



# Iraqi Refugees in Jordan: Cause for Concern in a Pivotal State

By Nathan Hodson

Of the 2 million Iraqi refugees, it is estimated that at least 700,000 are in Jordan, an enormous figure for a country of less than 6 million.<sup>1</sup> Officials from the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior put the number around 500,000 but point out that it can fluctuate in either direction because of the large number of Iraqis who move in and out of Iraq conducting business.<sup>2</sup> Aid officials, however, give estimates as high as 1 million.<sup>3</sup> Most Iraqis in Jordan live in urban centers rather than in rural areas or refugee camps, but despite having been moderately integrated into Jordanian society, their lives are diverse and increasingly complicated.<sup>4</sup> For Jordan, their arrival has magnified internal security concerns, strained social services, and aggravated economic and environmental problems.

## Background

Jordan has received two primary waves of Iraqi refugees; the first arrived after the 1991 Gulf War. Many of

these Iraqis were middle class, including doctors, intellectuals, and teachers.<sup>5</sup> Between 250,000 and 300,000 were thought to have been already living in Jordan at the start of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.<sup>6</sup> This figure is typically included in estimates of Iraqis currently residing in Jordan, many of whom are not traditional refugees but long-term residents who had remained in Jordan to work, often doing business in Iraq. The 1991 Gulf War initially sent between 1 million and 2 million Iraqi refugees into Jordan, largely in response to Saddam's brutal repression of Iraqi Shiites and Kurds.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the 1990s and into the early years of this decade, many were resettled in Iraq and other Arab countries, but a large number claimed asylum and settled in Europe, Australia, and Canada.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to Iraqis who fled Iraq in the wake of the Gulf War, about 360,000 Jordanian citizens—

1. Michael Gabaudan (regional representative for the U.S. and Caribbean Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, hearing on "The Plight of Iraqi Refugees," January 16, 2007 (available online at [judiciary.senate.gov/testimony.cfm?id=2470&wit\\_id=5994](http://judiciary.senate.gov/testimony.cfm?id=2470&wit_id=5994)); U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), *World Refugee Survey 2006*, "Jordan" (Washington, D.C.: USCRI) (available online at [www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)).
2. "The Silent Treatment: Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan," *Human Rights Watch* 18, no. 10(E) (November 2006), p. 19. Available online ([www.hrw.org/reports/2006/jordan1106](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/jordan1106)).
3. Sudarsan Raghavan, "War in Iraq Propelling a Massive Migration; Wave Creates Tension across the Middle East," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2007, p. A1.
4. Bill Frelick, director of refugee policy at Human Rights Watch, e-mail correspondence with author, February 26, 2007; "Patience with Iraqi Refugees Running Thin," *Agence France-Presse*, February 19, 2007.

5. Hassan M. Fattah, "Uneasy Exiles Await Those Who Flee the Chaos in Iraq," *New York Times*, December 8, 2006, p. A18; Géraldine Chatelard, "Jordan as a Transit Country: Semi-Protectionist Immigration Policies and Their Effects on Iraqi Forced Migrants," UNHCR Working Paper no. 61, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence, Italy, August 2002, p. 3 (available online at [www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/research/openssl.pdf?tbl=RESEARCH&cid=3d57aa757](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/research/openssl.pdf?tbl=RESEARCH&cid=3d57aa757)).
6. Human Rights Watch, "Iraqi Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Displaced Persons: Current Conditions and Concerns in the Event of War," Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, February 13, 2003, p. 15 (available online at [www.hrw.org/background/mena/iraq021203/index.htm](http://www.hrw.org/background/mena/iraq021203/index.htm)); U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2003*, "Jordan"; James Drummond, Nicolas Pelham and Heba Saleh, "Shock and Anger across Region," *Financial Times* (London), April 11, 2003, p. 4.
7. Julian Borger, "Iraq Crisis: Amman Faces Rising Anger," *Guardian* (London), February 13, 1998, p. 12; John Donnelly, "Jordan's Crown Prince Criticizes U.S. for Lack of Communication with Saddam," Knight Ridder Washington Bureau, February 10, 1998; Chatelard, "Jordan as a Transit Country," p. 3.
8. Chatelard, "Jordan as a Transit Country," p. 3.

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mostly Palestinians who had been living in Kuwait, Iraq, and other Gulf countries—were involuntarily returned to Jordan.<sup>9</sup> Their emigration was, in part, tied to the war itself, but it was also the result of persecution, insecurity, and the enforcement of new residence regulations in Kuwait. About 60,000 of those who left moved on to the West Bank, immigrated to third countries, or went to work elsewhere in the Gulf, leaving approximately 300,000 who settled permanently in Jordan. Although evidence exists that the arrival of a large number of skilled professionals and an inflow of financial resources may have had a net positive effect on the Jordanian economy, these Palestinian returnees also created economic and social problems. Heavy burdens were placed on water resources, and demand for educational, health, and other social services greatly increased.<sup>10</sup> The unemployment rate also rose, which helped fuel resentment toward the newcomers.<sup>11</sup> Along with Jordan's economic troubles of the late 1980s, the mass arrival led to a decline in living standards among the poorer sectors of society. Even though the majority of the Palestinians had lived in the Gulf for more than a decade, they were still Jordanian citizens with rights and status not afforded Iraqis.<sup>12</sup>

After the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the demographics of those fleeing Iraq for Jordan were similar to those of the first wave. They were businessmen and former government officials who brought with them billions of dollars in investments.<sup>13</sup> This influx of cash helped boost the Jordanian economy, but it also fueled inflation and shortages, which aggravated existing inequalities.<sup>14</sup> As violence in Iraq

grew worse and poorer Iraqis began to stream into Jordan, rising prices began to be an issue not only for poor Jordanians but also for Iraqis who were unable to sustain themselves in Jordan.

Many of Iraq's political and business elite have found sanctuary in Jordan. *Al-Sabil*, a Jordanian Islamic weekly, reported in January 2007 that Amman has become home to a number of political and party leaders, parliamentarians, tribal leaders, and even current ministers in Maliki's government.<sup>15</sup> According to this report, the first president of the republic after Saddam, Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar, settled in Amman after leaving Iraq. Ayad Allawi, the head of the interim government and leader of the Iraqi National Accord party, spends a great deal of time in Amman, where he holds meetings and runs his business and the party. Amman has also become home to Sheikh Harith al-Dhari, president of the Muslim Scholars Association, and Sheikh Adman al-Dulaymi, former head of the Sunni Endowment. The current Iraqi interior minister, Jawad al-Bulani, has frequented Amman since he purchased a villa there and transferred his family to the city. Two of Saddam Hussein's daughters, Rana and Raghad, also settled in Jordan and used the country as a base to organize their father's defense team.<sup>16</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, contrary to initial expectations, Iraqis left Iraq at no more than a trickle. Nevertheless, media attention focused on several thousand ethnic and religious minorities who were stuck in three camps near the Jordanian border and in a "no-man's land" between Jordan and Iraq.<sup>17</sup> Those carrying Palestinian documents in addition to a number of Kurds, Iranians, and Sudanese found themselves with nowhere to go. Many of those refugees have been resettled, but a group of Iranian Kurds is still trapped between Jordan and Iraq and, as of January 2007, 119 were living in the al-Ruweished camp about fifty kilometers from the Iraqi border.<sup>18</sup>

9. Nicholas van Hear, "The Impact of the Involuntary Mass 'Return' to Jordan in the Wake of the Gulf Crisis," *International Migration Review* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1995), p. 352.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

13. Jay Solomon, "Trouble Next Door: In Jordan, Bombs Highlight Changes Wrought by War; Influx of Iraqis and Their Wealth Bring Growth and Tension to a Key American Ally; Worries at the Textile Plant," *Wall Street Journal*, November 10, 2005, p. A1; Sultan Hattab, "The Iraqis in Jordan: What Kind of Addition?" *Al-Rai* (Amman), in Arabic, February 24, 2007, translated by Mideastwire; Thanassis Cambanis, "Exodus from Iraq Unsettles Mideast Neighbor States Fear Instability," *Boston Globe*, December 3, 2006, p. A1; Fattah, "Uneasy Exiles."

14. Solomon, "Trouble Next Door."

15. "Jordan Report Says Iraqi Elite Flee to Amman as 'Safe Haven,'" BBC Monitoring Middle East, *Al-Sabil* (Amman), January 22, 2007.

16. Solomon, "Trouble Next Door."

17. For more information, see "Jordan" in the 2004 and 2005 editions of U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey*.

18. "Iraq-Jordan: UNHCR Upbeat about Future of Ruweished Refugees," IRIN, January 10, 2007 (available online at [www.irin.org](http://www.irin.org)).

However, these groups are a fraction of those fleeing Iraq, who are found overwhelmingly in urban centers. As sectarian violence in Iraq escalated, and particularly after the February 2006 Samarra bombing, Iraqis began fleeing en masse.<sup>19</sup>

### Legal Status and Jordanian Openness

The question of who would assume responsibility for refugees fleeing Iraq in the event of a U.S.-led invasion created tension between the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the government of Jordan. In the months leading up to the war, Jordanian officials made clear that Iraqi refugees would not be permitted to remain in Jordan.<sup>20</sup> Jordan has not signed the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, the major international agreements governing the status of refugees.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Jordan has provided no legal definition of refugees and has not established domestic policies for the determination of refugee status.<sup>22</sup> The Jordanian Interior Ministry divides Iraqis into categories such as guests, investors, residents, and refugees, although the term “refugee” is seldom used.<sup>23</sup>

Despite this lack of legal clarity, UNHCR has been operating in Jordan since October 1991, when its Amman office was opened to deal with asylum seekers in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>24</sup> In a memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and the government of Jordan signed in April 1998, Jordan accepted UNHCR’s operations under the stipulation that refugees would be repatriated or

resettled and that individuals recognized as refugees would not stay in Jordan more than six months.<sup>25</sup> Formal asylum seekers who register with UNHCR are given registration cards, and the Jordanian authorities grant them temporary protection as well as valid residence permits.<sup>26</sup> But Jordan has rejected the principle of local integration.

The vast majority of Iraqi refugees in Jordan are not recognized as such by UNHCR. In fact, as of March 2007, UNHCR had officially granted refugee status to only 1,300 Iraqis.<sup>27</sup> Roughly 22,000 are seeking asylum, but no official records exist on the total number of Iraqis who have entered Jordan or have remained.<sup>28</sup> The number of those seeking asylum and the number granted refugee status have been increasing, especially since the United States announced it would accept many more refugees in fiscal year 2007.

One reason so few refugees register with UNHCR is that many are unfamiliar with the process required to attain refugee status. Others are fearful of being denied asylum. Although registering entails securing one’s residence in Jordan in the near term, neither asylum seekers nor unclassified refugees are entitled to work permits or public assistance.<sup>29</sup> Though many Iraqis are already working in the gray sector, most are doing so on expired residency permits.<sup>30</sup> Registered asylum seekers and refugees would be much more visible and therefore more likely to be harassed or denied work. According to Jordanian residency laws, Iraqis are entitled to stay in Jordan for a period of three to six months, after which a person either exits the country or applies for annual residency.<sup>31</sup> In practice, however, very few Iraqis are actually deported for

news.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=64370); Bill Frelick, e-mail correspondence with author; Ben Sanders, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, e-mail correspondence with author, February 20, 2007; author interview with Jordanian official, Washington, D.C., February 22, 2007.

19. U.S. Department of State, “Briefing with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres and Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration Ellen Sauerbrey,” Washington, D.C., February 14, 2007. Available online (www.state.gov/g/rls/rm/80532.htm).

20. Mark McDonald, International News, Knight Ridder Washington Bureau, December 19, 2002; Nicholas Pelham, “Iraq’s Neighbours: Jordan Prepares for Fresh Influx of Refugees,” *Financial Times* (London), February 11, 2003, p. 4.

21. “The Silent Treatment,” Human Rights Watch, p. 19.

22. Chatelard, “Jordan as a Transit Country,” p. 8.

23. Linda Hindi, “Jordan Calls for International Conference on Iraqi Refugees,” *Jordan Times*, January 23, 2007.

24. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2005*, “Jordan”.

25. Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Jordan and UNHCR, April 1998. Available online (www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd/rsddocview.html?tbl=RSDLEGAL&cid=3ae6b31920).

26. “The Silent Treatment,” Human Rights Watch, pp. 34–37.

27. Dale Gavlak, “Jordan to Discuss How to Better Manage Iraqi Refugee Crisis During Meeting with UN, US Officials,” Associated Press, March 12, 2007.

28. “Jordanian Paper Reports on Number, Status of Iraqi Refugees,” BBC Monitoring Middle East, *Al-Arab al-Yawm* (Amman), February 7, 2007.

29. “The Silent Treatment,” Human Rights Watch, pp. 34–37.

30. Tom A. Peter, “Iraqi Refugees Spill into Jordan, Driving Prices Up,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 29, 2006, p. 4.

31. Author interview with Jordanian official, Washington, D.C., February 22, 2007.

exceeding their visa eligibility or for reasons other than criminal activity.<sup>32</sup> And, until now, working illegally has not been sufficient cause for deporting large numbers of refugees.

From 2003 to 2006, Jordan admitted Iraqis with few restrictions, and authorities looked the other way when they overstayed their visas.<sup>33</sup> But this policy may be changing. In recent months, a number of new reports have surfaced indicating a rise in deportation and incarceration. Human Rights Watch reported in November 2006 that Jordan refuses entry to Iraqi men between seventeen and thirty-five years of age; yet other reports suggest this practice is only sporadically enforced, and the government denies a blanket ban.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the government has taken clear steps to hinder the flow of refugees. On January 2, 2006, Jordan imposed new border restrictions that prohibit vehicles with Iraqi license plates from entering the country.<sup>35</sup> And on February 28, 2007, Iraqis seeking entrance into Jordan were informed they must carry a new type of passport, which was only made available in April 2006 and which the Iraqi embassy in Amman only began issuing on April 8, 2007.<sup>36</sup> Still, Jordanian spokesman Nasser Judeh has insisted that the border with Iraq has “remained open.”<sup>37</sup>

### Internal Security and Economic Concerns

The flow of refugees into Jordan has caused alarm in the country’s security establishment, resulting in the imposition of stricter border conditions on Iraqi nationals. Two events in particular raised security concerns throughout the kingdom. On August 19, 2005, a group of Syrian, Iraqi, and Jordanian affiliates

of al-Qaeda in Iraq carried out rocket attacks on two U.S. warships docked in Aqaba Bay.<sup>38</sup> This attack was followed by the bombing of three hotels in Amman by Iraqi nationals on November 9, 2005, which killed sixty people.<sup>39</sup> Fearing the growth of Sunni Islamic militancy, the government began to prevent more Iraqis from entering Jordan and has made renewing residency permits more difficult.<sup>40</sup> Although Amman acknowledges that it is becoming more restrictive about entry and residency permit renewal, it refuses to give details.<sup>41</sup> In addition to responsibilities to its own people, the Jordanian government is under immense pressure to keep its 335-kilometer border with Israel and the West Bank secure. In January 2007, King Abdullah II said that the influx of Iraqis has put “pressure on infrastructure” but that Iraqis were welcome as long as they abide by the law.<sup>42</sup> He also issued a stern warning, saying, “We will never allow Jordan to be used as a staging post to foment any problems against Iraq.”<sup>43</sup>

Although Jordanians are undoubtedly concerned about Sunni militants, some Iraqi refugees in Jordan claim that the official crackdown is taking on sectarian dimensions.<sup>44</sup> They point to King Abdullah’s 2004 warning of a “Shiite crescent” spreading from Iran to Lebanon as well as to the fact that authorities have paid more attention to Shiites, fearing sectarian spill-over from Iraq.<sup>45</sup> In November 2006, Agence France-Presse reported that the government had deported a group of Iraqi Shiites the previous month, apparently for practicing self-flagellation rituals at a Shiite shrine

32. Ibid.

33. “The Silent Treatment,” Human Rights Watch, p. 20.

34. Bill Frelick, “Iraq’s Other Surge,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 15, 2007, p. A19; Michael Gabaudan, Testimony before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary; Kristen Gillespie, “Limbo Land,” *Jerusalem Report*, December 11, 2006, p. 28; Ben Sanders, e-mail correspondence with author.

35. Jackie Spinner, “Iraqis Find Travel to Jordan Increasingly Frustrating,” *Washington Post*, January 17, 2006, p. A14.

36. “New Rules for Iraqi Refugees,” *Middle East Economic Digest*, February 28, 2007; “Al-Sharqiyah TV Updates Iraq Security, Political Developments,” BBC Monitoring Middle East, al-Sharqiyah TV, February 28, 2007.

37. Quoted in Gavlak, “Jordan to Discuss How to Better Manage Iraqi Refugee Crisis.”

38. Hassan M. Fattah, “Jordan Arrests Key Suspect in Rocket Attack on U.S. Warships; Link to Iraqi Insurgents is Seen,” *New York Times*, August 23, 2005, p. A8; Dale Gavlak, “Jordan Says It Will Ask Iraq to Arrest the Perpetrators of Aqaba Rocket Attack,” Associated Press, August 27, 2005.

39. “Jordanian Man Dies of Wounds from Hotel Blasts, Raising Death Toll to 60,” Associated Press, November 20, 2005; Michael Slackman, “Iraqi Qaeda Leader Is Said to Vow More Attacks on Jordan,” *New York Times*, November 19, 2005, p. A6.

40. “The Silent Treatment,” Human Rights Watch p. 19.

41. Author interview with Jordanian official, Washington, D.C., February 22, 2007.

42. Randa Habib, “‘Little Iraq’ Emerges in Neighboring Jordan,” Agence France-Presse, January 28, 2007.

43. Ibid.

44. Fattah, “Uneasy Exiles.”

45. Robin Wright and Peter Baker, “Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election from Iran; Leaders Warn Against Forming Religious State,” *Washington Post*, December 8, 2004, p. A1.

outside Amman.<sup>46</sup> In at least one instance, Jordanian authorities have rejected requests to establish a Shiite mosque, and in 2005, Jordan barred Shiite Iraqis from holding rites at a local shrine.<sup>47</sup> However, Nasser Judeh, in an interview with the *Times* of London in December 2006, insisted that Jordan does not exclude Iraqis except on security grounds, saying, “We don’t have a Sunni-Shia problem.”<sup>48</sup> Of Iraqis in Jordan, the percentage of Shiites is unknown, and estimates vary widely. Figures of up to 50 percent have appeared in media reports, but Jordanian officials have expressed disbelief that the number is nearly that high.<sup>49</sup> Over 90 percent of Jordanians are Sunni Muslim.<sup>50</sup> Most of the remainder are Christian, and Shiites account for less than 1 percent of the country’s population. Despite so few native Shiites, public support for Hizballah is high, particularly among Jordanians of Palestinian origin.<sup>51</sup> Most Jordanians, however, insist that their support is political rather than sectarian.

Security concerns are compounded by economic vulnerabilities. Although many of the Iraqi refugees initially entering Jordan were relatively wealthy, as the conflict in Iraq continues, many Iraqis are arriving without the means to sustain themselves. They are often unable to find work, given government restrictions on employment and an unemployment rate hovering around 20 percent. The official unemployment rate in early 2006 was 14.4 percent, but independent analysts put the number between 20 and 25 percent.<sup>52</sup>

The cost of basic goods has also risen dramatically. Government efforts to eliminate fuel subsidies have played a part, but Iraqis have increased demand and provide an easy scapegoat for Jordanians looking for someone to blame.<sup>53</sup>

Real estate prices have likewise skyrocketed since 2004, making housing unaffordable for Iraqis and Jordanians alike. According to recent reports, in some cases housing costs in affluent areas have tripled.<sup>54</sup> And as the cost of living has risen, wages for unskilled (often illegal) labor have been driven down.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, Jordan’s administrative capacity has been strained. Even when Iraqis can overcome the bureaucratic and legal confusion of sending their children to school, classrooms are overcrowded and ill equipped. Only after a bout of bureaucratic wrangling and the subsequent intervention of the king were Iraqi children admitted to private schools.<sup>56</sup> They are now admitted to Jordanian public schools for the fee of \$60 per year per child, which barely covers books and study materials.<sup>57</sup>

The flow of refugees into Jordan has also strained the kingdom’s ability to deliver water to its population. Jordan is one of the most water-poor countries in the world. With per capita renewable water resources of less than 200 cubic meters per year, Jordan falls far short of the 1,000 cubic meters per year recommended by the World Bank.<sup>58</sup> Jordan faces the perennial challenges of water shortages, and the entry of nearly 1 million refugees hampers the government’s ability to manage the crisis.

46. Shafika Mattar, “Respect for Hezbollah, Influx of Iraqi Shiites Fuel Fears of Shiite Influence in Jordan,” Associated Press Online, November 17, 2006.

47. Ibid.

48. Stephen Farrell and Nicholas Blanford, “Religious Split That Could Set Region on Fire,” *Times* (London), December 8, 2006, Overseas News, p. 50.

49. Faiza Saleh Ambah, “Arab Leaders, Unlike Much of Public, Uneasy about Hezbollah,” *Washington Post*, July 24, 2006, p. A12; Mattar, “Respect for Hezbollah”; Mohammed Al-Masri, “The Growing Sunni-Shiite Divide: Attitudes in Jordan,” *Bitterlemons-international.org*, ed. 4, vol. 5, January 25, 2007 (available online at [www.bitterlemons-international.org/previous.php?opt=1&cid=165](http://www.bitterlemons-international.org/previous.php?opt=1&cid=165)); author interview with Jordanian official, Washington, D.C., February 22, 2007.

50. Mattar, “Respect for Hezbollah.”

51. Mattar, “Respect for Hezbollah”; Neil MacFarquhar, “Tide of Arab Opinion Turns to Support for Hezbollah,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2006, p. A5.

52. Philip McCrum (ed.) and Robert Powell (consulting ed.), *Jordan: Country Profile 2006* (Economist Intelligence Unit annual country report, 2006).

53. Solomon, “Trouble Next Door”; Peter, “Iraqi Refugees Spill into Jordan.”

54. “Patience with Iraqi Refugees Running Thin,” Agence France-Presse; Ian Black, “Guardian Weekly: Review: Iraqi Exodus Strains Jordan’s Hospitality: Rich or Poor, the Newcomers Have Become a Sensitive Issue,” *Guardian Weekly*, February 2, 2007, p. 18; Omar Fekeiki and Yasmine Mousa, “Living in Jordan, Longing for Iraq: Amman Becomes Primary Destination for Those Escaping War,” *Washington Post*, August 5, 2006, p. A15.

55. “The Silent Treatment,” Human Rights Watch, pp. 4–5; Ingrid McDonald, “The War Next Door,” *The American Scholar* (Spring 2006), pp. 9–10.

56. Gillespie, “Limbo Land.”

57. Author interview with Jordanian official, Washington, D.C., February 22, 2007.

58. Shobha Shetty, *Water, Food Security and Agricultural Policy in the Middle East and North Africa Region*, Middle East and North Africa Working Paper Series no. 47, Office of the Chief Economist, World Bank, Washington, D.C., July 2006, p. 2.

Increased crowding is also an issue. The number of new vehicles in Amman has resulted in thicker traffic and longer commutes.<sup>59</sup> When coupled with rising housing and fuel costs and the difficulty of finding employment, these developments have contributed to growing resentment toward Iraqis.<sup>60</sup> Although this resentment has not yet manifested itself in overt tensions, large refugee flows could eventually weaken the state and undermine Jordan's political and economic stability.

### U.S., Jordanian, and International Responses

In January 2007, UNHCR made an emergency request for \$60 million, which is more than double its \$29 million budget in 2006.<sup>61</sup> The Jordanian government, too, has taken steps toward recognizing and alleviating the problem. On January 22, the government called for an international conference to discuss the current exodus of Iraqis fleeing to neighboring countries.<sup>62</sup> Responding to similar calls throughout the region and to elevated international pressure, UNHCR planned such a conference for April 17–18, 2007, in Geneva to “mobilize much bigger support, especially for the countries that are paying the price of being generous in hosting refugees.”<sup>63</sup>

The Jordanian government's relative silence on the refugee issue through 2006 prevented adequate international aid resources from reaching Iraqis, which left valuable opportunities untapped. Only since February 2007, as the issue gained increased international attention, has the government begun to speak more openly about the problem. Seeking to determine numbers and residency status, Jordan has contracted the Norwegian research foundation and aid agency Fafo to conduct a survey of Iraqis in the kingdom.<sup>64</sup>

59. Gillespie, “Limbo Land.”

60. “Iraqis on the Run: What the World Can Do,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 12, 2007, p. 8; Solomon, “Trouble Next Door.”

61. “UN Refugee Agency Doubles Iraq Budget as More Flee Violence,” *Agence France-Presse*, January 8, 2007.

62. Dan Gavlak, “Jordan Urges International Conference to Discuss Escalating Iraqi Refugee Problem,” *Associated Press*, January 22, 2007.

63. “UN Refugee Commissioner Makes Plea for Displaced Iraqis,” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, February 8, 2007.

64. Sharmila Devi, “An Uncertain Future Awaits Jordan's ‘Guests’ in Exile,” *Financial Times* (London), March 13, 2007, p. 3; Khalid

Still, according to Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group, “Jordan wants assistance but doesn't want to create an additional pull factor.”<sup>65</sup>

The United States is also paying more attention to the refugee issue. On February 5, 2007, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced the creation of a high-level task force to look into the issue of Iraqi refugees.<sup>66</sup> Still, the administration has been accused of not doing enough to ameliorate the Iraqi refugee crisis. From the start of the war in 2003 through September 2006, the United States absorbed only 466 Iraqi refugees.<sup>67</sup> The Department of State did announce in February 2007 that it would expand its capacity to receive referrals from UNHCR and process about 7,000 of them in the near term, up from 202 in fiscal year 2006.<sup>68</sup> But even if the United States were to use its 20,000 emergency refugee slots for Iraqis, that action would still do little to reduce the pressure on Jordan and other countries in the region.

Given its small scale, resettlement will relieve only a fraction of the pressures on Jordanian infrastructure. In this regard, protection and assistance to refugees who remain in Jordan are at least as important. In 2006, the United States provided \$7.9 million of UNHCR's operational budget for Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.<sup>69</sup> This figure represented 27.5 percent of the total but was less than half of the \$19.9 million provided in 2005.<sup>70</sup> The fiscal year 2007 request for migration and refugee assistance included \$20 million for Iraqi humanitarian needs.<sup>71</sup>

Nu'aymat, “Cabinet to Conclude Discussions on Salary Raise Today,” *Jordan Times*, February 20, 2007.

65. Quoted in Devi, “An Uncertain Future.”

66. “Secretary of State Establishes New Iraq Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Task Force,” Press Statement released by the U.S. Department of State, February 5, 2007. Available online ([www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2007/february/80090.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2007/february/80090.htm)).

67. Nora Boustany and Joshua Partlow, “U.S. Agrees to Resettle Refugees from Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 15, 2007, p. A22.

68. Boustany and Partlow, “U.S. Agrees to Resettle Refugees”; U.S. Department of State, “Briefing with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.”

69. Michael Gabaudan, Testimony before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Ellen Sauerbrey, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, “The Plight of Iraqi Refugees,” Testimony before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, January 16, 2007. Available online ([www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/78989.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/78989.htm)).

An outflow of Iraqi refugees was one of the few contingencies the administration actually anticipated and planned for prior to the war. Although no large refugee flows occurred during the fighting of 2003, predictions made before the war are now proving correct. Given the proportions of the refugee problem, Washington needs to take a lead role in helping to improve conditions for Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries and particularly in Jordan. The United States should encourage regional governments to continue to accept refugees and help these states to better cope with the security and stability challenges they pose. Simultaneously, the administration should lead an international donor effort to help alleviate the financial burden of this endeavor. Providing funding to bolster educational

and health care programs would help relieve some of the strains on the Jordanian economy. The United States has worked closely with the Jordanian government as well as UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and a variety of nongovernmental organizations. It should continue to engage local and international partners to ensure that the situation does not become unmanageable.

Jordan has traditionally been and continues to be one of the region's most welcoming countries toward refugees. Nevertheless, unless the international community takes steps to help counter problems resulting from the influx of Iraqi refugees, the kingdom, long known for its stability and openness, may soon be compelled by self-interest to shut its borders.

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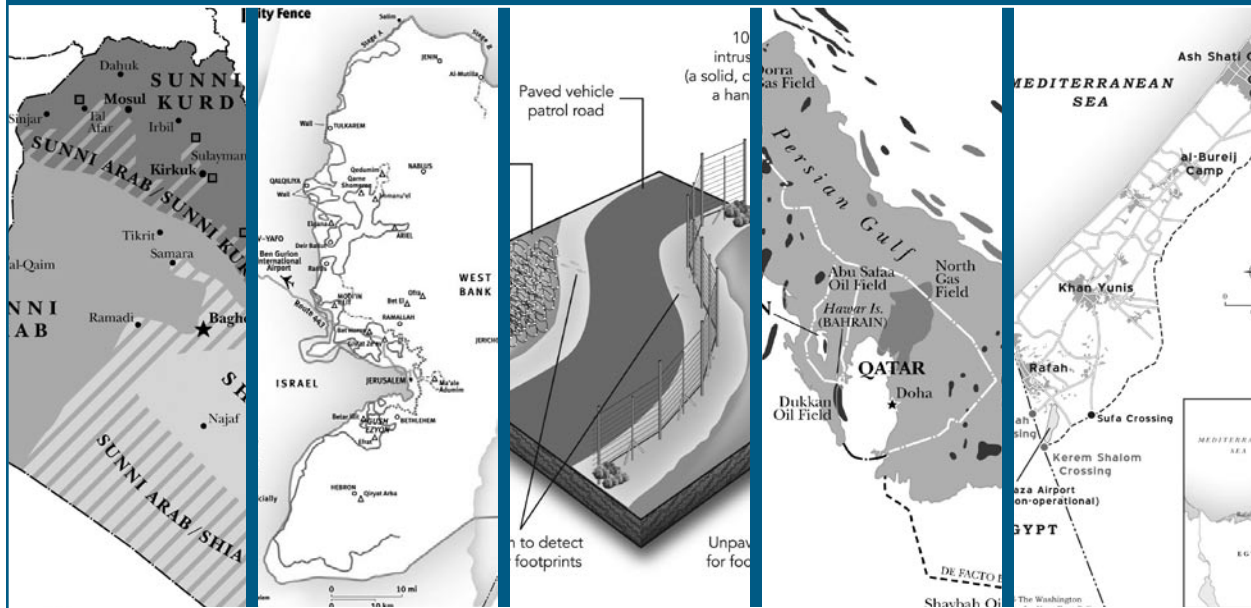
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RESEARCH NOTES #13

Iraqi Refugees in Jordan