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35 years of forced displacement in Iraq: Contextualising the ISIS threat, unpacking the movements

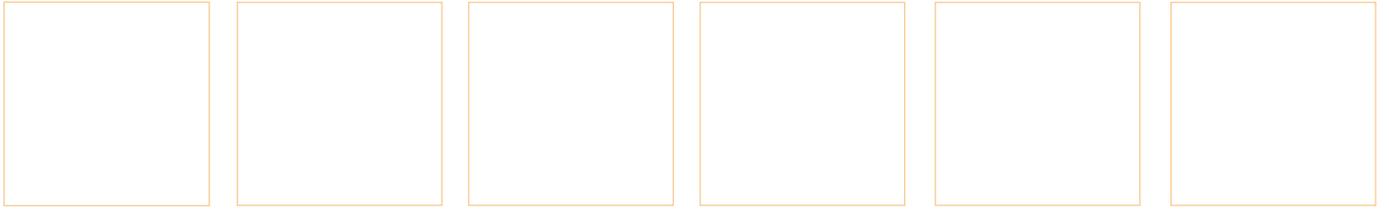
Cameron Thibos, Migration Policy Centre, EUI

The astonishing rise of the group Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham (ISIS*), which has been as brutal as it has been quick, has fundamentally altered the political landscapes of Syria and Iraq and forced more than a million civilians from their homes. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that approximately 1.7 million Iraqis have been displaced in 2014.¹ This does not include the 217,000 Syrians already taking refuge there when the year began. The vast majority of affected *Iraqis* have so far remained internally displaced persons (IDPs), moving repeatedly within and between provinces to escape the shifting violence. The IOM further estimates that nearly half of these IDPs are taking shelter in the Autonomous Kurdish Region (KR-I). This is where the vast majority of Syrian refugees are located as well. A small number of Iraqis have become refugees by crossing into Jordan, Turkey, and even Syria in search of succour.

This brief situates what is happening today within Iraq's much larger history of violent displacement. Looking across the past 35 years, it argues that ISIS may be distinct inasmuch as it has taken and held territory from Syria and Iraq, thereby successfully challenging colonial-

* ISIS, sometimes called ISIL, is also known by its Arabic acronym *Da'ish*, which stands for *Ad-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-'Irāq wa ash-shām*. ISIS recently shortened its name to 'Islamic State', but this article uses ISIS as it is more familiar to English-speaking audiences.

1. Dooley, E. (2014) 'Obama says US will "degrade and ultimately defeat" ISIS like Al Qaeda', ABC News, 5. Sept, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-obama-us-degrade-ultimately-defeat-isis-al/story?id=25261946>



era borders. Its violence is furthermore ‘non-state’ and it espouses a radically retrogressive ideology. But even though some of its tactics differ from those of earlier aggressors, it is neither unique in its level of brutality nor is it an unprecedented threat to the well-being of Iraqi citizens. It is important to maintain this perspective as Western governments expand their offensive against the group over the coming months. ISIS’ goals, structure and fighting ability make it a difficult enemy to either appease or neutralise. As such, it remains unclear whether military action can effectively “degrade and ultimately defeat ISI(S)”, as US President Obama vowed to do on 5 September.² What is certain, however, is that recourse to either aerial bombardment or ground troops, as unlikely as the latter seems at the moment, will further increase Iraq’s IDP and refugee populations.

This report also discusses the evolution and expansion of ISIS, as well as the human displacement it has caused. It demonstrates that the nature of the movements is anything but random. Sunnis, Christians and Yazidis are fleeing north into the KR-I, while Shi’a are heading toward their southern heartlands. The longer this keeps up, the more striking will be the changes to Iraq’s ethnic and religious geography.

Finally, this report seeks to remind readers that, when it comes to the plight of IDPs and refugees, old problems have not been solved simply because new problems have begun. Whether within Iraq or in neighbouring countries, the latest violence adds a new layer of victims on top of pre-existing, protracted refugee and IDP populations. The European response, if it is to address the *full* problem of displacement in Iraq, cannot be limited to those scattered by the ISIS advance. As big as even that task is, to do so would be to further forget those extremely

vulnerable individuals whose plight has been superseded in the headlines by the seemingly never-ending string of crises afflicting our world today.

Constant Violence, Recurring Displacement

The violent displacement of individuals and communities has been a near-constant feature of Iraq for at least the past 35 years. Indeed, under Saddam Hussein (president 1979-2003) forced displacement was a well-used tool for achieving political and economic ends.³ During the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from 1980-1988, there was widespread flight of Shi’a and other political dissidents to Syria and elsewhere.⁴ The Shi’a, due to their shared religion with Iran and despite the loyalty Shi’i soldiers demonstrated during the war, were easily portrayed as a fifth column and tens of thousands were deported to Iran by Saddam’s regime.⁵

The Iraqi state was, in parallel to its conflict with Iran, fighting the nationalist aspirations of Iraqi Kurds. The Ba’athist regime systematically targeted Kurdish areas throughout the war to repress demands for Kurdish autonomy and retaliate against Iranian-backed, Kurdish militants. “Between 1980 and 1988, the Ba’ath regime destroyed some 4,000 villages, displacing up to a million people, and eviscerating rural Iraqi Kurdistan.”⁶ The *coup de grâce* in anti-Kurdish fighting was the 1986-1988 Al-Anfal campaign, which ended with over 100,000 Kurdish dead and hundreds of thousands forced from their

2. Dooley, E. (2014) ‘Obama says US will “degrade and ultimately defeat” ISIS like Al Qaeda’, *ABC News*, 5. Sept, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-obama-us-degrade-ultimately-defeat-isis-al/story?id=25261946>

3. Fawcett, J. & Tanner, V. (2002), ‘The Internally Displaced People of Iraq’, *Brookings*.

4. Al Khalidi, A.; Hoffman, S. and Tanner, V. (2007) ‘Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic: A field-based snapshot’, *Brookings*, p. 9.

5. Romano (2005), ‘Whose house is this anyway? IDP and refugee return in post-Saddam Iraq’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 18(4), p.432.

6. Fawcett and Tanner (2002), p.9.

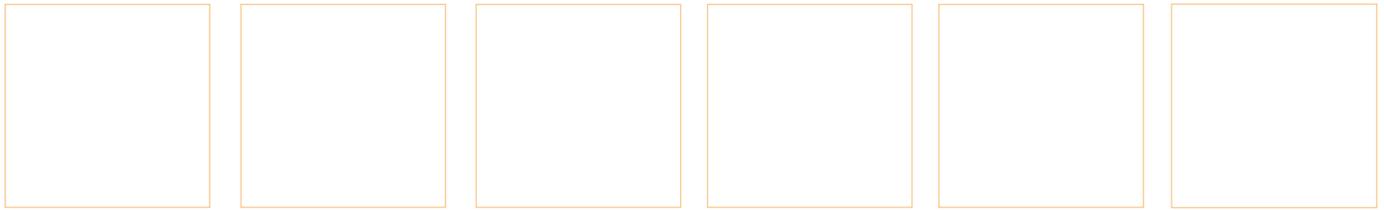
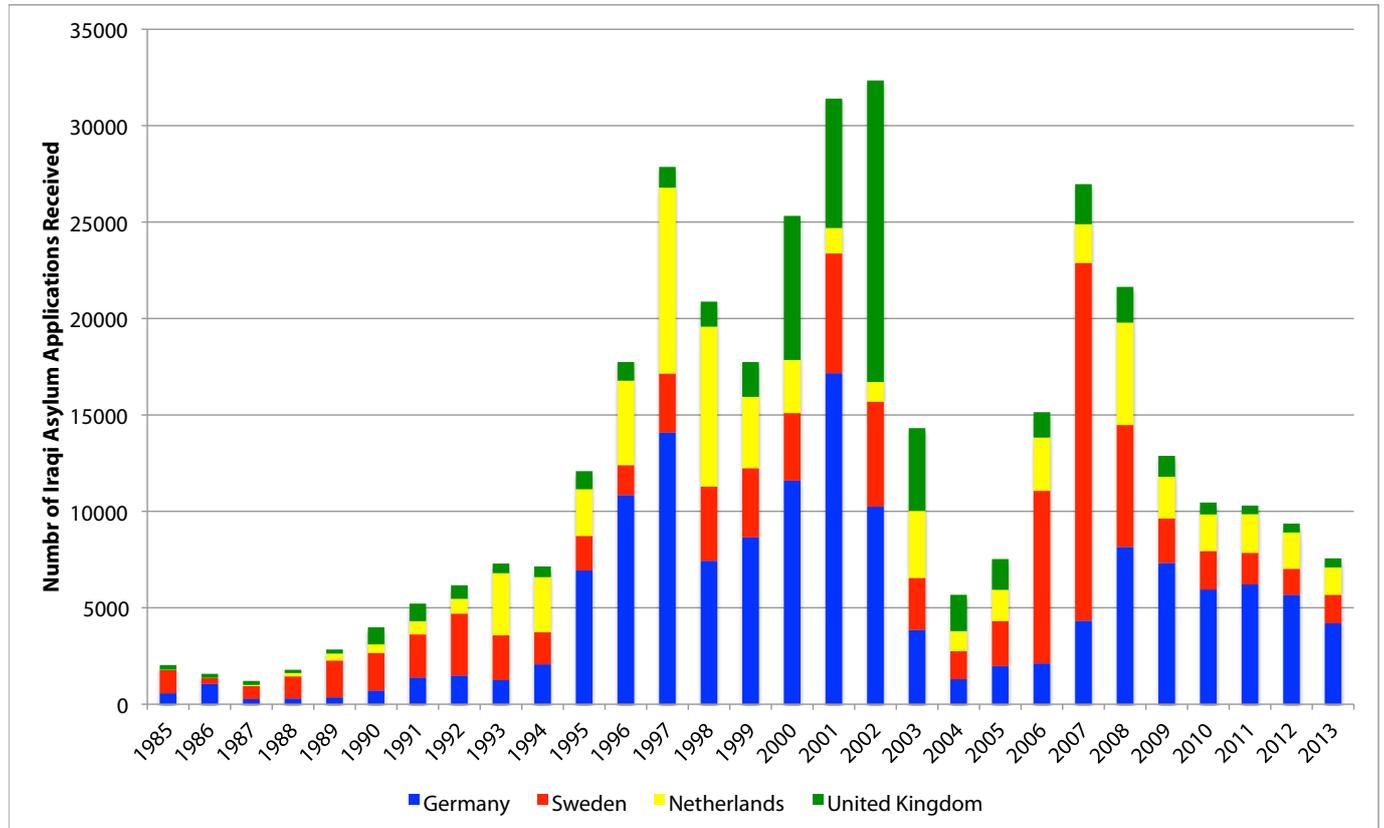


Figure 1: Iraqi Refugee Applications Received in Top 4 Receivers (1985-2013)



Source: Eurostat, National Statistical Bureaus.

homes, “forbidden to return to their villages of origin on pain of death.”⁷

The Iran-Iraq war resulted in non-victories for both sides. Seeking a consolation prize of sorts, Ba’athist generals sent their army into Kuwait in August 1990. This precipitated Operation Desert Storm in January 1991, resulting in thousands of Iraqi deaths as well as the institution of a punitive financial and trade embargo that lasted until 2003. At the same time, and in no small part due to the America’s promise of support, both Kurds and Shi’a rose in rebellion against the Ba’athist state. This promise did not materialise, and coalition forces stood aside while the Iraqi military ferociously countered both uprisings. In the north, an estimated 1.5 million Kurds

entered Iran, while half a million more found themselves trapped on the northern border after Turkish military barred them entry. Turkish intransigence moved the West to institute a no-fly zone against all Iraqi airpower in Kurdish areas.⁸ However government efforts to expel Kurds from certain areas, as part of a concerted programme of ‘Arabisation’, continued until American forces returned in 2003.⁹

The Shi’a *intifada* (uprising) across southern Iraq in March 1991 was likewise crushed. When the remnants of the opposition fled into Iraq’s southern marshes, the state used it as a pretext to drain the marshes and purge the area of its Shi’a inhabitants. “Iraqi security forces used napalm and other chemical weapons, shelled and burned villages, assassinated local leaders ... and abducted heads of families.

7. ‘The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds’, *Human Rights Watch* (1993). <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraq-anfal/ANFALINT.htm>

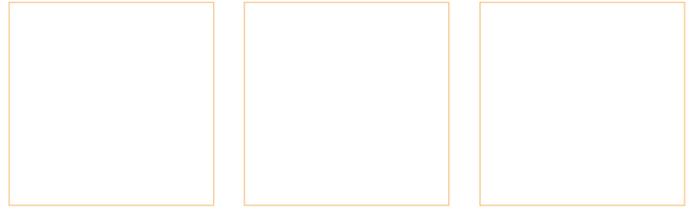
8. Fawcett and Tanner (2002), p.10

9. Romano (2005), p.432.



Other tactics ... included the deliberate contamination of water supplies, the poisoning of the fishing grounds, commercial blockades, [and] the denial of aid.”¹⁰ In targeted areas those who were not killed were expelled, the villages were razed, and the ground laced with mines to prevent return.¹¹ Much like the standing state policy of aggression against the Kurds in the north, attacks against Shi’a in the south continued into 2002. By the end of Saddam’s rule, the total population in the area had dropped by a factor of 10 from an estimated population 250,000 in 1990 to 25,000 a decade later.¹² Brookings estimated that around 300,000, predominantly Shi’i individuals remained displaced in South/Central Iraq and around 600,000 IDPs were in the Kurdish north on the eve of the 2003 American invasion.¹³

Saddam-era repression and crippling sanctions furthermore pushed hundreds of thousands of individuals out of the country. While reliable numbers are hard to come by, one widely-cited paper estimated that more than half a million Iraqis lived in neighbouring countries in 2002: around 300,000 in Jordan, 200,000 in Iran, 40,000 in Syria, and 5,000 in Saudi Arabia.¹⁴ Europe also received a steady and increasing stream of Iraqi refugees from the 1980s onward. The four main receiving countries of Iraqi asylum seekers in Europe – Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom – logged 225,000 asylum applications from Iraqi nationals between 1985 and 2002. Indeed, Europe-wide the highest levels of Iraqi asylum applicants in the past 30 years (40,000+ across the EU27) were registered



in 2001 and 2002, *before* the American invasion took place (See Figure 1).¹⁵

American invasion, insurgency, and internecine fighting

To the surprise of many, the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US and its allies did not, at least initially, trigger a massive outpouring of refugees into neighbouring countries.¹⁶ Limited numbers of refugees returned to Iraq and some attempts were made resettle the ‘old caseload’ of pre-2003 IDPs. However, previous Ba’athist Arabisation policies had not only cleansed areas of certain populations but resettled them with others. Returnees thus often found themselves living in tents or creating new IDPs, with one displaced family displacing another.¹⁷

Conditions deteriorated as the occupation dragged on. Disaffected Iraqis, predominantly Sunnis caught on the losing end of a power swing toward Iraq’s majority Shi’a population, as well as foreign fighters attacked American troops with increasing intensity. American and coalition soldiers fought back, and their capacity for inflicting violence as the occupying power was a main driver of displacement in the 2000s.

Sunni militants also attacked Shi’a population centres and symbols. Events came to a head in early 2006, when Sunni militants bombed the Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra, one of the holiest Shi’i monuments in the world. “Shi’a militiamen, mostly from the Mahdi Army, responded with stunning violence, storming through Sunni neighbourhoods in Baghdad and elsewhere, randomly slaughtering Sunni residents, torching Sunni businesses and defiling Sunni

10. Fawcett and Tanner (2002), p.31

11. Romano (2005), p.432

12. Fawcett and Tanner (2002), p.33

13. Fawcett and Tanner (2002), p.33, 16. Estimates were made using US Committee for Refugees data

14. USRC (2002), cited in Romano (2005), p. 435

15. Eurostat. Data for Sweden (1995; 1996; 2002), Netherlands (2002) and Germany (1985-1996) taken from the respective national statistics bureaus

16. Al-Khalidi et al. (2007), p.5

17. Romano (2005), p. 436

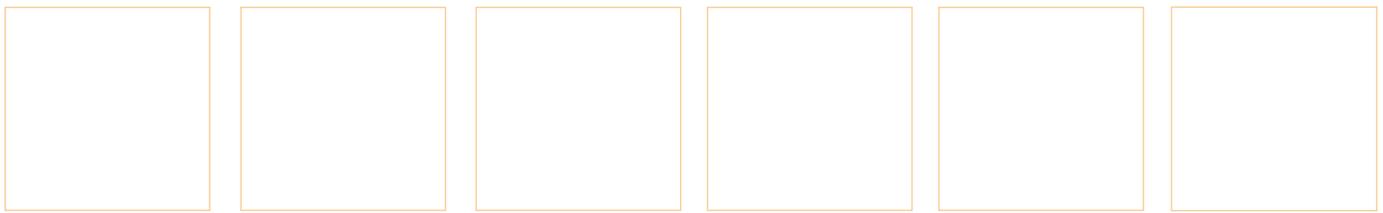
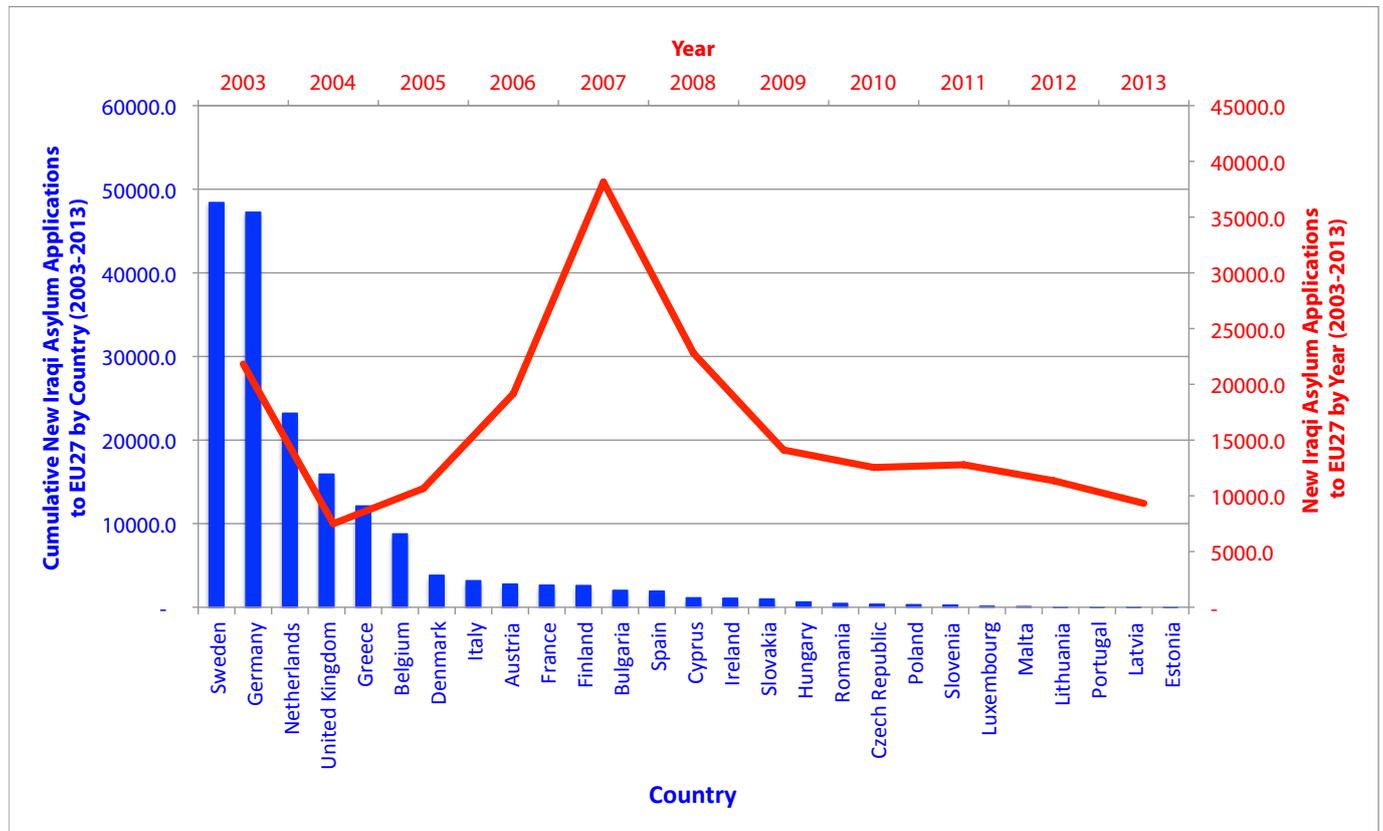


Figure 2: Iraqi Asylum Applications to EU27 by Country and by Year (2003-2013)



Source: Eurostat

mosques. That, in turn, lead to yet more retribution against Shi'a civilians by radical Sunni militias."¹⁸

The cycle of violence quickened over the following months. Iraq in 2006-7 saw the daylight executions of civilians, the torching of neighbourhoods, and an estimated daily average of 30-40 kidnappings in Baghdad alone.¹⁹ Sunni extremists in some areas also demanded that Christians convert, pay *jizya* (a tax on non-Muslims that has not been used in the area since the Ottomans abolished it in the 19th century), or die.²⁰ ISIS – the direct descendent of Al-Qaeda in Iraq – would repeat this demand in 2014.²¹

18. Al Khalidi et al. (2007), p.6

19. Al Khalidi et al. (2007), p.7

20. Al-Khalidi et al. (2007), p.13

21. Evans, D. and al-Rube'i, I. (2014) 'Convert, pay tax, or die, Islamic State warns Christians', *Reuters*, 18 July. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/18/us-iraq-security-christians-idUSKBN0FN29J20140718>

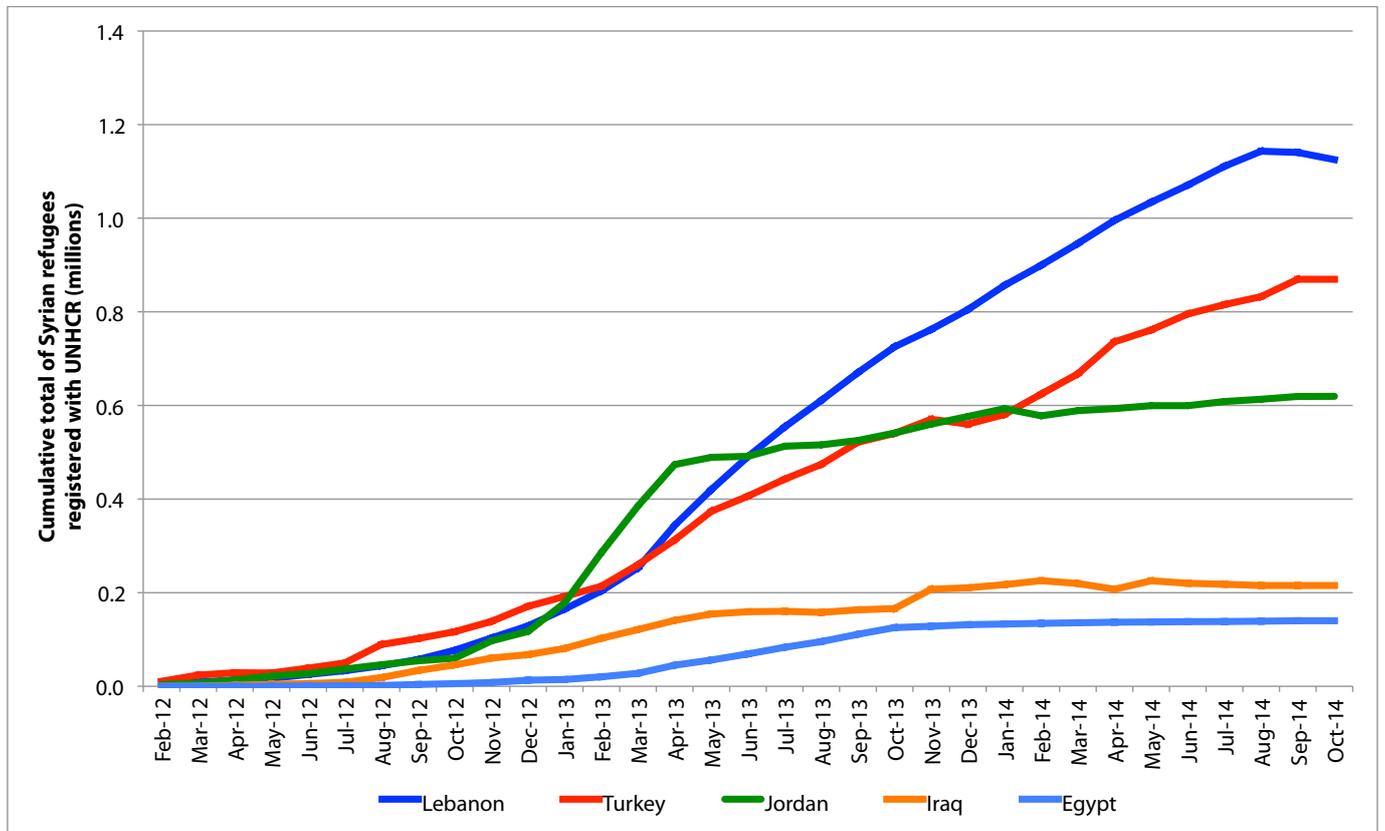
Iraqis fled *en masse*, creating the refugee crisis everybody had feared would happen when the invasion began. Humanitarian actors at the time assumed that 2 million were displaced within Iraq and an additional 2 million were living, often unregistered, as refugees in neighbouring countries. The Norwegian Research Institute FAFO concluded in May 2007 that 162,000 Iraqis were in Jordan, but later revised that number upward, somewhat dubiously, to a shade less than half a million.²² The Danish Research Council put the number in Lebanon at between 26,000-50,000 for the same year.²³ A 2008 statistical survey from the American University in Cairo concluded that 17,000 Iraqis were residing in

22. FAFO (2007), 'Iraqis in Jordan: Their number and characteristics', p. 3

23. DRC, 'Iraqi Population Survey in Lebanon', November 2007, p.10



Figure 3a: Registered Syrian Refugee Populations in Neighbouring Countries



Source: UNHCR

Egypt.²⁴ The remainder – some 1.5 million – were commonly assumed to be in Syria, but Iraqis there were never counted and that number now appears to have been greatly exaggerated.²⁵

Over-estimates aside, the movement of Iraqis in 2006 and 2007 was still the largest displacement the Middle East had seen since 1948, a title which has now been passed onto the Syrian crisis.²⁶ With the sole exception of 2004, European Member States

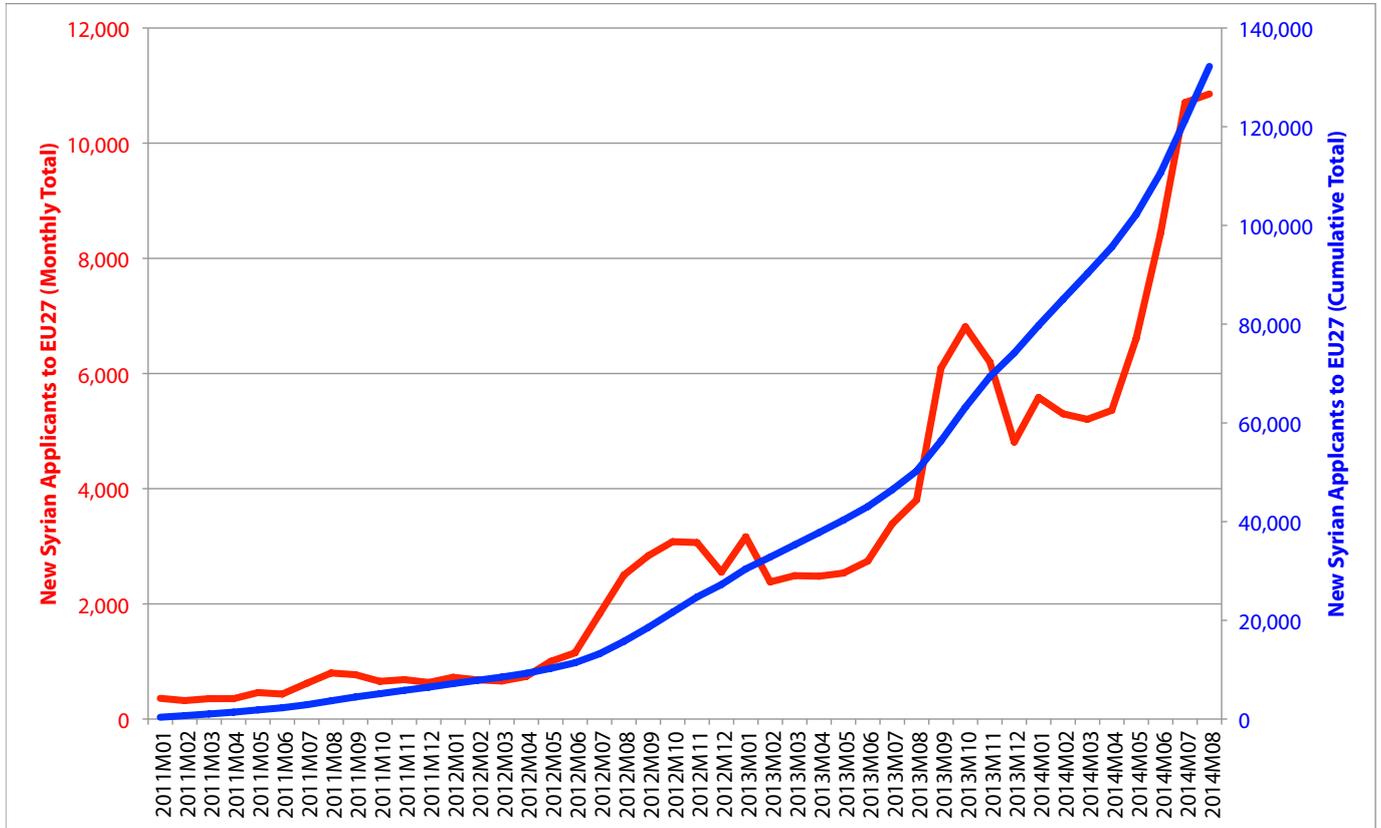
have received no less than 10,000 new asylum applications from Iraqis annually since the Americans entered in 2003. Applications, which may only be filed by people who have entered EU territory, peaked at nearly 39,000 applications in 2007 (See Figure 2).²⁷ Cumulatively, this has resulted in more than 180,000 asylum applications being filed by Iraqi citizens to EU Member States since 2003, with most going to Sweden (48,000), Germany (47,000), the Netherlands (23,000) and the United Kingdom (16,000) (See Figure 2). Only around one-quarter of these were accepted between 2003-2005. The rate of acceptance picked up as conditions worsened over the decade. Since 2006 the positive decision rate for Iraqi asylum applications has fluctuated between 45% and 60%, according to data from Eurostat.

24. Fargues, P.; El-Masry, S.; Sadek, S. and Shaban, A. (2008) 'Iraqis in Egypt: A Statistical Survey in 2008', *The American University in Cairo*
 25. P. Fargues (2013) 'International Migration and the Nation State in Arab Countries' *Middle East Law and Governance*, 5, 5–35, p.26-29
 26. Harper, A. 'Iraq's refugees: Ignored and unwanted', *International Review of the Red Cross*, p.169; Syrian refugee numbers come from UNHCR and IDP estimates from the latest SHARP plan from the UN

27. Eurostat. Data accessed 13 October 2014



Figure 3b: Syrian Asylum Applicants to EU27



Source: Eurostat

The Syria crisis and the rise of ISIS

The Syrian crisis began in March 2011 with relatively modest refugee flows, but as the fighting got worse the pace of the flight quickened. It is now the biggest displacement crisis ever seen in the Middle East. UNHCR had registered just 40,000 refugees in neighbouring countries one year into the crisis. Syrian refugees had topped 1 million 12 months after that. The most recent figures for mid-October 2014 show three million people registered in five neighbouring countries, some 214,000 of which are in Iraq (See Figure 3a). EU Member States, in contrast, have received a comparatively modest amount of Syrians. Slightly less than 124,000 Syrian asylum applications were filed between January 2011 and July 2014, or

2,700 a month. Of these, 63% were filed in Germany and Sweden (See Figure 3b).²⁸

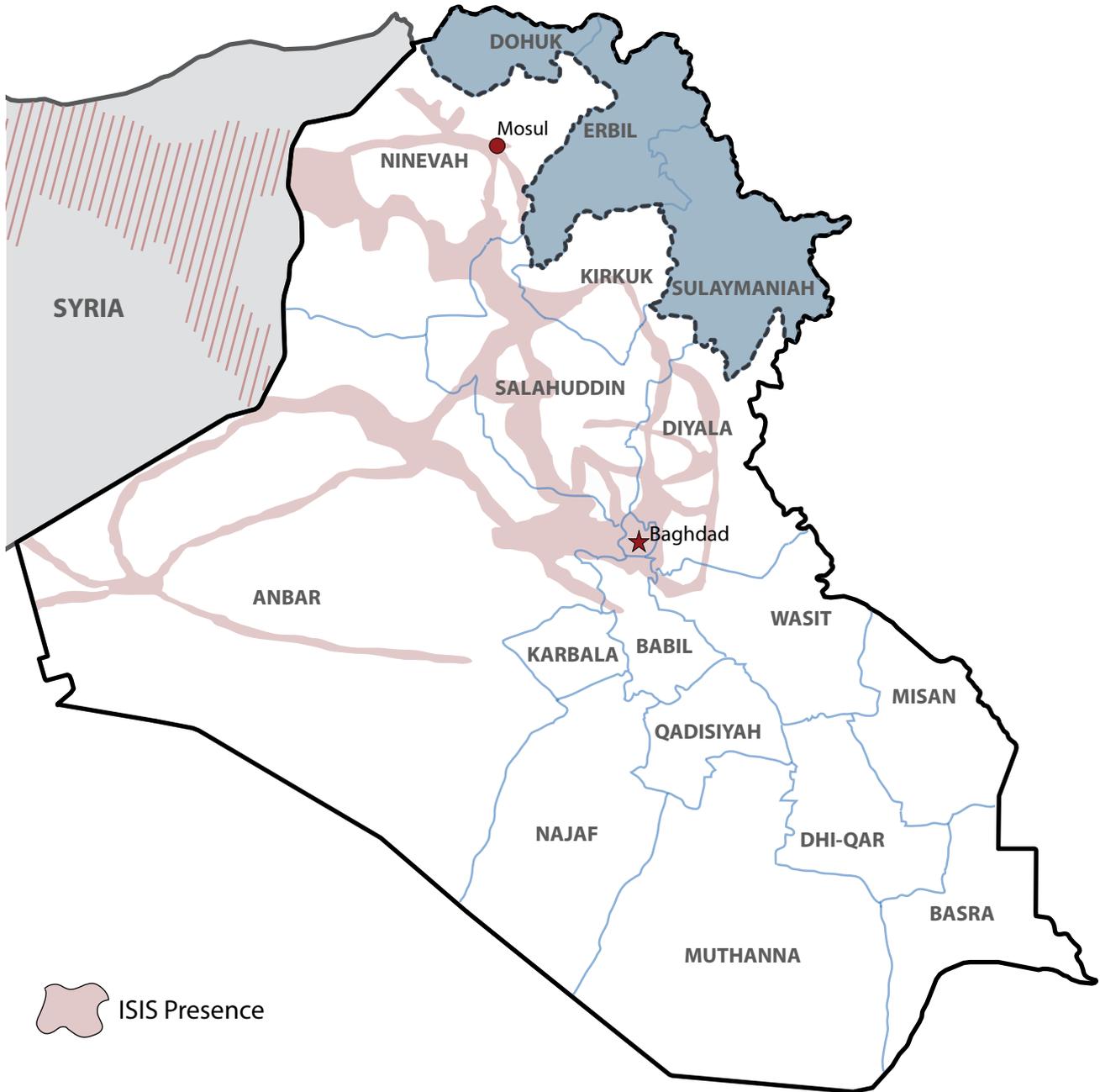
The Syrian civil war, the root cause of the refugee crisis, has been joined by many factions. On one side stands the Syrian regime, its quasi-reserve army/militia the National Defense Force, its Lebanese ally Hezbollah, as well as several smaller groups. On the other stands myriad, often competing opposition groups. Major players include, *inter alia*: the Free Syria Army, Syria's 'secular' opposition backed by the United States; Islamic Front, a coalition of groups including Liwa at-Tawhid, the Muslim Brotherhood affiliate that is the main opposition in Aleppo; Jabhat an-Nusra, al-Qaeda's Syria branch; and ISIS.

ISIS has its origins in America's 2003 adventure in Iraq. The brainchild of Abu Musab az-Zarqawi, it

28. Eurostat. Data accessed 13 October 2014



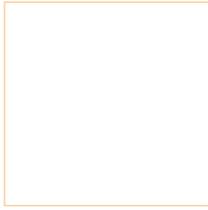
Figure 4: ISIS Presence in Iraq and Syria, as of 19 August 2014



Source: Syria Needs Analysis Project (SNAP), ACAPS

was founded shortly after the American invasion as Jama'at al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad. It quickly rose to notoriety after it aligned itself with Osama bin Laden, changed its name to Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and made the Shi'a their target of choice. Az-Zarqawi was killed by American bombs in 2006, but the group survived. By the time war broke out in Syria it had changed its name

to Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and was commanded by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, now the self-styled caliph of Islamic State. ISI's fighting force was strongly bolstered by the former commanders and soldiers of Saddam's military, many of whom had been co-opted by the Americans only a few years earlier to fight against Al-Qaeda in Iraq. They switched



sides when they found themselves sidelined by the Shi'i al-Maliki government, which had no intention of sharing power with its former tormentors (see above), after the American withdrawal in 2011.²⁹

Al-Baghdadi declared the formation of Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham in April 2013 as a deliberate expansionary project to involve his group in Syria.³⁰ ISIS now maintains a strong presence in the eastern provinces of ar-Raqqa, al-Hasakah, and Deir az-Zor. It has captured wide swaths of territory, and in doing so effectively erased much of Iraq's western border with Syria at least for the duration of its dominance there. The group's capture of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, on 9 June and the declaration of a caliphate with Al-Baghdadi as caliph marks the culmination of this campaign (See Figure 4).

No longer affiliated with al-Qaeda, ISIS is one of the most extreme and brutal factions fighting today. The western-backed Free Syrian Army and al-Qaeda's Jabhat an-Nusra, as well as myriad other groups, have made common cause against it since the beginning of the year. Over the summer they largely succeeded in expelling ISIS from most of Syria's northwest provinces. It is now resurgent there, and ISIS fighting in Kobane, Syria above Aleppo recently sent an estimated 130,000 Syrian Kurds across the Turkish border in 96 hours (18-22 Sept.).³¹

Since this time Iraqi civilians and Western audiences alike have been treated to a never-ending saga of atrocity, cruelty, and murder. ISIS celebrated its leader's coronation by demanding that religious minori-

ties in Mosul convert, leave, pay the *jizya* tax (see above), or be put to the sword. They had 24 hours to comply.³² They followed this by putting thousands of Yazidis under siege atop Mt. Sinjar, a barren slope without water or food, for a week in early August. Most recently, the beheadings of American journalists James Foley (19 August) and Steven Sotloff (2 Sept.), as well as British aid workers David Haines (14 Sept.) and Alan Henning (3 Oct.), have confronted Western audiences with ISIS's pornographic violence as never before. Yet as horrific as each of these events are, they do not capture the scale or longevity of Iraq's chronic crisis of violence and displacement.

IDPs and refugees in Iraq today

The fighting of the past year is but a new act in Iraq's seemingly endless instability and displacement. UNHCR estimated that prior to January 2014, when ISIS fighters made their debut by wresting control of Fallujah from the Iraqi security forces,³³ Iraq already housed 1.13 million IDPs who had been displaced during the 2006-08 fighting.³⁴ It was also giving shelter to some 217,000 registered Syrian refugees, the vast majority of whom are ethnically Kurdish and some 96% have sought shelter in the Autonomous Kurdistan Region (KR-I).³⁵

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) attempts to monitor the movements of IDPs in Iraq

29. Ghosh, B. (2014) 'ISIS: A short history', *The Atlantic*, 14 Aug. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/isis-a-short-history/376030>

30. 'ISI Confirms That Jabhat Al-Nusra Is Its Extension In Syria, Declares 'Islamic State Of Iraq And Al-Sham' As New Name Of Merged Group', *MEMRI*, April 8 2013. <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/7119.htm>

31. 'Syrian Kurds halt ISIL push' near Turkey', *AlJazeera*, 22 Sept 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/09/syrian-kurds-isil-kobane-201492285029457801.html>

32. Rubin, A. (2014). 'ISIS Forces Last Iraqi Christians to Flee Mosul', *The New York Times*, 18 July. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/world/middleeast/isis-forces-last-iraqi-christians-to-flee-mosul.html>

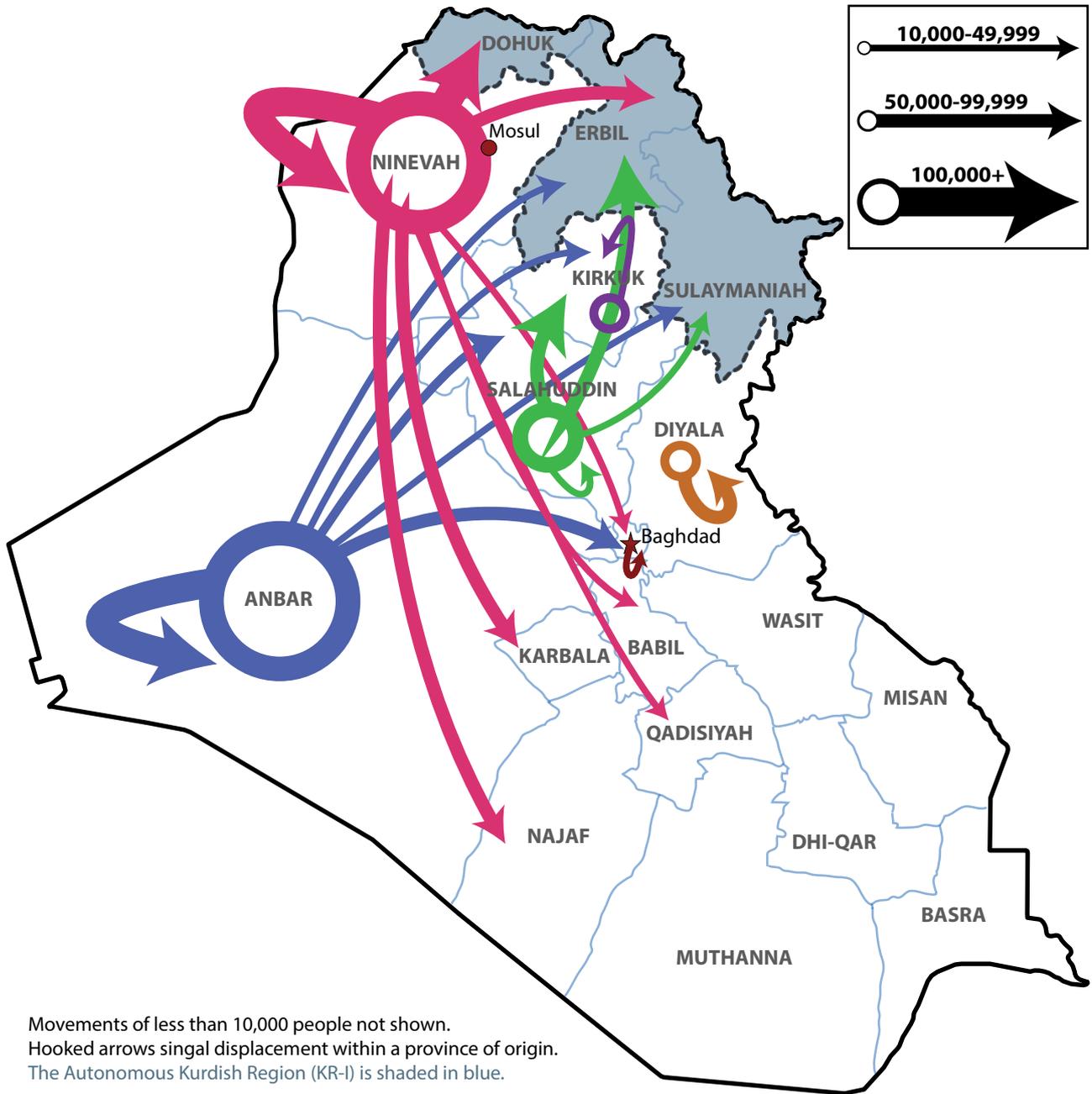
33. 'Iraq government loses control of Fallujah', *Al Jazeera English*, 4 January 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/01/iraq-government-loses-control-fallujah-20141414625597514.html>

34. 'UNHCR concerned as sectarian violence in Iraq threatens new internal displacement', *UNHCR*, 24 Sept. 2013. <http://www.unhcr.org/print/5241644c9.html>

35. UNHCR



Figure 5: IDP Movements in Iraq by Province of Origin and Destination, (as of 19 August 2014)



Source: Displacement Tracking Matrix, IOM

using its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). The DTM³⁶ relies on community leaders, local authorities, security forces, government registration data,

36. For more information on the International Organisation for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix in Iraq, as well as access to the data, see: <http://iomiraq.net/dtm-page>

and other agencies to identify IDP locations. When the security situation permits, field teams survey the IDPs to understand their profile, movement history, shelter, and basic needs. This makes the information provided by the DTM necessarily incomplete, but it is the best data available for a population notori-



ously hard to track. This paper references DTM data released 28 August. The reader should note that, as neither are all IDP locations known nor are they able to be continuously monitored, discussion of DTM data and its visual depiction in Figure 5 can only refer to the province of origin and current location for IDPs *on this date*. It does not capture the many intermediary steps experienced by those forced to move repeatedly in order to stay out of harm's way.

The DTM estimates slightly less than 1.7 million *new* people have been displaced since January 2014 across nearly 1600 locations.³⁷ The composition of the displaced includes people from all religions, sects, ethnicities and socio-economic classes. Thus while certain patterns of movement are linked to the profile of individual IDPs, and although ISIS claims to follow Sunni Islam, ISIS violence is not one 'category' of people punishing another. It is a political project that targets anybody who does not (or cannot) conform to it, regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliations.

Nearly all IDPs (93%, some 1.5 million people) come from the three provinces where the ISIS hammer has hit hardest: Ninevah (49%), Anbar (29%), and Salahuddin (15%). Patterns of movement within these provinces differ. Two-thirds of IDPs from Anbar have circulated within the province. In contrast, 90% of those displaced in Ninevah and Salahuddin have fled their provinces of origin (See Figure 5). A small number have reportedly escaped to Jordan, while others have crossed into Syria's al-Hasakeh province, itself a site of violence³⁸ The turmoil is spreading, and fighting in both countries continues to generate new IDPs with few good options.

37. Using the 1 Sept. 2014 round of the [DTM-Iraq](#). The DTM is the best data we have at the moment, but IOM fully admits that security concerns and multiple movements make it necessarily incomplete.

38. 'Iraq Displacement Profile', ACAPS, 4 July 2014

An estimated 750,000 Iraqis, a little less than half the entire population of 2014 IDPs, have found their way to the Autonomous Kurdish Region (KR-I). They are technically classified as IDPs as they have not left Iraq. However this inaccurately describes their situation, as KR-I security forces operate border controls for non-Kurds and issue short-term visas at their discretion. They are thus in many ways closer to refugees than IDPs, and "ironically, Syrians ... hold a clearer legal status, as they receive a residency permit after registering with the UN agency."³⁹

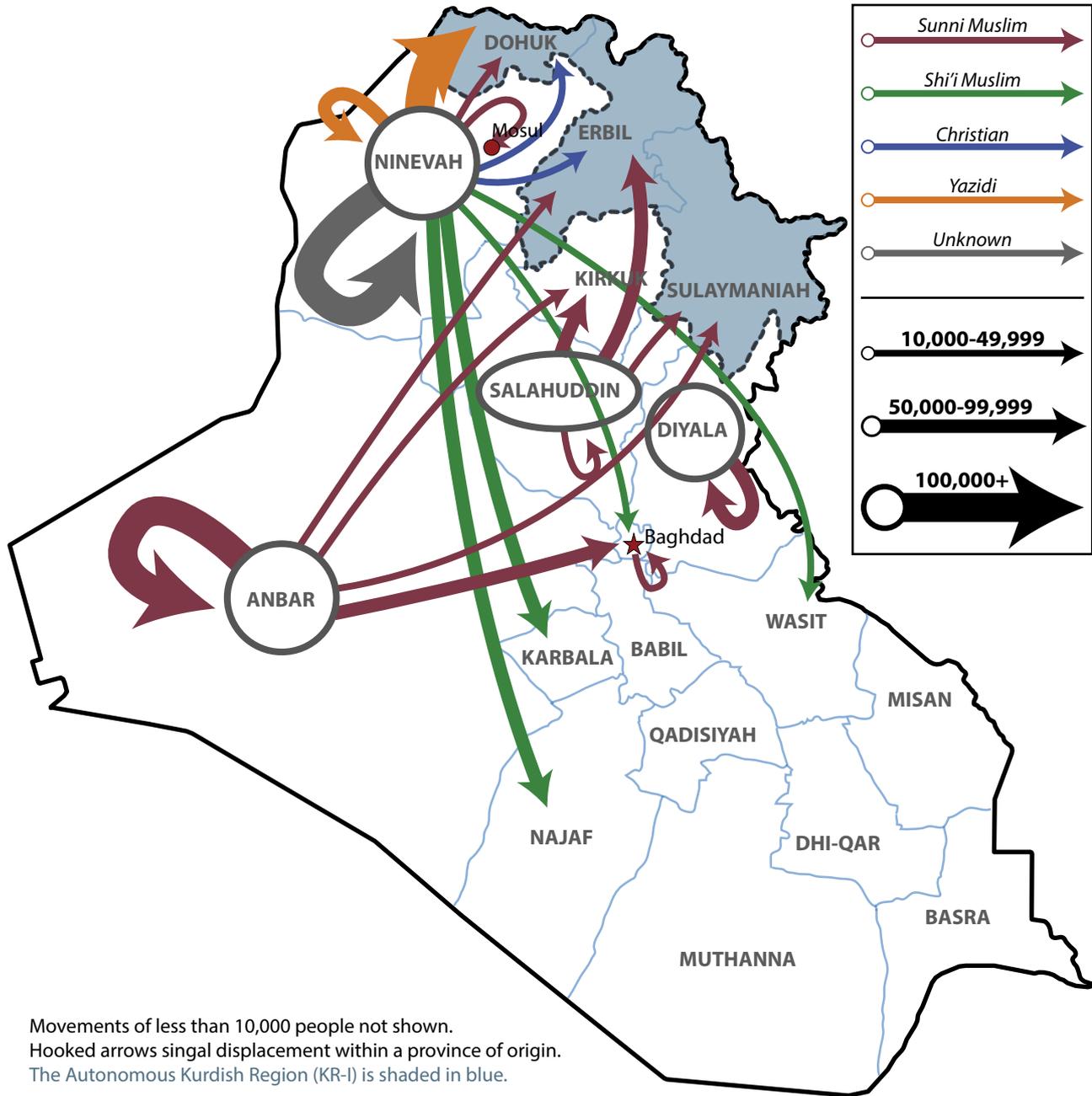
This tenuous legal situation is exacerbated by a lack of humanitarian programmes in KR-I geared specifically for dealing with IDPs. The programmes that exist were designed to meet the needs of Syrian refugees, and to date there is no systematic way to handle IDPs in KR-I or Iraq more generally. Indeed, the Iraqi government in Baghdad has shown neither ability nor interest in ameliorating the suffering of its displaced citizens.

The directions of flight in Iraq are not random. Breaking down the movements by ethnicity and religious group reveals that a type of ethno-religious cleansing or consolidation is taking place in Iraq today (see Figure 6). On the one hand, Sunni Arabs from Anbar and Salahuddin who have left their province of origin have moved north and east to KR-I (27%), Kirkuk (12%), and Baghdad (9%). Kirkuk, while not in KR-I proper, is claimed by the Kurdish authorities and has a strong Kurdish military presence. They are joined by around 372,000 Iraqi Kurds, 91% of whom are Yazidi. Nearly all of them come from Ninevah province. Of these, 81% have fled north to Dohuk while another 17% have remained in Ninevah, accounting for nearly the entire Kurdish IDP population of 2014. The estimated 56,000 Christians that have been forced from their homes have,

39. Hoffmann, Sophia (2014) 'Nowhere to turn for Mosul's refugees', MERIP, July 15. <http://www.merip.org/nowhere-turn-mosuls-refugees>



Figure 6: IDP Movements in Iraq by Religious Group (as of 19 August 2014)



Movements of less than 10,000 people not shown.
 Hooked arrows signal displacement within a province of origin.
 The Autonomous Kurdish Region (KR-I) is shaded in blue.

Source: Displacement Tracking Matrix, IOM

almost without exception, gone to KR-I and Kirkuk as well.

Shi'a are in contrast heading south. Some 83% (178,000 individuals) have gone to a province south of Baghdad, even though nearly all of them originated from Ninevah, a province directly bordering

Dohuk and farther north than Anbar. In doing so, they are reversing Saddam-era policies of Arabisation that transplanted many Shi'a from the south into Iraq's northern provinces (see above). This was done to counter Kurdish dominance in the north while weakening southern Shi'a communities at the same

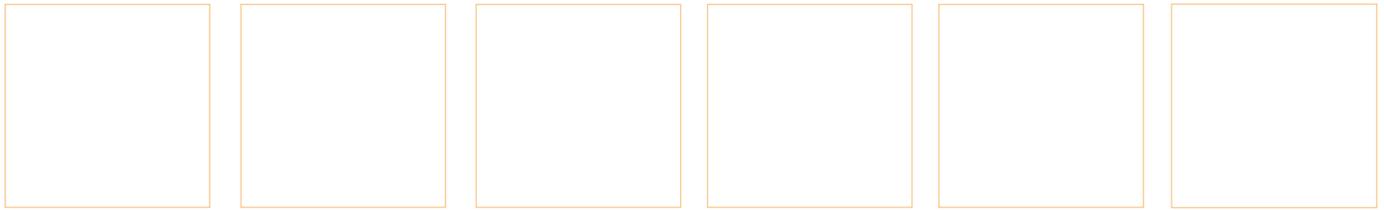
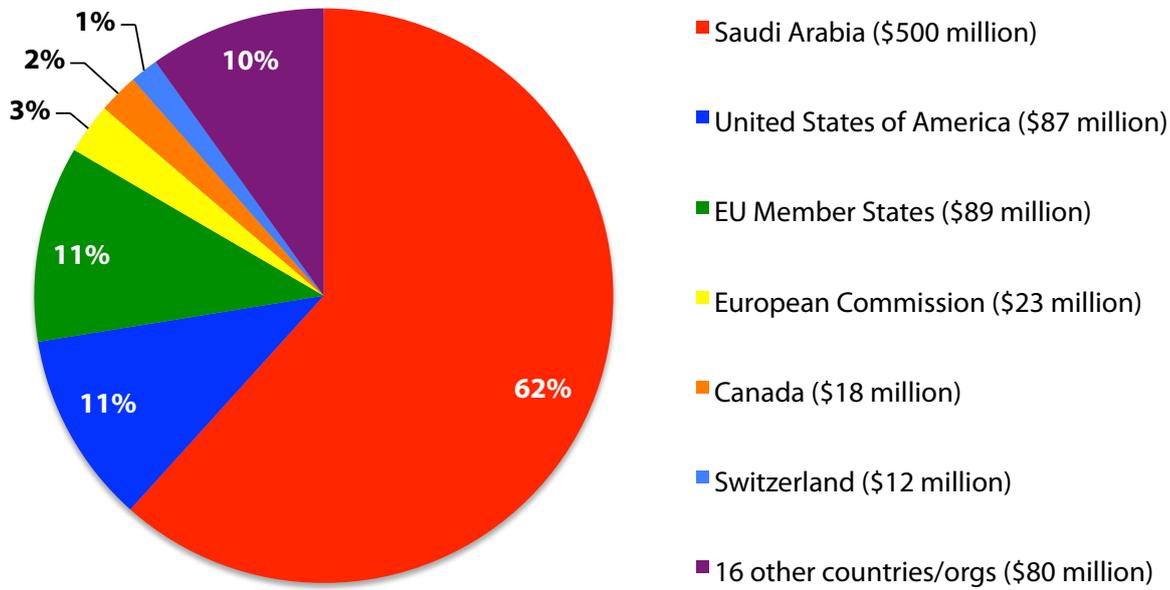


Figure 7: Top Humanitarian Aid Donors to Iraq in 2014



Source: Financial Tracking Service, OCHA. Accessed: 13 October 2014

time.⁴⁰ The longer this pattern of movement lasts, the more marked will be the change to Iraq's ethnic and religious demographics. Kurdish areas will have a more pronounced Sunni Arab presence, while Shi'a populations will be even more concentrated in the south than they already were.

Responding to an uncertain future

The recent beheadings of Westerners, and the promise of more to come, have spurred Western government officials into demanding a more forceful response. Yet it is unclear how much military action will be able to accomplish in terms of peace and stability. What is certain is that as long as the bombs drop, and as long as ISIS rapes, tortures, enslaves, and persecutes its way through its 'caliphate' project, people will continue to run.

Concern for the continued suffering of Iraq's IDPs is, however, in danger of being overshadowed by the military intervention as well as a growing fear that ISIS is a threat to Western nations. This has shifted some donors, especially the American and British governments, to speak more in military than humanitarian terms. Aid to IDPs is also threatened by palpable donor fatigue. The UN Strategic Response Plan for Iraq originally requested \$312 million in humanitarian aid to respond to the IDP crisis in Iraq today. To date OCHA reports that donations total some \$771 million, an incredible 2.5 times the original requested amount.⁴¹ As heartening as that seems, parsing the data reveals that 65% of this has come from Saudi Arabia, which has donated \$500 million in humanitarian aid to Iraq this year. The

40. Romano (2005), p. 432

41. 'Iraq 2014: List of all humanitarian pledges, commitments & contributions in 2014', *Financial Tracking Service, OCHA*, Accessed: 25 Sept. 2014. <http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyDetails&appealID=983>



United States, the second largest donor, has given \$87.5 million, even while it is estimated to have spent ten times that amount bombing ISIS.⁴² The European Union has so far donated \$113 million to Iraq: \$90 million from Member States and \$23 million from the European Commission (See Figure 7). Without Saudi Arabia's largess, OCHA would not yet have met its original funding goal, let alone surpassed it.

Iraq has known 35 years of displacement, not least because of Western military adventures in the region. Until the time comes when people caught up in fighting can return to a normal life, if not their original location, they cannot be left along the wayside.

42. 'Estimating the cost of operations against ISIL', *Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, Sept 2014. <http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2014/09/estimating-the-cost-of-operations-against-isil/>

Migration Policy Centre

The Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, Florence, conducts advanced research on global migration to serve migration governance needs at European level, from developing, implementing and monitoring migration-related policies to assessing their impact on the wider economy and society. The Migration Policy Centre is co-financed by the European Union.

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