only one set of interviews processing Iraqis in Jordan and Syria and there is simply too many “bureaucratic bottlenecks”.³⁶ More processing centers are needed to keep Iraqis basic needs met and countries stable. This will only happen with more funding to the host governments, UNHCR and other UN agencies working on this crisis. Taking a closer look at US funding for this refugee crisis, it is startling to note that the 240 million given to UNHCR operations is less than the cost of one day spent fighting in Iraq (\$275 to 300 million per day).³⁷ Some economists argue

³⁴ "Meeting the Health Needs of Iraqis Displaced in Neighboring Countries." *UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO*. 18 September 2007.

³⁵ Stockman, Farah. "Iraq urged to spend more on refugees." *Boston Globe*, 11 April 2008,

³⁶ Hsu, Spencer, and Robin Wright. "Crocker Blasts Refugee Process: Iraqis Could Wait 2 Years for Entry, Ambassador Says." *Washington Post*, 17 September 2007, .

³⁷ Walk, Martin . "Cost of Iraq war could surpass \$1 trillion." *MSNBC*, 17 March 2006.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11880954/>.

much more.³⁸ In this cost are private security contractors working on cost-plus contracts where it is easier to use US funds to replace a truck with a flat tire than just replace the tire, see the DV 'Iraq on Sale'.

Even though the US has pledged 240 million to UNHRC operation FY08 and millions more to other UN agencies working in these countries, the Syrian and Jordanian governments are beginning to lose control of their countries. In Jordan, employment is nearly impossible for Iraqis to find. Iraqi women are prostituting themselves to pay their increasing rent and to feed their children. If the US does not increase funding for the central government to help pay for Iraqis educational, food, housing and other needs, the US could lose an important and strategic ally in Jordan and become less credible in Syria. Both countries could slip into chaos. Syria is already ruled by an experienced minority Alawite, Bashar al-Assad. The country, quite poor even before the crisis began, is becoming worse. Cost for housing in Damascus is skyrocketing. State health services are strained. Many Iraqis are even returning to the violence of Iraq because their basic human needs are still not being met in Syria.³⁹ Jordan already has a majority of Palestinian refugees, if it is strained further, chaos may well develop.

'High Politics Issue: Failing States?'

The main reason given for regional stability is that a given country there does not become a safe-haven for terrorists. If US allies, such as the governments of Jordan and

³⁸ Lydersen, Kari. "War Costing \$720 Million Each Day, Group Says." *Washington Post*, 22 September 2007.

³⁹ "SYRIA: Not safe enough for Iraqi refugees to return - UNHCR chief." IRIM , 14 February 2008.

Egypt fall, due to, among others, pressure arising from the presence of Iraqi refugees, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Islamic Jihad or Hamas in Jordan could come to power. Even though the current governments are not democratically elected, are known for their human rights abuses and not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, these countries offer some refuge that is better than if these countries collapse.

Normative approach: Best for Iraqis, Best for US

The next question to ask is whether Iraqis really want to settle in the US in the first place. Though they are persons seeking safety or protection, most do not want to travel too far away from their homes. Many would like to be able to promptly return home when the situation permits. Their lives have been disrupted enough, establishing themselves in a new country with a completely different culture and norms would be even more disruption. In light of this, a US response ought not to focus too much on increasing admittance numbers but rather adequately funding UNHCR's operation in Arab states with the most Iraqi refugees. This will serve two interests, Iraqi refugees and US interest in the region.

Adequately funding UN agencies and Arab governments in order to properly provide for Iraqi refugees is essential. Iraq is part of the greater Arab world, with similar cultures, norms, values and language, major cultural adjustments are not required. The Arab world also has the most Iraqi refugees to assist. There are thousands going to Europe and the US, but millions in the region. The goal ought to be to provide for the most people in an efficient way. US spending habits must change, as requested by some US congressmen, by shifting military money to aiding refugees.

There are two views of looking at the issue of admitting more Iraqis into the US. First, by doing so, Americans will become more accustomed to Arab culture. As in anything, enhanced dialogue causes less conflict. Many Americans are ignorant of the Middle East, its history, politics, language, religion, etc. If we allow more Iraqis into the US, more cultural communication and understanding will occur. Americans will learn not all Arabs are terrorists and Iraqis will learn not all Americans want to destroy Middle Eastern culture and most importantly, that they are not at war with Islam.

The second view takes into consideration the realities of the US job market and Iraqis best interests. While cross-cultural dialogue is beneficial, it does not address the immediate issues of Iraqi refugees. Given the situation in the US, with admitted Iraqi refugees choosing to return to Iraq to earn a living, the USA ought to increase the number of Iraqis into the USA and increase assistance to them while establishing themselves. The USA should not however increase the number to comparable figures of Vietnamese after the Vietnam War. Most efforts ought to be in supporting (funding and staff) for agencies and governments with Iraqi refugees to care for until their country is safe for them to return home.

Conclusion

This paper addresses a number of issues facing the US response to the Iraqi refugee crisis. It proposes a particular approach as a means of elevating this growing humanitarian crisis, mainly by increasing funding. It has shown there are roughly 4.4 million displaced Iraqis, with roughly half being IDPs and half refugees. The majority of these refugees are in Jordan and Syria and various other Arab states. Thousands are fleeing to Europe and even less to the US. In the case of the US, the environment has changed drastically from pre-9/11 optimism. America is more xenophobic and fearful of

foreigner taking their jobs. It shows life of the lucky Iraqis refugees in the USA is not easy. The US government does little to assist Iraqis establish themselves in their US new home. In some cases, the government made life harder by not completing refugees' paper work in time for them to find steady employment. While some Iraqis love their new home and are adapting quite well, other are tempted to return to Iraq to earn a living they are unable to earn in the US. It finds most Iraqis simply want to return home when it is safe to, not reestablish themselves in a new country thousands of miles away. It finds the US being the largest donor to the UNHCR, Jordan and Syria, but still not giving enough. Taking into consideration US spending for one day of the Iraq war (\$275-300 million per day, depending on the sources consulted), the US ought to give more than its \$240 million to the UNHCR. It concludes with a normative approach to the US response to this crisis, entailing steady increasing the number of Iraqis given refuge in the US but leaning towards much more funding for Iraqi refugees displaced in the Arab world. This approach will be best for Iraqis and US interests.

While refugees should always come first, if realities are not accounted for, they will be hurt most. More needs to be written on this topic in order to better guide policy maker in the right direction to improve the legal and material conditions of Iraqi refugees. This is an ideal case study for a realist approach to refugee issues. Specific action plans for each country also need to be devised for a bottom-up solution to what is actually happening on the ground. Lastly, qualitative studies are needed to provide policy maker with concert data showing exactly what needs to be done for Iraqi refugees and for future refugee crises.

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