REFUGEES IN THE MAKING OF AN ARAB REGIONAL DISORDER

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About the Author

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Summary

Wars in Iraq and Syria have displaced around 12 million Syrians and 4 million Iraqis as of June 2015, marking a historic turning point for the region. The increasingly sectarian nature of these conflicts is dismantling the idea of a nation-state built on societal diversity and is affecting the refugee policies of Lebanon and Jordan, the two Arab countries hosting the most refugees. A substantial new underclass of citizens has emerged, along with an evident expansion in militant identities. Without effective policies, these trends will have profound repercussions on regional and international stability.

A Historic Turning Point

- Wars in Iraq and Syria are generating 90 percent of Arab refugee flows as of 2015. These displacements represent the catastrophic humanitarian implications of a profound political crisis.

- The fallout from the Syrian crisis mirrors the repercussions of Iraq's conflicts but on an amplified scale.

- Governments as well as rogue entities are targeting communities based on ethnic and sectarian identities. These identity politics are playing a significant role in determining patterns of displacement and the potential for return.

- Identity politics inform the refugee policies of Lebanon and Jordan. Fears of prospective changes to current social orders fuel national anxieties.

- The international response to these conflicts is inadequate, while the ongoing course of territorial fragmentation in Syria and Iraq and the absence of immediate political or military solutions are creating a protracted refugee crisis.

Major Lessons for Future Policy

Addressing the refugee crisis is a political and developmental imperative.
Finding adequate resolutions to the catastrophic fallout from the conflicts is primarily a political challenge, and political responses should steer clear from identity-based partition. But a developmental approach is also essential for political stabilization, societal reconciliation, and peace building.

Actors should prepare for protracted displacement. Lebanon and Jordan need to adjust their refugee policies accordingly. International and regional actors should step up to their responsibilities toward host countries and refugees.

The internally displaced problem requires quick international action. Assistance is needed in the form of either protection for those facing imminent threats to their lives or humanitarian and other support.

An international partnership is needed. The scale of the crisis and its wide reach means that responsibility for addressing the fallout must go beyond the United Nations and include partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations.

Education is essential. Inadequate funding for educating millions of children in the region must be rectified. Keeping these children in school gives them a foundation for a better future and makes them less vulnerable to recruitment by extremist organizations.

A Brutal Transition in the Arab Levant

Warring parties in the Iraq and Syria conflicts are increasingly targeting individuals and communities based on sectarian and ethnic identities. The most visible consequences of such actions are brutal population movements that are taking place at a scale and pace unprecedented in the Arab region's recent history.[1] Meanwhile, borders and state control of territory are crumbling in the face of subnational entities. This trend is dismantling the idea of a nation-state built on societal diversity and replacing it with the notion of a sectarian or an ethnic enclave that celebrates uniformity.

Both Iraq and Syria have become wastelands of death and destruction that account for 90 percent of the displacements in Middle Eastern and North African countries.[2] Close to 12 million Syrians and 4 million Iraqis have forcibly fled the mayhem in their countries as of June 2015. The displacement of Iraqis is more protracted, beginning with the first Gulf War in 1990, increasing and decreasing with successive external wars and internal conflicts, and intensifying after the emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (also known as ISIS, for Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). Today, Lebanon and Jordan are the two Arab countries hosting the largest number of these refugees, with around 1.1 million Syrians and 8,000 Iraqis registered with the United Nations (UN) in Lebanon and 629,000 Syrians and 30,800 Iraqis registered in Jordan as of July 2015.[3]

The scale of forced displacements, coupled with widespread political upheaval, signals a historic turning point for the region, the likes of which have not been seen since the end of World War I. As international borders between Iraq and Syria have crumbled under the onslaught of the Islamic State, parties to the various conflicts are seeking to reshape state geographies and ensure control of territories by targeting individuals and communities based solely on identity in what amounts to acts of ethnic cleansing.

Brutal population movements are taking place at a scale and pace unprecedented in the Arab region's recent history.

These forced population movements represent a demographic undoing of the Sykes-Picot agreement, the French-British treaty that drew the borders of countries in the Arab Levant. Ongoing identity-based population displacements are not only reconstituting Syrian and Iraqi societies but also affecting neighboring countries, namely Lebanon and Jordan. Furthermore, this process is dismantling the ethnic and sectarian diversity that has characterized these societies for millennia. It is also driving the militarization of society as some ethnic and sectarian communities seek to arm themselves for protection.

Concerns with identity are not limited to warring parties.

In Lebanon and Jordan, national anxieties related to identity increasingly dominate policy and public discussions about the refugees, albeit in different ways. Policymakers and the populace at large are increasingly alarmed that the dramatic spike in the number of refugees fleeing into their countries is altering current demographics and undermining existing social orders. In Lebanon, the fear is that the predominantly Sunni Syrians will disrupt the delicate sectarian balance in the country. In Jordan, this concern focuses on questions of national origin.

With the escalation of conflict, Syria's neighbors hardened their refugee policies. The initial open-door and humanitarian approach has shifted to a narrower security agenda. Public narratives and official discourse about refugees in both Jordan and Lebanon no longer consider fleeing populations to be "guests" but rather consider them to be "burdens" on their host communities and a potential security threat.

International and regional reactions to the crisis and the inability to either stem the conflict or address its fallout have fueled these anxieties further. Political deadlock at the international level, particularly in the UN Security Council, has allowed a prolongation and escalation of the conflicts. In both Syria and Iraq, different regional and international actors are backing a wide variety of local groups on the ground, while diplomatic efforts best embodied in the Geneva process have yet to bear fruit.[4] This has tilted the scales in favor of military and security options in dealing with the unfolding conflicts, including the broad, U.S.-led coalition fighting against the Islamic State and the more recent Russian military action in support of the Syrian regime.

Meanwhile, a large funding gap in humanitarian assistance has forced a number of UN agencies to reduce vital services, including food and education. UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) require $4.53 billion to carry out a regional response plan to the crisis in Syria for 2015–2016. Yet only $1.83 billion—41 percent—had been secured as of the end of September 2015. In Iraq, only 37 percent of the $2.23 billion requested for 2014–2015 had been funded by February 2015.[5] In June, the UN issued a new humanitarian appeal for $497 million to address the urgent needs of 5.6 million vulnerable Iraqis.[6]

Consequently, a massive number of individuals have been pushed to the fringes of society, where they remain in limbo, unable to move backward or forward with their lives. Effectively, they are in a state of exception, defined by philosopher Giorgio Agamben as a status under which entire categories of people live and where various laws are suspended indefinitely.[7] In this state of exception, a new underclass of Arab citizens is emerging, spread across those four Arab countries—two hemorrhaging citizens and two gaining refugees—and characterized by tremendous setbacks in health, education, and income. This situation also threatens the future of an entire generation of Syrian and Iraqi youth who are growing up in the shadow of conflict and with minimal

prospects for the future. Their despair can trap the region in a cycle of vulner-
ability from which it will need decades to recover.

Communal Identities and the Reshaping of Political Landscapes

Identity politics—the targeting of communities based on ethnic and sectarian
identities—have come to play a prominent role in the ongoing conflicts in both
Iraq and Syria. While some practices are new, particularly those undertaken
by the Islamic State, others are rooted in a longer history of governance in the
region, especially in Iraq and Syria. The 2003 Iraq war, a watershed moment
for the region, created the conditions for an even more tragic expansion of
such practices and the institution of radical ruptures in Iraqi national identity
and society. The unraveling of the Syrian state in 2011 transformed it into the
epicenter of similar sociopolitical changes on a much more amplified scale, and
accelerated the dramatic process of territorial disintegration and catastrophic
societal transformation.

Old-New Policies

In the post–World War II period, the Arab region, particularly the Levant, has
witnessed specific episodes of political targeting as well as brutal, large-scale
displacements of entire communities based on ethnicity or religion.

Regionally, the forced exodus of Palestinians in 1948 when the State of Israel
was established and then in 1967 after the Arab-Israeli War is perhaps the most
significant identity-based displacement in the region in the era of state estab-
lishment and nation building. Close to 726,000 Palestinians forcibly left their
homes and villages in 1948 fearing for their lives, followed by 325,000 more
in 1967.[8] Today, more than 5 million Palestinian refugees
populate camps and urban centers across the world. This
displacement of Palestinians would become the longest
refugee crisis worldwide. It would shape the consciousness
and world experience of successive generations of Arab citi-
zens and inform their understanding of justice. It would
also come to influence the policy responses of Jordan and
Lebanon, both hosting substantial Palestinian refugee
populations, to the more recently displaced Syrians.

Identity politics—the targeting of communities based on ethnic and sectarian identities— have come to play a prominent role in the ongoing conflicts in both Iraq and Syria.

In Syria and Iraq, ongoing conflict has amplified decades of identity poli-
tics wielded for political ends by the Baath regimes of both countries. Former
presidents Hafez al-Assad of Syria and Saddam Hussein of Iraq distributed
state favors, goods, and services, selectively giving preference to some com-
munities and marginalizing others. Both regimes also sought to "Arabize"
territories considered of strategic interest, such as oil fields and agricultural

plains, by moving poor Arab populations to these areas. For example, in 1972, the Syrian government began an intense campaign to appropriate land owned by the Kurds, many of whom had previously been stripped of Syrian nationality, under an agricultural reform plan and settled thousands of Arab farmers in model villages in the area.[9] In Iraq, the Arabization campaign that began in 1975 displaced Kurdish, Assyrian, and Yazidi Iraqis from predominantly Kurdish provinces, particularly Kirkuk, in a bid to undermine Kurdish national aspirations and to control oil fields. The government also moved many poor Arab families, enticed by offers of cheap housing, into this region.[10]

The regimes of both Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein also instigated brutal attacks against select population groups as part of a broader drive to suppress opposition movements and consolidate power. These actions set the scene for broader contemporary grievances. In Syria, the most notorious incident was the crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood in a 1982 military operation, including a three-week-long siege that laid waste to the city of Hama, destroyed most of its historic center, and left 10,000 to 25,000 Syrians dead.[11] In Iraq, attacks against Kurdish populations culminated in the Anfal campaign and a genocidal strike involving chemical weapons against the town of Halabja in 1988 that left thousands dead. In 1991, Saddam Hussein's forces also attacked and killed thousands of Shia, particularly the marshlands community of some 250,000 individuals that had occupied a unique habitat for close to five thousand years.[12]

Iraq 2003: A Watershed for the Levant

The second Gulf War that began in 2003 was a watershed for the Iraqi state and its citizens, initiating an even more profound process of state-society transformation. Beyond the massive destruction to lives and livelihoods, the war to topple a brutal dictator dismantled the central state and allowed new actors such as al-Qaeda and external forces including Iran to gain influence in Iraq. Meanwhile, key political decisions made in the postwar period set the scene for the rise of virulent forms of identity politics.

While the new Iraqi constitution guaranteed equal rights and fundamental freedoms to all citizens, the governance system put in place institutionalized political representation based on ethnic and sectarian identities and focused more on the differences between communities and less on their common bonds.[13] The patronage-based networks and corruption that emerged, as well as the disastrous impact of former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki's divisive and nepotistic policies, further aggravated sectarian tensions and eventually paved the way for subsequent conflict as well as the emergence of the so-called Islamic State.

In this larger political context, population displacements occurred in stages and intensified with bouts of conflict. The most significant identity-based displacement occurred during the civil conflict between 2006 and 2008, when sectarian violence forced about 1.6 million Iraqis to leave their homes.[14] It also reconstituted sections of Iraq's political and social geography on an ethnic or sectarian basis, leading to the segregation of cities and administrative zones. One example is the separation wall constructed by the Multi-National Force in Iraq in 2007 around the district of Adhamiya to restore stability in the wake of sectarian bombings. It carved Baghdad into a series of disconnected enclaves that have drifted further apart and reinforced victimhood narratives among communities.[15]

The sweep of the Islamic State into Iraqi territory intensified the process of identity-based displacement and the recasting of territories on a sectarian and ethnic basis.

To make things worse, the lack of political will of successive Iraqi governments and their failure to address the identity components of this unfolding tragedy meant that 759,000 Iraqis, officially registered as internally displaced from earlier rounds of conflict, have not returned to their homes. Thousands of other internally displaced Iraqis are believed to be unregistered.[16] Key obstacles to return include destroyed dwellings and damaged infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, waiting to be reconstructed; institutional and fiscal bottlenecks that characterize the process of registering internally displaced persons through the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement; war-related trauma associated with areas of origin; and fear of going home without visible guarantees of safety.

The sweep of the Islamic State into Iraqi territory in June 2014 has further intensified this process of identity-based displacement and the recasting of territories on a sectarian and ethnic basis. The rogue group not only gained territorial control over large spans of two countries but also announced the establishment of its own state, or caliphate—one that did away with existing nation-states in favor of a regressive and unitary interpretation of identity. In the year that followed, 2.57 million people fled as the group targeted entire communities that had lived on the plains of Iraq for centuries.[17] The Christians of Mosul forcibly left their ancestral homes, but they fared better than the Yazidis, Shabaks, Mandaeans, Shia, and Turkomans, many of whom were hunted down and killed. Fleeing populations scattered to more than 2,000 locations across the country and beyond Iraq's borders, adding to the number of Iraqis displaced by previous conflicts.[18] Thousands of Yazidi women and children continue to be enslaved by the Islamic State.

These mass migrations forced by the Islamic State were significant beyond their scale and sheer brutality. In one sweep, the group has initiated an Arab pogrom, or an ethnic cleansing, that seeks to do away with the remaining but vital constituent of Iraq's historic identity: its ethnic and cultural diversity. It is also attempting to erase centuries of coexistence and intermingling among

communities of varied ethnic and sectarian groups. The wide scattering of these communities makes ensuring their continued viability far more challenging.

Notwithstanding the ruthlessness and regressive ideology of the Islamic State and similar groups, the response of government institutions to this crisis is also aggravating identity-based tensions.

> **Iraqi policymakers have based some of their decisions about the type of support extended to communities displaced by the Islamic State on sectarian and ethnic considerations.**

Since 2014, Iraqi policymakers have based some of their decisions about the type of support extended to communities displaced by the Islamic State on sectarian and ethnic considerations. For example, authorities in Iraq's Kurdish region, where close to 1.45 million internally displaced persons sought refuge, have provided support to Kurdish, Christian, and Yazidi communities while keeping Sunni, Shia, and Turkomans on the borders of Kurdistan and even flying some Shia to other parts of the country.[19] Additionally, some 611,700 Sunnis displaced from areas controlled by the Islamic State have been denied entry into areas controlled by the government of Iraq and the Kurdish peshmerga forces, leaving them with few options to seek safety.[20]

The Iraqi government's complex relationship with and its reliance on local militias for security and military functions have also undermined confidence in the central authority and led to documented abuses by these militias at the local level. This is further inflaming societal tensions and posing additional challenges for future reconciliation to the extent that when villages or towns of origin are recaptured from militants by forces affiliated with the government, many of the displaced, fearful for their lives, have not returned. Local forces have also prevented the return of others accused of sympathizing with the Islamic State by virtue of being Sunni.[21]

Collectively, these factors are reinforcing primordial or subnational identities at the expense of national belonging. They are also driving the increased militarization of ethnic and sectarian communities. Since the Islamic State's takeover of Nineveh Province in June 2014, most communities have taken up arms under the auspices of either the government militia (known as al-Hashd al-Shaabi) or the peshmerga forces and are fighting to liberate their areas from the Islamic State. Some have also conducted revenge killings against those they perceived as collaborators with the Islamic State and have formed private militias to protect themselves and their communities.[22]

The Unraveling of the Syrian State

The brutal response in 2011 by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime to a peaceful civil uprising demanding political and socioeconomic reform opened the door for multiple civil wars and a dramatic collapse of state and society that have not only mimicked but also surpassed the colossal losses in Iraq. Globally

one in five refugees is Syrian, and 35 percent of Syrians have forcibly moved in the span of four years.[23]

Syria today is broadly governed—to the degree that it is governed at all—by five distinct entities: the Syrian government; the Islamic State; the Nusra Front, an opposition group with ties to al-Qaeda, and its allies; the Free Syrian Army and other rebel groups; and the Kurds. The Syrian state has lost control of as much as 80 percent of its territory to these different nonstate actors as well as thousands of smaller paramilitary groups.[24] It is also conducting brutal air raids with lethal barrel bombs over civilian areas across much of Syria. Indications are that these bombs have killed more civilians than the Islamic State and al-Qaeda combined.[25]

The net result of these multiple wars on the lives and livelihoods of Syrians has been catastrophic. As of January 2015, the conflict had claimed around 206,000 lives, plus 840,000 wounded and more than 85,000 people reported missing,[26] many assumed to have been captured by government forces at the beginning of the civilian uprising. Close to 4 million Syrians of a total population of 22 million have sought refuge in neighboring countries, and an additional 7.6 million are displaced within Syria.[27] Recent estimates suggest that the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria is 12.2 million, including 460,000 Palestinian refugees.[28] The funds required to address humanitarian needs, meanwhile, have increased fivefold between 2012 and 2015.[29] Infrastructural damage and economic losses have been astronomical.

Beyond this toll on human lives and on physical and economic infrastructure, mounting evidence indicates that the Syrian government and subnational military groups are using identity-based population displacements as a strategy of war, in what also amounts to ethnic cleansing. As described by the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, the situation indicates that "targeted human rights and humanitarian law violations conducted on discriminatory grounds, that is, geographic origin, religious, political or other perceived affiliation," are driving the displacement process.[30] Government attacks against densely populated areas and territories where the displaced have sought refuge "evince a strategy of terrorizing civilians," in the words of the UN high commissioner for human rights, to make opposition-held areas unlivable, driving Syrians to areas held by the government or outside the country.[31] Recent news reports point to an even more insidious and deliberate strategy of sectarian engineering—the replacement of one sectarian population group with another—in strategic areas such as Zabadani, where ferocious battles are taking place.[32]

Syrian government and subnational military groups are using identity-based population displacements as a strategy of war, in what also amounts to ethnic cleansing.

These actions are in line with the increasingly dominant sectarian narrative of the unfolding war. This narrative was deliberately perpetuated by the Syrian regime as part of its wider war strategy and to paint a picture of the civilian

uprising as paving the way for a takeover of the country by fundamentalist Sunnis such as the Islamic State. In such a narrative, the regime is presented as the sole protector of ethnic and religious minorities and a key partner for the international community in fighting the terrorism undertaken by such entities.

Not surprisingly, such actions have intensified sectarian sentiments, affecting the strategic choices of refuge for the displaced and reproducing the sectarian logic that the conflict has now assumed. As of 2013, the escalation of conflict and the deliberate targeting of religious and ethnic minorities, through systematic bombardment by the regime or by extremist groups such as the Islamic State, the Nusra Front, the Tawhid Brigade, and the Islamic Front, forced members of these communities to seek refuge with relatives in different parts of the country. Kurds who fled Sheikh Maqsoud, near Aleppo, in 2014 sought refuge with their kinfolk in the city of Hasakah, which is under Kurdish control. Meanwhile, Christians and Alawis escaping the conflict in the central regions of Syria have moved to the coastal towns of Tartus and Latakia, which are under the control of the regime.[33] Such patterns of displacement bode ill for longer-term societal reconciliation, particularly when the perpetrators may be former neighbors or government forces.

This dramatic unraveling of borders and the disintegration of the state into multiple entities means that for many refugees the chance of going back to their homes is slim at best. As in Iraq, the likelihood the displaced may eventually return depends on who controls their homes and towns of origin. Provincial military leaders often view the presence of specific communities as a disruption of the power balance in the areas they control. In cities such as Homs, for example, the return of Sunni families to their homes has not taken place; in many instances, these homes were either turned to rubble or occupied by Alawi families fleeing conflict in their own towns.[34] Claims that the Kurdish People's Protection Units (the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party) displaced 23,000 Arabs after the liberation of the strategic border town of Tal Abyad from the Islamic State in late June 2015 generated accusations of large-scale population transfers as part of a larger plan to consolidate Kurdish-controlled territories.[35]

Identity Politics and National Anxieties

Meanwhile, the arrival of large numbers of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan triggered deep anxieties that the fundamental principles and sense of identity that underpin their own nation-states would be undone. In Lebanon, this question has taken a sectarian dimension, while in Jordan it revolves around national origin.

Syrian refugees began arriving in Lebanon and Jordan in 2011 after the brutal crackdown by the Syrian regime. About 1.1 million Syrians are now living in Lebanon, spread out across 1,700 locations.[36] More than 50 percent are

below the age of eighteen. Lebanon bears the biggest burden relative to its size, with the highest number (257) of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants.[37] In Jordan, the flow of refugees has exploded from 2,000 who crossed Jordanian borders in 2011 to 629,000 four years later. Despite the construction of four refugee camps (Zaatari, Azraq, Mrajeeb al-Fhood, and Cyber City), close to 90 percent of the Syrian diaspora lives in host communities and makeshift settlements across the country.

This massive inflow of Syrian refugees has pushed the Lebanese and Jordanian coping mechanisms and the financial and infrastructural capacities to the limit. For Jordan, the Syrian refugee crisis comes on the heels of the earlier Iraqi refugee crisis precipitated by the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and the sectarian civil war that followed.

The influx of Syrian refugees has awakened sectarian demons in the Lebanese psyche.

Because of these identity-based and practical concerns, the attitudes of decisionmakers in both countries point to an increasingly palpable yearning to wish the refugee crisis away. This yearning is shaping the development of a refugee strategy characterized by the gradual increase in restrictive policies and a shrinking protection space.

Awakening Sectarian Demons in Lebanon

The influx of Syrian refugees has awakened sectarian demons in the Lebanese psyche. For many, the Syrian refugee crisis has the potential to undo the fundamental basis of the country's governance system and social order.

Lebanese officials perceive the large influx of mainly Sunni refugees as a threat to the delicate sectarian balance of the country. The Lebanese state officially recognizes eighteen religious and ethnic communities, and a long-standing national pact among the country's political leadership distributes the top government posts among its key religious communities.[38] Fears are that dramatic changes in the demographic balance between sects could open the door for demands to reconsider the basis of this pact.

This concern with sectarian balance intersects in complex ways with Lebanon's experience with the protracted Palestinian refugee crisis. Eight decades after their arrival in Lebanon as a short-term measure awaiting a political solution, Palestinians continue to reside in twelve refugee camps across the country. With the exception of middle-class Christian families, the Lebanese state has denied most Palestinian refugees (mainly Sunni Muslims) citizenship rights for fear of altering the country's sectarian balance. Moreover, despite radical differences in context and circumstances, many Lebanese recalled with alarm the previous military involvement of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the country. It used southern Lebanon as an operational launching pad for military attacks on Israel in the 1970s and subsequently acted as a trigger, and then as an active participant, in the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1982.

Perhaps the most palpable expression of this overlap between national anxieties and refugee policy lies in the debates that took place around the construction of refugee camps for fleeing Syrians. The Lebanese government has categorically refused to build such camps, despite repeated advice from international organizations. Concerns focused mainly on the idea that the construction of camps would be tantamount to acknowledging the potential permanence of the Syrian populations, as happened with the Palestinians.

With the escalation of conflict and the expanding military participation of Hezbollah, the Shia political party aligned with Iran, in the Syrian war in support of the regime, resistance to the construction of these camps took on an additional military and sectarian tint. In short, Hezbollah focused its public position on the undesirability of having such camps within its geographic areas of influence. When the UN announced plans to build a dozen refugee camps across the country, Hezbollah's deputy leader, Sheikh Naim Qassem, objected: "We cannot accept refugee camps for Syrians in Lebanon because any camp will become a military pocket that will be used as a launch pad against Syria and then against Lebanon."[39] However, it is likely that Hezbollah was equally concerned that this mainly Sunni population would further tip the demographic balance in the country away from its hegemony. The country's leadership also displayed a rare show of unity across political and religious divides around this issue, with ministers from the different political parties echoing Qassem's statement.

Questions of National Origin in Jordan

The issue of national origin has shaped Jordan's perspective on the refugee crisis. Established in the post–World War I era under the British Mandate, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, unlike Lebanon, granted full citizenship to the majority of Palestinians who fled to the country following the establishment of Israel in 1948 and again after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

In light of these circumstances, the monarchy has built its legitimacy around East Jordanian national identity. In time, it came to rely on a delicate balance between the interests of East Bank Jordanian tribes and Jordanians of Palestinian origin. A central part of this balance is the assertion of a distinct Jordanian identity to counter proposals that the country become an alternative homeland for the Palestinians as initially envisioned by the United Kingdom and Israel during the mandate period. Palestinians have also held on to their own distinct identity and their political right of return to their homes of origin.

The issue of national origin has shaped Jordan's perspective on the refugee crisis.

However, the arrival of large numbers of Syrian refugees, after a major influx of Iraqi refugees, threatens to tilt the demographic balance away from East Jordanians even further. This has prompted increased concerns among

East Bankers that they "will become minorities and guests in [their] own nation," according to a former member of Jordan's parliament.[40] Perhaps the clearest example of concerns over the balance of identities is the abhorrent treatment of Palestinian refugees attempting to flee the conflict in Syria. Since 2012, Jordanian authorities have systematically refused entry to Palestinians coming from Syria, with several instances of repatriation to Syria against international laws.[41]

This worry also overlaps with the growing trepidation of many Jordanians about the evident social change caused by waves of incoming populations with different customs and habits. As explained by a current Jordanian minister, these fears vary according to locality. The impact of the refugees' presence differs between the capital Amman, a historically cosmopolitan city that has absorbed previous waves of fleeing populations, and more conservative towns like Mafraq, where refugees make up more than 50 percent of the population, generating even greater apprehensions of change not only to national identity but also to local identities.[42]

State of Exception and Refugee Policies

These identity-related anxieties are affecting the shape of refugee policies. The legal framework through which the governments of both Lebanon and Jordan operate facilitates a humanitarian and security policy approach to the refugee crisis. In due time, this approach is forcing refugees into a state of exception, defined by philosopher Giorgio Agamben as a "no-man's land between political and legal" existence for those involved.[43] In effect, what Agamben is pointing to is the absence of an autonomous space in the political order of contemporary nation-states for individuals, such as refugees, whose rights to dignified lives are reduced to a basic right to life (food and shelter) and for whom the two basic solutions proposed, repatriation or asylum, are simply not possible.

Mind the Legal Gap

Neither Lebanon nor Jordan has ratified the two international conventions for dealing with refugees: the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol.[44] The convention defined refugee status and identified the legal obligations of the host state toward refugees, including guaranteeing their rights to freedom of movement, protection, justice, and work. The protocol removed the geographic and temporal boundaries included in the convention, a post-WWII instrument that had limited its applicability to persons who had become refugees due to events in Europe and prior to January 1951. A basic pillar of both instruments is *non-refoulement*, or protection from being forcibly expelled and returned to a context where freedoms are threatened and lives endangered.

In place of this convention, the governments of Lebanon and Jordan consider fleeing populations as guests and not as refugees. This approach allows both governments to deny refugees a number of basic rights guaranteed by the convention, including the right to identification papers, the right to work, and the right to protection, and to reduce refugees' well-being to the largesse of host countries and international agencies. The thinking behind this policy, as expressed repeatedly by different Jordanian and Lebanese political figures, is to ensure that displaced individuals are not integrated and do not settle in their area of refuge, and that new refugees are not encouraged to flee to either country. To do so, a Jordanian minister remarked, "You try to restrict their access to the labor market." He continued, "You try to restrict their access to areas that could enhance sustainability. You provide the minimum education, health and food, but not anything further. You don't want to enhance their engagement with the rest of the society."[45]

> **The governments of Lebanon and Jordan consider fleeing populations as guests and not as refugees. This approach allows both governments to deny refugees a number of basic rights.**

Some Lebanese politicians have even expressed an overarching desire to wish the refugees away, by making outlandish propositions that repatriation by any means of these de facto refugees is the only durable solution to the crisis. In the words of the minister of labor, "What is at stake now is the proposal that refugees who trust the regime return to the areas under regime control, and those who have faith in Nusra Front and ISIS go to the regions under their control."[46] More recently, the minister of social affairs in Lebanon called for the creation of a joint Lebanese-Jordanian plan for the return of Syrian refugees along the same lines.[47]

Between Security and Humanitarianism:
The Evolution of Refugee Policies

Against this background, both Jordan and Lebanon have espoused a humanitarian- and security-oriented approach to the refugee crisis. The humanitarian approach effectively means limiting support for incoming refugees to the provision of minimum shelter, food, healthcare, and, where possible, education. No projects seeking to promote active economic participation or social integration may be undertaken. The security-based approach considers all refugees as potential threats to stability.

Lebanon and Jordan initially adopted an open-door policy that welcomed refugees and generously provided varying degrees of access to health and educational services. In doing so, they have spent considerable funds on care for incoming refugees. In 2013, the World Bank estimated that the refugee crisis would cost Lebanon $2.6 billion—$1.5 billion in lost revenue and $1.1 billion in providing public services. It also suggested that an additional $2.5 billion would be required for stabilization, that is, to reinstate the access to

and quality of public services to their pre-Syrian-conflict level.[48] Meanwhile, Jordan's Economic and Social Council estimates that the Syrian crisis has cost the country $1.2 billion, with the total estimated to rise to $4.2 billion by 2016.[49]

By 2013, and as the conflict grew more protracted and the capacities of both Lebanon and Jordan were stretched to the limit, their respective governments undertook a series of changes to their refugee policies. The principal policy changes created additional restrictions on the inflow of refugees, their residency conditions, and their access to the labor market. For example, the Lebanese government enacted laws that restrict entry to the country as well as potential employment opportunities for Syrian refugees. These included a new residency permit law, which requires refugees to pay an estimated $200 per person every six months for permits, placing already-impoverished refugees under undue duress.[50] Such insecurity is driving numerous refugees into informal employment in precarious conditions or prompting them to undertake treacherous trips in search of a more secure future, as occurred in mid-2015 with the mass exodus of refugees to Europe. Jordan has also enacted comparable restrictions on residency and employment.

This security mind-set, coupled with the refusal to accord fleeing populations refugee status and rights, renders them vulnerable to abuse and harassment with no recourse to justice. Reports of Syrian refugees forcibly returned home due to "security" concerns indicate that authorities are not upholding the principle of *non-refoulement*.[51] Multiple human rights organizations have also documented the different forms of exploitation that Iraqi and Syrian refugees face.[52] These include a constant fear of arrest, mistreatment by employers or proprietors, and the denial of healthcare and education to children. For many, limited access to resources, as well as living in fear of arrest, is forcing them to make choices that can prejudice their futures, including becoming involved in illicit activities such as the drug trade and sex trafficking.[53] Effectively, it means they cannot resume their lives. As a Syrian refugee who ran a grocery store recounted recently, "After two years of living here, I would rather go to the hellhole that is ISIS territory than continue being subjected to daily humiliations in this country."[54]

These policy changes also sought to appease negative public sentiment over the perceived impact of the refugees' presence on the declining quality of public services as well as access to the labor market. For example, close to 85 percent of Jordanians believe that Syrians should not be allowed into the country, and 65 percent would like to see them confined to refugee camps.[55] Equally vocal and negative voices are heard in Lebanon.

Such negativity emerged from several interrelated factors.

The majority of Syrian refugees have wound up in the most impoverished areas of Lebanon and Jordan, which, in time, has generated competition between refugees and the poorest of Lebanese and Jordanians for scarce resources.

In Lebanon, the largest concentrations of refugees are mainly in Akkar, Hermel, the Beqaa Valley, and around the cities of Tripoli in the north and Tyre in the south; in urban poverty pockets such as Hay el-Sullum; or in existing informal settlements such as Shatila. Close to 85 percent of the refugees reside in areas where more than two-thirds of the population lives below the poverty line of $2.40 per day.[56] In Jordan, a similar pattern is apparent as three-quarters of refugees have settled in impoverished areas in the capital, Amman, as well as two other northern municipalities, Irbid and Mafraq, and where 40–50 percent of Jordan's poor live.

Over time, this dramatic increase in population levels has exerted mounting pressures on existing infrastructure, generating tensions between once-welcoming residents and incoming populations. A widespread perception among Lebanese and Jordanian citizens that the presence of refugees has driven down their own quality of life fuels these tensions. Citizens feel that access to state services has declined, that wages are depressed, and that labor market competition has intensified.

While increased demand generated by the presence of large numbers of refugees has had an impact on access to services, particularly healthcare, shelter, and education, in reality the refugees have not so much caused shortages as exacerbated structural challenges that both countries were already facing. These include an economic downturn in both countries and challenges related to service delivery.

In Jordan, the presence of refugees has meant a dramatic increase in demand for educational and health services. In education, this has led to students doing double shifts in schools, overcrowding, and higher teacher-to-student ratios. Increased demand for shelter has exacerbated Jordan's preexisting housing shortage, driving rental prices up almost sixfold in towns like Mafraq and Ramtha and affecting the poorest of Jordanians who do not own housing.[57] Similarly, the arrival of refugees has increased demand for scarce water resources, causing a dramatic decline in the average daily supply for ordinary Jordanians, particularly among northern municipalities hosting refugees, to just 30 liters per person as compared to the required 80 liters.[58] Meanwhile, labor competition is occurring mainly in the informal sector, such as seasonal agricultural or construction work, where an estimated 160,000 Syrians are currently employed.[59]

In Lebanon, increased demand for electrical and other such services has also aggravated chronic shortcomings and problems of mismanagement in the system. The education sector is witnessing challenges similar to those Jordan has seen, including double shifts and overcrowding, while increased demand for housing has driven rents up by around 400 percent in some areas of Beirut.[60] Meanwhile, labor market competition is taking place in the informal sector, where close to 60 percent of refugees have

> **The dramatic increase in population levels has exerted mounting pressures on existing infrastructure, generating tensions between once-welcoming residents and incoming populations.**

sought employment.[61] Their willingness to accept lower wages has displaced Lebanese workers and also put downward pressure on wages. The significance of such competition is that it is occurring among the most marginalized members of society; that is, the refugees and their host communities.

Finally, the initial focus of aid agencies on providing support to refugees while ignoring destitute host communities has also generated local resentment and aggravated the situation further. Indeed, almost 80 percent of Jordanians believe that international financial support for Syrians is unfair since they are also poor and are not receiving such support.[62] Similar perceptions are evident in Lebanon as well.

International Response

The inadequate international response to the unfolding conflicts in Syria and Iraq has exacerbated the refugee crisis and its repercussions. As of mid-2015, Syria is the site of a geopolitical contest among major regional and global powers, in particular Iran, Iraq, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States. In Iraq, the international community and the Islamic State are engaged in a complex struggle. Diplomatic efforts to end the conflict have proven ineffective thus far while military and geopolitical realities and the zero-sum-game attitude of those involved indicate that a negotiated political solution to the multiple wars is increasingly difficult to attain.

This political deadlock and the competing interests mean that military options are gaining the upper hand, further complicating potential resolutions and extending the crisis. The international community has favored a costly boots-off-the-ground strategy focused on an aerial bombardment campaign against the Islamic State that, according to a 2014 estimate, has been costing the United States more than $10 million a day.[63] Russia's active entry in September 2015 into the conflict through aerial bombardments of rebel-held areas and its strategic support of the Syrian regime have raised the stakes in an international and regional proxy war also involving Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States. Meanwhile, in Syria, the complex intersection between this proxy war with the highly localized nature of paramilitary groups on the ground is propelling a spike in sectarian rhetoric and violence by all parties and making a negotiated settlement to the conflict all that more difficult to achieve.[64] In Iraq, the government's increasing reliance on local tribal forces, as well as sectarian militias and the involvement of a wide range of local, regional, and international actors including the Islamic State, augments the threat of sectarian violence and aggravates further local grievances.[65]

At the humanitarian level, and in contrast to the massive military spending, the United Nations has decried the shortage in funding needed for essential support, a shortfall that has also undermined the role of the international

community in addressing the fallout from the crisis. The $3.47 billion gap between funds required and funds received leaves host governments in Lebanon and Jordan bearing the burden of caring for the refugees.[66] It also means a further extension of this human suffering. For example, in the first quarter of 2015, the UN World Food Program was forced to cut its food assistance to 1.7 million Syrian refugees, thus reducing monthly stipends from $27 to $19. In July, it further reduced the stipend to $13.50, or $0.45 a day. To cope, the hundreds of thousands affected Syrian families in Lebanon reported a reduction in the frequency of meals and other negative coping mechanisms, including employment in unsafe environments.[67]

> A lack of funding for programs, coupled with the escalating conflict, has amplified the sense of instability among fleeing populations both within and outside Syria and Iraq.

Meanwhile, since Lebanon and Jordan are both considered middle-income countries based on their gross national incomes, they are excluded from additional aid packages and concessional loans from international financial institutions. Such packages could have been used to finance development projects and support both countries in dealing with the economic and financial fallout from the crisis. "We are being penalized for achieving middle-income development," the Jordanian minister of planning and international cooperation complained.[68]

This lack of funding for programs, coupled with the escalating conflicts, has amplified the sense of instability among fleeing populations both within and outside Syria and Iraq. Internally displaced populations face both a lack of access to humanitarian aid and the hijacking of this aid, when it is available, by local militias and thugs. Consequently, refugees and the internally displaced are having to increasingly rely on friends and relatives as well as local civil society organizations and NGOs, many of them directly affiliated with religious organizations. This is further reinforcing sectarian identities among individuals forced to turn to their own communities for shelter, support, and protection.

A New Underclass of Citizens

Collectively, these protracted conflicts and security-oriented policies are generating a new underclass of citizens spread across the four countries, including refugees, internally displaced populations, and individuals from host communities. High levels of income poverty and inadequate access to education and healthcare characterize this new underclass. In Iraq and Syria, it consists of millions of impoverished internally displaced people. In Lebanon and Jordan, this new underclass brings together disadvantaged locals and incoming refugees.

On the Run in Their Own Land

The massive scale of internal displacements or individuals who are "on the run in their own land," as the UN put it, best captures the catastrophic reconfiguration of Iraqi and Syrian societies.[69] In Syria, the shifting nature and borders of the ongoing conflict and a surrender-or-starve policy of the regime and other parties to the conflict[70]—that includes using barrel bombs and chemical weapons and besieging entire areas to prevent the entry of food, medicine, and other essentials—have driven 7.6 million individuals from their homes. As of June 2015, the conflict in Iraq had driven 3.1 million Iraqis to seek shelter elsewhere.[71]

Displaced populations have moved to camps constructed for them, informal settlements or makeshift and unsound structures such as construction sites across the country. Reports indicate that due to the increasing transportation costs through conflict zones, the more destitute Syrians tend to move into informal settlements rather than official camps constructed in the north of the country or along the Turkish border.[72] By August 2014, estimates indicated that 172,000 Syrians had moved to informal settlements in northern Syria, as well as in Lebanon and Jordan.[73] In Iraq, most of those displaced by the Islamic State have moved to camps in the north of the country.

Living in the camps is akin to living in a ghettoized community with precarious legal circumstances, no security of tenure, measly infrastructure, physical insecurity, and minimal access to services. The situation in informal settlements is even more perilous than in formal refugee camps, as water sanitation and healthcare, housing, and educational facilities are not monitored by UN agencies or other NGOs. For example, in Syria about half of the informal settlements do not have access to functional latrines, and the drinking water is polluted, with the consequent risk of communicable diseases.[74]

Meanwhile, whether they are in camps, informal settlements, or still in their homes, the entire populations of Syria and Iraq are suffering a catastrophic regression in development gains. In Syria, the unemployment rate grew from 14.9 percent in 2011 to 57.7 percent three years later, while close to 80 percent of the population is now considered poor, and two-thirds are living in abject poverty,[75] unable to provide the basic means for survival.[76] More than 2 million Syrian children are estimated to be out of school with another 400,000 at risk of leaving school, in comparison to pre-war levels of universal education and 90 percent literacy.[77] About 6.3 million Syrians are highly vulnerable to food insecurity, while one in ten Syrian children suffers from malnutrition.[78] In this context, it is no surprise to find that conflict has reduced the longevity of Syrians by more than twenty-two years, from nearly seventy-eight years to fifty-five.

Collectively, these protracted conflicts and security-oriented policies are generating a new underclass of citizens.

In Iraq, this rollback in development predates the current crisis with the Islamic State. Iraqis of all ethnic and sectarian backgrounds were excluded in post-2003 Iraq from the dividends of oil sales and of economic growth, and poverty levels have increased dramatically across most provinces.[79] The country's medical health services have disintegrated because of war-related destruction, dilapidation, and the flight of more than half the country's doctors out of Iraq. Meanwhile, nearly 95 percent of Iraqi families have no health insurance whatsoever while literacy rates have decreased substantially.[80]

Race to the Bottom

The contiguity of destitute refugees and the poorest of Lebanese and Jordanians along with their competition for scarce resources is also expanding the underclass in both countries. In the words of Makram Malaeb, the former head of the Syrian crisis response for Lebanon's Ministry of Social Affairs, "It is a race to the bottom between the poorest Syrians and the poorest Lebanese."[81]

Perhaps the clearest indicator of this expanding underclass is its impact on poverty and employment levels in both countries. A 2013 World Bank report indicated that the crisis might push 170,000 Lebanese into poverty.[82] Meanwhile, one-third of Lebanese youth are now unemployed, a 50 percent increase since 2011.[83] In Jordan, indications are that the incidence of poverty has also expanded among ordinary citizens as Syrian workers displace Jordanians in the informal sector.

For the refugees the situation is also dire. Those residing in Lebanon have limited access to livelihoods and are dependent on aid for survival. More than half are living in insecure conditions, while 75 percent are struggling to make ends meet.[84] Approximately one-third lack the necessary legal documents to move freely.[85] Many have managed to find work as laborers building high-end luxury apartments. With little legal or physical protection, they earn a minimum living and sleep in the basements of construction sites.[86] Estimates suggest that Syrian laborers in Lebanon are earning significantly less than the minimum wage and that 92 percent are working informally without legal or social protection. Child labor is also publicly apparent on the streets of the country.[87]

Meanwhile, two-thirds of Syrian refugees in Jordan are living below the monthly poverty line of 68 Jordanian dinars ($97) per person, and one in six refugee households lives on less than $40 per person.[88] Many must spend considerably more than what they earn just to meet basic needs and are having to deplete their savings or rely on social networks of families and friends. In addition, one in ten resides in informal housing considered precarious, and close to half (47 percent) of the refugees live in housing assessed as bad.[89] A particularly adverse coping strategy is to pull children from school in order to find work that will generate income for the family.

A Back to the Future Generation

In this larger context, concerns are increasing over the most vulnerable of refugees: children trapped in a life they did not choose. In a recent interview, in the Zaatari camp in Jordan, a young Syrian refugee responded to a question from the *Globe and Mail* about the progress of the war in his country with "I think we will not get freedom, Bashar will win." He continued, "My dream is we will win. But my second dream is . . . when I turn 16 or 18, I will go to Syria and join the *jihad*."[90]

This dream is a tragic emblem of a lost generation of youth growing up in the shadow of conflict. For them, the consequences of war and protracted displacement with the congruent push to the fringe are even more devastating. Many are firsthand witnesses to violence and unimaginable horrors that touched their families and communities. They have lost their friends, their homes, and their futures.

What extends the tragedy of these children is their loss of education. Today, the Arab region is host to some 21 million children who are either out of school or at risk of dropping out of school. The great majority of those children are Syrian and Iraqi refugees or from displaced populations. For example, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that in 2014 about 2.8 million Syrian children and about 50 percent of Syrian refugees aged six to seventeen were not in school.[91]

In Lebanon, of the 300,000 Syrian refugee children of school age, only 30,000 are attending school and 88,000 are enrolled in informal education that is not recognized by the government or other entities.[92] In Jordan, half the refugees are under the age of eighteen yet only 62 percent are attending school.[93]

This education deficit is catastrophic on multiple fronts. For children and youth, the absence of education represents a lost future. Without basic reading or arithmetic skills, children and youth have limited options for gainful employment or entrepreneurial activity.

The Arab region is host to some 21 million children who are either out of school or at risk of dropping out of school.

Yet despite the importance of education, it remains one of the most underfunded sectors. The inability of such vast numbers of children to access education is a testament to the continued emphasis on immediate humanitarian needs such as food and clothing at the expense of a longer-term investment in the future of these children. As outlined by a senior UN official in Lebanon, the UN response plan for refugees in the country focuses on addressing the shortfall in access to primary education for refugees. However, it does not include initiatives for those who are fourteen to twenty-five years old—the age at which young boys transition to adulthood and seek options to shape their future.[94]

In times of war, education also helps keep children and the youth out of conflict, as was evident in a recent analysis on the different reasons given by

Syrian children for joining combat. In addition to being tortured at the hands of government forces, following friends and family members into combat, participating in political protests, and needing jobs, two other specific reasons stand out. The first is the lack of education because they live in embattled areas with no schools, or because they were expelled from school for political reasons. The second is recruitment in refugee camps.

While the size of the problem is difficult to quantify, the horrors witnessed by these children and the continued traumas they are enduring place them at an increasing risk of recruitment by rogue entities. As Jane MacPhail, a UNICEF child-protection specialist, pointed out, the Zaatari camp is "a fertile ground for the recruitment of young people." She added, "If we don't get to these kids now, they will lose not only their sense of values, but their sense of hope."[95] Indeed, a young Syrian refugee best captured this pervasive sense of hopelessness when asked by Human Rights Watch why he was joining the war in Syria. He responded with: "Maybe we'll live, and maybe we'll die."[96]

Looking to the Future

Emerging patterns indicate that the complex intersection of identities, conflict, and displacement previously witnessed in Iraq is being mimicked in Syria on an amplified scale. The scale of current challenges resulting from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq is also daunting on multiple fronts.

The massive population displacements are radically transforming the socio-economic and cultural landscape of the Arab region. These transformations are not limited to the countries in conflict—they also include neighboring countries.

The use of identity as an instrument of war in ongoing conflicts is driving the region toward new kinds of state formations based on homogeneous ethnic and sectarian identities. The brutal use of such identity politics by both governments and rogue entities like the Islamic State seems to be reaching a tipping point from which recovery will be exceedingly difficult. Given the vicious, far-reaching, and fragmented nature of ongoing conflicts, the types of political settlements needed to resolve them will also be exceptionally complex.

The security-first response, which includes military campaigns by regional and international actors, is driving further wedges into fragile settings. The absence of a stabilization and peace-building strategy for areas recaptured from nonstate actors, one that includes actual measures to guarantee the safety of returnees, has opened the door for vengeful actions, including revenge killings and additional identity-based displacements. When placed in the larger context of other regional conflicts like Yemen and Libya, the ramification of this approach is that it will trap the region in a never-ending cycle of vulnerability for decades to come.

Addressing the disastrous fall out of these conflicts requires a political settlement between parties who acknowledge the catastrophic impact of their power politics on regional and even global stability. A historic political bargain among international and regional actors would include stemming support to rogue entities. By necessity, bottom-up negotiations among local actors to agree on the shape and vision for the future of both Syria and Iraq and an acceptable power-sharing formula should accompany such a bargain. The international community should support this process by restoring civilian capacities and state institutions in both countries. However, it should not support the establishment of sectarian entities as these would only pave the way for further conflict. In the meantime, this same community should renew its commitment to addressing the plight of refugees, including the rights to asylum, protection, and assistance. Failure to do so is simply prolonging the catastrophic undoing of states and societies and extending this insecurity beyond the region.

In the long term, the societal reconstitution of territories through ongoing population transfers signals immense obstacles for durable solutions to the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Challenges to the return of populations are in full evidence in the protracted displacement of Iraqis forced from their homes decades ago. Clear and transparent plans that guarantee security and stability would support the process of return.

Meanwhile, Lebanon and Jordan need to prepare for situations of protracted displacement for refugees within their borders while waiting for future political settlements to happen. In preparing for such a scenario, they need to reconsider their current humanitarian-and-security-only focus in support of refugees. Granting the refugees freedom of movement and recourse to justice would go a long way in alleviating their suffering. For both countries, it would also allow them to capitalize on the talent and labor that refugees bring with them.

In this, the governments of both countries could work with international agencies to move beyond a humanitarian approach to their refugee populations and to address the needs of a growing underclass of disenfranchised citizens. They could expand ongoing plans to carry out development programs that benefit both refugee and host communities. This could include infrastructural investments and improvement of basic services in some of the most impoverished areas that also host large portions of the refugees. It might also alleviate heightened tensions resulting from the mounting economic costs of the crisis on the country and the competition for informal sector jobs between residents and incoming refugees.

Lebanon and Jordan need to prepare for situations of protracted displacement for refugees within their borders while waiting for future political settlements to happen.

At the same time, addressing the expansion of poverty, inequality, food insecurity, and marginalization as well as the severe reversal in development gains will not be possible without a rethinking of development support to middle-income countries. Both Jordan and Lebanon need financing facilities to address considerable development challenges, including income

inequalities and access to services, that preceded this crisis and that have been severely accentuated by it.

At the regional level, resource-rich countries, many of which are already among the highest contributors to official development assistance, could establish a fund that aims to mitigate some of the fallout from the current conflicts on individuals and communities. The goal of such a fund would be to provide financing for education, vocational training, healthcare, and shelter as well as financial grants to support the implementation of development projects in host countries.

In the meantime, the push to the fringes of massive numbers of people and entire communities places hundreds of thousands of children at risk of becoming a lost generation. Public-private partnerships could be established to ensure innovative approaches and the delivery of educational packages to refugee children and youth. Particular attention needs to be paid to the forgotten cohort of youth who are fourteen to twenty-five years old and who are most vulnerable to exploitation and radicalization.

The refugee tragedy is a symptom of a wider political crisis. Finding adequate solutions for the refugees and internally displaced populations is primarily a political imperative, but it is also a development challenge that is essential for political stabilization, societal reconciliation, and peace building.

The scale of the challenges requires courageous thinking, bold initiatives, and ingenuity by political and development leaders at the national, regional, and global levels. Without those, this violence and its humanitarian fallout will engulf the region and far beyond.

Notes

1 For various reasons, figures for refugees and displaced populations are estimates. This includes the inability by the UN and other international agencies to reach some conflict zones, the difficulties of assessing repeat population movements, the concern that numbers may be over- or understated depending on political interests, and that national systems of data collection for entry and exit into neighboring countries are not always reliable. However, reasonable estimates are possible using figures produced by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) for the total number of individuals and families displaced by ongoing conflicts, and that are based on the registration of individuals and families with the organization. However, these figures do not include unregistered individuals who may have entered a country through informal networks or those who do not need UNHCR support. Other figures used include those of national organizations managing asylum seekers.

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