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## Will Refuge Continue to be Elusive

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## Will Refuge Continue to be Elusive

### Abstract

According to U.N. estimates, if current trends continue, the number of Iraqi asylum seekers by year-end could reach between 40,000 to 50,000. The influx of Iraqis into states such as Syria and Jordan also threatens to be a destabilizing force in those countries. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect these states to individually cope with migration flows of this magnitude.

### Keywords

Human rights, Iraq, War, Refugees, Displaced peoples

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## Will Refuge Continue to be Elusive

by Katherine Gockel

According to U.N. estimates, if current trends continue, the number of Iraqi asylum seekers by year-end could reach between 40,000 to 50,000. The influx of Iraqis into states such as Syria and Jordan also threatens to be a destabilizing force in those countries. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect these states to individually cope with migration flows of this magnitude.

As conveyed in the *Dissent* article, the U.S. Government's response is untenable and unconscionable, particularly given the actions taken by smaller states such as Sweden, and the continued calls from the U.N. and other organizations for greater support. Thankfully, a [recent memo](#) sent by the current U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, appears to have prodded the U.S. Government to take action. The memo points to coordination breakdowns between various departments of the U.S. Government that resulted in an inadequate response to asylum requests. Yet, the last thing needed right now is another blame game in Washington. Rather, efforts should be directed toward fixing the problems and developing solutions that consider both current and future migration scenarios for people displaced within Iraq, as well as those who have fled to other countries.

A first step in this direction was taken with the appointment of two new officials—James Foley as the coordinator for Iraqi refugee issues at the U.S. Department of State and Lori Scialabba as senior advisor at the Department of Homeland Security. These appointments need to be followed very quickly by bi-partisan plans of action on the part of the Administration and Congress to ensure continued oversight of future activities.

Several key elements need to be part of these plans. First, special attention needs to be paid and policies enacted on behalf of Iraqis who have assisted the U.S. and Coalition Forces in Iraq. As noted in a recent [Newsweek](#) article, if and when the U.S. decides to draw down its troop presence, these individuals will be in even more danger than they are now. Therefore, ensuring their security and safety needs to be part of any troop redeployment and force reduction plans.

Second, the U.S. needs to reassess how its strategies and plans can be coordinated as part of a larger, sustained multilateral response. This is necessary due to the [magnitude and nature of the current migration patterns](#) and the fact that the security situation in Iraq is not likely to improve in the near future.

A component of this larger multilateral response should be formal requests to Iraq's Arab neighbors for resources and support. In Track II diplomatic conferences sponsored by the [Stanley Foundation](#) in 2006 and 2007, individuals from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states asked for the Iraqis to provide concrete requests for assistance. It was also noted in the 2007 conference that Iraq is a member of the Arab League and as such should be able to rely on fellow member states for assistance.

These conference discussions beg the question as to whether or not these specific assistance requests have been made in support of Iraqis who have fled their homes. If these requests have been made and have gone unanswered, then this lack of response needs to be documented and

brought to the attention of the international community. If the requests have not been made, then the Iraqi Government should immediately begin working with these organizations and states to develop plans on how immediate and ongoing assistance can best be provided and sustained until Iraq's security situation improves. After all, this type of assistance serves everyone's interest as further destabilization, caused by migration flows, is not in the best interests of the GCC or members of the larger Arab League.

Finally, given the number of Iraqis fleeing to neighboring states such as Syria and Jordan, another component of the multilateral response must be a rethinking of prior refugee strategies, [as these displaced populations are not following "typical" refugee behaviors and are not covered under traditional refugee conventions](#). It will also be important to determine ways to mitigate the destabilizing effects of these Iraqi populations on the states to which they have fled, especially as these states are already grappling with their own security, demographic, and economic issues.

In conclusion, as noted by the authors of the article, the U.S. response to date has not been worthy of the situation it helped create or of its leadership status in the world community. Thankfully, publicity regarding this current sad state of affairs appears to have finally gained the U.S.'s and the international community's attention which may in turn finally lead to a commendable response. In order to develop and implement the type of future solutions needed, the U.S. must make a concerted effort to work constructively across party lines and within a larger multilateral framework. Otherwise, refuge and sanctuary will continue to be fleeting and the negative fallout from Iraq will continue to cast the world's only superpower in a disparaging light.

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