

THE RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT OF DISPLACED IRAQIS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EASTERN AND
SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
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CONTENTS

	Page
Al-Tikriti, Nabil, assistant professor of history, University of Mary Washington, Fredericksburg, VA	23
Prepared statement	25
Aossey, Nancy A., president and CEO, International Medical Corps, Los Angeles, CA	10
Prepared statement	12
Casey, Hon. Robert P., U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania, opening statement	1
Prepared statement	1
Laipson, Ellen, president and CEO, The Henry L. Stimson Center, Washington, DC	4
Prepared statement	6
ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD	
Joint prepared statement of Kenneth H. Bacon, president, and Kristele Younes, senior advocate, Refugees International, Washington, DC	46

THE RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT OF DISPLACED IRAQIS

TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2009

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EASTERN AND
SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:30 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert Casey (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senators Casey, Kaufman, and Risch.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT P. CASEY, JR., U.S. SENATOR FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Senator CASEY. The hearing of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian and Central Asian Affairs will now come to order.

Today, the subcommittee meets to examine the crisis concerning Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, known often, maybe only here in Washington, by the acronym IDPs, one of the most tragic humanitarian consequences of America's war in Iraq. The purpose of this hearing is to determine the efforts being taken by the Iraqi Government, the United States, and the rest of the international community to facilitate the resettlement of Iraqis displaced internally, and the repatriation of Iraqi refugees living in neighboring countries.

I will, for purposes of moving things along, just summarize the rest of my testimony. I'll have the entire statement be made part of the record.

[The prepared statement of Senator Casey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT P. CASEY, JR., U.S. SENATOR FROM
PENNSYLVANIA

Today, the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs meets to examine the crisis concerning Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), one of the tragic humanitarian consequences of America's war in Iraq. The purpose of this hearing is to determine the efforts being taken by the Iraqi Government, the United States, and the rest of the international community to facilitate the resettlement of Iraqis displaced internally, and the repatriation of Iraqi refugees living in neighboring countries. The presence of such a large population in a state of displacement not only has humanitarian consequences, but poses security risks to future Iraqi stability and the interests of neighboring states and the international community. Accordingly, as the United States begins to drawdown its military presence in Iraq, we have a both a moral and a security interest in ensuring the safety and welfare of Iraqi refugees and IDPs.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 4.7 million Iraqis have been forced to leave their homes. Approximately 2.7 million are displaced internally, while 2 million have fled to neighboring states, particularly Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. Indeed, these numbers have been called into dispute, and I invite the views of our witnesses today on whether they are too high or too low. The Iraqi Government has demonstrated an inability to deal with a problem of such magnitude. Declining oil revenues and institutional deficiencies are preventing the government from effectively addressing this issue. In spite of improved security conditions, displaced Iraqis who return home are confronted with deplorable living conditions, or worse, destroyed homes. I am also concerned that ongoing sectarian divisions could be preventing the government from mustering the political will necessary to deal with the refugee crisis. We should assess whether the government's Shiite majority has an agenda to keep large numbers of Sunni refugees from returning to Iraq, and we also need to understand what is prompting thousands of Iraqi Christians to flee to Syria.

The exodus of refugees out of Iraq is overwhelming Iraq's neighbors, which I witnessed firsthand during my trip to Jordan in 2007. Countries like Jordan and Syria cannot handle the constant flow of refugees from Iraq, and some have started to impose legal and visa restrictions on new arrivals. These countries are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and have denied Iraqi refugees within their borders the protections and basic human rights refugees claim in most countries. As Refugees International reported last month, these Iraqis cannot find gainful employment in their host countries, and they are quickly running out of resources to sustain themselves. Unfortunately, the return of refugees to Iraq, however desirable, continues to be problematic, due to a difficult security environment and inadequate living conditions awaiting them at home.

I was pleased to hear that the Obama administration announced FY 2009 contributions of more than \$141 million to help displaced Iraqis. However, the crisis does not appear to be improving. It is my understanding that the administration is engaged in an ongoing review of policy toward the refugee challenge. President Obama has announced that, by August 2010, the majority of U.S. troops will be withdrawn from Iraq. While I fully support the President's plan to withdraw our forces from Iraq, I believe we must sustain our commitment to the refugee and IDP situation affecting nearly 5 million of its citizens, especially when the problem cannot be effectively controlled by the Iraqi Government and places undue strain on its neighbors. We cannot ignore the consequences for regional stability and Iraq's internal order if a large population of dispossessed and displaced individuals remains in place. Without any opportunity for reintegration or an escape from poverty and despair, displaced populations may be susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups, threatening the viability of the Iraqi state.

In September 2008, my distinguished colleague, Senator Ben Cardin, and I filed legislation—titled “The Support for Vulnerable and Displaced Iraqis Act of 2008”—to mandate the development of a comprehensive U.S. strategy to address the mass displacement of Iraqis. This bill addressed several issues that are still pertinent today. And as several of my colleagues and I emphasized to then-President-elect Obama in a letter we wrote in December 2008, these issues should be a focus of his administration's overall approach to Iraq.

First, a U.S. strategy on Iraqi refugees should address the responsibility of the Iraqi Government to help meet the urgent needs of its displaced citizens, including an assessment of how much assistance is needed to help meet these needs. Second, it should assess what conditions are necessary for the voluntary, safe, and sustainable return of displaced Iraqis. Finally, it should outline steps the U.S. Government will take to engage the international community to implement the strategy. It is imperative that the United States work in concert with Iraq's neighbors, donor governments, and other international actors to address challenges facing Iraqi refugees and IDPs, such as:

- The lack of legal status for refugees;
- The inability of refugees to work legally;
- Limited access to health care and education;
- Critical food shortages;
- Inadequate shelter, drinking water, sanitation, and protection.

Moreover, in the context of renewing U.S. engagement with Syria, the administration could find an important avenue for cooperation by working with Damascus on the refugee crisis.

The U.S. Government can also bolster its efforts to resettle in the United States those Iraqi refugees who risked their lives to assist the U.S. mission. Resettlement is the right thing to do, and it would also ease the burden on Iraq's neighbors. Only

in 2007 did the previous administration significantly increase the number of Iraq refugees to be settled in the United States. And even though the United States exceeded its FY 2008 admissions target of 12,000 Iraqi refugees, the demand for resettlement outpaces the steps the U.S. Government is taking. Any comprehensive U.S. strategy on Iraqi refugees should examine our current resettlement plan, and draw on all relevant government agencies to support this process.

We are joined here today by an esteemed panel of experts, who will discuss the myriad challenges involved in the Iraqi refugee crisis. Our first witness is Ellen Laipson, president and CEO of The Henry L. Stimson Center since 2002. Ms. Laipson is one of Washington's preeminent authorities on the Middle East, having written extensively about the challenges the United States faces in Iraq. Prior to joining the Stimson Center, Ms. Laipson served nearly 25 years in the United States Government, many of which were devoted to analysis and policymaking on Middle Eastern issues. She was the vice chair of the National Intelligence Council from 1997–2002, and held senior posts at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and in the National Security Council. I look forward to her analysis of the refugee crisis, how it relates to regional stability, and how the United States should approach this problem.

Nancy Aossey is president and CEO of the International Medical Corps. After becoming CEO shortly after IMC's founding in the mid-1980s, Ms. Aossey helped to transform International Medical Corps into one of the world's largest humanitarian organizations, providing more than \$120 million in disaster response and recovery programs annually. Thanks to Ms. Aossey's leadership, International Medical Corps assists the internally displaced throughout Iraq, providing badly needed medical care to those in need. She has also served as chairman of the board of InterAction and now serves on its executive committee.

Our final witness is Dr. Nabil Al-Tikriti of the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, VA. Dr. Al-Tikriti has written extensively on the effects of population displacement in Iraq and its neighbors, and its policy implications for the region. In addition to his scholarship, Al-Tikriti volunteered with the Catholic Relief Services humanitarian assistance project in Iraq in 1991–1992, and later served with Doctors without Borders as a relief worker in Somalia, Iran, Albania, Turkey, and Jordan.

Before we turn to our witnesses, I would like to enter into the formal hearing record a statement submitted to the committee by Mr. Kenneth Bacon, president of Refugees International, and Kristele Younes, senior advocate for Refugees International.

I encourage all of our witnesses to keep their remarks brief and succinct so that we can move to questions; accordingly, please limit your oral statement to no more than 10 minutes. If that requires you to summarize your statement, the text of your full statement will be included in the hearing record.

Senator CASEY. I know we had some delay here because we just had three budget votes, and that delayed our start.

But, suffice it to say that this is an issue that has not received near enough attention here in Washington. It presents, I believe, to the American people and to the world, both a moral challenge as well as one that is related to security. I believe that this isn't just about Iraqi refugees, it's about how our country's policy will be carried out in Iraq and whether or not we create a secure environment there.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 4.7 million Iraqis have been forced to leave their homes; approximately 2.7 are displaced internally, while 2 million have fled to neighboring states, particularly Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. Indeed, these numbers have been called into dispute, and I'd invite our witnesses, who have labored in this vineyard, so to speak, a long time, to correct me if I'm wrong about those numbers, but they're the numbers that we are working with.

So, with that, I will move forward with our witnesses. I wanted to briefly introduce them now. We have a distinguished panel of experts who are testifying today. They'll discuss the many challenges involved in this issue, really a crisis.

Our first witness is Ellen Laipson, president and CEO of The Henry L. Stimson Center since 2002. Ms. Laipson is one of Washington's preeminent authorities on the Middle East, having written extensively about the challenges the United States faces in Iraq.

Our second witness is Nancy Aosse, president and CEO of the International Medical Corps. After becoming CEO, shortly after IMC's founding in the mid-1980s, Ms. Aosse helped to transform the International Medical Corps into one of the world's largest humanitarian organizations.

And finally, we're joined today by Dr. Nabil Al-Tikriti, of the University of Mary Washington, in Fredericksburg, VA. He has written extensively on the effects of population displacement in Iraq and its neighbors, and its policy implications for the region.

And we know that each of these witnesses brings both a passion about, but also experience in and scholarship in, the issues we're going to discuss today.

Our ranking member, Senator Risch, will be joining us later. When he is here, I'll yield to him for any comments. And I know that Senator Kaufman is here. If he wanted to make some opening comments, I'd invite him to do that.

Senator KAUFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No, I think we've waited long enough. But, I want to, again, repeat what you said about this talented group that have come to testify, and I'm looking forward to your testimony. Especially recognize Ms. Laipson, who used to work with me in Senator Biden's office, and I know how well qualified she is. So, I just would like not to hold off, and get on with their testimony, which I'm ready to listen to. I'm going to have to leave to go preside at 4 o'clock, so don't take it personally.

Senator CASEY. Why don't we go from my right to left.

And, Ms. Laipson, you may start. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF ELLEN LAIPSON, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, THE HENRY L. STIMSON CENTER, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. LAIPSON. Thank you, Senator, for giving me the opportunity to address your subcommittee on the issue of Iraqi refugees.

The plight of more than a million Iraqi refugees has significant consequences for the Middle East region, as well as for the future stability and identity of the Iraqi state. How the refugees are treated will also be seen, over time, as a test of U.S. leadership and a measure of U.S. ability to manage the consequences of the decision to oust Saddam Hussein.

I approach this issue, not as a refugee expert, per se, or as someone involved directly in humanitarian programs, but I look at it from a political perspective as it relates to the future of Iraq, the stability of the neighboring countries, and the larger challenge of regional security.

Seen from this broader perspective, the potential implications of the refugee crisis are profound. At one extreme, it's worth considering whether the Iraqi refugees will someday be seen as the new Palestinians, a large population movement caused by political upheaval and war who have the potential to change the politics of the region for generations, reshaping the demographic and political balances in key countries of the region.

But, even if that scenario does not play out, the drama of the flow of Iraqis fleeing their homes has huge consequences for Iraq itself, the tragic loss of cultural diversity, the tradition of coexistence in urban neighborhoods and rural villages, the brain drain of well-trained professionals, and the uncertainties of political loyalties and national identities that are provoked by this abrupt shift in the demographic makeup of the country.

Today, I'd like to share some thoughts on how to think about refugees, in general, some of the definitional problems, and then briefly look at some of the key countries that have been receiving countries. How has this affected their politics? What are the prospects for return or repatriation, as you mentioned? And the long-term implications for the United States, and what we should—how we should think about our own options.

So, let's begin with just a couple of definitional problems. As you mentioned, we really don't know for certain how many Iraqis left the country during different phases of the crisis. It's often cited that as many as 20 percent of the total Iraqi population has moved since 2003, either within Iraq's borders or across international borders. A new USIP study also reminds us that we are still—that Iraq is still dealing with some of the people who were displaced during the Saddam Hussein period, so some of the movement back to villages and towns in Iraq are people that may have been displaced even prior to 2003.

But, since the American intervention, Iraqis left the country in two waves; initially in the 2003 to 2005 period, but a much larger wave left in response to the outbreak of sectarian fighting that began in February 2006. So, really it's from 2006 to the present that the largest proportion of the crisis, as we know it, occurred.

The situation is tapering off now, there are fewer Iraqis trying to leave now. And so, we can focus on whether this population currently outside of Iraq may eventually find the conditions favorable to return.

Refugee experts tell us that there's sometimes not an easy distinction to be made between who is a refugee and who is an economic migrant. We know that a lot of the Iraqis left with their savings, in search of professional opportunities in neighboring countries, but, over time, their status has changed; as they've run out of their funding, they now find themselves needing to register with the U.N. as refugees so that their children can go to school and that they are entitled to some of the food programs and other socioeconomic support systems.

It's also important to note that we tend to look at refugees as a collective, as a group, with shared requirements, but we should remember that refugees are individuals and families, each with deeply personal and unique stories and perspectives. Resolving the refugee crisis must take into account that people will respond differently to the trauma of fleeing their country, and not all will embrace the solutions that international organizations may offer them. So, we want to be flexible when we think about refugee programs that are available to them.

Let me turn now to the prospects for return. It does seem to me that the refugees themselves are demonstrating to us that they don't believe that conditions in Iraq today are favorable for return.

So far, we've seen perhaps a few tens of thousands returning, and many of them are finding that these financial subsidies that the Iraqi Government offers are not sufficient to really resume the life that they had known before. Some of the Iraqis that are trying to return are finding that their socioeconomic status has been reduced from what they once enjoyed; but, it still may be better than being unemployed in Syria or Jordan, so some of them will make that choice.

But, it's important to note that, first and foremost, perception of security conditions will be the primary factor that determines whether Iraqis return. Second will be economics, whether they think they will find employment, and whether they can resume normal life back in Iraq. And the services that the Iraqi Government provides are perhaps the least single important factor in determining the decision to take the advantage of opportunities to return to Iraq.

Seems to me that the United States has a deep and abiding interest in both the stability of Iraq and its ability to resume its place in the region. The presence of Iraqis, with deteriorating economic conditions in Syria and Jordan in particular, is a painful reminder of Iraq's weakness and an increasing burden on those hosts. As Iraq's neighbors adjust to new realities and we attempt to reintegrate Iraq in the region, the refugee issue has the potential to be a source of cooperation and common concern, but also a source of enduring friction. We should not think that the return of the refugees, in and of itself, will determine Iraq's relations with its neighbors, but it will contribute to how Iraq's neighbors perceive the integrity of the Iraqi Government and how the two societies relate to each other. Some Iraqis will, of course, become loyal citizens of other countries, but many will always yearn to return.

The international community needs to have a range of programs for the Iraqi displaced—first and foremost, to work on conditions inside Iraq that will make return a viable and attractive option; to provide support to the host countries to manage the infrastructure challenges of absorbing, even temporarily, large numbers of Iraqis; and to encourage Iraqis to find long-term solutions, either through integration where they're currently residing, or resettlement to third countries, including the United States.

In the end, these are profoundly personal choices. Refugee policies for the United States that are generous in spirit and flexible in practice will offer the most solace to a population that fled the country during war and conflict that can still return to play an important role in Iraq's future, if they choose, or to find a new life elsewhere.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Laipson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELLEN LAIPSON, PRESIDENT AND CEO, THE HENRY L. STIMSON CENTER, WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address your subcommittee on the issue of Iraqi refugees. The plight of the more than a million Iraqi refugees has significant consequences for the Middle East region, as well as for the future stability and identity of the Iraqi state. How the refugees are treated is also seen as a test of U.S. leadership, and a measure of U.S. ability to manage the consequences of the decision to oust Saddam Hussein.

I approach this issue not as a refugee expert per se, nor as someone directly involved in the many laudable humanitarian programs that support refugee needs. I look at the refugee issue from a broad political perspective, as it relates to the future of Iraq, the stability of the neighboring countries that have received large numbers of Iraqi migrants, and the larger challenge of regional security.

Seen from this broader perspective, the potential implications of the refugee issue are profound. At one extreme, it is worth pondering whether the Iraqi refugees will come to be seen as the next Palestinians: A large population movement caused by political upheaval and war that has the potential to change the politics of the region for generations, reshaping the demographic and political balances in some of the key countries of the region, including Syria and Jordan. Even if that scenario does not play out, the drama of the spontaneous flow of Iraqis away from their homes has huge consequences for Iraq itself; the tragic loss of cultural diversity and coexistence in many urban neighborhoods and remote villages, the brain drain of well-trained professionals, and the uncertainties for political loyalties and national identity that are provoked by this abrupt shift in the demographic makeup of the country.

My comments today will offer some reflections on how to think about the Iraqi refugee problem, and about refugees and other forms of migration. I will then address three key questions:

1. What are the current conditions and policy concerns regarding Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan, and other Middle Eastern states?
2. What are the prospects for large-scale return of Iraqi refugees?
3. What are the implications of the Iraqi refugee crisis for Iraq, its reintegration in the region and regional stability?

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THE REFUGEE CRISIS

There are a number of definitional issues that should be recognized: The unplanned movement of people from crisis zones does not always mean they can be easily categorized for purposes of the international community's responses, nor are numbers often reliable or based on deeply scientific methods. In the case of Iraq, we do not know for certain how many Iraqis left the country during different phases of the crisis; it is often cited that as much as 20 percent of Iraq's population has moved since 2003, half within the country and half across its international borders. A new U.S. Institute of Peace report¹ on Iraq's displaced reminds us that there was mass displacement of Iraqis during the rule of the Baath Party and Saddam Hussein. Some of those Iraqis are now moving within Iraq back to their place or origin, while others have been returning from international places of temporary residence or asylum. This will add another dimension of complexity with respect to eligibility for various kinds of support for return, including housing and employment support once back inside Iraq.

Since 2003, Iraqis left the country in two waves: One in the early period of chaos and uncertainty, and a much larger wave provoked by the outbreak of sectarian fighting in February 2006. The flow of Iraqis across the borders to neighboring Syria and Jordan in particular was largest in 2006 and began to taper off in 2007, when conditions began to improve gradually inside Iraq, and receiving countries developed more formal policies for those seeking to come for safety and work. The number of Iraqis who have left since 2003 is not known; officially the commonly used arithmetic is 1.2 million Iraqis in Syria, 500,000 in Jordan, 200,000 in the gulf countries, and some tens of thousands in Egypt and Lebanon. But NGOs and experts on the ground considered those figures to be swollen by as much as 30–40 percent.

Migration experts, such as those at the American University of Cairo's Center for Migration and Refugee Studies, point out that there is sometimes not a clear distinction between an economic migrant and a refugee. A person or family can choose to leave their home when conflict or chronic instability makes it hard to earn a living. They leave in search of a more normal life, both in terms of livelihood and safety. The receiving country may consider the person an economic migrant; the decision to self-declare as a refugee is also not a simple proposition for a middle-class person who hopes to quickly acquire a home and a job, not to live as a ward of local charities or the international community.

One's status can also change over time. In the case of the Iraqis in Syria, for example, many came as "guests" of the Syrians, and were able to finance their temporary residence in Syria's cities. But over time, absent promising conditions in Iraq to lure them back, these same families deplete their savings, find no employment in the local economy, and reluctantly find themselves applying for services and sub-

¹U.S. Institute of Peace, Deborah Isser and Peter Van der Anveraert, "Land, Property and the Challenge of Return for Iraq's Displaced," USIP Special Report No. 221, April 2009.

sities that oblige them to register as refugees. The U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees is now encouraging Iraqis to register, in order to facilitate access to basic human needs programs, including financial support for food, housing, health, and education.

It is also important to note that to address the needs of a refugee population, it is often necessary to treat them as a collective, as a group with shared requirements. But refugees are individuals and families, each with deeply personal and unique stories and perspectives. Resolving the refugee crisis must take into account that people will respond differently to the traumatic experience of fleeing their country, and will not all embrace the services provided by relief organizations or the incentives offered by Iraq or receiving countries for those migrants to return. The long-term solution, therefore, will require a range of options for the refugees, not a policy based on an assumption that they are a cohesive or like-minded cohort.²

CURRENT CONDITIONS AND CONCERNS

The environment in which Iraqi refugees find themselves in early 2009 in the neighboring Arab states is affected by a range of factors: The global economic downturn and its local impact, the history and legacy of Iraq's relations with each host country, and the host government's views of the changing situation in Iraq and prospects for return. It is also affected by the behavior of the Iraqis themselves. It is important to note that no major Arab country has created "refugee camps" for the Iraqis. Some Arab cities, however, now have neighborhoods where Iraqis cluster, with restaurants and customs that have an Iraqi character. In other cases, Iraqis choose to move together to small rural enclaves and avoid the cities where they may be subject to discrimination or run afoul of security authorities.

Some of the early concerns about Iraqis bringing sectarian politics or violence with them appear to have abated. Local security services have attempted to screen out Iraqis with a clear political agenda, and for the most part, there are few instances of Iraqi refugees, migrants, and guests causing conflict or law and order problems in their countries of temporary residence. Local populations, however, perceive the Iraqis in a somewhat hostile way, considering them responsible for inflation, for high real estate prices, and even for water scarcity. This suggests that conflict or competition over resources will remain a concern for host countries.

A quick snapshot of the situation in key Arab states may be useful³:

Syria

Overall, Syria is viewed by the aid community and political analysts to have been the most generous and accommodating of the regional states toward Iraqi refugees. The government in Damascus considers the Iraqis to be "guests" and does not formally take a position on repatriation. Syria received a larger share of Christian refugees than other neighbors, and it is widely assumed that the Christians, many from small villages in northern Iraq, are not likely to return, even if security conditions improve in Iraq. The Christian Iraqis receive support and services from various local and international Christian nongovernmental organizations, and are somewhat integrated at the social level.

Economic conditions for Iraqis in Syria, however, are dire. Many have depleted their savings or proceeds from selling homes and businesses in Iraq, and are not able to seek formal employment in the Syrian labor market, where unemployment is already high. The strain on resources is considerable, and the international NGO community finds itself serving both the Iraqi refugee population and Syrians who are also in need of food, education, and housing support.

The Syrian Government remains relatively confident that the refugee problem is manageable. Syrian officials would like more financial support from Iraq, which Damascus complains has not lived up to its promises to help finance the basic needs of Iraqis in Syria, and from the international community, but they seem to take a long-term view. The leadership realizes, nonetheless, that unemployed and under-

²For a useful discussion of different and simultaneous options for Iraqi refugees, see The International Rescue Committee, "Five Years Later, A Hidden Crisis," Report of the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees, March 2008.

³I am grateful for a draft paper by Sara Sadek, "Iraq 'Temporary Guests' in Neighboring Countries: Challenges and Prospects of Integration," Center for Migration and Refugee Studies; American University in Cairo. Discussion paper prepared for a Stimson Center-AUC-AUB workshop on migration held in Beirut, March 16-17, 2009.

educated refugees in Syrian cities could, over time, become a virtual “bomb” for Syria, and for Iraq, should they return.⁴

Jordan

Jordan has been more nervous about the presence of Iraqi refugees, has more stringent policies for screening who is eligible to enter, and has felt a more direct impact of the influx on its relatively smaller population and infrastructure.

Jordan provides Iraqis with asylum-seeking status, rather than refugee status granted by the U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) as it provided in most other countries, once the refugees register. They are given a 6-month visa with no authorization to work, although affluent Iraqis who can deposit \$150,000 in Jordanian banks have been given longer residence permits.

Jordan is also worried about the long-term impact of sectarian consciousness of a Shia refugee population in a Sunni majority country. Jordan sees the refugee crisis from the perspective of its own history, hosting Palestinians who now form about half of the Jordanian population, and its once-close relationship with Baghdad.

*Egypt*⁵

The relatively small cohort of Iraqis in Egypt does not generate much attention or concern from the Egyptian Government, which also houses large refugee populations from Sudan, Somalia, and other African conflict zones. Many Iraqis in Egypt have legal residence, either through their economic investments or through registering with UNHCR to allow their children into the public school system.

In contrast to the large African populations in Cairo, Iraqis are perceived as wealthy migrants, based in part on the collective memory of Egyptian laborers who worked in Iraq in the 1980s. There are some social frictions over property, and Iraqis complain that they have been blocked from forming their own civil associations, reportedly on security grounds.

Lebanon

Iraqis in Lebanon face considerable obstacles to normalizing their status. They are granted refugee status by UNHCR, but this has not protected them from detention by Lebanese authorities. Many do not have residence permits and are required to pay fees to acquire them. They also have no access to public health and education services, or to the labor market.

Unlike the situation in Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, Iraqis in Lebanon have formed community networks to survive, and Lebanon has permitted them to establish these services. Given the profound and seemingly permanent impact that Palestinian refugees have had on Lebanon, it appears unlikely that the government in Beirut will permit the Iraqis to fully integrate, and they may remain in rural enclaves, or migrate to other locales as circumstances permit.

PROSPECTS FOR RETURN

Repatriation of Iraqis who have not already integrated elsewhere or who may achieve resettlement status outside the Middle East is an important and compelling solution. It requires a number of conditions: Iraq has to be perceived as a relatively stable and secure environment, and refugees need some assurances about their prospects for returning to their homes and for finding employment. Much of the burden for meeting these conditions resides with the Iraqi Government and society, but the international community can also contribute to making this a viable option for many refugees.

The perception of security conditions inside Iraq is likely to be the most important driver of a refugee’s decision to return: All the services and subsidies will not suffice if the fundamental reason for flight has not been addressed. Iraqis in refugee status maintain contact with relatives and neighbors inside, as well as media accounts of conditions inside. They are interested in security at the national level, but also at the neighborhood level and at the family level. In 2006, families fled because of direct threats from neighbors of a different sectarian identity. They will gauge for themselves whether those conditions have changed and how much risk they are willing to take. Do they have the option of living in a more homogeneous area where sectarian dangers are reduced? Refugee experts suggest that the refugees them-

⁴See U.S. Institute of Peace-Stimson Center joint report “Iraq, Its Neighbors and the Obama Administration: Syrian and Saudi Perspectives,” a working paper on a study mission in January 2009, p. 8.

⁵See, for example, their study “Iraqis in Egypt: A Statistical Survey in 2008,” at <http://www.aucegypt.edu/ResearchatAUC/rc/cmrs/Documents/Iraqis%20in%20Egypt%20Provisional%20Copy.pdf>

selves will be good indicators of when the right conditions for return prevail: Iraqis have informal networks of information and even travel back into Iraq, to appraise the situation.

Economics is also a powerful driver of the decision to return. Iraqi refugees were not able to calculate the duration of their refuge, and many would return at a lower socioeconomic status than they enjoyed before their departure. The readjustment to life in Iraq may be hard, but at some point, it may be better than remaining unemployed in a neighboring country. Resuming their earlier professional lives may not be feasible immediately, but can be an aspiration that motivates them to return.

The Iraqi Government offers transportation and modest financial assistance to returnees. The estimate of returnees in early 2008 was less than 100,000, a very small reaction of those displaced since 2003. In general, these services and the sustained commitment to providing them are not robust enough to have generated large numbers to date, nor are the other conditions cited above strong enough.

LONG-TERM PROGNOSIS

The United States has a deep and abiding interest in the stability of Iraq and its ability to resume its place as a key state in the region. The enduring presence of Iraqis with deteriorating economic conditions in neighboring states will be a painful reminder of Iraq's weakness and its internal strife, and an increasing burden on their hosts. As Iraq's neighbors adjust to new realities, and Iraq is integrated back into the region, the refugee issue has the potential to be a source of cooperation and common concern, but also an enduring source of friction. Disaffected Iraqis with few prospects of integration in host countries could be drawn to extremism or lawlessness, which will hurt Iraq and the host societies and impede prospects for regional security.

The international community needs to have a range of programs and policies for the Iraqi displaced: First and foremost, to work on conditions inside Iraq that will make return a viable and attractive option; to provide support to host countries to manage the infrastructure challenges of absorbing, even temporarily, large numbers of Iraqis; and to encourage policies that permit Iraqis to find long-term solutions, through integration when possible and resettlement to third countries, including the United States. In the end, these are profoundly personal choices. The United States needs to work strategically for stability in Iraq, recognizing that some of these societal traumas will take a very long time to heal. Refugee policies that are generous of spirit and flexible in practice will offer the most solace to a population that needs support now, and attention over time so that Iraqis who fled war and conflict in recent years can return to play a role in Iraq's future if they choose, or find a new life elsewhere.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much.

Ms. Aosse.

STATEMENT OF NANCY AOSSEY, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS, LOS ANGELES, CA

Ms. AOSSEY. I'd like to thank you, Chairman Casey, for calling this very important hearing today, and Senator Kaufman, for being here today, as well.

I head the International Medical Corps. We're headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, and were founded in 1984. We are currently operating programs throughout the world in more than 25 countries.

We have been working in Iraq continuously, in almost all of Iraq, since 2003, promoting self-reliance and long-term development programs. Our 500 staff in Iraq work mostly outside the Green Zone, among the Iraqi people. We have 22 expatriate staff and about 40 technical experts. We also have about 200 staff members and 13 expatriates in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Our local staff are hired from the communities where we work. And, in fact, it is because of this that we have longevity in Iraq. It is the result of our staying true to the principle of acceptance of our presence by the people in the communities that we serve.

International Medical Corps builds close ties to these communities where we work, and we work in consultation with local leaders and institutions to build this local support. The currency of our relationships, and the foundation of all of them, is trust.

I'd like to focus on the conditions in which Iraq's displaced live, as well as the challenges ahead for this population. I will then present four recommendations for U.S. policy in Iraq that we think will help mitigate the current displacement crisis and assist in finding durable and long-lasting solutions. Of course, I've submitted my written testimony, which is quite a bit longer.

Until now, the plight of displaced Iraqis has really received mostly sporadic attention. If left alone, the displacement has the potential to undermine the nation's fragile and hard-won gains. How the displacement crisis is handled by all of us will have far-reaching consequences. Decisions regarding return, repatriation, and resettlement should not be made in haste.

The plight of Iraq's internally displaced people is largely invisible. There are no sprawling tent camps or dramatic airdrops to capture international attention. Instead, the majority of them have found shelter quietly among the poorest of neighborhoods or sometimes amid strangers in overcrowded cities. Most are forced to rely on external support, with no means to make a living.

The estimated 2 million Iraqis who fled to the neighboring countries do not fit the stereotype of refugees; they live in urban settings among the local population. They often cannot work. An ongoing assessment by International Medical Corps in all three countries finds that the majority of Iraqis refugees chronically lack access to health care and education, and that women and children, especially, experience declining health and social isolation. The reality is, in all three countries, Iraqis have fled insecurity, only to face severe poverty and deprivation.

As a real, yet fragile, degree of security continues to settle over Iraq, some of the displaced families have begun to return home. Their numbers are small, just under 300,000, less than 6 percent of the total displaced population. And 9 of 10 returnees are internally displaced persons. This means that the tremendous pressures on neighboring countries that host these refugees remains essentially unchanged.

The international community really does owe a debt of gratitude to those nations of the Middle East that have taken in large numbers of these refugees and accept the economic, social, and political burdens that come with them. While the evidence of returns is encouraging, it's very important not to rush this process, because to push for accelerated returns before the proper conditions are in place could cause the exchange of existing problems for new, equally complex, and possibly much more dangerous set of challenges. We must also assure, of course, that other options are available to those who are not able to settle back into Iraq.

But, return—and I repeat—return can only occur when Iraqi families feel it is safe to do so. And they rely on their information, in large part, not from government entities, but by talking to relatives and friends, in the communities from which they come, to get a sense of how safe their friends and relatives feel in those

communities. That's where they're getting a lot of their information.

Certain conditions must be put in place for these displaced populations to feel that they can return. They need access to accurate information, they need an acceptable level of security, they need a package of support that's offered by the international community.

The evidence is clear that the Government of Iraq needs our help in this task, and this is, in large part, due to the fact that ministries, such as the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, with whom we work, have demonstrated the commitment and the willingness to assume their roles, but truly don't have the capacity to do so.

I'd like to focus on some recommendations. There are certainly many compelling reasons why the United States should remain engaged and support the Iraqi Government in helping to establish conditions for long-term solutions for displaced Iraqis. Certainly, Iraq is vital to the stability of the Middle East. Considering the conditions I've described, the United States policy toward Iraq should develop and implement a strategy to address the crisis of IDPs and refugees in neighboring countries that figures prominently in the administration's plan for political and economic stability in Iraq.

There should be increased support for humanitarian efforts aimed at fostering the conditions necessary for safe and sustainable return. Additional resources should be provided to USAID, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, and the Department of State to help them achieve the humanitarian and development objectives necessary to address this crisis in a comprehensive manner, and we should urge—and, very importantly, support—the Iraqi Government in the development of a unified legal and administrative framework designed to ensure safe and sustainable returns. Finally, we should accelerate technical and capacity-building measures within the Iraqi Government ministries to help them comprehensively address the country's displacement crisis. Managing this crisis must be an Iraqi-led process, it cannot be carried out solely by the rest of us, and it requires close collaboration with the Iraqi Government.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Aosse follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NANCY A. OSSEY, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS, LOS ANGELES, CA

Chairman Casey, Senator Risch, members of the subcommittee, I am Nancy Aosse, President and CEO of International Medical Corps, a private, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization headquartered in Los Angeles, California, that has been working continuously in Iraq since the spring of 2003 and is currently assisting Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Thank you for the invitation to testify and the opportunity to appear before you. We applaud your decision to conduct this hearing on the plight of the millions of Iraqis forced from their homes over the past 6 years.

I have led International Medical Corps for the past 23 years since shortly after its founding in 1984. I would like to share with you today our unique perspective as a humanitarian assistance organization that has worked for nearly 6 years with displaced Iraqis and their families both on the ground in Iraq and in the neighboring countries. International Medical Corps' work in the region seeks to promote self-reliance and advance long-term development by targeting four key sectors: Health, humanitarian assistance, capacity-building, and democracy and governance.

International Medical Corps was founded by volunteer doctors and nurses to train mid-level health care workers in Afghanistan. We are now a global humanitarian organization dedicated to saving lives and relieving suffering of those affected by war, natural disaster and disease and to delivering vital health care services that incorporate capacity-building of our counterparts. International Medical Corps helps people return to self-reliance by enabling the development of essential skills for health, livelihoods, rehabilitation and service delivery. We implement major emergency relief and longer term transitional and development programs that provide comprehensive health and nutrition services, rehabilitate infrastructure, train local personnel and enhance community participation and development in more than 20 countries worldwide. Those countries today include Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, where the overwhelming majority of the displaced Iraqis currently reside.

At your request, I will focus my testimony today on the present day realities in the region for the displaced Iraqi population, how I believe the process of return and resettlement will proceed and how the United States can best play a constructive role in coordination with the Iraqi Government and the international community. I will conclude with recommendations to the administration for addressing the current crisis.

My comments are based on International Medical Corps' considerable experience in dealing with the current crisis—our experience is certainly among the broadest and deepest of the nongovernmental, humanitarian relief organizations operating in the Middle East region. Although exact numbers are difficult to obtain, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates the current total displacement in the region at 4.7 million people. Of that number, approximately 2.7 million have been displaced inside Iraq, and up to 2 million refugees are estimated to have fled to neighboring countries.

International Medical Corps has been in Iraq without interruption since the spring of 2003, and has operated extensively in all of the country's 18 governorates. We have worked in the region, providing assistance to a target population of 3 million inside Iraq and are currently serving a beneficiary population of nearly 200,000 Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. We have implemented programs in these areas totaling over \$150 million as of December 2008.

We currently have more than 500 staff members inside Iraq, including 22 expatriates and over 40 visiting technical experts. In Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, we have more than 200 staff, including 13 expatriates. The vast majority of local staff we hire comes from the communities where we work. We have worked in coordination with a variety of U.S. agencies and departments, including the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Department of State, as well as with United Nations agencies, international and Iraqi nongovernmental organizations and local religious and tribal leaders.

Despite an extremely difficult environment, International Medical Corps has worked continuously inside Iraq since 2003. In Baghdad, our staff live and work in the so-called "red zone"—the majority of the city that is outside the tightly guarded, high security "green zone" that is home to the U.S. Embassy, the Iraq Parliament and the residences and offices of many of the international organizations working in Iraq.

We have been able to work outside the green zone without a heavy security presence. Our ability to do this lies in our disciplined adherence to a few basic "musts." First, we operate on the principle of acceptance of our presence and our work by the local population. Second, we depend on building close ties to the communities where we work. In addition to hiring staff locally, we consult and collaborate with Iraqi institutions, local leaders and groups and government officials at all levels in order to build the necessary support for our relief, development, and training efforts. Third, the currency of these relationships is a common understanding and trust. In a very real sense, our word has been our bond.

For example, today in Iraq, International Medical Corps projects build the capacity of the government while concurrently providing direct services to Iraqis. In the health sector, we implement continuing medical education and professional development programs for health workers, recently, training more than 200 health professionals in anaesthesia, ophthalmology, emergency medicine, psychiatry, and obstetrics/gynecology. International Medical Corps also responds to emergency situations, including specific incidents that have resulted in displacement. For example, when violence erupted in Mosul, in early October 2008, militants forced more than 11,000 of the city's Christians to flee. With financial support from USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), within 24 hours we procured and delivered emergency food rations, hygiene kits, and household items to displaced families. Also with funding from OFDA, we are assisting the Ministry of Displacement and Migration in operating Returnee Assistance Centers to provide immediate and longer term

assistance to internally displaced people and refugee returnees, including registration, protection, legal assistance and ministerial capacity-building.

International Medical Corps has used our unique position to conduct original research on the flow of internally displaced Iraqis—especially in and out of Baghdad and also within Baghdad itself. Our January 2007 report on displacement in Baghdad was among the very first to document the gravity and scope of the violence-driven shifts of populations underway in Iraq. Our role as an American nongovernmental, international relief agency working in both Iraq and three neighboring countries hosting some of the largest concentrations of displaced Iraqis gives us a special perspective on the impact of the crisis across the Middle East region.

Despite the size of the problem, the plight of Iraq's displaced people is largely invisible. There are no sprawling tent camps or dramatic airdrops to capture international attention. Instead, the majority of Iraq's displaced population has found shelter quietly, often in the poorest neighborhoods of unfamiliar communities, sometimes with friends and relatives inside Iraq, sometimes amid strangers in an overcrowded foreign city. Most are forced to live on their savings because there is little or no work available. In many cases the communities hosting the 2.7 million internally displaced Iraqis are as destitute as those they are helping. For the majority of the estimated 2 million other displaced Iraqis who have sought safety in neighboring countries, work is illegal and livelihood opportunities are extremely limited to nonexistent. Because they have fled their country of origin, they are officially known as refugees.

I believe the international community owes a debt of gratitude to those nations of the Middle East that have taken in large numbers of these refugees and accepted the economic, social, and political burdens that have come with them—all with limited support from the world at large and from the Government of Iraq. That said the work of important donor agencies, including USAID, the State Department's Bureau of Populations, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and U.N. agencies such as the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR have played important roles in helping ease the suffering.

If there is good news about the crisis of displaced Iraqis in the spring of 2009, it is that the number of those on the move has slowed substantially. According to a February 2009 report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the numbers of newly displaced families has dropped from an average of 16,000 per month during most of 2006 and early 2007 to only a few hundred families per month in the final months of 2008. Many of these new displacements stem from specific events, such as militia attacks against Christians in the northern city of Mosul last fall.

The bad news, however, is that all too many of the millions of displaced Iraqis are suffering the predictable ills of substandard life. They are experiencing deteriorating health, plummeting income levels, reduced education, poor, overcrowded living conditions and the psychological weight of living a life on hold, uncertain when it might end.

At a political level, the internal displacement of nearly 10 percent of its population has a serious impact on Iraq's economic development prospects and saddled the government with daunting social and political problems. Outside Iraq itself, the presence of such a large and economically unproductive refugee population has added an additional burden on host nations already struggling to provide for their own. The pressures of the global economic downturn merely exacerbate the situation, building upon social tensions in countries where citizens suddenly find themselves competing with refugees for such fundamentals as adequate health care. In short, the conditions in which the majority of displaced Iraqis currently live is unsustainable over the long term.

As a real, yet fragile, degree of security has settled over Iraq over the past several months, some of the displaced families have begun to return home. The numbers remain small—just under 300,000 individuals so far, according to the most recent IOM figures. That figure is less than 6 percent of the total displaced population. Nine of every ten returnees are internally displaced, that is they are returning to their locations of origin from other parts of Iraq. That means the burdens on neighboring countries hosting refugees remains essentially unchanged despite the improved security situation.

Our own internal research tells us the majority of those heading home have cited improved security conditions as their reason for moving back. We also know from historical experience that the majority of people forced to leave their homes prefer to return once conditions on the ground are in place that provide a safe and secure environment. We know too that for some, returning may not be an option, and other durable solutions, including resettlement in another country, must be made available.

While evidence of returns is heartening, I believe we need to be careful not to move too quickly on this front. To push for accelerated returns before the proper conditions are achieved could effectively cause us to exchange existing problems for new, equally complex, and possibly more dangerous, concerns.

THE PROCESS OF RETURN

The process of return poses major challenges to the Government of Iraq. To succeed, it will need the help of the United States and other members of the international community. While the Iraqis have instituted a few support measures to help those returning home, they have been insufficient and only marginally effective. The unfortunate reality is that the Government of Iraq has yet to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with this issue.

Most importantly, necessary conditions must be met that enable both refugees in neighboring countries and those displaced internally to return home voluntarily, in safety and with dignity. Some of these conditions are already in place. For example, with a popularly elected Government, a Constitution, and an active Parliament, Iraq today is increasingly a nation that functions under the rule of law. Other important conditions are also necessary. I will name just a few:

- Access to accurate information is a key concern for displaced Iraqis as they consider returning to their place of origin. We know that displaced populations tend to return in large numbers when they believe they have reliable, accurate, and objective information on their locations of origin or habitual residence. It is also clear that refugees most often rely on sources of information they most trust—that is the local community, family, friends, and relatives still living in the location of origin.

We believe that improving the flow of credible and independent information is a critical component in helping refugees and internally displaced Iraqis in the decisionmaking process of when—or if—they should return home. This reality merely underscores the need for a community-based approach to providing information. A forthcoming survey on Iraqi internal displacement, conducted by International Medical Corps in conjunction with the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration and the United Nations, found that displaced Iraqi individuals and families overwhelmingly turned to the local community for information and even tried to visit themselves where possible. Few, however, turned to local or national authorities or other government channels. We at International Medical Corps have worked to open these channels in order to facilitate the flow of information by setting up a web portal at a returnee acceptance center in Baghdad. The web portal was established in cooperation with local community councils and leaders to provide information on specific Baghdad neighborhoods and share experiences with members of displaced families who have already returned. It also serves as an information source for displaced people to learn about the registration process and learn what they can expect to receive in terms of financial and social benefits upon return.

- There must also be an acceptable level of security. Security has improved dramatically in Iraq over the past year, but remains fragile and uncertain. According to a Government Accounting Office (GAO) report on Iraq released earlier this month, the number of insurgent-initiated attacks fell from nearly 180 per day in June 2007 to 27 per day in January 2009. The challenge here is to make the security gains sustainable so that security becomes stability—an essential ingredient to ending the displacement crisis successfully. To achieve this requires the continued commitment of the Iraqi Government. As the number of U.S. troops decreases, it is of course important to further the ability of the national government to provide security for its citizens. Support for other efforts that promote national reconciliation are also critical in helping to establish a stable and secure environment—for example, efforts that promote interreligious and intersectorian dialogue and understanding.
- The Iraqi Government must develop a strategic framework to deal with the returns in a systematic, coordinated manner and be in a position to provide a package of support specifically tailored to the needs of those returning, such as a functioning mechanism for resolving disputes over property abandoned in haste. The government must also be able to provide the basic public services to the community at large, including health services and education, and assure the availability of both affordable housing and employment opportunities. The job will not be easy. Both Iraqi refugees and those displaced internally remain in desperate need of immediate humanitarian assistance ranging from health care, water and food to housing, education and economic opportunities. They

will also require longer term assistance to help them rebuild their lives and fully integrate into society.

The Government of Iraq has struggled—and often failed—to meet the needs of the relatively small number of displaced Iraqis who have returned so far. In general, the displaced remain in a precarious situation across Iraq and little attention or effort has been devoted to helping them reintegrate into their original communities. Property issues have been, and will continue to be, an important challenge for those responsible for managing the returns process. Over half of the families who return to their original location report that their homes are seriously damaged or occupied by another family, according to data from the IOM. To succeed in the larger task ahead, the Government of Iraq will need the support of the international community—including the United States, the United Nations, and nongovernment organizations with experience of such crises such as International Medical Corps.

To prepare for a greater flow of returns, the Iraqi Government's Ministry of Displacement and Migration has taken some steps. It has opened Returnee Assistance Centers in Baghdad, and others are planned for areas outside the capital. The Iraqi Government also provides one-time grants of 1 million dinars per family—an amount equivalent to about \$850—to help ease the financial costs of returning home. Officially, the decision to return rests with the individual displaced families. However, concern has been expressed by a number of international groups supporting displaced Iraqis that the present poor conditions in which the displaced currently live could lead to returns that are not truly voluntary. Mounting political pressure for return from some of the governments involved in the crisis may also result in the displaced returning at a time conditions on the ground may not yet be suitable, safe, or sustainable.

Returning to one's place of origin is the preferred durable solution for any displaced population, while recognizing that there need to be options in place for those who feel that they cannot return. But return can only—I repeat—only occur when Iraqi families feel it is safe and secure to do so. Returns must take place in an environment of confidence, dignity, safety, and mutual respect. Conditions for return must also be sustainable. In such an atmosphere, I can assure this committee that International Medical Corps and other nongovernmental organizations inside the country will be well-positioned to assist returnees as they meet the many challenges involved in the transition back home to a productive, peaceful life.

While the evidence of returns is heartening, I believe we need to be careful not to move forward too quickly. To push for accelerated returns before the proper conditions are achieved could effectively cause us to exchange existing problems for a new, equally complex—and possibly more dangerous—set of challenges. We must also ensure that other options, such as resettlement in a third country, and integration into current communities; are available to those for whom return is not appropriate.

In the struggle to stabilize Iraq, every year has been heralded as “critical.” Yet, coming after the surge, with provincial and national elections looming, U.S. forces due to withdraw from cities and towns, and a new U.S. administration to take the helm during a time of unprecedented domestic and international economic upheaval—2009 truly promises to be a watershed in the Iraq conflict. The staying power of Iraqi civil and security institutions, and therefore U.S. investment in building their capacities, will be sorely tested.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

After 6 years of sacrifice and tens of billions of dollars of investment to rebuild Iraq, International Medical Corps believes the United States would be ill-advised, at this important juncture, to reduce U.S. support of Iraq's development process. Technical assistance from the United States, the United Nations and other international agencies and organizations is a must in order to assure robust and fully supported programs that create jobs, stabilize local economies, and raise the prospect of a better future for all Iraqis.

There are also compelling reasons why the United States must remain fully engaged in Iraq at this crucial time.

- Because a stable Iraq is vital to the stability of the broader Middle East, the United States must reinforce its efforts to strengthen the Iraqi Government's capacity at all levels to respond to the needs of its people, regain their trust and rebuild the kind of strong, prosperous communities that lie at the heart of a stable nation.
- Such efforts are the most effective weapon against a resurgence of extremism. And at a time large numbers of displaced Iraqis weigh the possibility of returning home, effective measures are needed to improve the chances of the successful

reintegration of these returnees. If this process of return fails, the result will be heightened social tensions and a very real danger of a new descent into violence. —It is also important that the United States set an example of moral leadership in helping the Iraqis help the most vulnerable elements of their population—the more than 4.7 million displaced by violence.

I can assure members of this subcommittee there is compelling evidence that the Government of Iraq needs help in this task. I am encouraged that those in key Iraqi Government ministries understand this fact and want our help. They have demonstrated a commitment and a willingness to reform. International Medical Corps has experienced this firsthand as it has worked to strengthen the capacity of important ministries, including the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, a key ministry in the process of return.

Currently, however, the majority of Iraqi ministries are crippled by problems of political patronage, unskilled staff, bureaucratic inertia and decisionmaking processes that are unnecessarily convoluted and highly centralized. The price of such practices is high. I cite just one example: The recently released GAO report on Iraq noted that central government ministries responsible for providing essential services to the Iraqi people managed to spend only 11 percent of their 2007 budgets. We do not believe such problems should be addressed by sending in battalions of outside advisers, many of whom may not even possess the needed expertise. Our experience tells us that carefully calibrated, targeted assistance deployed to work on well-defined issues is an efficient, cost-effective way to generate meaningful results.

Since 2006, International Medical Corps has been at the forefront of efforts to improve the capacities of these ministries. We have assisted numerous Iraqi ministries in improving their technical, managerial, and administrative capacities with the aim of promoting good governance, transparency, and improvement in the delivery of essential services to Iraq's citizens. Central to our approach to building the capacity of the Iraqi Government to serve its people is the belief that "professional development" is not a one-off event, but rather a continuous process of improvement and growth through the accumulation of skills and ideas.

Most recently, International Medical Corps has been working in partnership with the ministries of Migration and Displacement, Health, and Labor and Social Affairs to design and deliver programs tailored to address each ministry's existing gaps in capacity and improve the skill sets of senior and middle management. The success of our programs in this area has led to an increase in requests from Iraqi ministries for the establishment of direct partnerships. Such partnerships would strengthen staff capacity and ensure that public sector employees possess the skill sets necessary to provide high quality services to the population. To fail to respond to such requests would, in my opinion, be simply irresponsible.

THE REGIONAL PICTURE: HIDDEN SUFFERING, UNSEEN PRESSURES

The estimated 2 million Iraqis who fled to neighboring countries and now wait to come home do not fit the refugee stereotype. They don't live in camps and only a minority has registered with UNHCR. None of the three host countries where International Medical Corps works—Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon—has signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, the cornerstone document in international law that defines both the rights of a refugee and the obligations of a hosting country. The result of all this means that Iraqis who have fled to these countries live amid considerable uncertainty.

An International Medical Corps assessment in all three countries conducted in early 2007 found that the majority are living with limited access to health care and education. Having left their homes and jobs behind, many Iraqis have lost a stable income and live in squalid conditions, depending on loans and gifts. Working legally is extremely difficult. Our research found that most Iraqis in exile are extremely vulnerable. Women and children especially show signs of declining health and social isolation. In all three countries, Iraqis have fled insecurity only to face severe poverty and deprivation.

In these countries, International Medical Corps has operated a series of services for refugees, ranging from continuing medical education and continuing professional development programs that target the skills of Iraqi refugee professionals to the distribution of nonfood items, such as mattresses, blankets, children's clothing and diapers, to improve living conditions.

To all but the discerning eye, the Iraqi refugees are unseen, many of them swallowed up in the poorer neighborhoods of Damascus and Amman and the southern suburbs of Beirut. The price of relative safety in a foreign land has been steep for an Iraqi refugee population, much of which once considered itself part of a well-educated middle class. In Syria, for example, nearly one-third of the refugees have a

college degree, according to UNHCR. One-third expects their financial resources will last for 3 months or less. The refugees scattered across the region come from different areas of Iraq, but a majority share a common dream. They want to go home.

Syria

International Medical Corps began working in Syria in 2007 and continues to be the only American medical nongovernment organization authorized or officially registered to operate there. Over half of all Iraqi refugees in the current crisis have fled to Syria, a country that suddenly finds itself host to the world's largest concentration of Iraqis outside of Iraq. Worried about being overwhelmed by the wave of refugees that followed the February 2006 bombing of a holy Shiite shrine in Samarra, Syrian authorities ended unrestricted entry for Iraqis in the fall of 2007 and implemented visa requirements that allow entry to certain categories, such as academics and their families, students, and a limited number of other categories.

Under programs funded by PRM and in collaboration with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, International Medical Corps operates clinics in four different Syrian communities, focusing on providing comprehensive primary and preventative health care needs for some of the most vulnerable refugees. Over a 6-month period, International Medical Corps-supported clinics provided nearly 50,000 consultations, an effort that helped ease pressures on Syria's existing health infrastructure—already hard-pressed to meet the demands of its own citizens.

In the past 18 months, conditions for some refugees have eased following the arrival of several international assistance groups, including U.N. organizations such as UNHCR, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, and UNICEF.

I would like to cite an example of the impact assistance from the United States has made at a very personal level. It is the story of a young Iraqi girl named Zainab, whom we saw at an International Medical Corps clinic in Syria. She had acute lymphoblastic leukemia, but had to stop her treatment short because it was so expensive. We approached our U.S. Government donor about the possibility of including care for chronic and complicated health issues in its already successful Syria-Iraqi Refugee Assistance Program. Shortly after, a program was launched that brought specialized treatment to people suffering, chronic conditions, including Zainab. Although Zainab died of leukemia last December, the program she inspired is saving lives. Three Iraqi women in the program would not otherwise have received care for their high-risk pregnancies and were scheduled for Cesarean-section births to bring their babies into the world safely, thanks to American assistance and the inspiration of a remarkable child.

Jordan

Conditions for Iraqi refugees in Jordan are also difficult. Iraqis in Jordan equal about 8 percent of the country's own population. Visa requirements have limited the entry of many Iraqis trying to enter the country, while Western human rights groups have reported a disproportionate number of young men being turned back at the border. Once in Jordan, life is tenuous for Iraqi refugees. Their legal status is unclear and opportunities for work are severely restricted. Only one in five low-income Iraqis reported having a valid residence permit, according to the UNHCR. As in Syria, some Iraqis live off their savings, while others are supported by relatives from outside the country. According to UNHCR statistics, one in five families is headed by a female—an additional burden in the Arab world—and are often found living among more impoverished elements of society. Despite this, the overwhelming majority of Iraqis recently surveyed in Jordan by UNHCR—95 percent—said they wanted to return to Iraq only when security conditions had improved.

Much as in Syria, the addition of a large and vulnerable population of Iraqi refugees has strained Jordan's public services, including its health care system. Iraqis have access to the same medical services as Jordanians, but the overall health infrastructure lacks the capacity to provide comprehensive primary health care services to the enlarged population. As the Iraqi refugee population grew, Jordan also opened its schools to Iraqi children.

International Medical Corps' programs in Jordan have serviced the Iraqi refugee population since 2007, while at the same time also providing critical services to vulnerable Jordanians. Working from clinics and mobile units, International Medical Corps provides community level primary and mental health services and is working to boost the ability of Jordan's primary health care providers to deal with mental illness through theoretical and on-the-job training. International Medical Corps also offers pediatric health screenings and facilitates mother-to-mother support groups that deal with health care and other child-rearing issues. Because the women are under stress, we have found these sessions are often emotional. In one such meet-

ing, a woman named Hadaf introduces herself with one sentence. “I am an Iraqi woman; I have no other aim than going home one day.” Her comment came in what is called the “ice breaker,” when women tell the other women in the group about themselves in a few sentences. Within minutes all of them are crying, for themselves and the other Iraqi mothers in the room whom they never met before but who share their hardship, their homesickness, and their lost sense of belonging in exile.

The workshops, run by social workers from International Medical Corps and the Jordan River Foundation, address how these women can build positive relationships with their children and discover how to change negative practices. The project is a small but important component of a far larger effort to improve the quality of life for Iraqi refugees. It is funded by UNHCR, UNICEF, and PRM. In total, 600 mothers have participated and 10 of them eventually will become “peer mothers” and train others in improving the well-being of their children.

Lebanon

For the estimated 50,000 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, where International Medical Corps has worked since 2006, conditions appear to have improved over the past year, although they remain arduous. Due to Lebanon’s delicate religious and sectarian balance, integrating or legalizing Iraqi refugees is not a political option. The majority of Iraqis in Lebanon are young, single men, not permitted to work legally. A quarter of them are Christian. Prior to February 2008, human rights groups, such as Amnesty International, reported that Lebanese authorities arrested and detained hundreds of Iraqis, who were then held indefinitely on charges of being in the country illegally. The tactic was viewed by many as an apparent attempt to coerce the refugees to return to Iraq. Early last year, the Lebanese Government changed course, introducing a program to legalize foreign nationals and offer them year-long residence and work permits; however the costs and necessary bureaucratic steps made the offer difficult to fulfill. Still, according to a June 2008 Amnesty International report, the number of refugees in detention had dropped from about 600 in early 2008 to less than 150 five months later.

Iraqi refugees have settled in various parts of Lebanon, but the majority now lives in Beirut’s southern suburbs, an area where the government’s law enforcement has been historically weak. A second concentration, mainly comprising Iraqi Christians from Mosul and Baghdad, has come together in the poor Christian neighborhoods of northeast Beirut. Many of the estimated 11,000 Christians fleeing intimidation and violence carried out by militia groups in Mosul ended up in Beirut because of the relative freedom of Christians to follow their faith there. The story of one such family that received support from International Medical Corps helps illustrate the fate of Iraq’s Christian minority in Lebanon. The family of five, including two infants, headed by a man named Nawar, managed to escape Mosul with little more than the clothes on their back. They came to Beirut because, like other Christians, they felt it was a safe place to practice their faith. The entire family lives in a one-bedroom apartment with no heating and sporadic electricity. Both Nawar and his mother have health problems, and because Nawar cannot work, they don’t have the money to buy the nutrient-rich food his infant sons require. An International Medical Corps mobile medical unit provides free food supplements, clothing, hygiene kits and even complete physical exams to Nawar’s family and other refugee families with young children.

IRAQ: ENCOURAGING SECURITY, ELUSIVE STABILITY

International Medical Corps assessment teams first crossed into Iraq from Kuwait in March 2003, amid concerns that heavy fighting would generate a large population of refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). As we now know, those population movements only came later—beginning in 2004 and escalating with the rise in sectarian violence, the beginning of al-Qaeda operations in western Iraq and a dramatic deterioration of security in many areas of the country.

Changing security landscape and the rise in returns

It is evident that overall living conditions in Iraq have improved. Physical and human security has especially improved in ways we could only hope for just 18 months ago. These dramatic changes in Iraq’s internal dynamics have also had a strong effect on the issue of displacement within the country and across its borders. By late 2007, it was clear that displaced Iraqis were beginning to feel confident and safe enough to begin weighing a return to their homes and locations of habitual residence.

Since then the number of returns has increased steadily, with the most notable rise taking place in Baghdad, where it is estimated that upward of 31,521 families

(or 189,126 individuals) have returned to the governorate, according to the February 2009 IOM Emergency Needs Assessment Report. That constitutes nearly two-thirds of all returnees. According to the same report, returns have also picked up in areas of the country that were once subject to some of the worst of the country's sectarian-based violence. In Diyala, for example, 8,818 families (or 52,908 individuals) have returned, while 4,542 families (or 27,525 individuals) have returned to Anbar.

As noted earlier, issues surrounding property rights represent just one problem displaced Iraqis face as they return home, attempt to reclaim their lives and begin anew. Among the others:

Security—real but fragile

Security continues to be a priority concern for displaced Iraqis as they weigh the possibility of return—whether they be refugees residing outside the country or those who have been displaced inside Iraq. And although there have been major improvements in the last several months, the tangible gains are considered fragile and the perception of displaced population is that it is generally not yet stable enough for them to return to their place of origin. There are also several factors that will test the strength of the existing calm in the months ahead. For example, the Iraqi Government's inability to spend money already budgeted coupled with the unexpectedly sharp decline in the price of oil have raised the prospect of cuts in the Iraqi military, which is now the single most important player in maintaining law and order in the country. Another vital component in Iraq's security fabric is the U.S. military presence, which is also expected to decline steadily in numbers. At the same time, tensions are rising between the government and the mainly Sunni militias that have helped keep the peace in Sunni-dominated western Iraq.

The early stages of the return process constitute an especially delicate time, both socially and politically, in a society such as Iraq, so deeply divided along both sectarian and ethnic lines. Significant population movements can easily reignite violence and therefore need to be handled very cautiously. However, the inability to spend money already appropriated for essential services plus worries about shrinking oil revenues could also limit the kind of Iraqi Government support needed to ease social tensions, such as new jobs and public services.

Kirkuk—exception to a larger calm

Unlike most of Iraq, security in the key northern city of Kirkuk has not improved and in some areas has actually worsened. It still presents a difficult security challenge for the Government of Iraq. The city has sizable populations of nearly all Iraq's ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, in addition to one-third of Iraq's proven oil deposits. It is also an anomaly in that both its displaced and returnee populations, unlike the rest of Iraq, continue to be highly mixed in their ethnicity, religion, and language. Because of its oil, Kirkuk has long been the object of a power struggle between Kurds and Arabs, and the enormity of the economic stakes, coupled with the social tensions, make the issue as delicate as it is complicated.

The call for a more comprehensive approach to the needs of the displaced

Increasing humanitarian aid to those still displaced is needed to avoid so-called push factors—factors driving the displaced from their current location and effectively forcing them to return home. If displaced Iraqis return home because they cannot access basic services in their location of displacement (as is currently the case in many areas), it does not qualify as a voluntary, safe, and dignified return. Meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of displaced Iraqis must be kept a priority and cannot be sidelined even in the face of increasing returns.

For those who do choose to return home, assistance must move beyond the current level provided to them—primarily a one-time monetary grant. Returns should be sustainable, and conditions must be in place to make that happen. Basic services, including employment generation activities and such services as psychosocial assistance, vocational and skills training and child development activities, should be extended to populations that host displaced people, as well as vulnerable communities and populations where returns are taking place.

Speaking for an organization with vast experience in the health sector, I can attest that Iraq's health care system has been hit hard by the flight of skilled medical professionals, and important gaps now exist in access to medicine and equipment, while medical facilities have been damaged or neglected. While affecting all Iraqis, this situation disproportionately impacts the internally displaced and other vulnerable populations, where a lack of quality health care increases the spread of disease and worsens the impact of chronic health conditions.

The option of staying put

Because of these and other difficulties, there is evidence to suggest that many of those displaced inside Iraq appear to be considering the option of remaining where they are. A large number of families participating in the national survey on internal displacement said they preferred to integrate locally into their current community rather than return home. Depending on the area of the country, the percentage of families expressing this desire ranged from roughly half to almost 80 percent, according to preliminary data gathered by International Medical Corps and the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration.

However, there are also problems for IDPs in trying to settle permanently where they are. For example, there are serious disparities in the level and quality of services offered in different parts of the country. The data gathered through the national survey on internally displaced Iraqis suggest this disparity falls mainly along sectarian lines, with IDPs in predominantly Sunni areas having more difficulty in accessing government benefits and services. Between 70 percent and 85 percent of the IDPs questioned during the survey reported they were dependent on some form of assistance as their main source of income.

The fate of minorities

As a country whose land encompasses both the cradle of civilization and some of the region's most well-traveled ancient trade routes, Iraq is home to a generous sprinkling of ethnic, religious, and national minorities, including Jews, Christians, Turkmen, Kurds, Yazidis, Palestinians, and Mandaeans. With the exception of the Kurds, who govern three northern governorates of Iraq where they constitute a majority of the population, most of Iraq's minorities have suffered disproportionately during the past years of unrestrained violence. As a result, their numbers have declined sharply. Iraq's Ministry of Displacement and Migration estimates nearly half the country's non-Kurdish minority population is no longer in the country. According to a recently released Brookings Institution report on Iraqi minorities, all but a handful of Iraq's few hundred remaining Jews have fled the country, the Turkomen population has dropped by about 75 percent, the Palestinians by over half and a sizable Christian minority of as many as 1.4 million is now believed to be between 600,000 and 800,000, according to Ministry figures.

Many Christians have taken refuge in Lebanon, while others have sought resettlement to third countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe.

RECOMMENDATIONS: AN AGENDA FOR FOSTERING STABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

While recognizing that humanitarian crises require political solutions, it should also be recognized that addressing Iraq's displacement crisis is a key element in achieving sustainable peace and security in Iraq and the region. The United States must also demonstrate moral leadership in helping to resolve the crisis of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons.

How the displacement crisis is handled—by this administration, the Iraqi Government, countries hosting the refugees and the broader international community—will have far reaching consequences. Decisions regarding return, repatriation, and resettlement should not be made in haste and must ensure that the best interest of displaced Iraqis, not political pressure, is the guiding factor in determining the appropriate solutions.

An effective strategy will mean ensuring that immediate needs of IDPs, refugees, and returnees are met, in addition to longer term planning to develop effective policies that address the underlying social, political, economic and cultural dimensions of the crisis.

Considering the conditions that I have just described, I recommend the following elements be included in U.S. policy toward Iraq:

1. Implement a strategy to address the crisis of Iraqi displacement that figures prominently in the administration's plan for political and economic stability in Iraq as it decreases its military presence over the coming months.

It should be acknowledged that addressing Iraq's displacement crisis is a key element to ensuring a sustainable peace in Iraq and the region. Focused, high-level U.S. Government engagement and coordinated, strategic planning among U.S. agencies is critical in both addressing the needs surrounding displacement and in helping to facilitate steps toward durable solutions.

Working together with the Iraqi Government, U.N. agencies and other international actors, the U.S. Government can develop its strategy that will support Iraqi communities. With the change of administration, such a focused approach would sig-

nal to Iraq, the region, and the international stage that the U.S. Government is serious about facing the challenges surrounding Iraqi displacement.

2. Increase support for humanitarian efforts aimed at fostering the conditions necessary for safe, voluntary and sustainable return.

Despite the fact that new displacements have virtually ceased, those who have been driven from their homes, whether as IDPs or refugees, continue to live in dire conditions where access to health care, water and sanitation, employment, electricity, education and other services is extremely limited. To avoid involuntary returns, humanitarian assistance that addresses the current needs of those displaced must be increased.

Similarly, the conditions needed for durable solutions can only come when people are well-informed and confident they are returning to an environment that can meet their basic needs. Effectively addressing this challenge will require the understanding that Iraq's displacement crisis is more than a humanitarian emergency, that it is inextricably linked to the country's security, stability, and prosperity. Any large-scale return of displaced Iraqis before adequate support and basic services are in place to serve their needs could lead to renewed social tensions, conflict, and instability.

It would be irresponsible and dangerous to assume that the challenge is over once IDPs and refugees start returning in large numbers. Efforts must focus on building the capacities of the Government of Iraq and local communities to deliver more than transitional assistance to those returning. Displacement will only truly end when people have regular access to services, sustainable employment, and adequate housing.

Additional resources should be provided to USAID and the Department of State to achieve the humanitarian and development objectives necessary to effectively address the crisis in a comprehensive manner. This assistance should be allocated to approaches that are community-based and through established, accountable agencies and organizations that possess the necessary technical expertise and capacity to do the job efficiently and well.

3. Urge and support the Iraqi Government in the development of a unified legal and administrative framework designed to ensure safe and sustainable returns.

Beyond working to create conditions that will be conducive to returns, the U.S. Government should urge and support the Iraqi Government ministries dealing with the crisis—especially the Ministry of Displacement and Migration—to develop and implement a comprehensive framework and package of measures that ensures sustainable returns and durable solutions.

At the moment, returnees receive some assistance from the Iraqi Government, although mainly in the form of financial compensation. Followup support, however, is either entirely absent or extremely limited and ad hoc in nature. More troubling is the fact that no overarching strategy or plan exists at the national, provincial, or local level to coordinate the response of government entities responsible for managing returns. In order to effectively deal with returns, it is imperative that a national legal framework be put in place to guide the government's response.

Supporting and assisting in the development of such a framework should be a key priority for the United States Government. By helping the Iraqi Government establish a legal and administrative framework for returns, the United States will ensure that the Government of Iraq and its ministries are up to this crucial task, that ministries and systems are synchronized to confront the range of challenging issues arising from return, such as property restitution and providing access to basic services, documentation, and government benefits.

4. Accelerate technical and capacity-building measures with Iraqi Government ministries to help them comprehensively address the country's displacement crisis.

Managing the displacement crisis must be an Iraqi-led process. It must not, indeed cannot, be carried out solely by the United States Government, international nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations or any other international agency. A sustainable approach to returns, however, will necessitate that Iraq's Government ministries are responsive, capable, and functional. Unfortunately, at present most Iraqi ministries, including the Ministry of Displacement and Migration as the lead ministry on displacement issues, lack the skills, capacity, management and general expertise needed to meet these challenges. This fact is painfully obvious to the millions of Iraqis living in displacement.

There is, however, reason to be hopeful. There have been successes in building Iraqi Government capacity, and we know, firsthand, it can be done. U.S. Government-funded projects have allowed International Medical Corps and other nongovernmental agencies to carry out capacity-building programs with a variety of Iraqi ministries. International Medical Corps has worked with the Ministry of

Health, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and, most recently, with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration. As a result of International Medical Corps' work with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, the ministry was able to open on time a much-needed second Returnee Assistance Center in west Baghdad. The center has been open since November 2008, and its capacity to register returnees is triple that of the original center.

These successes underscore the need to accelerate technical assistance and capacity-building support to Iraq's ministries, especially those tasked with handling the displacement crisis.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you again for inviting me to testify before the subcommittee on the critical issue of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons that is so central to the future stability of Iraq.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much.
Doctor.

**STATEMENT OF NABIL AL-TIKRITI, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON, FRED-
ERICKSBURG, VA**

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. Senator Casey, I wish to thank the committee for this opportunity to testify, for the record, on the issue of Iraqi sectarianism and forced migration, and its effects on Iraq, the Middle East, and the United States.

Commentators frequently affirm that sectarian violence in Iraq springs from age-old ethnic tensions; however, while the relevant sectarian identities do date back several centuries, sectarian violence has not persisted as a social constant throughout the millennia of regional history. In fact, Reidar Visser only sees three instances in the last five centuries. Rather, outbreaks of sectarian violence have erupted in highly specific occasions, most of which can be explained through careful analysis of the particular social stresses at the time.

As in other societies, when long-term shifts, such as dwindling natural resources, mass migration, housing shortages, or changes in social identity are inflamed by deliberate and short-term policy choices, violence can break out.

In accordance with this presumption and projection of age-old ethnic tensions, it's the perception of Iraqi society as little more than unnatural British creation of the early 20th century, held together solely by brute force. Those who see Iraq this way also envision Iraq as three distinct ethnosectarian regions: A Shia Arab southern Iraq, Sunni Arab central Iraq, and Sunni Kurdish northern Iraq. While this simplified portrayal does bear some general resemblance to ethnosectarian reality, it provides insufficient contextual information to competently engage with Iraqi society, one of those situations where knowing a little bit is more dangerous than knowing nothing.

If one must classify Iraq according to ethnosectarian identity, then there are far more than the three major ethnosectarian groupings frequently mentioned. Sizable additional groups include the Chaldo-Assyrian Christians, Turkoman, Jewish Iraqis, Yazidis, Sabaeen-Mandaeans, Shabak, Armenians, and several smaller groups. In addition to these indigenous categories, several third-country national groups, including Palestinians, Mujahidin-i Khalq Iranians, Iranian Kurds, and guest workers have settled in Iraq over the past several decades, and have found their situations deteriorating following the 2003 collapse of the Iraqi state.

Not only are there several minority groups in Iraq, but the three largest ethnosectarian groups, historically, have rarely acted in internally coherent fashions. As a result, before 2003, one might more usefully have categorized Iraqi society as being divided between Baghdad and the rest of the country, Baath Party members and the rest of society, Kurdish nationalists and their opponents, communitarian activists and secularists, exiles and residents, tribal confederations, various class actors, such as merchants, bureaucrats, peasants, and landowners, and several other categories, which no longer carry the same relevance today. However, rather than recognizing the relevance of such classifications, Americans have tended to force Iraq into an artificial tripartite box allowing for only Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish categories.

Unfortunately for Iraq, in the wake of the 2003 invasion, occupation authorities insisted—or, rather, instituted policies which, in their effect, although not usually in their intent, encouraged an increased sectarianism, which eventually culminated in the violent geographic consolidation of Iraq's ethnosectarian mapping after 2006. Predictably, policymakers at the time blamed age-old ethnic conflicts when sectarian violence exploded throughout the country after the February 2006 Samarra Shrine bombing. Several prominent commentators even argued for various forms of tripartite state partition as a solution for this violence. While a notable shift in United States policy in 2007 eventually contributed a calming of the violence, the remapping of Iraq's ethnosectarian geography has not yet been, and may never be, completely reversed.

Ironically, this remapping has all but created the tripartite Iraq that American policymakers imagined already existed in 2003. In effect, Iraq's new imagined community was imagined right here in Washington, DC, and continues to be so imagined.

Now, I'm going to skip a bit that's in the permanent testimony, and skip to recommendations.

So, where do we go from here? Here are some recommendations for addressing, ameliorating, and partially reversing the troubling legacies of Iraqi-forced migration of recent years, starting with IDPs.

Property adjudication and returnee assistance. For further detail, interested parties should examine the outstanding special report being issued, just this week, by the U.S. Institute of Peace on this issue. According to that report, several initiatives might alleviate the problem of property adjudication, without which no longer term solution is possible. In line with these, I would emphasize the following. The Iraqi Government should adjudicate post-2003 property disputes with the same bureaucratic zeal and legal priority as pre-2003 property disputes. Without such adjudication, return cannot be envisioned for hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. International actors should provide capacity-building assistance to Iraqi Government agents charged with adjudicating property disputes originating both before and after 2003. The Iraqi Government currently provides return assistance only to those displaced between 2006 and 2008. This limitation clearly disadvantages those displaced between 2003 and 2006.

All right, housing, next category. There needs to be a radical increase in housing throughout the country to make up for over 30

years of postponed construction. A recently announced \$160 million initiative in four southern provinces is a step in the right direction, but there needs to be far more, and it should be coordinated with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration.

Elections. The Iraqi Government should ensure that Iraqi citizens, wherever they are physically located, have equal access to the polls in the elections scheduled later this year. If they do not, then the elections will be seen to be as tainted, and the future Iraqi Government will lose a great deal of legitimacy as a result, which will have knock-on effects on stability.

PDS transferability. The public distribution system cards are not currently easily transferrable from government to government, which is increasing the burden on those displaced internally in Iraq. They should be more freely transferrable.

There need to be special protections for the microminorities that I mentioned earlier. One idea that's been floated is a minority security council.

And then, finally—two final points—for regional forced migrants, there needs to be the possibility of look-and-see returns, where they can go back to Iraq, see if their situation has improved, and go back to the country where they're currently resident. That is not currently possible, because of the restrictions on crossing borders.

Finally, there needs to be more emphasis and ability to process Iraqis who need third-country resettlement, especially in the United States. And once they get here, the support programs need to be increased radically, as they were with the 1970s Southeast Asian refugee assistance programs.

I'll close my points there. Thank you very much for your time.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Al-Tikriti follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NABIL AL-TIKRITI, PH.D, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON, FREDERICKSBURG, VA

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank the committee for this opportunity to testify for the record on the issue of Iraqi sectarianism and forced migration, and its effects on Iraq, the Middle East, and the United States.

Commentators frequently affirm that sectarian violence in Iraq springs from “age-old ethnic tensions.” However, while the relevant sectarian identities do date back several centuries, sectarian violence has not persisted as a social constant throughout the millennia of regional history. Rather, outbreaks of sectarian violence have erupted in highly specific occasions, most of which can be explained through careful analysis of the particular social stresses at the time. As in other societies, when long-term shifts such as dwindling natural resources, mass migration, or changes in social identity are inflamed by deliberate and short-term policy choices, violence can break out.

In accordance with this presumption and projection of “age-old ethnic tensions” is the perception of Iraqi society as little more than an unnatural British creation of the early 20th century, held together solely by brute force. Those who see Iraq this way also envision Iraq as three distinct ethnosectarian regions: a Shi'i Arab Southern Iraq, Sunni Arab Central Iraq, and Sunni Kurdish Northern Iraq. While this simplified portrayal does bear some general resemblance to ethnosectarian reality, it provides insufficient contextual information to competently engage with Iraqi society.

If one must classify Iraq according to ethnosectarian identity, then there are far more than the three major ethnosectarian groupings frequently mentioned. Sizeable additional groups include the Chaldo-Assyrian, Turcoman, Jewish, Yazidi, Sabaeen-Mandaean, Shabak, Armenian, and several smaller groups. In addition to these indigenous categories, several Third Country National (TCN) groups, including Palestinians, Mujahidin-i Khalq (MEK) Iranians, Iranian Kurds, and guest workers, have settled in Iraq over the past several decades, and have found their situations deteriorating following the 2003 collapse of the Iraqi state.

Not only are there several minority groups in Iraq, but the three largest ethnosectarian groups historically have rarely acted in internally coherent fashions. As a result, before 2003, one might more usefully have categorized Iraqi society as being divided between:

- Baghdad and the rest of the country;
- Baath Party members and the rest of society;
- Kurdish nationalists and their opponents;
- Communitarian activists and secularists;
- Exiles and residents;
- Tribal confederations;
- Various class actors such as merchants, bureaucrats, peasants, and landowners; and
- Several other categories which no longer carry the same relevance today.

Rather than recognizing the relevance of such classifications, Americans have tended to force Iraq into an artificial tripartite box allowing for only Shi'i, Sunni, and Kurdish categories.

Unfortunately for Iraq, in the wake of the 2003 invasion, occupation authorities instituted policies which in their effect—although usually not in their intent—encouraged an increased sectarianism which eventually culminated in the violent geographic consolidation of Iraq's ethnosectarian mapping after 2006. Predictably, policymakers blamed “age-old ethnic conflicts” when sectarian violence exploded throughout the country after the February 2006 Samarra Shrine bombing. Several prominent commentators even argued for various forms of tripartite state partition as a solution for this violence. While a noticeable shift in U.S. policy in 2007 eventually contributed to a calming of the violence, the remapping of Iraq's ethnosectarian geography has not yet been—and may never be—reversed. Ironically, this remapping has all but created the tripartite Iraq that American policymakers imagined already existed in 2003. In effect, Iraq's new “imagined community” was imagined in Washington, DC—and continues to be so imagined.

The effects of the ethno-sectarian remapping described here are widespread, potentially permanent, and highly problematic for the cohesion of Iraq's future state and society. Communal consolidation has progressed to such an extent that Iraq has already evolved somewhat from a mosaic patchwork of geographically mixed sectarian clusters into the rough outline of three large regions coinciding with the majoritarian ethnosectarian identities of Shi'i Arab, Sunni Arab, and Kurdish. Those who either refuse to or are not allowed to fit within these majoritarian identities have mostly been forced out, causing:

- The nearly complete erasure of certain microminority communities such as the Sabaeen-Mandaeans and Shabak;
- The external migration of roughly half of Iraq's Chaldo-Assyrian Christian populations;
- The entrapment and/or external migration of prominent third country nationals such as the Palestinians, certain Iranian Kurds, and the Mujahidin-i Khalq Iranians;
- The expulsion of minority clusters of majoritarian ethnosectarian groups caught outside of their region of dominance.

The Government of Iraq announced a major initiative in July 2008 to help reverse the ethnosectarian remapping described here. This initiative promised incentive packages to return to place of origin, an increased emphasis on property rights and protection of returnees, and other elements that might promote the reversal of post-2003 forced migration. Unfortunately, implementation has remained uneven since this initiative's initial announcement. Through today the return of Iraqi populations to their pre-2003 place of origin has remained minimal. Does this mean we should push for immediate return? Paradoxically, no. Displaced Iraqis have quite well-founded fears of return at the moment and their returns should not be encouraged before adequate legal frameworks to deal with property disputes are in place. The rushing of such returns could destabilize Iraq and endanger recent security gains if overall political progress has not first been sufficiently achieved.

CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS

So, where do we go from here? Here are some recommendations for addressing, ameliorating, and partially reversing the most troubling legacies of Iraqi forced migration of recent years:

IDPs

- Property Adjudication & Returnee Assistance*: For further detail, interested parties should examine the outstanding special report being issued by the U.S. Institute

of Peace's Deborah Isser and Peter Van der Auweraert on this issue this week. According to that report, several initiatives might alleviate the problem of property adjudication, without which no longer term solution is possible. In line with these, I would emphasize the following:

- The Iraqi Government should adjudicate post-2003 property disputes with the same bureaucratic zeal and legal priority as pre-2003 property disputes. Without such adjudication, return cannot be envisioned for hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.
 - International actors should provide capacity-building assistance to Iraqi Government agencies charged with adjudicating property disputes originating both before and after 2003.
 - The Iraqi Government currently provides return assistance only to those displaced between January 1, 2006, and January 1, 2008. This limitation clearly disadvantages those displaced between 2003 and 2006.
 - Property adjudication and returnee assistance initiatives should be implemented within a broader framework of national reconciliation and transitional justice.
- Housing*: One of the underlying factors contributing to forced migration in Iraq is a previously unrecognized and acute housing shortage throughout the country. The Government of Iraq—and its supporters—must strive to construct housing throughout the country, in order to catch up with nearly 30 years of postponed construction and ameliorate property pressures which have contributed to sectarian violence in recent years. A newly announced \$160 million initiative to construct 5,000 housing units throughout four southern provinces is a step in the right direction. Coordinating such housing initiatives with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration might help alleviate the plight of displaced populations, both in Baghdad and throughout the governorates.
- Elections*: Iraqi Government authorities and international support agencies must ensure that all Iraqi citizens are able to vote, regardless of their physical location at the time of the elections scheduled for later this year. If election administration is perceived as rigged against displaced populations (domestic and international), the results are not likely to be perceived as legitimate, which will undermine the future stability and legitimacy of any elected government.
- PDS Transferability*: One of the factors causing hardship among displaced Iraqis is the nontransferability of Public Distribution System (PDS) cards between governorates. Such cards should be made freely transferrable between governorates in order to reduce the hardship of vulnerable populations, and contribute to the stabilization of displaced populations.
- Microminority Protections*: The “microminorities” of Iraq serve as a figural “canary in the coal mine” vis-a-vis the maintenance of social stability, individual freedoms, and cultural diversity. If such populations—the Sabaeen-Mandaeen, Shabak, Chaldo-Assyrian Christian, Yazidi, Turcoman, and others—are secure, then the chances for a stable, diverse, and secure Iraq are greatly increased. In order to bring about such a situation, several recommendations come to mind:
- Minority Security Council—such a body should be created and tied directly to the Prime Minister's office. It would provide a voice for minorities close to the center of governance without creating any extraterritorial or sectarianizing expectations on behalf of the body politic.
 - Concentrate third country resettlement of Sabaeen-Mandaeans, so that the cultural continuity of this very small community might be preserved. At this point, the spreading of this community throughout the world threatens their very survival as a communal identity.
 - Autonomous Zones—such initiatives should not be encouraged, as they encourage the further factionalization of Iraqi politics and would encourage a dangerous backlash from the respective regional majority populations.

Regional Forced Migrants

—*Cross-Border Mobility*: In order to encourage those who have left Iraq to consider return, the United States should help Jordan and Syria think creatively about a special and temporary status that would allow those Iraqis in those two countries mobility across the border. Such an initiative would allow Iraqis to carry out “look and see” visits to their places of origin. At this point, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis in neighboring countries face a “one way ticket” back to Iraq—if they can afford to leave at all due to penalties assessed on those who overstay their visas. If such Iraqis return and then discover that their situation is unsafe, they would be effectively trapped as they cannot return to the countries they are currently residing in due to their ad hoc and semilegal status as “guests.” In order to ame-

liorate this situation, neighboring countries—particularly Jordan and Syria—must be encouraged to waive visa overstay penalties and allow Iraqis to enter again should they find their return untenable following such a brief visit. If this policy change is not implemented, migrant Iraqis are unlikely to risk return at all, unless they're absolutely sure that the situation in Iraq is better than in their current location—which will not be the case any time soon.

Third Country Resettlement Forced Migration

—*Increase in-country processing* of asylum seekers in Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. This has been stated several times in recent years, but remains a key need.

—*Increase federal support for domestic assistance* for asylum seekers, modeled on the 1970s Southeast Asian refugee assistance programs. The United States is directly responsible for the displacement of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable Iraqis—the least we can do as a society is to ease the transition for those fortunate enough to survive the horrendous violence of the past 6 years.

The forced migration of Iraqis comprises at one and the same time a series of individual and communal tragedies, a humanitarian challenge in the near term, and a potential security challenge for the future. While there is no single “silver bullet” which can solve this highly complex and contentious set of issues, I hope these strategies might serve to address the most troubling aspects of the problem.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much.

I wanted to start with a question on the numbers, the numbers we've been using, and I want to make sure the record reflects any corrections or amendments. We've been using 2.7 plus 2, so a total of 4.7 million. I'd ask each of our witnesses, to the extent they wanted to comment on this, whether or not you think those numbers are correct, incorrect, in the ballpark. What's your sense of that? It's just one metric, but it's important, I think.

Ms. LAIPSON. I think, in general, there is a concern that these numbers that are the 2-plus-million category of Iraqis outside of the borders are probably inflated. I've heard an inflation factor of as high as 30 to 40 percent.

Senator CASEY. So, you mean that the 2.7—

Ms. LAIPSON. That that number is too high, yes.

Senator CASEY [continuing]. Or the 2 million outside of Iraq, that number is inflated or too large.

Ms. LAIPSON. Correct, so that—I've heard—

Senator CASEY. How about—I'm sorry.

Ms. LAIPSON. So, for example, in Syria we use a figure of 1.2 million. The UNHCR interacts with a small fraction of that population. Some of the people consider—the Syrians consider them the guests, the Iraqis may consider themselves to be just temporarily resident in Syria and they don't register as refugees, so there's no methodology for counting all of them. So, let's assume that the number is smaller than over 2 million outside of Iraq's borders. But, even if that were true, we are still talking about hundreds of thousands of people.

If we look at UNHCR today, they say about 300,000 Iraqis are registered with them, meaning have actually filled out the forms to be entitled to certain programs, but UNHCR would not assume that that's the total number; that's a portion of the total.

Senator CASEY. So, according to what you're saying, the number outside of Iraq is too high, possibly—the 2 million. What about the 2.7 internally displaced number?

Ms. LAIPSON. Others may know more about that. I believe that is also—you know it's a very fluid situation, where people move temporarily, they move back after, you know, the tensions abate a

bit. And so, my guess is, that's also on the high side, but others may have a more specific view on internal.

Senator CASEY. OK.

Ms. AOSSEY.

Ms. AOSSEY. Yes. It is really extremely difficult to know. There are estimates that you can extrapolate from the numbers that UNHCR is quoting are consistent with estimates that they've made around the world when they have just as little information, so if they are inaccurate, they're, relatively speaking, probably inaccurate according to other refugee situations, as well.

This one is difficult, especially, as Ellen mentioned, the IDPs because there's so much fluid movement. It's really difficult to track in real time where people are—they're moving back and forth so much.

Whether or not 4.7 which everyone is using, is the exact number—is really difficult to know. It's possibly high. Especially because, when you look at the refugees, many of them are afraid of being repatriated back into their countries, therefore, they're literally in hiding. So, it's difficult to tie down. We're using it because we rely pretty much on the UNHCR method of estimating these numbers, knowing that they might be off.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. First, a simple answer. The range that I have seen in the literature for—globally, that is, within Iraq and in the region, as a whole—the low number seems to be 3.8 million as a total, and the high number sometimes goes up to 5.2 or 5.5. Ergo, the 4.7 is kind of a golden mean. That's the simple answer.

Explanations as to why this is happening. First of all, when you get into the—outside of Iraq—Jordan and Syria see this as a sensitive point of their own state security, so they are highly resistant to any kind of surveys being done. Now, there was one very notable survey done in Jordan, and that survey itself was quite a hot potato within Jordanian internal politics, and, as a result, they actually had to negotiate what the final number was.

That said, roughly 300,000 refugees have been registered at UNHCR in the two countries that are primarily involved here, Jordan and Syria, and the estimates for Jordan and Syria are 750,000 and 2 million.

Finally, on the IDPs, there seems to be primarily two sources, that I'm aware of, that keep getting cited: The Ministry of Displacement and Migration, their own sources, and IOM, the International Organization for Migration. IOM is cited more, and IOM is very confident of its own numbers. And in an interview that I had with them in the field, they said that they were based on surveys of something like 80 percent of the whole population. They're highly confident of their numbers.

That said, it is a very fluid situation, and categorization is a problem, because you don't know whether you're counting an IDP from 1987, in the Anfal campaign, whether you're counting someone from 1990s, during the sanctions era, you're counting someone, 2003 to 2006, 2006 to 2008. And each of these categories has highly contentious political and sensitive and sectarian overtones.

Senator CASEY. Well, thank you. We'll never know the exact number, but at least we're in agreement that there is a consensus,

at least about a range. I think that's a safe thing to say for the record.

Ms. Aosse, I wanted to make sure that—and I want to make sure I'm pronouncing your last name correctly.

Ms. AOSSEY. It's "Aussie," like Australia. You are.

Senator CASEY. Like "Aussie."

Ms. AOSSEY. "Aussie," that's right.

Senator CASEY. "Aussie," not "Owsie." OK, "Aussie."

Ms. AOSSEY. Yes, sir.

Senator CASEY. Sorry about that.

Ms. AOSSEY. No, it's not—

Senator CASEY. I was close.

Ms. AOSSEY. Very close, closer than most people get.

Senator CASEY. You had mentioned, in your testimony, the Ministry of Displacement and Migration within the Iraqi Government. And you said—but I'm not reading from your testimony, I'm reading from my notes—that the Ministry doesn't have the capacity to deal with that. It's a quick summary of what you said. Tell me more about that. What's your sense of that? When you say "doesn't have the capacity," does that mean—because I think there's some debate about whether it's capacity or will, or whether it's capacity or some other impediment. What's your sense of that? And define what you mean by "capacity."

Ms. AOSSEY. Our experience with this ministry is that they do have the will. We've worked very closely with them, and we do believe, through the people that we've worked with in—within this ministry, that they are very interested in doing the right thing by their people.

The capacity, the best way for me to describe that is historically, the Government of Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, was very, very centralized. And as a result of that, we haven't seen, within Iraq, throughout the country, an ability for people within the ministries, to really administer what they're faced with. They just literally don't have any historical experience with setting up systems, with decisionmaking, with delegating, with the kinds of things that one needs in place in order to, not only make decisions, but to implement them, to make sure services get to where people need them. They just don't know how to do it. To some extent, there's some inertia too—probably because people are afraid of making mistakes, and because they're not accustomed to making decisions, all the way down the chain. We have just seen that they don't have the mechanisms in place.

If you look at the GAO report, which cited that only 11 percent of the Government of Iraq's budget was spent getting services to the people—in large part, they don't have the way to administer those funds, because they just don't know how to do it, whether it be management expertise, as I mentioned earlier, or systems.

We haven't seen where it's a lack of will, we've just seen that they don't necessarily have many of the skills that they need, and that is where we think they need a lot of support. When you think about what it takes to put money out or put programs out, or figure out ways to reach people and do the right things, there's a whole list of mechanisms that have to be set up, and they're not

necessarily there. Often people don't know how to get that money out the door in the form of services where they are needed.

Senator CASEY. So, experience in operating a function of government, in essence.

Ms. AOSSEY. That's exactly it. It's difficult, obviously, for us to imagine that, but the history there is that people were not necessarily empowered to do these things. Obviously there were a few people at the top who were, but the people themselves don't have a history of being empowered to do some of the things that we have learned over the years, just because we've had the opportunity to do them. Part of that is a function of time, but part of that is a function of needing support when it comes to setting up those systems. Giving them the confidence that they can disburse money, that there can be checks and balances, and that the funds and the services will get to people, where they need to, without being afraid of making decisions, or the wrong decisions. They've never been in these situations before, where they had that kind of decision-making authority.

Senator CASEY. How about other agencies that can work together with the Iraqi Government to mitigate the effects of the crisis? Any sense of how you think that's going, right now?

Ms. AOSSEY. I feel that there are a number of things that can be done to "bolster" efforts in the future. I mentioned earlier the efforts of the United States Agency for International Development and the State Department, of U.S. OFDA, to bolster civilian capacity. This is very, very important, and they do that, working in partnership with groups like International Medical Corps, other NGOs, and the U.N., helping people through a civilian mechanism, building trust within populations and bringing in core technical expertise to work side by side with Iraqis, and do the kind of training that is needed. A lot of this is management training and administrative expertise, and a number of these organizations and these funders are accustomed to doing this kind of work and, I believe, would be most well-equipped to do it.

Senator CASEY. Doctor, you had—

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. I should just point out that the Ministry of Displacement and Migration is a post-2003 creation, in and of itself. It was basically written into existence by Ambassador Bremer during the CPA era. And as recently as 2007, it had a very small budget and very small staff, something in the magnitude of a few million dollars and a couple of hundred staff members. I think it's been operationalized quite a bit since 2007, but that's fairly recent to have been operationalized.

In the old days, their functions would have been shared out between the Ministry of Interior and the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, both of which still exist and might be able to provide some sort of services, but I go beyond what I know, right there.

Senator CASEY. I guess the volume, too, is a problem, huh? I mean, even if the operational impediments or lack of experience weren't an issue, which they are in this instance, I guess just the sheer volume, alone, makes it pretty difficult.

Ms. Laipson.

Ms. LAIPSON. I just wanted to add one additional thought, which was, as the United States presence gets reconfigured in Iraq with

the drawdown of United States troops, there is this new institution that we've created, called these Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

Senator CASEY. Right.

Ms. LAIPSON. And for the refugees and the IDPs that return to some of the provinces of Iraq, the PRTs themselves could become useful supporting-cast players in helping, at the provincial level, determine the housing needs of returnees, some of the employment opportunities, so that the function of the PRTs committed to reconstruction activities, could be very relevant and useful, should an important wave of returnees occur. That isn't yet happening, so we have not yet seen significant numbers of the refugees choosing to return. But there is, as we said before, sort of a movement of internally displaced that are trying to resume, in some cases, to parts of the country where either the housing stock has been degraded, destroyed by conflict, or whether other people are living in their homes, so that, in terms of housing needs and in other infrastructure needs, the PRTs may be able to be important players in that.

Senator CASEY. One question that I have had, and others have had, is what's happening at the senior levels of the government. One of the challenges that we face is determining whether, in fact, the Shia—the central government, which has Shiites in charge, whether that government's discriminating against the displaced Sunni population. I'll go from right to left. If you have an opinion on that, what's your sense of that?

Ms. LAIPSON. Well, it's clear that the politics of Iraq are still in some state of agitation and that there's not complete mutual trust. I think some of the stories of discrimination could be because people are not fully testing the system yet, they don't really know whether they should believe that there is rule of law, they're not, perhaps, taking advantage of all of the legal recourse they have, if they perceive that something was—that they were treated unfairly. And I do think it's correct to suggest that different parts of Iraqi leadership probably have different attitudes about population movement issues. I do think that President Talibani, of course, who is the Kurd, sees—is very attentive to Iraq's image, internationally. He sees, I think, the return of some Iraqi refugees as part of Iraq's credibility, as part of Iraq's positive image, and as part of the re-integration goal; whereas, other political actors, possibly including the Prime Minister or some of the ministries, are still enjoying being the ones on top, after many years when they were not, and they may be, you know, not always signaling as positive an attitude as, perhaps, they need to. I don't think the government, in general, has made repatriation a high priority. But, I think they look at it through different political lenses, and some of the people who don't yet trust the new Iraqi Government are not also testing the system to find out whether they'll be treated fairly or not.

Senator CASEY. Ms. Aosse, you said before, you don't think there's a lack of will.

Ms. AOSSEY. Absolutely. And I just want to add to something that Ellen said. People have networks—their families, their friends—living in their communities. They're communicating with them back home all the time. We have found, regardless of what the government says, they don't feel safe to return home. They don't feel that they will have many of the basic things they need.

But, it first starts with the feeling that safety must be something that's durable and not fleeting, even though things have stabilized.

As far as our experience, International Medical Corps has, as I mentioned earlier, been working throughout Iraq, and over time, has served a population of up to 3 million people, some of them displaced inside Iraq and some of them not displaced. Generally speaking, it appears to us that people who are Sunni have a more difficult time accessing services. That's been our general impression. It's hard to explain all the reasons why. But our experience is that they do have a more difficult time accessing many of the services that they need.

Senator CASEY. That who does?

Ms. AOSSEY. Those who are Sunni, versus Shiite. These populations seem to struggle more in accessing services that they need, but we don't know exactly why that is; we can't pinpoint it. It's something that we have noticed. There tends to be some trends in that regard. That's a very general statement, but it is something that we have noticed.

Senator CASEY. Doctor.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. Regarding the behavior of the central government, I think the record is mixed, but far better than their predecessors, under Ibrahim al-Jaafari. And I also think that it behaves more like a classic Iraqi central government than a simply sectarian government, so they have a lot of parallels with any Iraqi central government through the ages.

That said, here are some examples where they either have or have not acted in a sectarian fashion. There are several.

They acted against rival Shiite factions in Basra a year ago, which was seen as a positive nonsectarian action. On the other hand, just this past weekend, they acted against Sons of Iraq militia factions in Fadhil neighborhood, and may have set off the beginnings of a civil uprising in Baghdad. That's a negative.

They have not extended assistance to those displaced during 2003 to 2006. They've accepted them, from the categories of those getting assistance, according to the USIP report, right here. And most of those are—can be seen as Sunnis, minorities, and professionals. So, there is a sectarian element to that, potentially.

Their housing initiative, that I mentioned in my testimony, started in the south. Najaf is attracting a lot more resources than other parts of the country, like a brand new airport, for example. That's tied to the pilgrimage traffic.

There's anecdotal evidence, or not even evidence—rumor, I would characterize it—that the east Baghdad field offices of the Ministry of Displacement and Migration are functioning better than the west Baghdad. Again, that's a rumor, but if it's accurate, that could have a sectarian bent to it.

And finally, the Kurds are quite worried about developments in the disputed territories; namely, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Ninawa. So, there's a rising Kurdish-Arab tension happening right now, as well.

So, those are—it's mixed. It's a mixed—it's a mixed record, and I think, again, they act more like a central government than they do a sectarian government, most of the time.

Senator CASEY. Doctor, I want to ask you a more blunt question, I guess. Is it your sense, or do you have any reason to believe, that

Prime Minister al-Maliki is actively inhibiting the return of refugees who happen to be Sunni?

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. No. I do not believe that. I do believe, however—and I think there's a lot of evidence to back this up—that those who are displaced do not trust al-Maliki. Now, where blame lies in that, I cannot venture to guess. But, for example, in October 2008 in Syria—

Senator CASEY. So, you mean it could be on their end of the—the refugee—you're saying that the refugees may be—

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. There's a lot of bad blood—

Senator CASEY [continuing]. Reluctant to—

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. There's a lot of bad blood—sorry—

Senator CASEY. Yes.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. There's a lot of bad blood, because of the developments, particularly of 2006 to 2008—or, rather, 2006–2007, as well as what went on back in the 1980s and 1990s. So, I mean, there's the flip side of it, as well. I don't know that any particular group's hands are clean, and I don't know who is being more distrustful, but there's definitely a logjam afoot right now.

Senator CASEY. I think it's—look, and I think this is an important point and sometimes at hearings we don't have the record very clear. I'm not trying to start a fight, here, but I think it's important for—as best we can, for witnesses to be able to state clearly how they perceive the situation, and I appreciate your candor on that.

I wanted to move to another area of questioning more having to do with resources and what's happening on the ground.

Our Government, as you know, is providing substantial help, here. The Obama administration has committed about \$150 million to assist displaced Iraqis in this current fiscal year, 2009. Our Government is committing almost \$100 million to UNHCR, and several million to both the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization. It seems as though the administration is attempting to tackle several important issues simultaneously.

And I guess, Ms. Aosse, I wanted to ask you from the perspective of an organization that benefits from USAID funding, do you believe the United States is providing adequate resources to NGOs and international organizations with a presence in Iraq?

Ms. AOSSEY. I think additional resources are needed, less for infrastructure, which has been, historically, the case, and more to do the things that USAID and the State Department have known all along were important, and that is to build the capacity of the people. A lot of the focus in the past—and, understandably, when you look at the funds that have flowed to Iraq—has been on the infrastructure. I really believe that they are correct in wanting to focus on building, within the ministries, the people, the skills. As important as infrastructure is, there's only so much that can be done. People in key ministries basically are not really familiar with how to administer a budget, when you look at this kind of central authority. It's more this than it is intent or discrimination or bad will toward anybody. It's the lack of their ability to administer what is required. I think that resources to help USAID and the Department of State do that, working with partners like my organization and others, is an important step forward.

Senator CASEY. I'm not sure I understand the difference. Explain to me what you mean by "infrastructure" versus spending in other areas.

Ms. AOSSEY. Hardscape kinds of projects, things that are important—buildings, et cetera.

Senator CASEY. Right.

Ms. AOSSEY. They're important, but, at the end of the day, the people who have to then turn around and administer services or, negotiate property rights or set up judicial systems so that many of these property disputes can be resolved, figure out how to get health services and education back into the population—the skill set doesn't seem to be there.

Senator CASEY. So, training becomes a priority of—

Ms. AOSSEY. Training becomes the priority. If you look at many of the refugees, safety is No. 1. But, as bad as things are where they may be, if they don't think that they can come back and have a place to live, because their house has been taken over by someone else and they have no way to get that house back, or to get health care, or to send their children to school—as bad as it may be, they at least may feel it's not as bad as going back. Right now the Iraqi Government makes payments to people when they come back. They're able to make one-time payments, and there are incentives to have people, in homes, leave homes that do not belong to them. So, there has been some of this.

But, it's difficult for them to do anything beyond these one-time payments. It's very much payment-driven, and, beyond the disbursement of payments when people repatriate back, they just don't seem to have the skill set that is needed to set up things that go way beyond that.

There's a host of things that we've talked about; basic services, property rights—that we've already discussed, where people think they have something that they can return to—because it's very difficult, when they're hearing, from people within their communities, there are no jobs. That's a key piece. If there's no jobs—even if it is safe to return, or they perceive it as safe to return—if they can't get a job, don't have a place to live, let alone health and education, they don't feel a large incentive to come back. And I think that's one of the main reasons we haven't seen people coming back.

Certainly, stability is better, and hopefully, over time it's sustainable. There's no question about that, that it's much safer today. But, all these other things also have to be in place for people to feel that they can improve their situation, beyond where they already are.

Senator CASEY. I want to give our two other witnesses a chance, if you have anything to add on that question, about resources or how the dollars are spent. Either of you?

Ms. LAIPSON. Well, we might want to make a distinction between activities inside Iraq—and Iraq, after all, is potentially a very wealthy country, a country that should be able to finance, over time, most, if not all, of its reconstruction, versus, kind of, temporary services that are needed to the Iraqis outside of the country. So, I think the United States contributions to some of the U.N. agencies that are really serving this population outside of Iraq is where the most immediate need probably is. And there, I think the

U.N. agencies would say they could always use more. But, the United States is not the only donor; we are the largest donor, but we're not the—part of the goal here is to make sure that other countries also make contributions.

Senator CASEY. Unless you had something, Doctor—

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. Well, just that the amount that has been pledged, \$160 million recently, is not so greatly different than what it was in the last couple of fiscal years. And I've heard two very different critiques of this.

One is that, on this grand scale of things, \$160 million is really a small amount of money, especially compared to the figures that are being thrown around for other issues in governance these days. That's one critique.

Another is that much of the international community feels that this is primarily a U.S. crisis, and the United States should be primarily involved in dealing with it. And the U.S. response to date has been, as I understand it, to pretty much stick with the global formulas for international donations; in other words, something like one-quarter of U.N. funding. And the other part of the critique says, no, the United States, this time, should pay more.

Countering that is the one critique that I've heard from an NGO professional in the field, saying that they were a little bit skeptical that if more money, just more money were thrown out there, that they would really be able to use it all that well. That was just one NGO professional who stated that, not all the others. And that was a little bit of a, you could almost say, heretical viewpoint within the NGO community, but I did hear at least one say that.

Senator CASEY. Yes.

Ms. AOSSEY. May I just add—I think that a lot of that comes back to the capacity of the Government of Iraq to administer. And if there was, say, a master plan that the Government of Iraq had to deal with all these things, where other donors outside the United States, as well, had confidence that there was some kind of a plan to actually tackle a whole host of these issues, then I think people would want to participate and they would want to support the ministries in doing what needs to be done.

The Government of Iraq has resources, too. And, as the GAO report pointed out, a lot of those resources could certainly be brought to bear. I think that, in many ways, they're not using all their own resources, just for the reasons we talked about before. I don't think that they really know how to administer many of the things that are needed. Others would step in and help them, if there was some kind of a plan or package of support where others could plug into.

Senator CASEY. I wanted to move to the security issue, which each of you have mentioned more than once, I think. But, before I get to that, I wanted to ask you about children.

If we look at this problem just through the eyes of a child or from the vantage point of what happens to a child in this process, not just whether or not they're provided with the services and the opportunity that they should be provided with, but whether or not those opportunities and services and help are being provided to such an extent that it will dissuade or create a disincentive for a child or someone coming of age to be attracted to an ideology which is harmful, what's your sense of how children are faring in this

process, both from a mechanical point of view, in terms of what services they're getting, but also from a more—I'm not sure how best to express it, but from a broader view, in terms of whether or not we're doing enough to dissuade them from being attracted to some extremist ideology because of the lack of services?

Ms. LAIPSON. I visited some Iraqi refugees in Syria, and I know that there is a deep concern, not so much very young children, but teenagers that are idle all the time, and whether there are opportunities for them to have outside activities that are healthy ones, whether it's sports or educational opportunities, after-school—some of them don't go to school at all. And—

Senator CASEY. You mean, Iraqi teenagers in Syria.

Ms. LAIPSON. In Syria—

Senator CASEY. OK.

Ms. LAIPSON [continuing]. With nothing to do. And—now, in Syria it's a somewhat controlled environment. There are not many opportunities to join a jihadi club or something that would be promoting an ideology that could be dangerous. But, there is always the concern that this long period of isolation, the family has experienced a great drop in its socioeconomic status, et cetera. Now—so, the question is—opportunity. I think that, in a way, the environment is something one should be concerned about.

That's not something that the United States can necessarily direct by itself. In the case of Syria, the Syrian state also worries about not allowing its own citizens to be exposed to either religiously motivated or ideologically motivated activities. It's quite adamant about secularism. But, I think, in some of the other countries, that would be a concern.

In Lebanon, for example, the Iraqi refugees have somewhat left—been left to their own devices and have been allowed to create community associations so they can try to inculcate Iraqi identity, Iraqi songs, activities, et cetera, that at least hold on to some Iraqi culture. But, they are also in an environment where there's a great diversity of political views, in Lebanon, so they could be exposed.

In Egypt, they could also be exposed, I think, to a wide range of political activities.

Ms. AOSSEY. Certainly, in both refugee populations and IDP populations, children suffer disproportionately. And if I could add, women and children. One of the troubling things that we see is that a number of families are struggling because they are now female-headed households. Women, as a result of that, face greater isolation than the family would otherwise. Children living in poverty, for a whole host of reasons, is always a bad situation. And certainly, they are more vulnerable, more fragile.

There's a number of psychosocial interventions that are happening both within the refugee populations and within the IDP populations. I cannot overemphasize enough how important these programs are, because in addition to the fact that children lack access to basic health care and education and the kinds of things that a child needs to develop and thrive and be healthy, they also don't always have an outlet to express many of the things that they've seen, their fears, and the kinds of things that they have to come to terms with, just as children. It's often too much for an adult to cope with these kinds of things, let alone a child.

Many times we have found that, by working with the mothers and the women in these families, we're able to improve the lot for the children, by working with the mothers, because as we know, children, in large part, react to how their parents are doing. Regardless of what's happening in their world, what they form a lot of their opinions and draw a lot of their securities or insecurities from is based on their parents. Often by trying to take care of the family, by trying to take care of the father and the mother, you can then often best take care of the child.

If you don't help the mother and the father, if they are unemployed, if they are deprived, if they are isolated, if they are afraid, then, chances are, so are the children. That's been our experience, over and over again, not just here, but throughout the world. That concern is a major concern, and it's something that we are seeing on all sides of the borders.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. Although it's a legitimate concern of the U.S. Government, I'm personally uncomfortable with the paradigm of youth as a security threat, if, for no other reason, than you can create a surreal negative incentive, whereby you'll have children say, "Educate me or I'll blow up a hotel."

That said, rather, we should see these individuals, both as individuals deserving the full menu of life's opportunities, but second, as factors in the region's future positive economic and social development. So, as such, I think Jordan and Syria, in particular, should be given cart blanche, in terms of support, for educating Iraqis amongst their population. There will be leakages. They will use this money to educate Syrians and Jordanians, but there are many who say that's not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, that's not a bad thing at all.

Senator CASEY. Before turning to my colleague, I have just a real quick question on the number. If we're operating from that 4.7 million number, do you have any sense, or is there any estimate, as to the number of children that comprise that? What percent of the 4.7 million are children? Does anyone have a rough estimate on that?

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. I don't have a rough estimate, although someone here might, but just that it's higher than it normally would be, because these are survivors of a war zone.

Ms. AOSSEY. We know that women and children account for 75 percent, give or take.

Senator CASEY. Seventy-five.

Ms. AOSSEY. Yes; 75 percent. And it's possible that, of the overall numbers, children account for possibly more than half of that number, give or take.

Senator CASEY. That's a big number.

I wanted to turn to my distinguished colleague, the ranking member, Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, I'll pass, Mr. Chairman. Let's continue on with the list.

Senator CASEY. I've been—

[Laughter.]

Senator CASEY [continuing]. Given unlimited time, here. There's probably some people who want me to turn it over to you. [Laughter.]

If you wanted to match my time, you get about half an hour.
[Laughter.]

Let me just ask one or two more.

One real concern that people have here, as well as in other parts of the world, is just the stability and security, generally, but, in particular, how this crisis—and there's no better way to describe it than that word—how it affects, among other challenges, the Middle East itself, and the potential destabilizing effect that the crisis has on the Middle East. I mean, we know some of the larger numbers in Syria and Jordan. I was in Jordan, in August 2007, and we heard an awful lot, at that time, about the challenge of dealing with this inflow. One official extrapolating—and I think, appropriately so—extrapolating from—the inflow of Iraqi refugees into Jordan would be the equivalent of us having hundreds of thousands—I think it was more than 500,000 refugees coming to the United States—

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. Try 10 million.

Senator CASEY [continuing]. Which—well, depending on how you count it—but, this was—this was extraordinary. So, do you have any sense of that, in terms of the impact it can have on the region, in terms of stability? Anyone have an opinion on that?

Ms. LAIPSON. I think if we look at the smaller regional states, Jordan and Lebanon, for example, would be one scenario, and I think Syria and Egypt would be a different one. Both Jordan and Lebanon, I think, are deeply, deeply nervous about any transfer of, sort of, some of Iraq's political problems to their own societies, so they worry about rising sectarian consciousness, they worry about some of these Iraqis being "bad guys." And certainly, within refugee populations, you have your normal spectrum of human behavior, and you're going to get some who don't respect the law, bring in some political views that may not be congenial to the host governments, et cetera.

For the most part, those anxieties were most acute, I think, in 2006 and 2007. And, in a strange way, the countries in the region have more or—I feel that the temperature is down a little bit, in terms of how anxious they are that these Iraqis are going to really disrupt life, as they know it, in their home country. They are a little bit more focused on their economic requirements than on the security question, per se; in part, because the Iraqis are somewhat docile, and they're nervous, and they are—the Iraqis are pre-occupied with just day-to-day survival and really have not become very politically active. But, again, I think it's important that both Jordan and Lebanon have—feel deeply scarred by the experience of absorbing, or failing to absorb, such large cohorts of Palestinians, and they really don't want to see it happen to them again.

Syria has taken a somewhat more relaxed view, for reasons that are not completely clear. Syria has always had a testy relationship with Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and yet, it considers Iraq a brother country and has been quite generous, at the social level, in allowing the Iraqis to kind of settle where they want, to find homes, et cetera.

In Egypt, the numbers are much, much smaller, and the Iraqis really don't stand out as such a significant refugee cohort, when

you compare them to the Sudanese or other refugee groups that are currently resident in Egypt.

So, I think that there was an initial worry that some of Iraq's, sort of, social strife and deep divisions would somehow be transferred to these neighboring countries, and that they would also almost be infected, if you will, by sectarianism. And it seems that the worst fears have not played out and that there has been some tolerance. Now, that tolerance may be based on an assumption that, when conditions improve, the Iraqis will go home. The long-term absorption of these Iraqis is really something that I don't think Syria and Jordan have completely come to terms with.

Senator CASEY. How about with regard to what our Government's doing, vis-a-vis Syria? Is there more that we should be doing, in terms of any kind of new strategy or new initiative with regard to Syria? I mean, they've got very high numbers, and—I don't know if you have a sense of that.

Ms. LAIPSON. Well, the Syrians certainly want to manage how international NGOs are playing, vis-a-vis the Iraqis, but it's possible that there is—that they would be receptive to greater support for those activities.

What I found interesting was that the Syrians were a little bit frustrated that they have not been able to do business with Iraq. They believe that the long period of American disapproval of Syria has inhibited them from being kind of a more natural economic partner of Iraq. So, joint ventures, business opportunities, Syrian investment in Iraq, et cetera, which could help Iraqi reconstruction and could, in theory, on the margins at least, improve the chances for Iraqis to go home, have not been exploited, have not been developed. So, the Syrians would argue that if the United States were to create a more conducive environment, you could get more natural economic interaction between Syria and Iraq that would help the Iraqi displaced people, as well.

So, one intervention, perhaps in the context of an overall improvement in United States-Syrian relations, would be something that would clarify the status of Syrian businessmen, Syrian investors, in the Iraqi economy.

The Iraqi business partners suggest that they don't want to do business with Syrians, because they think Syrians are somehow disapproved by Washington, so it's not worth—if they were to bump into sanctions, for example. Now, the reason for those sanctions are—is a different set of issues, and it's possible that those sanctions cannot be lifted very, very quickly, but that's something that at least the Syrians believe would improve their ability to help Iraq.

Senator CASEY. Ms. Aosse.

Ms. AOSSEY. If you look at Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, generally speaking, I think they've done, overall, a pretty good job of accepting large numbers into their populations when their populations are already in need of many of the kinds of services that these refugees also need. Although, of course, rights have been limited, and certainly the right to work is limited, many of these refugees have had access to what is already a very, very strained system within these countries.

I can't think of many countries that want a refugee population in their country permanently. And, as mentioned before, many of them are still struggling with the issue of the Palestinian refugees within their own communities since 1948.

Also, there is a general concern even though the tension is significantly decreased, as Ellen mentioned, there is a general concern about how the influx of these refugees affect the religious balance within their countries, and what that may mean within each particular country. So, there has been concern about that, although it seems to be less.

I think, in large part, one of the ways that there has been less tension among these host communities, between the refugee population and the population of these countries, is that, because the refugees are not allowed to work, they can't take jobs that would go to someone who lives in that country. It's difficult for the refugees, of course, but to some extent, there is a little less tension because they're not taking local jobs away from the economy.

Just a comment on Syria. It's been our experience, in working, in the last couple of years, with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and a number of other such institutions, that there seems to be an opening up of the regime, and we should try and embrace that openness. Perhaps this issue of refugees in their country is a way to have a dialogue about that.

Refugees within Syria have had access to a lot of basic services. Certainly we never want to create reasons for people to go back home, except for reasons that are, of course, very positive. If people had a good reason to go home, we think many of them would. It's not because life is easy in Syria, but that they do have access to basic services, so if they do go home, it would be voluntary in nature.

Senator CASEY. Well, I know—moving to a different topic, because I know we have to wrap up soon, but—even as we point to what the Iraqi Government's doing or not doing well, or other governments, we have to look inward, as well. What is our Government doing? And we spoke a little bit about the dollar amounts, but the concern that I have—and a lot of people have this concern—and Senator Cardin—Senator Ben Cardin, from Maryland, and I expressed this to the President, when he was President-elect, in a letter about the need for someone in the White House to be able to coordinate, in terms of the interagency interaction. That's my sense of it, and I'd be curious to see what our witnesses think, whether or not the administration—our administration here—should appoint a special coordinator for Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons. Do you have any opinion on that? If you disagree, you're not going to offend me. This is an open forum.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. I look positively toward that idea. Up until now, as I understand it, there's been—the lead, internationally, has been BPRM, over in the State Department, but they have been unable to speed the process, in Homeland Security, for getting third-country resettlement asylum-seekers into the United States, and they've had no traction whatsoever, in terms of what happens to those asylum-seekers once they get to the United States. So, you've effectively got three different sets of bureaucracies, and they're not

coordinating very well at all, from what I've read and come to understand.

So, if someone were somehow coordinating those three different sets of bureaucracies, it would be a great advance over what it has been, up until now.

And the other thing I want to emphasize is, again, what I mentioned earlier in the testimony, namely that there should be a great deal—a great increase in resources allotted for those who do manage to get to the United States, because these—the benefits—“benefits” is, maybe, a dicey word to use there—but, the support, the assistance that they've been getting once they reach the United States has been allowed to wither ever since the 1990s, and, as a result, they really are only getting something like a few weeks' support and then they're on their own. And, as anyone can testify in the United States, without health insurance and a steady job, life can be very difficult. And if you don't know all that solid a grasp of English, then it's even more difficult.

Senator CASEY. I wanted to ask—Ms. Laipson, your long experience in government; you know more than just the theory of it, the practice of how it actually works. What's your sense of this question, as to whether or not to have a special coordinator in the White House?

Ms. LAIPSON. Well, I find myself a little bit conflicted. I'm not sure that special coordinators and creating, kind of, more processes that these dense bureaucracies, you know, already resist a bit, is necessarily the solution. But, I liked very much Nabil's description, that—my understanding is that the Iraqis—to get an Iraqi process to come into the United States is mindbogglingly complex, that they—there's almost a Catch 22, when they're outside the United States, of how they qualify; once they qualify, they have to start all over again with a different process, et cetera.

I'm not sure that a czar in the White House can break through all of that, and I don't know whether there's a legislative remedy to trying to streamline the process, not just for Iraqis, but for any other asylum-seekers and refugees. I do think this is a moment where our post-9/11 system gets in the way of some of our other foreign policy goals, and I don't know whether there's an opportunity here—again, not just for the Iraqis, but for others, as well—to clean up a system that may be unnecessarily slow and complex.

So, I'd put it in a—in kind of a larger question. I personally would rather see, you know, the Department of Homeland Security need to demonstrate a willingness to come up with more efficient processes. Someone sitting in the White House, maybe would add value, but not necessarily.

Ms. AOSSEY. I think it would show the extraordinary importance of this. Whether or not it would get muddled in the bureaucratic process is difficult to know, but I think that the issues are so important, so large and so looming that I think it would be a good idea, in large part, because it would be someone's only job. Probably the best way to look at it is, they have a lens into what all the different issues are, across the board, they would, from that perspective, be able to solve some of the issues. They're not solved necessarily, because no one single person is doing this across all agencies.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. May I have a follow-on, on that?

Senator CASEY. Sure.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. This is a personal anecdote, as a New Orleans native. Growing up in New Orleans in the 1970s, there was a very large Vietnamese community that were overwhelmingly refugees from the Southeast Asia conflict of the 1960s and 1970s. When they came to the United States, they had the kind of support that allowed them to work at the local supermarket, and half of their salaries, as I understand it, were paid for by the Federal Government. The supermarket cut its payroll in half, they got minimum-wage jobs; these jobs went on for years. And their children are doing quite well, as I understand it, including the most recent Republican Representative from District 2 in New Orleans. And that is a anecdote, that is an example, of what can happen, a generation after these asylum-seekers are accepted into the American immigrant mix.

Senator CASEY. Well, thank you. And I wanted to—I know we have to conclude, but—wanted to get your sense of how we’re doing with regard to resettlement of Iraqi refugees, in general, but, in particular, whether or not we’re doing enough to resettle Iraqis who supported the United States mission since the war began, as well as oppressed minorities, like Iraqi Christians, here in the United States.

Ms. LAIPSON. I think we’re doing poorly, across the board. I think the numbers aren’t big enough, and, I think, once they get here, the programs aren’t generous enough, as Nabil explained.

I take the notion that we should be particularly sensitive to the most vulnerable populations. I hope that that definition of “vulnerable” is inclusive enough so that it’s a mix of vulnerabilities, not just focused on what they call the “American-affiliated Iraqis”—the translators, et cetera. I hope that it would be more than one definition of “vulnerable population.” But, the numbers are just, I think, exceedingly small, given the scale of the people that could qualify to be “vulnerable.”

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. And I would agree with that. I think that any sectarian definition of those who get preference—in other words, saving Iraqi Christians because they’re Iraqi Christians—would be a very big mistake, if only for Iraqi sectarian politics back there, as well as in the Middle East, as a whole.

On the other hand, I can see an argument for supporting those who—as a special category—who helped the American venture in the last 6 years, because they did put their life on the lines for this adventure, whatever you think of it.

Ms. AOSSEY. If I could make one more comment about this coordinating mechanism, I’ve had an opportunity to think a little bit more about it. And certainly resettlement issues would be a part of that. But, if you look at the past, the lead for the refugees has been PRM at the State Department. And the lead for the internally displaced has been USAID’s OFDA. And these two organizations, we are a partner of them and we know them well, have really done an extraordinary job under very difficult and challenging—very, very difficult situations.

But, there needs to be, in addition to that, overall leadership at the highest level that looks at all these issues together, including

the resettlement issue, which is, of course, politically charged in so many ways. This challenge is a big one, and has tremendous implications, both in the neighboring countries and our own country and within Iraq. And if there's someone at the senior level who is able to work with people who have been focused on it over the years, look at it at a broader level, I think these issues, including the resettlement issues, that we're obviously struggling with, would be best looked at. It's not because I think the solutions are easy, it's because someone at a very high level would be looking at them all the time and across the board. And certainly, that includes the resettlement, as well.

Senator CASEY. I forgot to ask one question I was thinking of earlier. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams—as our troop presence is diminished and as we drawdown, I'd ask you whether or not you think the PRT's role has to be augmented because of that. Is there a general consensus on that, or not?

Anyone. This is—

Ms. LAIPSON. Yes; I personally think the PRTs will continue to have a very important role, and perhaps even an enhanced role, in this period of transition. Eventually, though, if we imagine, kind of, at the 5-year mark or beyond, a more normal relationship with Iraq, I don't know what—whether Iraq will, you know, either want, or we will give priority to, having such a robust presence at the provincial level.

We have this enormous Embassy in Baghdad that is perhaps too big for where the relationship will be, 3 years from now, 5 years from now. The PRTs are a very—you know, are an interesting experiment, and it's really to—in my mind, a transitional concept.

Eventually, when Iraq is stable, we would have normal consulates. But, when we think about the role of diplomats in the 21st century, we know that there will be a kind of different skill mix, and, in a way, PRTs are a pioneering effort to see what, kind of, different professions and different, kind of, functional backgrounds are needed in our civilian corps when we deploy, internationally. So, we want water engineers and we want legal experts and we want people of very different professional training.

And so, in a way, the PRTs are a very important experiment that perhaps will become institutionalized and become a permanent way we do business overseas. But, overall, I think that we should think of it, still, as a transition for Iraq, and eventually our diplomatic posture in Iraq may look different.

Senator CASEY. Anyone else, before we wrap up?

Ms. AOSSEY. I think—

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. Go ahead.

Ms. AOSSEY. The feelings toward the PRTs among the communities in Iraq vary from place to place, depending on what their relationship with them is. I'm a strong proponent of more being done at the civilian level—because civilian organizations, international organizations, NGOs, the U.N.—are used to working at the grassroots level with communities, and winning their trust. I think that's going to be very important in Iraq as we go forward. I think that much more needs to be done through civilian organizations. In that regard, it is a transition, and things have changed. There is much more of a role for civilians, whether it be organiza-

tions or the U.S. Government or the international community in general, because they are used to working within communities. They've been doing this for years and years, around the world. And they've done it very effectively, and in so many other places. I believe much more of that can be done in Iraq than has been done in the past.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. I would agree with everything that's been said. I just have one caveat. And I—that is, that I would hope that the PRTs' presence throughout the country, throughout the provincial capitals, would not later be used as a reason to maintain a security presence, a military presence, in order to protect the PRTs. In other words, sort of a reverse tail-wagging-the-dog kind of scenario. So, while I agree that their role probably should, and could be, and will be, enhanced, I don't think that should be a reason to keep a military presence there to protect them.

Senator CASEY. Before we leave, I wanted to give each of you—you have written testimony, you've given oral testimony, but just give you, maybe, 30 seconds each to do a kind of an exclamation point. What's your most important message you want to leave with us, so the record is crystal clear why you showed up here? [Laughter.]

Ms. LAIPSON. Well, I think the refugee story is a very important test of American leadership and how we bring this extraordinary period of our—of Iraq policy to some kind of closure. So, I would like the United States to pay more attention to the refugees.

Having said that, I want to think about the refugee problem in a very holistic way, and that really the solution to the refugee problem is organically linked to achieving some of the basics in Iraq, so that when Iraq is more stable, people will choose to return. So, I don't want to kind of put the refugee question under a microscope and say that that should be issue No. 1; I want to see it in the context of the United States remaining engaged in Iraq, at least for some period, until Iraq achieves stability. And then, I think there will be some natural resolution to at least part of the refugee problem.

Thank you.

Senator CASEY. Thank you.

Ms. AOSSEY. I think it's important that we take the hard-won gains and the progress that's been made over the last years and keep things progressing, that we don't actually backtrack. That is, we cannot rush the return of the refugees, or rush the return of the IDPs, beyond a point where they're not comfortable. It needs to be voluntary. People need to be safe, and they need to feel that they want to be back in their societies for there to be long-term and durable hope in Iraq.

I believe that this should be civilian-led. I think that working with the communities at the civilian level will have the most impact over the long run in Iraq in building those relationships. And that we, both the U.S. Government and the international community, should help the Government of Iraq to carry this out; that they need help with the master plan; that they do have the will to do it, but they don't have the capacity. A civilian-led effort to help them do that will be the most effective and, over the long run, will

help with our relationships within communities throughout the country.

Senator CASEY. Thank you.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI. Thank you for this opportunity.

Rather than restate some of what I've said before, I want to close on a slightly different point, and that is, I think the focus should be on the most vulnerable populations; and it hasn't always been, up until now. And I want to mention three particular populations, that haven't necessarily been mentioned yet today, quickly.

One, the Palestinian refugees in Iraq are effectively trapped; 2,500 of them on camps on the border. They need to go somewhere, and they're stuck, for the last 6 years, effectively. That's one group.

Another group are the Sabaeen-Mandaeans, who have effectively ceased to exist as a community in Iraq. There's less than 10,000 of them now. They've been dispersed all over the world, and they are of such numbers, as a community, that their communal identity is in danger of fading as they spread to Australia, Europe, and the United States.

And the third one are the Mujahidin-i Khalq Iranians in Camp Asraf, who have a long and difficult history in Iraq, obviously. They are not immediately vulnerable, but if things, politically, go a certain way and the United States withdraws, they could find themselves suddenly extremely, extremely vulnerable. So, it's not a case of vulnerability right now, it's a case of potential vulnerability in the future.

Once again, thank you for allowing me to testify.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much. And this is very helpful, and we'll make sure that all of your testimony is a part of the record.

We're adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:06 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JOINT PREPARED STATEMENT OF KENNETH H. BACON, PRESIDENT, AND KRISTELE YOUNES, SENIOR ADVOCATE, REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL, WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Senator Casey, for holding this hearing today. As President Obama noted in his February 27 speech on responsibly ending the war in Iraq, "millions of displaced Iraqis . . . are a living consequence of this war and a challenge to stability in the region, and they must become part of Iraq's reconciliation and recovery." This hearing and legislation such as the Casey-Cardin "Support for Vulnerable Iraqis Act" will play an important role in addressing the security and stability challenges presented by Iraqi displacement.

Refugees International has been working on the plight of displaced Iraqis for 3 years. In 2006 and 2007, we called the Iraqi displacement crisis "the fastest growing" in the world. Although the rates of displacement have since slowed, about 20 percent of the Iraqi population remains displaced. The Governments of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and other host countries say that they are sheltering almost 2 million Iraqi refugees, while the International Organization for Migration notes that another 2.6 million are internally displaced in Iraq. The latter are known as IDPs.

Throughout the past 3 years, Refugees International has advocated increased assistance to displaced Iraqis, as well as increased resettlement of Iraqi refugees in the U.S. and other countries. Our efforts have led the United Nations to significantly increase their presence and work in the region and the U.S. Government to step up efforts to respond to the crisis. In 2008, the U.S. Government provided \$400 million in assistance to displaced Iraqis. To date, in 2009, the U.S. has contributed \$150 million and expects to contribute more. As for resettlement, the U.S. welcomed more than 13,000 Iraqis in 2008 and plans to resettle at least 17,000 in the current

fiscal year. More needs to be done, but these improvements in the humanitarian response are encouraging and demonstrate the willingness of the U.S. Government to address some of the humanitarian consequences of the war in Iraq.

Assistance by the international community and the resettlement of vulnerable Iraqis to the U.S. and elsewhere remain critical components of a comprehensive response to the Iraqi displacement crisis. However, with such a large segment of the population displaced, the solution for most displaced Iraqis will be to return home.

As security in Iraq seems to be improving, it is essential that the Government of Iraq, the U.S. and the United Nations (U.N.) work together to create conditions suitable for returns.

Earlier this month, we conducted a mission to Iraq to survey work in the main areas of displacement and return in the center of the country. We visited several areas of Baghdad, as well as Eskandaria, in the former “Sunni triangle of death,” Fallujah in the Anbar governorate, Karbala and Hilla in the Babel governorate.

I very much appreciate your invitation to brief you on our findings. Unfortunately, a medical emergency has forced us to present our testimony in writing. I hope you will make this entire statement part of the hearing record and that you will not hesitate to submit questions in writing.

Here are our major findings:

- As security in Iraq improves, refugees and internally displaced Iraqis are starting to return home, but the returns are slow and tentative.
- While security remains the major factor in a family’s decision to return home, other factors play a role—infrastructure, particularly water and electricity, employment opportunities and health care. The Government of Iraq (GOI), the U.S. and the United Nations have to do a better job of working together provide the services necessary to support returning Iraqis.
- The capacity of the GOI to provide protection and services to returning Iraqis is weak. A vibrant civil society sector, including increasingly competent local nongovernment organizations, is beginning to develop in Iraq, but the government often sees the civil society movement as a threat rather than a potential partner. The U.S. and the U.N. should concentrate on helping to develop a better partnership between the GOI and civil society organizations.
- Returns tend to ratify the ethnic cleansing that took place during the worst years of sectarian violence, when many mixed neighborhoods became all Shia or all Sunni. The GOI needs to do a better job of convincing Iraqis that rule of law applies equally to all Iraqis and that the government is nonsectarian.

THE STATE OF RETURNS

Since November 2007, the Government of Iraq has been trying to encourage the return of displaced Iraqis. In Syria, Jordan, and Egypt the GOI has made buses and planes available to help refugees return to their country and has provided them with a small sum upon their return home. As for the internally displaced, they too can receive assistance to vacate the homes they sometimes occupy illegally and to return to their homes. Iraq went as far as violating international refugee law by asking Syria to close its borders to refugees at the end of 2007, when the number of people fleeing was still significant, because of fears that the large number of refugees gave a bad image of the security situation inside the country.

In its strategy to encourage returns, the Government of Iraq has failed to take political, social, and economic reality into consideration and examine the country’s capacity to absorb large numbers of returns. Instead, it has made the return of displaced Iraqis a component, as opposed to a consequence, of its security strategy. Large returns, the Government reasoned in 2007, would create the impression that security in Iraq was better and would win popular and international support for the Government’s military and political actions.

Pressure on the displaced to return to their homes continues today. Refugees International met with Government officials who all expressed the desire to see the “IDP file” closed in 2009, as there are “no longer reasons to be displaced” in Iraq. As a result, IDPs are no longer being registered, as the government hurries to make the displacement problem disappear. Moreover, Prime Minister al-Maliki’s Shia Government has little sympathy for the largely Sunni refugees in neighboring countries. Syria and Jordan state that almost 2 million such refugees are still in their countries, but the Government of Iraq states that there are no more than 400,000, and fewer have registered with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. According to a U.N. diplomat in Baghdad, the Prime Minister sees all refugees as “traitors” or “Baathists” who prefer “getting money without working” rather than helping rebuilding their country.

Displacement from Iraq has slowed but hasn't stopped yet; the U.N. continues to register new arrivals in Syria and Jordan for instance. A small percentage of the internally displaced are returning, in part because of the cease-fires imposed by Sunni and Shiite militias and the security those militias have established in their fiefdoms for members of the same sect. Also, many formerly mixed communities are no longer mixed and there is essentially no one left to force out. In addition, the conditions for displaced families both within Iraq and in neighboring countries are extremely difficult and continue to deteriorate. Thus, some Iraqis are returning to "safe" neighborhoods in Baghdad.

Returns remain a trickle, however, rather than the solution of choice for most displaced. According to the IOM, around 50,000 families (250,000 persons) have returned, mostly to Baghdad, and mostly from within the country. Only 8 percent of these returnees were refugees from neighboring countries. As for the rest of the IDPs, a survey by IOM shows that 61 percent of those still displaced would eventually like to return, but don't feel ready to do it now. The remaining 39 percent would either like to integrate in their current communities, or resettle somewhere else. Obviously, if the post-2006 population movements aren't reversed, there will be serious consequences for the political future of Iraq, as entire neighborhoods and cities will remain homogenous.

Returns are the most effective way to gauge lasting improvements in Iraq, as refugees and IDPs are often the best informed about the conditions in their places of origin. The low numbers demonstrate that major obstacles and challenges need to be addressed before mass returns can take place. According to UNHCR and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, many who have returned to Iraq from neighboring countries have now become internally displaced, unable to go back to their homes. They seek shelter in neighborhoods reflecting their religious sect, not neighborhoods where they are the minority and might feel threatened. As for IDPs, many fear returning because returnees have been killed. Local security officials and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) confirmed that there have been incidents of intimidation or murder in many areas, and these stories spread quickly throughout the population. Refugees International visited the Sunni area of Amriya, where a Shia family was killed when it tried to return. We heard of similar incidents happening to Sunni families in Shia neighborhoods.

Besides the fragility of the security situation, there are many other obstacles to return. According to assessments conducted by international and national aid agencies, refugees and IDPs who have returned need shelter, electricity, water, employment, and nonfood items. Health care is also a major issue: There are 18,000 health care workers in Iraq today, versus 36,000 in 2000. Humanitarian organizations have designed programs to target some of these needs. For instance, IOM designed a returnee food and nonfood basket, and seeks to assist returning families by including them in its community assistance, water/sanitation, health and education programs. Similarly, UNHCR included assistance to returnees in its 2008 and 2009 programs, while both international and local NGOs stand ready to assist in many areas of Iraq. As for the GOI, it announced assistance to returnees—around \$800 per family—that is neither sufficient nor efficiently distributed.

Despite these initiatives in assisting returnees, the systems are currently not in place to handle a large number of returnees as it is the overall infrastructure of the country that needs to be revived. Moreover, there is no unified process to deal with returning internally displaced persons or refugees. As in the post-conflict Balkans, property disputes are a key issue in Iraq, as many returnees are unable to go home since their houses are occupied by others. Property disputes will linger for many years to come and are likely to spark renewed violence. For now, they are being handled by the Iraqi Army on orders from the Prime Minister's Cabinet dealing with the eviction of "squatters," many of them IDPs themselves.

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR RETURNS: THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ

Despite improvements in security, many Iraqis believe large-scale violence might resume, as internal struggles for power emerge and are no longer limited to the Sunni-Shia divide. In particular, many fear the consequences of the U.S.-planned withdrawal, and the effect it will have on the different factions. The fear is compounded by the current lack of capacity of the Iraqi Government, which is reflected by its inability to deal effectively with displacement.

Inside the Government, sectarian bias remains strong. According to senior U.S. officials in Baghdad, "there isn't one Government in Iraq," but a regroupment of factions, each pursuing their own agenda. Sunni still largely feel disenfranchised and underrepresented, and mistrust toward the Shia-dominated Government is largely present at all levels of society. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration

(MODM) is run by Shia Kurds, whose first priority has been the resettlement of refugees coming back from Iran. Most advisers to the Prime Minister are Shia. IDPs feel it is much easier for displaced Shias than for displaced Sunnis to gain assistance. Similarly, many Iraqi NGOs working in Sunni areas report having trouble registering with the Government of Iraq. One NGO representative told us that when she went to the government NGO office to register her organization, she was asked “why she works in these areas,” meaning Sunni neighborhoods of Baghdad.

Sectarianism is not the only problem with the Government of Iraq. Corruption is rampant, and makes it extremely difficult for the Government to effectively deliver assistance and for international and national NGOs to operate. The World Food Programme (WFP), which delivers food assistance to hundreds of thousands of displaced Iraqis, had its cargo seized by Iraqi police who alleged that the food was rotten. Refugees International met with many local and international groups operating in the city of Hilla, in Babel, who complained that the local head of MODM was an incompetent 26-year-old, who was appointed because of his links to the Governor and who constantly tried to intimidate agencies into distributing assistance to his friends and family.

The improvements in security have not translated into improvements in the provision of services. This situation is unlikely to improve in the near future, given the financial difficulties that the Government of Iraq is currently experiencing. The fall in oil prices has had a severe impact on the Iraqi national budget, which went from a planned \$82 billion to less than \$60 billion for 2009, with further cuts planned. Moreover, the government has also made cuts in the public distribution system of food (PDS) which cost \$5.9 billion last year.

The Government has nevertheless tried to take a few steps to address displacement. The creation of returnee assistance centers in Baghdad provides legal and financial assistance to returnees. Unfortunately, the government interrupted the payment of \$800 to returnee families in October, and it is unclear when assistance will resume. To address property disputes, the Prime Minister’s office issued two orders for the Iraqi Army (through the Baghdad Operations Center, or BOC) to evict squatters when returnees can show documents establishing their property rights. Those evicted are entitled to some assistance. This system is, however, flawed, as many squatters are IDPs themselves who cannot return home. As for homeowners, getting their property back does not mean they can return, since they often fear for their safety.

Assistance to returnees, property restitution, and the provision of basic services are essential for Iraqis to return home. But many will still not return until they feel the root causes of the conflict have been addressed. They need to feel accepted by the community and provided with security guarantees. Baghdad, and indeed the rest of Iraq, resembles a large military base today—with each neighborhood sealed off by walls, and populations unable to move freely when they choose. Areas are currently protected by the army or by “awakening groups,” Sunni militias created by the U.S. Army, who were eventually supposed to be integrated into the Iraqi Armed Forces and police. Save a few exceptions, it hasn’t really happened yet, making the situation unsustainable. Refugees International and others worry that absent a real political reconciliation process and an efficient disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program, these groups will remain as armed militias with the same political agenda and strong grievances. The possibility for resumed violence is also present along the disputed boundaries between the Kurds and the central Iraqi Government. A political solution is vital to ensure there won’t be large-scale confrontations.

The U.S., the international community, and the U.N. need to provide financial and technical assistance to the Government of Iraq to address the needs of the displaced, the returnees and the root causes of displacement. In addition, political pressure on the Government of Iraq to address its own sectarianism and rampant corruption must be maintained. A comprehensive, interministerial system is needed to establish the rule of law, which is essential for Iraqis to feel safe and return to their homes. Finally, the international community must work with the Government of Iraq to create jobs. With 30 percent unemployment rate, Iraq’s economic future is compromised. So is its security, as most of the unemployed are young men who are vulnerable to recruitment by militias and other armed groups.

THE WAY FORWARD

Humanitarian needs remain a priority in Iraq. The U.N. assistance mission to Iraq is currently trying to build the Government of Iraq’s capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies and should be supported in this work. Many populations in Iraq live in vulnerable conditions, unknown to the aid community which, because

of security restrictions, has been unable to get a comprehensive picture of conditions in the country. Refugees International visited groups of displaced Iraqis in Baghdad and elsewhere who lived in unsanitary conditions, were not registered with the MODM, and had never received any assistance from any U.N. agency or NGO. Aid organizations must work together and establish better coordination and reporting mechanisms to ensure that vulnerable Iraqis stop falling through the cracks.

NGOs and U.N. agencies have started addressing these problems by designing several types of programs: Some targeting basic needs and others looking at longer term development, such as job training for widows. UNHCR is working with local NGOs to provide protection and assistance to the most vulnerable, while UNICEF is launching its IMPACT program, addressing the needs of some of the poorest communities in Iraq. These organizations and others who are working in Iraq need financial and political support. At the end of 2008, the U.N. launched an appeal for \$547 million to meet the needs of Iraqis both in and outside of Iraq. Contributions to this appeal have been insufficient to date. Refugees International urges the U.S. to lead by example and fund 50 percent of the overall appeal. The U.S. plays a special role in the region, and this needs to be translated into the prioritizations of humanitarian assistance as well.

Civil society plays an essential role in Iraq. Both international and national NGOs have been at the forefront of providing assistance since the beginning of the war, often at great risks for their staff. Yet there seems to be great mistrust by the Government of Iraq toward NGOs, especially Iraqi ones. The Government is currently discussing a law that if passed, would enable the State to exert a disproportionate level of control on NGOs, on their finances, and even on their lifespan. It is true that the Iraqi civil society is young, and that many NGOs exist only by name, or as a tool for political parties. Many others however, are legitimate and could become important actors if they were given the resources and the capacity-building they need. Refugees International met with impressive local groups, who provide assistance to thousands of vulnerable Iraqis, without any support from the Iraqi Government or the international community. The U.S. and other donors must also work with the government to achieve a compromise that would ensure government oversight without impeding NGOs independence. Iraq today is struggling to replace sectarian violence with political discourse and reconciliation. It has a long way to go, but more active civil society organizations would provide a good mediation channel.

Even if fully funded though, the U.N. and NGOs will not be able to address major problems, such as the establishment of basic services throughout the country. This task has been taken up by the government, and also by the U.S. provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) which have a much larger budget than any U.N. agency. For example, UNICEF had \$30 million budget in 2008, the PRTs had \$862 million at their disposal to undertake projects such as the repair of power grids, the rebuilding of schools and bridges, or the construction of hospitals. Unfortunately the PRTs projects are often implemented without much coordination with the central authorities, the U.N., or USAID. There needs to be much increased coordination with communities and all actors involved in the reconstruction of Iraq to ensure ownership and sustainability. Furthermore, as the U.S. troops drawdown, thought has to be given to the handing over of PRT projects to the Government of Iraq or the U.N. The U.S. has a responsibility to ensure that these projects don't fall through, and that whomever they are handed to has the capacity and the resources to maintain and complete them.

As efforts continue to stabilize and rebuild Iraq, special attention needs to be given to the most vulnerable, and durable solutions need to be found. The stateless Palestinians of Iraq remain one of the most vulnerable groups, the subjects of discrimination and attacks by many factions. The hundreds who sought shelter in the camps of Al-Tanf and Al-Waleed at the Syrian border with Iraq must be resettled immediately and the criteria applied should be the same as for Iraqis. According to the U.N., there are 10–12,000 left in Iraq. For this population, resettlement to a third country is likely to be the only durable solution.

The U.S. and the international community must also turn their attention to Iraqis who will not be able to return home, whether they are refugees or internally displaced. They may be too vulnerable to return, or have reasons to fear for their safety. Either way, there are currently no plans to address their needs and plan for their future. The U.S. must engage Syria, Jordan, and other host countries on finding durable solutions for these particularly vulnerable groups. As for the 39 percent of internally displaced Iraqis who don't plan to return home, they will need assistance to either integrate in their new communities or resettle elsewhere. The political implications for the future of Iraq must be carefully considered, while respecting the will of the displaced.

We can avoid repeating past mistakes. The U.S. must consider the humanitarian implications of its engagement in Iraq, and ensure that measures are taken to mitigate the effects the conflict continues to have on civilians. Working with the Government of Iraq and the U.N., the U.S. must stand ready to assist vulnerable Iraqis, including the displaced and the returnees. This is not only a humanitarian imperative, but a security one as well.

