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# Humanitarian action in the new security environment: policy and operational implications in Iraq

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## 1 Executive summary

For the past three years, humanitarian actors (HAs) in Iraq have had to face a unique operational environment which is highly insecure, volatile and politicised. Iraq has evolved from a post-conflict US-led occupation where reconstruction and political transition were the key themes to a highly fragmented open internal war and a major front in the US-led 'global war on terror' (GWOT). At the same time, the delivery of basic services in the country has at best stagnated compared to pre-2003-war levels, and the humanitarian situation has seriously deteriorated in parts of the country, as confirmed by all HAs operating in Iraq including the UN and the ICRC. The conflict has cost tens of thousands of Iraqi lives, and humanitarian actors have not been immune to its effects. Within the ranks of aid agencies, 57 persons have died and more than 200 have been injured. These figures are certainly under-estimates, as they do not include local NGOs.

While international HAs entered Iraq en masse after the 2003 invasion,<sup>1</sup> numbering about 200 aid agencies in July 2003, insecurity has forced a considerable decline in their presence in Iraq over the past three years: it is nowadays limited to the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and about 60 INGOs. The number of expatriates and Iraqis (to a lesser extent) working for these agencies was also considerably reduced. Insecurity has forced the great majority of international HAs to relocate expatriate staff in neighbouring countries. The remaining international HAs' geographical distribution in Iraq is uneven and, with the exception of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, their visibility is low due to the development of low-profile policies.

During the same period, there was an exponential growth of local humanitarian actors. From almost zero in pre-invasion times, their number is currently in the thousands. While the great majority of these LNGOs will not have a long-term life, they have emerged in a period of high uncertainty dominated by violence. As international actors rely more and more on local actors, LNGOs contribute greatly to shaping the future of humanitarian action in Iraq.

HAs' efforts to intervene are hampered by insecurity, the prevention-of-access policy adopted by the various parties to the conflict, the politicisation of aid and the lack of independent funding.<sup>2</sup> HAs that maintained operations in Iraq have had to deal with a wealth of challenges, starting with security management and constant adaptation to the changing operational environment to coordination, civil-military relations, organisational management and remote programming.

The evolving nature of the conflict and its increasingly political nature created serious dilemmas for all HAs involved in the response to the conflict. While an analysis of security incidents and trends over the last three years has not yielded conclusive arguments as to the specific targeting of HAs because of their humanitarian activities in the country, it appears that most HAs did not distinguish themselves clearly enough from the occupation process at the outset, either by conscious choice or through the HAs' inability to maintain a clear distinction between their work and the process itself, therefore lacking any influence on the way they were perceived by the Iraqi population at large.

Disassociating from the regime-change agenda of the 2003 invasion, with its massive military, political and reconstruction components aimed at the establishment of a Western-leaning secular government, has proved to be an enormous challenge. Parties to the conflict are extremely suspicious of foreign organisations, which they believe are in Iraq to support a foreign political agenda. Anyone deemed close to the US-led regime-change process in Iraq is considered a fair target.

Some interviewees maintain that the blurring of the lines between the military, private contractors and humanitarian actors could have been avoided or at least reduced if there was a more concerted

<sup>1</sup> Some aid workers refer to this period as the time when HAs entered Iraq 'behind the tanks'.

<sup>2</sup> In this report, independent funding is defined as funding not emanating from governments that have troops in Iraq.

attempt by HAs at principled humanitarian action, and note that international humanitarian law (IHL) and humanitarian principles provide a framework for assistance and protection operations, but were largely ignored by the vast majority of HAs and the parties to the conflict. Although this has not prevented attacks, the delivery of humanitarian assistance under the Red Crescent emblem is widely perceived as offering more protection than operating without it. This is in striking contrast with the decision of all the other HAs to operate without visibility, which underlines the serious handicap foreign aid agencies have faced. It also might speak to the level of acceptance the Red Crescent has in the region, which other, more western agencies have struggled to secure.

In 2003, the failure to foresee or to honestly acknowledge the rapid deterioration in the security environment led to a failure to respond to the changes in the humanitarian operational environment. The analysis of HAs' tools for contextual and situational analysis revealed that those tools were inadequate to build sound perceptions of insecurity and threat levels in a guerrilla-warfare environment.

As of today, no specific security report encompasses the wide range of information necessary for HAs to analyse the security environment. Reporting is neither frequent enough nor in the level of detail that is necessary in such an insecure and volatile environment. The most detailed information available concerns the Multi-National Force (MNF), as it provides the majority of information contained in security reports. Security reports are therefore militarised and not tailored to the holistic approach to security necessary to HAs. Moreover, indicators of the security situation and the overall situation in Iraq are extremely sensitive for all parties to the conflict. HAs lack the necessary tools for contextual and situational analysis.

Although the wealth of security reports made available to HAs would tend to be an indication of intense information-sharing and analysis, this is not the case. The reporting of security events and information sharing is done on an *ad hoc* and fragmented basis. The process of collection and analysis of security events and information is not optimal and leaves room for rumours and speculation. Low-profile strategies have also seriously undermined the exchange of information as well as the lack of trust among HAs, and between them and other actors relevant to HAs' security. This in turn has negatively affected the flow of information from non-HAs to HAs.

The distance between international and national staff complicates the reading and analysis of the security environment. The situation is further aggravated by high expatriate staff turnover,<sup>3</sup> which prevents sound institutional perceptions of insecurity and threat levels.

While the perception of insecurity and threat levels is largely subjective, with no basis for objective comparison, the gap between Iraqi and expatriate perceptions is widening to dangerous levels, whereby the latter are disconnected from reality or perceive changes after the fact, thereby endangering their Iraqi staff in a context where quick adaptation to changes in the security environment is vital. Moreover, HAs have set risk thresholds higher than they would do in other contexts. Risks are transferred to national staff and NGO partners, which poses ethical questions.

Field-headquarters communications and security standards and practices vary greatly from agency to agency. As in many other settings, the larger the agency is, the more concerned it is and the more resources it dedicates to security issues. Security officers have made a positive difference in putting in place and enforcing security standards, but many HAs are concerned with the profile of expatriate security officers, which tends to 'militarise' the agency's security. Some concerned HAs have struck a good balance by hiring and training Iraqi security officers, and by sending expatriate security officers for security reviews and/or training of staff.

With violence in Iraq becoming more deadly, HAs had to make decisions on the security postures they would take if they were willing to continue their work there. In other contexts, HAs have focused on

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<sup>3</sup> Expatriate staff turnover varies from six to 12 months on average, while periods exceeding one year are exceptional.

developing security strategies mostly based on acceptance. Due to the impossibility of disassociating from the military, the political transition and growing insecurity, HAs have stopped using a security strategy based for the most part on acceptance, and have had to resort to strategies primarily based on protection and, in some cases, deterrence.

Protection measures have consisted in hardening the target while reducing visibility and exposure. This reduced exposure translates into the withdrawal of expatriate staff from the south and centre of Iraq, as well as low-profile policies. The few expatriates who travel to Iraq without armed escorts travel on an irregular basis for short stays. The more insecure the environment is, the more HAs' policy has been aimed at reducing their communication with local actors and the Iraqi population. In the most insecure areas, the majority of international HAs have stretched low-profile policies to the point of not communicating to the beneficiaries the real identity of the agency providing aid. HAs funded by international donors communicate even less about the real identity of the donor due to the lack of independent funding available in Iraq and the potential backlash from the local population if it knew who is financing relief operations.

The UN and the majority of US-based NGOs operational in Iraq have opted for protection and deterrence strategies allowing them to have a permanent expatriate presence in the country, but under armed protection and in heavily fortified bunkers. Their decision to maintain expatriates in Iraq is either political (in the case of the UN) or a donor requirement (in the case of INGOs). In almost all cases, the means of deterrence are outsourced. The UN relies first and foremost on the MNF, while most INGOs have resorted to foreign private security companies (PSCs), and also sometimes have called on the MNF for escorting supplies. While those strategies have clearly reduced expatriates' vulnerability, they have resulted in a further undermining of the neutrality and independence of those actors by tying their presence and movement within and in/out of Iraq to the will and capabilities of the MNF and PSCs. Furthermore, if those deterrence strategies have reduced expatriate staff vulnerability, they have also proportionally increased that of Iraqi staff by raising the profile of those agencies' premises, and therefore increasing the likelihood of being identified as working with a foreign organisation.

Although necessary, low-profile postures have had particularly harmful consequences. They have prevented HAs from reaching an optimal balance between the acceptance and protection components of their security strategies. Indeed, they have hindered HAs' capacities to communicate and have therefore changed the perception various actors may have had of them. A small minority of HAs have pushed their protection strategy to a new level, adopting a clandestine security approach where they do not maintain or develop any sort of relationships, not even with the beneficiaries of their programmes.

In order to gain access to populations in need in Iraq, HAs have been faced with a host of other challenges: coordination, civil–military relations, organisational management and programming. The sustained deterioration in Iraq's operational environment over the last three years has therefore created both constraints and opportunities for HAs in regard to their actions.

Coordination efforts are seriously challenged by the scattered distribution of HAs in Iraq, Jordan and Kuwait, and their reduced mobility. HAs and donors have complained about the lack of coordination and information on who is doing what, where. Civil–military relations also represent an important challenge that HAs have had to face as they relate directly to security, perception and access issues. Confronted with a raging insurgency and sectarian violence, the role of the military presence in Iraq has not declined, nor is it confined to security issues. The military policy is moving towards the greater integration of security, political, humanitarian, reconstruction and economic activities as part of their counter-insurrection strategy. Where humanitarian needs and insecurity are the greatest, the military is the single most important factor preventing access for HAs, apart for the few that have resorted to military escorts. The readjustment of the US government's foreign and defence strategy (including its aid policy) to accommodate its GWOT objectives is particularly worrying for HAs. The US administration has started to develop Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), similar to those it developed in

Afghanistan, in key Iraqi provinces and new rounds of USAID funding require the complete collaboration of its partners, including NGOs, with PRT military personnel.<sup>4</sup>

Another issue involves the managing of human resources. Insecurity has complicated human resources' management and has increased the costs of humanitarian operations. HAs face difficulties in recruiting expatriate aid workers with adequate profiles. National staff recruitment and training are hampered by distance and insecurity.

Much more straightforward issues arose from the continuation of humanitarian programming in the volatile Iraqi context. The distance between expatriates and nationals has forced HAs to adapt their organisational strategy and to rethink the role and responsibilities of expatriates. All international HAs have adopted a remote management approach to the conduct of their operations, with the exception of a handful who have either managed to nationalise expatriate positions or have 'bunkerised' themselves. Between those two extreme configurations and depending on HAs' organisational cultures, three main remote programming options developed alongside, each with its specificities, advantages and constraints. HAs have experienced three different remote programming strategies, differing in the level of responsibility given to Iraqi personnel: remote control, remote management and remote support. These experiences provide evidence that remote-control strategies do not work, while remote management may prove non-viable over the long term. Part of the lessons learnt is that management components cannot be conducted remotely and should remain within the responsibilities of staff either permanently based in Iraq, or based there on an intermittent basis. Most HAs consider that the permanent presence of expatriates is not an option because it implies adopting a deterrence strategy or exposing staff to extreme risks. Relying on regular expatriate visits requires adopting a high risk threshold. Moreover, it may prove unfeasible in the midst of active civil war. Nationalising positions that are traditionally allocated to expatriates can therefore offer the best alternative. Since this cannot be done overnight, a remote support strategy is required. Moreover, this strategy can either target HAs' own staff or existing local actors in the form of a partnership.

All in all, the challenges presented by the security situation in Iraq to the humanitarian community led to the shutting down of Iraq operations for a great deal of agencies, to a reduction in the level of programming as compared to the needs of the general population, to a shift in the locations of programmes in order to avoid areas where access was not guaranteed and risks were too high (only a handful of international HAs currently work in 'hot spots'), and to changes in the nature of the programming itself. In order to reduce their exposure to risks, HAs have often deserted the most insecure governorates, which are also those where humanitarian needs are the most important. This leads to a departure from the impartiality principle, with significant consequences in a country plagued by sectarian violence. In addition, the nature of HAs' programming was altered by downsizing of the scope of their humanitarian interventions, the channelling of aid through partners (INGOs, local actors such as LNGOs and mosques) with little supervision and the tailoring of aid programmes to fit donors' agendas rather than assessed field needs. These changes have resulted in the diminution of the overall quality and accountability of aid, underscored by the largely inefficient functions of assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

To ensure that assistance and protection activities reach those in need in Iraq, HAs have had to develop inventive approaches to gain access to those in need. There is a lot to draw upon in these experiences to improve humanitarian action in Iraq and in similar contexts elsewhere. To be effective, approaches need to be flexible without being reckless, and supported by robust security management, skilled and committed staff, appropriate organisational strategies and support from donors.

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<sup>4</sup> See USAID Call for Proposal 'Stabilization in Strategic Cities Initiative' launched in November 2005. <http://www.grants.gov/search/search.do?mode=VIEW&opId=3365>.

## 2 Introduction

This study aims to measure the insecurity of aid workers in Iraq, identifying changes in perceptions of security and threat levels, mapping the individual security practices of key humanitarian actors and their collective security arrangements, and drawing conclusions as to how the security environment has impacted on humanitarian delivery.

The case study was based on the following:

- Semi-structured interviews (phone and direct) and email exchanges with staff members of UN agencies, UNDSS, Iraqi and international NGOs, NCCI (NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq), commercial contractors used in programming, donors and other relevant actors.
- Documents related to security events such as security incident reports and public communication on security incidents.
- Private security companies, UN and NCCI Security Situation Reports.
- International press coverage of security incidents in Iraq depicted as targeting humanitarian actors.
- Relevant documents in the public domain.
- Humanitarian actors' assessment reports, such as Iraqi NGO needs assessments and context analysis.
- Email communications between relevant players on research-related topics.
- Minutes of meetings of relevant players on research-related topics.

A two-week trip to Amman was organised in February, and two Iraqi consultants met humanitarian actors in Baghdad.



### 3 Operational environment

#### 3.1 Mapping humanitarian actors in Iraq

For the purpose of this study, humanitarian actors (HAs) refers to the UN, the Red Crescent and Red Cross Movement, international NGOs (INGOs) and Iraqi NGOs involved in life-saving, basic welfare provision and protection activities.

Due to insecurity, the UN has reduced its expatriate presence in Iraq by five-fold and the majority of its personnel are related to security. The ICRC has also reduced its personnel in Iraq and no longer has a permanent expatriate presence in Baghdad. The number of INGOs has declined to less than a third of its original number in July 2003, and most international personnel are based outside Iraq. The number of expatriates and, to a lesser extent, the number of Iraqis working for HAs was also considerably reduced. However, local NGOs now number in the thousands, while they were almost non-existent before 2003 with the exception of autonomous areas in Iraqi Kurdistan.

##### 3.1.1 UN

Iraq was a founding member of the UN, which it joined in 1945. However, the UN legacy in Iraq is poor in the eyes of Iraqis due to the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the sanctions imposed during the 1990s, which resulted in the creation of the Oil for Food programme.<sup>5</sup> As put by the Deputy of the Deputy SRSG for humanitarian coordination, 'the UN is starting in a position of being guilty until proven innocent'. UN Security Council Resolution 1500<sup>6</sup> adopted on 14 August 2003 established the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) as a one-year follow-through mission to facilitate the Oil-for-Food programme handover on 21 November 2003. The current UNAMI mandate is defined in Resolution 1546<sup>7</sup> dated 8 June 2004. UNAMI<sup>8</sup> consists of two pillars – political, and reconstruction and development. The political pillar constitutes the central mission of the UN presence in Iraq.

The UN presence in Iraq amounted to approximately 650 expatriates before the August 2003 attack. By September 2003, only about 40 international staff remained in Baghdad after the UN HQ bombing, and 44 were located in the safer northern governorates.<sup>9</sup> Today, the UN mission numbers about 140 expatriate staff in Iraq, including a majority of security personnel. The UN national staff was reduced from about 4,200 in August 2003 to about 800 in 2006. Although the UN is determined to expand its presence in Iraq, violence hampers this plan.<sup>10</sup>

##### 3.1.2 Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The ICRC has been present in Iraq since the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq conflict in 1980. ICRC activities were mainly directed in favour of prisoners of war during the Iraq–Iran war (1980–88) and the Gulf war

<sup>5</sup> Under the Oil-for-Food Programme, set up on 14 April 1995 by the UN Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, Iraq was allowed to use oil sales to buy the food and humanitarian supplies on which 60 per cent of Iraqis depended as their sole source of sustenance. It also provided Iraq with the opportunity to sell oil to finance the purchase of humanitarian goods and various mandated UN activities concerning Iraq. The programme was intended to be a 'temporary measure to provide for the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people', until the fulfilment by Iraq of the relevant Council resolutions, including notably Resolution 687 (1991) of 3 April 1991. The Office of the Iraq Programme/Oil for Food closed on 31 May 2004. <http://www.un.org/Depts/oip>.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/467/78/PDF/N0346778.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www2.unog.ch/uncc/resolutio/res1546.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> UNAMI web portal: <http://www.uniraq.org/aboutus/aboutus.asp>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.un.org/depts/oip/background/latest/bvs030929.html>.

<sup>10</sup> 'Violence Keeps UN Expansion in Iraq on Hold – Annan', Reuters, 3 August 2006, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N07477542.htm>.

(1991).<sup>11</sup> ICRC repatriated about 97,000 Iraqi prisoners back to Iraq up to 2003. ICRC is therefore fairly well-known to Iraqis, and has a good reputation. The ICRC had an estimated 700 Iraqi staff and 130 expatriates in August 2003.<sup>12</sup> In 2006, ICRC personnel total 390 expatriates and local staff in Iraq and Amman, Jordan.<sup>13</sup> Since the attack on its Baghdad delegation in October 2003, the ICRC has worked under severe operational constraints in Iraq. However, within these limitations ICRC continues its mission of assistance and protection. In addition, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) and other Red Crescent societies from across the region are operate in Iraq.

### 3.1.3 International NGOs (INGOs)

Notwithstanding an important presence in the three northern Kurdish governorates since the end of the Gulf war of 1991, humanitarian NGOs were largely unknown in Iraq prior to the 2003 conflict. In 1997, about 15 INGOs had programmes and an expatriate presence in Iraq.<sup>14</sup> A year later, in 1998, about half remained and would do so up to 2003, with a permanent expatriate presence in the country and under strict scrutiny by the former regime.

After the 2003 conflict, about 200 international NGOs entered Iraq together with hundreds of journalists to meet what was expected to be a major humanitarian crisis. In the end, the millions of internally displaced people and refugees humanitarian actors planned for<sup>15</sup> in neighbouring countries did not materialise. Instead, they found a country exhausted by three major wars over the previous 20 years more than a decade of UN-imposed embargo: humanitarian aid was needed for part of its population, and it seemed that the first essential task would be to keep the limited basic services functioning while engaging in reconstruction efforts.

Insecurity in Iraq has taken its toll on the international NGO community. From about 170–200 agencies in July 2003, their presence has steadily decreased to about 60. Most of the INGOs involved in Iraq are multiple-mandate agencies. Only a few have a purely humanitarian agenda: most NGOs with a ‘relief wing’ are also engaged in development and societal change, with activities in fields including gender, civil society capacity-building and democratisation.

### 3.1.4 Local NGOs (LNGOs)<sup>16</sup>

With the exception of Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraqi NGOs were almost unknown due to the repressive character of the former regime. After 1991, with Baghdad’s sovereign authority lifted over Kurdish-controlled areas and the presence of the UN and INGOs, local NGOs in Kurdistan benefited from a favourable environment in which to develop. After the fall of the regime in 2003, Iraqi NGOs have multiplied. The CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) estimated the number of LNGOs at 400 in February 2004; in June 2004, the Ministry of Planning, Development and Cooperation reported 2,000 applications for registration. The UN currently estimates the number of LNGOs in the country at 12,000 but, as put by a UN official, only a few of these organisations are credible.

<sup>11</sup> For more details see : <http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList322/20E15BCAA3EE9E19C1256CE6004E2512>.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList322/1B3EB1B16B92902FC1256D81004CFA6>.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/iraq?OpenDocument>.

<sup>14</sup> See Annex 1, ‘Iraq Timeline’.

<sup>15</sup> See Interaction statement, ‘US Unprepared for Humanitarian Response in Iraq’, 24 February 2003, <http://www.interaction.org/library/detail.php?id=1330>.

<sup>16</sup> Most Iraqis do not know what an NGO is and tend to associate the word ‘organisation’ with foreign countries and spies. The word ‘NGO’ is almost never used by LNGOs in their external communication with non-Western entities. A survey among Iraqi NGOs shows a that preferred terms are, in order of preference:

- association (*jamayia*), mainly used before 2003;
- league (*rabita*);
- committee (*lijna* or *haya*);
- society (understood by Iraqis as a group of people gathered together voluntarily to help people and/or doing useful activities for the community);
- civil society organisation (*munadama al muchtama madani*), mainly used by the government during TV broadcasts; and
- union (not widely used because the word is associated with the former regime).

LNGOs play an important role in the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Iraq. They vary from purely volunteer locally based organisations to large LNGOs comparable in size with the largest INGOs, with multi-million-dollar annual budgets. One of the important differences with the great majority of INGOs is that LNGOs always employ a number of volunteers. Many LNGOs can be defined as HAs since they engage in the provision of relief, however more recently LNGOs have developed a larger array of activities. Only a few have a single mandate.

There are several motivations behind the existence or creation of a local NGO in Iraq. Many are composed of men and women who want to exploit the new opportunities to play a role in the public affairs of their country.

Since the fall of the former regime, religion has played an extremely important role in shaping political changes in Iraq, and the orientation of successive governments. In broad terms, two ideologies are competing to impose their views of what Iraq should look like at the end of the transitional political process. One is a secular ideology mainly based on Western models<sup>17</sup> (many Iraqis are genuinely attached to a secular regime), the other a religious ideology led by various Iraqi components and, to some extent, subject to foreign influence. These religious components are opposed along sectarian lines and currently dominate the political arena. In return, the motivations behind the creation of local NGOs are greatly inspired by these two ideologies. Very few LNGOs have remained neutral in this ideological conflict.

Due to insecurity, LNGOs tend not to expand their geographical operational area but are more open and flexible in the types of activities they implement. Funding opportunities often drive this flexibility. Very few LNGOs are independent financially, and are dependent on foreign aid and only a few LNGOs had budgets above 1 million USD in 2005. Most of the assistance LNGOs receive is part of international donors' assistance to the democratisation process, and usually involve work in the fields of human rights, gender, child protection and monitoring/informing/supporting the political process. In addition to these sectors of activity, LNGOs have benefited from funds made available for humanitarian aid and mentoring from some INGOs. Indeed, with the escalation of insecurity, HAs and donors have channelled more funds for humanitarian activities through LNGOs than would have been the case if insecurity had not forced HAs to scale down their operations. Nowadays, all the major donors fund both local and international NGOs.

Most Iraqi NGOs involved in relief are often limited to a certain geographical area. The main reason for this is their limited size. Few have been able to expand and deploy to other areas. The issue of impartiality is always in the back of their minds, but it is often conditioned by the possibility of reaching a critical size before being able to operate in an impartial manner. Larger INGOs are also faced with this problem, and the majority have not overcome it. Also, security is another impediment to

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<sup>17</sup> One of the activities of the UN governance and civil society cluster (Cluster 9) is: 'Empowering emerging civil society organisations in the areas of human rights, gender, child protection, media and the environment to play an active role in the reconstruction of the country – socially, politically, economically and physically'. The UN's approach is 'to work with Iraqis to foster a society where the rights and responsibilities of citizens are as equally developed as a responsive, accountable administration. Initiatives focus on enabling key government institutions at central and local levels, bridging the gap between the administration and the people, on the understanding that the effective provision of essential services can only be done with the full participation of the population. The creation of independent media and dynamic civil society organisations will act as checks and balances to local administrations that will be given the tools necessary to complete their tasks'. See <http://www.uniraq.org/clusters/cluster9.asp>. For instance UNOPS' objective in the field of civil society developments states: 'To improve the capacity of Iraqi civil society in order that they can take a more active role in informing, monitoring and supporting the process of democratisation in the country'. USAID Democracy and Governance programme sees a greater political role for the civil society: 'Increased Development of a Politically Active Civil Society: The hallmark of a free society is the ability of individuals to associate with like-minded individuals, express their views publicly, openly debate public policy, and petition their government. 'Civil society' is an increasingly accepted term which best describes the non-governmental, not-for-profit, independent nature of this segment of society'. [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/democracy\\_and\\_governance/technical\\_areas/civil\\_society](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/technical_areas/civil_society). The EU objectives in Iraq are: the development of a secure, stable and democratic Iraq; the establishment of an open, stable, sustainable and diversified market economy; and Iraq's political and economic integration into its region and the international system. See [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/iraq/intro/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/iraq/intro/index.htm).

LNGOs' development in other areas where security is worst, or where they do not have enough local contacts to be able to project themselves operationally in areas where their activities would compensate for their perceived partiality. Security implies that staff recruitment is often limited to trusted individuals who often come from a specific community.

### 3.2 Humanitarian situation

Humanitarian needs and security in Iraq differ from one region to another. Southern Iraq is in a post-conflict phase as compared to other regions in Iraq. Southern governorates are less prone to military conflict since the last uprising during the summer of 2004. However, criminality, tribal violence and the infiltration of the security forces by militias pose a daily threat. Moreover, the security situation can change dramatically in a matter of a few hours. Central Iraq is in a conflict phase due to a relentless insurgency, small to large-scale military operations and sectarian violence. Furthermore, there has been no trace of effective governmental control since the 2003 invasion.<sup>18</sup> In the north, however, the security situation appears to be more stable as the Kurdish administration retains tight control of the three northern governorates, where it is in their interest that international actors remain unharmed. The three northern governorates can be considered as in a developmental phase, compared to the rest of the country.

Humanitarian needs have been steadily on the increase. According to NCCI,<sup>19</sup> 1.5 million Iraqis are internally displaced, 26% are malnourished and more than 20% of the population lives below the poverty line. All actors met during the course of this study, including the UN, have mentioned that, with the exception of the three northern governorates and to a lesser extent some southern governorates, the delivery of basic services has at best stagnated compared to levels before the 2003 war.

The various reconstruction programmes launched in 2003 brought the hope that the situation would improve rapidly. These reconstruction programmes focused almost exclusively on infrastructure rehabilitation and developmental activities. They did not provide for meeting emergency needs or the development of an effective emergency preparedness plan, which ultimately led to reconstruction objectives not being met. This lack of provision resulted from a number of risks that were not taken into consideration during the planning phase of the post-conflict environment, and the over-optimistic assumptions on which reconstruction plans were developed.

The reconstruction of Iraq was part of a transition 'package' meant to lead Iraq from dictatorship and a state-controlled economy towards peace, democracy and a market economy. Reconstruction progress served therefore as one of the indicators of this 'integrated strategy for success'. Also, with a raging insurgency and terrorism on the rise, making the headlines in the world news, it was essential to provide 'positive information' on Iraq, and the 'reconstruction arm' was committed to deliver. While political deadlines were met, it was essential for the reconstruction process to follow and support these political gains. With those parameters in mind, it became clear that any re-evaluation of the reconstruction programme leading to a shift towards relief operations and the maintaining of essential services would have raised suspicions that the situation was not improving in Iraq. As a consequence, it became more and more difficult for governments to explain that hundreds of millions of dollars have been allocated to reconstruction in Iraq, while this has not made much difference to the level of basic service delivery. Changing major donors' strategies, starting first with the US government, would constitute a political admission that things have not gone as planned.

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<sup>18</sup> As put by a senior UN official: 'Anbar [governorate] is the most tightened area and also the one where you find the most humanitarian needs. Not a single city in Anbar has retrieved any normal life after military assaults. Resources are not a problem, access is the issue'.

<sup>19</sup> See [http://www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf/NCCI\\_-\\_Iraq\\_Emergency\\_situation\\_-\\_Press\\_statement\\_-\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf/NCCI_-_Iraq_Emergency_situation_-_Press_statement_-_Eng.pdf).

### 3.3 Contextual analysis and actors

#### 3.3.1 Contextual analysis

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, the political transition in Iraq has been hampered by violence while a vision for Iraqi society still remains to be defined. Political agendas, vary from the establishment of a Western-leaning secular government to the imposition of an Islamic regime. In the absence of common ground between the parties and the lack of a consensus over the means to achieve the political transition, the conflict has moved from an international conflict to a highly fragmented open internal war, with the presence of multinational forces and proxies of neighbouring countries. Mismanagement of the occupation, terrorism, conflicting political agendas and counterinsurgency failures have contributed to the creation of fertile ground for a violent political transition that has no regard for the protection of civilians.

#### 3.3.2 Legal framework for the presence and protection of humanitarian workers under International Humanitarian Law

UN Security Council Resolution 1483, adopted on 22 May 2003, provided the foundations of the legal environment in which HAs were working until June 2004. The situation in Iraq was, according to international humanitarian law, one of occupation. HAs therefore faced a number of dilemmas. In particular, there was the issue of governments occupying Iraq while also providing the bulk of humanitarian funding to Western-based organisations. A minority of INGOs refused to operate in Iraq with funds derived from governments that sent troops to Iraq. Since it was the responsibility of the occupying power (OP) to provide for the needs of the population, HAs should only have intervened where urgent needs were not being met by the OP. There has been speculation in the humanitarian community that, if HAs had distanced themselves from reconstruction and developmental activities from the start, it would have helped the Iraqis in making a clear distinction between HAs and non-HAs.<sup>20</sup>

UNSCR 1546 resulted in the end of the occupation and the dissolution of the CPA by 30 June 2004. Therefore, from the legal point of view, the situation in Iraq is not considered to be that of an international armed conflict between the US-led coalition and the state of Iraq. The current hostilities in Iraq amount to a non-international armed conflict. However, most Iraqis and parties to the conflict do not consider it this way and still refer to the presence of the MNF as an occupation. The level of protection of HAs under IHL does not differ from an international to a non-international armed conflict but, given the lack of respect of the parties to the conflict for IHL, being associated with the MNF increases HAs' vulnerability.

#### 3.3.3 Perception of humanitarian actors

A large contingent of private contractors and eager entrepreneurs joined the CF and the CPA (and the US and British embassies after the dissolution of the CPA) and were made responsible for the implementation of an extremely wide range of activities, from reconstruction tasks to the writing of textbooks for schools and the drafting of the constitution. Part of the role of private security contractors, who make up the second contingent of foreign forces in Iraq after the US military, is to ensure the security of these actors.

Humanitarian actors represent an almost negligible proportion of civilian foreigners in Iraq in terms of numbers and in terms of the funds they manage. With insecurity on the rise, the implementation of low-profile strategies, competition with the private sector and HAs undertaking a number of activities

<sup>20</sup> According to the InterAction NGO Security Assessment Mission to Iraq (21 August 2003): 'Very few (if any) in the plethora of NGOs working in Iraq are providing the life-saving interventions that characterize complex emergencies. Most are engaged in work more commonly associated with reconstruction and development, which in the context of the security environment is challenging prior assumptions about how staff security should be weighed against program objectives. We seem to be defining a new paradigm – the "complex reconstruction" – in which the humanitarian community appears willing to accept higher thresholds of risk to pursue non-emergency interventions'.

directly related to the political transition (development, civil society capacity building, gender), HAs' collective efforts to disconnect themselves from other foreign entities in the eyes of Iraqis were unlikely ever to succeed. From March 2003 until June 2004, and in the framework of their assistance and protection activities, HAs had to interact with the civilian and military occupation authorities. All foreign actors used Saddam's former palaces throughout the country as central meeting points with the newly appointed authorities; however, these remained in the eyes of the Iraqi population symbols of the former regime, which had been replaced by a foreign occupation force. The adoption of MNF escort and protection services by the UN and foreign private security companies for close protection and training by most US-based NGOs reinforced this blurring of lines. The interchangeable vehicles, clothes and signage of the military, HAs and private contractors underscored that it was impossible for relief actors to distance their own operations from those of non-HAs.<sup>21</sup>

Most Iraqis who have worked with INGOs do not necessarily make the distinction between HAs and a political organisation such as the NDI (National Democratic Institute). For them, it is yet another foreign organisation. They would tend to differentiate more on the basis of the country where the agency has its HQ. Often, higher authorities would differentiate on the basis of where the agency draws its funds from. In the eyes of Iraqis who were dealing directly or indirectly with all those new actors who appeared after the 2003 invasion, there was almost no possibility of distinction, since all of them were involved pretty much in the same field.

When the transfer of authority from the CPA to the IIG (Iraqi Interim Government) occurred in 2004, the political transition entered a race against time. Reaching Iraqi communities was essential to ensure that Iraqis would participate fully in the political process. Local NGOs had an essential role to play as 'members of civil society'. It became usual therefore to see LNGOs that were previously working on humanitarian and/or developmental and/or human rights issues extending their mandate to incorporate a more explicit political agenda. Local NGOs became the target of civil society capacity building programmes when they were not a mere creation to fulfil the international organisations' and institutes' intended purpose of building 'civil society' in Iraq. Those programmes included training members of Iraqi NGOs to act as election observers and supporting the constitution-drafting exercise.

Some Iraqis see attacks on foreigners as legitimate because the 'occupying powers' have failed to deliver on the promised improvements. They do not make any distinction between foreign HAs and the rest of the Western presence, whether military or civilian. The blurring of the lines is not confined to the usual military/civilian issue, but encompasses the broader spectrum of Western activities in Iraq – corporate, military and political.

Faith as a motivation for relief operations or as a form of solidarity provides Muslim faith-based NGOs with an advantage over other HAs in terms of building trust with local actors, and therefore enhances their access to vulnerable populations. Iraqis are less suspicious about international Muslim faith-based organisations, although this does not mean that they would not have to prove concretely in the field that they have come to help and are neutral, impartial and independent. However, they do face a number of problems. They do not necessarily have a higher profile than other INGOs. Moreover, they tend to do more emergency relief work than other INGOs, which means that they take more risks by working where insecurity is greater. With respect to insurgents, being a Muslim faith-based

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<sup>21</sup> According to Interaction's security assessment of August 2003: 'Complicating public perceptions of NGOs is the challenge an Iraqi observer might have in distinguishing between the cast of characters working in Iraq. The mission observed or was told of each of the following operating in Iraq:

- Armed soldiers in uniform and in marked military vehicles performing military duties.
- Armed soldiers in uniform and marked military vehicles who distributing some form of aid.
- Armed soldiers in uniform in unmarked civilian vehicles.
- Armed individuals in civilian clothes in military vehicles.
- Armed soldiers in civilian clothes in unmarked civilian vehicles.
- Armed civilian contractors in civilian vehicles either unmarked or with humanitarian signage.
- Unarmed civilian aid workers in unmarked civilian vehicles.
- Unarmed civilian aid workers in civilian vehicles with humanitarian signage.
- Aid vehicles operating in convoy with military vehicles'.

organisation does not necessarily matter much in an environment of intense guerrilla warfare. If these faith-based INGOs have expatriates, they may be of Arab origin and can therefore raise Iraqi government and MNF suspicions. Crossing Iraqi borders can prove difficult for Arabs. Some international Muslim faith-based NGOs have seen international bank transfers blocked over suspicions that they were linked to terrorist organisations.

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) is a striking example that ‘classical’ humanitarian work in Iraq is possible and can be recognised by the parties to the conflict as an impartial and neutral activity.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the IRCS, the Palestinian, Emirate, Saudi and Qatari Red Crescent Societies operate on a permanent basis in Iraq. The Red Crescent Societies are the only HAs that have a visible presence in Iraq. The Red Crescent emblem is widely respected by the Iraqi population and local sections provide the IRCS with a wide network within Iraqi communities. While vehicles bearing Red Crescent emblems have also been targeted in Iraq by the various parties to the conflict, it is acknowledged that having the emblem offers more protection than not having it. The IRCS has suffered many security incidents, but continues to conduct its life-saving operations. Those security incidents often occurred during missions in highly troubled areas.

### 3.4 Risk/threat analysis, trends and vulnerability

The analysis of the major security incidents<sup>23</sup> that have involved international<sup>24</sup> HAs provides the following conclusions:

- HA staff have died (57) or been injured (200-plus) in the following types of incidents:

Type of incident	Number (declared)	killed	Number (estimated)	wounded
Collateral damage	8		14	
Theft	2		4	
Bombing	25		160	
Armed attack in/on office/assassination	12		8	
Armed attack on moving vehicles	8		4	
Execution during a kidnapping situation	2			
Kidnapping/hostage situation	About 14 persons were kidnapped. 12 were released and 2 killed.			

- Collateral damage and theft do not constitute direct targeting of humanitarian actors.
- Bombing:
  - o The UN was directly targeted twice by bombing (and by other means such as RPG, stone-throwing and small arms fire before the main attack in August 2003, as well as in locations across the country). There is no doubt that the UN is a target for some parties to the conflict in Iraq. It is however targeted as a political body not as a humanitarian actor.
  - o There is still speculation as to whether the ICRC office was the intended target or not. Even in ICRC’s opinion, there is no clear-cut answer. However, for security purposes and until proven otherwise, the incident is taken as a deliberate targeting of the ICRC.
- Armed attack in/on office/assassination:
  - o None of the incidents is clearly a deliberate attack aimed at HAs.
  - o 2 cases are UN incidents and should be understood as non-HA.

<sup>22</sup> The IRCS was created more than 40 years ago. The suppression of any independent form of action outside the government affected the role of the IRCS during the former regime. The IRCS was largely controlled by the former regime but, with its fall, the IRCS has gained in independence.

<sup>23</sup> By major security incident, we mean those security incidents that have led to death and/or casualties, and those which consisted of a kidnapping/hostage situation.

<sup>24</sup> Because of the lack of information and the absence of a centralised information system, the figures do not include local NGOs’ security incidents, which certainly exceed those of international HAs.

- A few cases appeared to be motivated by personnel considerations.
- Other cases seemed to be opportunistic, with no possibility for the perpetrators knowing that the victims were HAs.
- Armed attacks on moving vehicles:
  - 1 case concerns the UN
  - 1 case concerns IOM and cannot be considered as a deliberate targeting of HAs.<sup>25</sup>
  - 1 case is thought to have been motivated by revenge.
  - 1 case concerns 4 missionaries.
  - 1 case concerns the IRCS. It was during the crisis in Najaf and the IRCS convoy was most probably targeted as part of the sectarian violence in Iraq. The convoy was transporting relief supplies to Najaf and crossing an area well known for sectarian executions.
- Execution during a kidnapping situation:
  - All hostages/kidnapees were released bar 2. The prime motivation for the abductions appears to be criminal. See section 4.1.4, 'Insecurity and threat level perception'.
  - The execution of the American Christian Peacemaker Team member cannot be analysed at this stage.
  - The hostage-taking and apparent execution of Margaret Hassan seemed to have been politically motivated. It is deemed impossible that the perpetrators did not know of her humanitarian activities.

It is not possible to conclude that HAs were targeted as such except in one incident. In any case, it cannot be concluded that there has been a systematic targeting of HAs. Apart from incidents linked to collateral damage or loose rules of engagement, it appears that the motivations underlying these security incidents and others are:

- economic
- personal in nature
- subversive (ideological/political/psychological) in the sense of strikes at symbols of the occupation and the political transition
- 'military', in a context of guerrilla warfare, strikes against perceived 'spies' or 'collaborators' conducting 'hostile activities'
- sectarian.

Security incidents<sup>26</sup> are widespread but particularly concentrated in the central governorates and western governorates. They have also evolved over time, mainly because of HAs' efforts to reduce their vulnerability particularly by reducing their profile, but also because of the change in the conflict's nature. Indeed, as the conflict slides towards an open internal conflict, HAs are increasingly affected by sectarian violence.<sup>27</sup>

Experienced HAs are used to operating in armed conflicts where a territory is occupied, criminality is rampant and/or where a sectarian conflict is taking place. They have developed fairly effective security strategies to reduce their vulnerability. However, HAs were poorly prepared for a guerrilla warfare environment where Westerners would be associated with the occupation forces. Humanitarian and reconstruction activities have from the onset of the conflict been depicted by the occupation as attributes of regime change in Iraq.<sup>28</sup> In this context, they are particularly prone to guerrilla operations.

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<sup>25</sup> IOM received direct threats because the agency was taken for an Israeli organisation by unknown group/s. One of its offices was targeted by an RPG before the fatal assault. IOM staff at the time of the incident were driving in IOM marked cars.

<sup>26</sup> See Annex 4, 'Iraq 2003–2006: List of Security Incidents'.

<sup>27</sup> See Annex 6, 'Threat Risk Vulnerability' and Annex 7, 'Risk Analysis'.

<sup>28</sup> Major combat operations were declared over on 1 May 2003, but information warfare remained a crucial component of the conflict both internally, for insurrection and counter-insurrection purposes, and externally, to maintain public support, mainly in the US. The situation in Iraq (how reconstruction is going, how the war is being fought, how the political process is going) has been mischaracterised by the parties to the conflict, and humanitarian actors have not been immune from the impact of this information warfare given their direct presence on the battlefield. Political progress (holding elections, drafting a constitution) as well as military progress (training the Iraqi security forces) were often cited as indicators of success, while opponents often use as indicators of lack of progress the delivery of basic services (healthcare, electricity, fuel and water), oil



Expatriates are valuable political assets for insurgents and terrorists. However, criminality is at the origin of the large majority of abductions. Criminal abductions are often disguised as politically motivated as a means to leverage more financial gains. It therefore becomes almost impossible to draw a clear line between politically and criminally motivated abductions.

Attacks on HAs were rarely the result of opportunism, and all accounts show that perpetrators had information about the HA (routine, country of origin, activities).

When asking Iraqi NGO staff whether they feel more secure working for a local NGO as opposed to an INGO, their answer is often yes. However, LNGOs are more exposed to certain types of threats, such as the misappropriation of NGO property, facilities and financial assets.

Arbitrary detention is another important problem affecting more Iraqi LNGO workers than INGO staff because of their higher vulnerability to such threats. Higher-management personnel of LNGOs are more exposed to danger than those of INGOs because they are more visible, since LNGO organisational structures are often less compartmented than in INGOs (fewer resources, fewer staff, less keen in delegating certain tasks). Moreover, LNGOs do more work with the local communities than INGOs and are therefore more exposed. Also, while INGOs would more easily rent offices in more secure neighbourhoods, LNGOs have less financial means and often rent offices in locations more prone to insurgent activities, where they are more likely to face problems in particular with the ISF and MNF. Moreover, while INGOs have many ways of accessing the highest authorities (through embassies, the UN), local NGOs have to find their own way to file a complaint and expose themselves to important risks by doing so.

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production, violence and absence of the rule of law. Humanitarian actors are clearly in the eye of the information warfare hurricane, especially if they wish to advocate on the situation in Iraq. Advocating on issues regarding violation of International Humanitarian Law and keeping an Iraqi and expatriate presence in Iraq, let alone also trying to remain neutral, has been one of the greatest challenges facing HAs. For instance, one of Al Qaeda Organisation in Mesopotamia's propaganda videotapes contains a Human Rights Watch report. The report is used by the terrorist group to illustrate the 'crimes of the Iraqi security forces' against Iraqis, which in turn legitimises in their eyes the fight against the Iraqi security forces.

## 4 Security management

Security reporting in Iraq is not up to the standards required by HAs. Specific characteristics of the Iraqi context, such as the one-source ‘militarisation’ of reporting, and the sensitive nature of security reporting in such a high-stakes political setting reinforce the limited effectiveness of HAs’ security management in Iraq. The lack of an institutionalised reporting structure at a time where information could not be shared because of visibility concerns created the conditions for a lack of readiness on the HAs’ part to face the downgrading of security conditions in the country, and an unwillingness to exchange data on security issues for lack of reciprocity and suspicion of other actors’ motivations. This resulted in a reduction in the use of relevant security information by HAs in their planning processes, often due to a perceived lack of efficient analysis and a distancing from field realities after the pull-out of expatriates from Iraq. In return, perceptions of risk and insecurity were altered and gaps developed between expatriates, mostly outside Iraq, and national staff, affecting the way incidents involving the seemingly targeted attacks of HAs were analysed and reviewed (i.e. media-driven and not placed in the political/subversive context of the field realities).

Instead of putting together the necessary resources to obtain reliable data and analyse it thoroughly, HAs went separate ways in defining their standards and establishing practice. Notwithstanding the different risk thresholds for different actors depending on their mandate and mission, rising insecurity left unanswered questions about liability and risk insurance, the need for expatriate and/or national security officers, the rising costs incurred by the necessity for individuals and organisations involved in Iraq to obtain security-specific training and the necessity for agencies to continuously review/evaluate their security standards and practice.

With violence in Iraq becoming more deadly, HAs had to make decisions on the security postures they would take if they were going to continue their work there. While a few agencies were successful in adopting an acceptance security strategy in specific areas of Iraq, all HAs have had to include some degree of protection, and in some cases deterrence. The ‘low profile’ tactic under the protection strategy ensured a decrease in the potential for direct targeting, while some of its constraints marginalised HAs from the general population and compromised HAs’ acceptance on the ground (even more so when HAs adopted a clandestine approach). On the other hand, some HAs did not hesitate before putting in place practices of deterrence, often with the unconcealed use of weapons, PSCs or even the MNF, which alienated local communities further and dramatically increased the risks for national staff.

All in all, most HAs have seen their security posture evolve over time, and the few successful agencies in Iraq have had to constantly adapt their way of dealing with security issues by combining one or more of the strategies described here. The difficult security environment on the ground in Iraq requires the utmost attention to changing conditions at the political and military levels, as well as a coordinated network of contacts throughout the country that will allow for follow-up of local and governorate-wide developments, to enable a comprehensive view of the country, of its potential evolution and, therefore, of the best programmatic and security strategy to put in place to minimise risks and continue assisting the Iraqi population.

### 4.1 Common reporting/information sharing system in place

#### 4.1.1 Analysis of the types of security indicators used in security reports

As illustrated in Annex 1 (Iraq General Timeline), the political, economic and security situation in Iraq has been evolving rapidly. Annex 2 (List of Security Indicators) provides the ideal list of indicators HAs should follow as part of their routine security procedures, in order to map security trends and apply the appropriate security policies. The list is divided into indicators of:

- o Social well being
- o Economics
- o Governance
- o Law enforcement
- o Armed conflict
- o Security events

Annex 3 (Security Indicators – Targets) gives details of the security events indicators.

Available Iraq security reports provide only the last two indicators, leaving the other four largely unaddressed unless agencies seek them out in the multitude of sources available, such as press releases, specialised institutes' reports and mainstream, specialised, regional and local media. Moreover, as detailed in Annex 3 (Security Indicators – Targets), security reports do not provide systematic information for all targets. The most covered target remains the MNF as well as other indicators that are of value to the military, since most of the information analysed in the security reports is provided by the MNF.

Security reports are therefore 'militarised' which is not what one would expect from HA security reports, as the threats to which they are exposed are not the same as the military.<sup>29, 30</sup>

Several security reports are made available to HAs, such as NCCI's, UN security briefs and those of several PSCs.<sup>31</sup> With so many security reports at the disposal of HAs, the illusion may be given that they have enough information to draw up sound security strategies. Some INGOs rely almost exclusively on the security reports they receive from international sources, and seldom have information coming from the ground. When and if they do, this is usually very localised information, limited to their operational areas, and it does not therefore give the larger picture. Sometimes, INGOs do not have internal, systematic security reports in place, and are sent information on security from their field staff only when a security incident has involved their NGO directly.

The lack of institutional agency security incident records and global security incident records is a major impediment to the conduct of security analysis. Moreover, staff turnover rates are too high to build up expertise in security analysis. For those who seek to complete the picture provided in the security reports they receive, extensive research and analysis will be required, which expatriates cannot sustain.<sup>32</sup>

Indicators of the security situation are extremely sensitive for all parties to the conflict because of the political nature of the conflict.<sup>33</sup> Any negative or positive assessment of the situation will be used for

<sup>29</sup> InterAction, 'NGO Security Assessment Mission to Iraq, 21 August 2003, states: 'One UNSECOORD official indicated that some 60% of their security information comes from the Coalition Forces. He also indicated that the quality and quantity of information coming from the Coalition has been decreasing in recent days and weeks. UNSECOORD's August 3 security report indicated "a sudden drop in the number of incidents being reported by the CF in Baghdad" although the "number of incidents being reported by IO staff remains constant". An UNSECOORD official in Basra indicated a similar concern. All spoken to at UNSECOORD said that very little information comes from NGOs'.

<sup>30</sup> Greg Hansen, *Independent Evaluation of the NCCI*, June 2004: 'While there is strong support among the NCCI membership for the continuation of the Security Office, many members and observers have expressed a need for a more analytical advisory service. Many have also felt that there has been too much reliance on the CPA, coalition forces and private contractors for incident reporting, the usefulness of which is regarded as somewhat limited for NGOs. At times, a certain "tone" has been evident in NCCI security reports in which the language of one set of combatants (e.g., the use of the moniker "anti-Coalition terrorists") has been used. Security reports have also provided little information about criminal activity, essentially because such information is not yet being systematically collected or shared by the Iraqi police with any consistency'.

<sup>31</sup> Such as AEGIS, CRG, HART, Black Water, Armoured group and URG.

<sup>32</sup> In his independent assessment of NCCI in June 2004, Hansen recommended that: 'The security office should be transformed over time into a "context" or information office, entailing a less militaristic, more holistic approach to security. The NCCI office and Board should consult on this approach with MSF-Belgium and the ICRC, both of which have had instructive experiences with the approach in other highly insecure settings'.

<sup>33</sup> 'The Political War', *The New Yorker*, 20 September 2004: 'Earlier this year, the United States Agency for International Development hired a team of independent experts to go to Iraq and evaluate the agency's programs there. The experts came back with a mixed review that included plenty of reason for worry: the reconstruction of Iraq was taking place in an ad-hoc

political purposes. Moreover, security information is often related to military operations or insurgent activities, and is therefore sensitive. HAs lack the necessary tools to increase their own internal capacity for qualitative contextual and situational analysis.

#### **4.1.2 Security incident reporting and security information**

Although the profusion of security reports seems to indicate that HAs have an effective system of information sharing, this is not the case due to a number of limitations.

First, security incident reporting systems are not institutionalised within most agencies or at the collective level. Security incident reports are more readily passed on when there is a direct and imminent threat to the humanitarian community. If not, the information will probably go unreported. On the other hand, for the most serious security events, the analysis is left open because it is impossible to determine the perpetrators' motives. In this case, the conclusions are not shared with others, and the agency will treat the security incident either as a direct targeting, or will not consider it as a major incident at all. In either case, analysis is not often shared, leaving room for misinterpretation of the relevance of a specific incident, and opening the way for rumours.

The second most important limitation has to do with concerns over HAs' public profile. Most HAs use low-profile postures and are therefore reluctant to incur any publicity. Many security incidents are a result of mistakes, and are often perceived as failure by others. This explains why some actors can be reluctant to share this information. Sharing can have a negative impact on an agency's reputation (and therefore affect its ability to attract funding) and liability issues (law suits and insurance issues). Also, HAs are afraid of leaks to the press and their consequences.

The exchange of security information is based on reciprocity. If the information flow is unidirectional, the agency or group of agencies at the origin of most information will stop providing information.

Exchange of information is hindered in some governorates because very few HAs operate in those governorates, and HAs do not see the purpose of exchanging information with actors that do not seem at first sight to be concerned with the security situation in those areas.

NCCI's Security Office was created October 2003. Subsequently, in November 2003, the NCCI security team asked INGOs what their expectations were in terms of security assistance. Only six out of 60 INGOs contacted responded to the email. By the end of 2003, more than half of INGOs in Iraq did not have a security plan in place. The lack of trust in the audience to which information may be provided is another important impediment. Expatriates are often unwilling to share security information with Iraqis.

Most HAs are more comfortable with an informal system. For instance, UN security reports are shared with non-UN agencies on an informal basis at the discretion of the UN security person.

#### **4.1.3 Degree of use and perceived efficacy**

Given the particular Iraqi context where almost all HAs have adopted a remote management approach to the conduct of their operations, most HAs seem to be satisfied with the information-sharing systems in place, whether meetings or reports. Complaints have more to do with the distance from the field, the time needed to read and analyse security reports and other constraints that are noted in this report.

However, the main concern that HAs had, particularly INGOs, was with the lack of analysis made available to HAs. Some HAs expect to find everything in a security brief or report, and tend to forget that

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fashion, without a consistent strategy, without the meaningful participation or advice of Iraqis, within paralyzing security constraints, and amid unrealistic claims of success. But something happened to the report on the way to publication. USAID kept sending parts of it back for revision, draft after draft, weeding out criticism, until the agency finally approved a version for internal use which one member of the team called "a whitewash" of his findings. Another expert said, "It's so political, everything going on out there. They just didn't want to hear any bad news." Pointing out that some of the numbers posted on the agency's Web site were overly optimistic, he concluded, "They like to make their sausage their way." [http://www.newyorker.com/talk/content/?040927ta\\_talk\\_packer](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/content/?040927ta_talk_packer).

they have to make their own analysis of the security environment with respect to their mission mandate and activities.

Some HAs have stopped reading security reports because they do not see the use of those reports in their daily operations. They feel that there is a gap between what they face in the field and what is written in the reports. Some also say that security reports do not provide the required analysis to enable decision-making processes. 'Reports are a mere collection of security events.' However, others will argue that providing an analysis would raise issues of liability. HAs could simply turn the responsibility of their own security over to the analyst providers in the event of security incidents. Since the most important security demand is in analysis to render the volatile Iraqi environment predictable, HAs would have a tendency to become extremely reliant on external analysis providers, and direct any security failure to them.

Security reports must be complemented with security meetings to share analysis and information. The UN is doing this internally on a weekly basis, while NGOs do not do it as often as they used to for a number of reasons, such as high staff turnover rates, lack of experience, lack of knowledge of the Iraqi context among expatriates and security constraints that often prevent large meetings in one place.

#### 4.1.4 Insecurity and threat perceptions

The overall responsibility for the security management of international HAs is almost exclusively in the hands of expatriates. Due to the difficulty in relying on objective indicators (lack of information, distance from the field, high expatriate staff turnover), the perception of insecurity is often based on subjective indicators. Distance and high expatriate staff turnover make it difficult for new staff to build up a realistic picture of the situation on the ground unless the person in charge is based in Iraq and can move fairly freely around. Most expatriate staff have never been to Iraq, or were based in fortresses disconnected from the reality on the ground. The lack of institutional memory prevents the construction of a sound institutional perception of insecurity and threat levels.

The largest international HAs, with rare exceptions such as the ICRC, have opted for full-time expatriate security officers. Very few expatriate security officers have previous experience in the Middle East and are of non-Western origin. Rarely do they speak Arabic which means that their access to first-hand field information is limited to what would be provided by their own English-speaking Iraqi staff and Western sources. Most have a military background.<sup>34</sup> Often, they originate from countries that take an active part in the conflict in Iraq. This does not mean that they would be systematically biased or partial, but it does have an impact on how they view Arab and Muslim cultures, and how they are perceived by Iraqis, which in turn impacts on what information they receive.

As for Iraqi aid workers, perceptions are largely dominated by the proverb: 'When you are already wet, you are not afraid of the rain', and/or by religious beliefs.<sup>35</sup>

This gap in expatriate/national perceptions is further widened by the distance and high expatriate staff turnovers, which do not contribute to building trust and common understanding. As put by an Iraqi INGO worker: 'When not living in Iraq, expatriates tend to forget about the security situation in Iraq or at least don't live it like Iraqis do, which can even lead to putting their Iraqi staff in danger when expecting more than they can physically achieve in the given environment'.

Security incidents that shaped most HAs' perception of insecurity consisted in what appeared to be a direct targeting of HAs. Those incidents involved suicide bombings, assassinations and kidnappings, and were always picked up by the press, making the headlines for days. According to the last SIGIR

<sup>34</sup> Hansen, 'Independent Evaluation of NCCI': 'Members, observers and others have taken note of the military "appearance" of NCCI security staff in some locations and have suggested more of an effort to blend in with the NGO community'.

<sup>35</sup> As in many other countries where religion plays an essential role in people's life, especially in countries that have suffered years of war, Iraqis rely on God's will. For instance, an Iraqi NGO worker declared that: 'Each day we come to work, we pray and rely on Allah who will protect us since we are going out to help people, so anything that might happen to us, it would be our destiny'.

January 2006 Quarterly Report and Semi-annual Report,<sup>36</sup> insecurity has claimed the lives of 467 expatriates in the ranks of the contractors. However, those deaths rarely made the headlines.

However, an analysis of those incidents shows that:

- Kidnapping of humanitarian expatriates did not concern only citizens from countries contributing troops to the MNF. The political character behind most kidnappings,<sup>37</sup> as reported by mainstream media outlets, is therefore not obvious. It appears that most releases of expatriates were not subsequent to meeting political demands, but rather through ransoms paid to the perpetrators.
- The most tragic events in 2003 were often preceded by early warnings, but HAs rarely acted upon them. Security was not high on the agenda of HAs.
- Analyses of security events are not shared widely.
- Some of the assassinations that occurred are believed by some members of the concerned agency to be motivated by personal reasons, rather than a deliberate attack on the humanitarian person as such.
- Often, the motivations behind security incidents are not directly available, and will often remain unknown. However, HAs will often consider those events as direct attacks against humanitarian work, even in the absence of concrete evidence.

## 4.2 Analysis of humanitarian actors' security standards and practices

### 4.2.1 Analysis of risk thresholds of different actors

For those HAs who are still operational, Iraq is most probably the country where HAs have pushed the risk threshold the farthest. One would expect that HAs are doing some large-scale, essential, life-saving work in Iraq which outweighs the risks to which they are exposed. But this is not the case for the majority of HAs.

Most of the HAs present in Iraq are almost exclusively funded by governmental donors who want to see parts of their agenda implemented by NGOs. This explains in large part why they have stayed in Iraq and raised their security threshold so high. In October 2003, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, expressed concern that contractors, aid groups and the United Nations would withdraw in significant numbers following the attacks on the UN and ICRC HQs in Baghdad. 'Their work is needed', he said. 'And if they are driven out, then the terrorists win.'<sup>38</sup> Political pressure was applied to maintain reconstruction efforts, and security costs were allowed to rise to unprecedented levels in order to keep contractors in Iraq. Humanitarian actors were also 'pressed' to stay the course and continue their work. During a meeting between USAID officials and an INGO, the USAID representative reportedly told the INGO, which had evacuated its expatriates from a town in Iraq for security reasons in May 2004, that the agency would have to send expatriates back there or USAID would find someone else to do the job.

In stark contrast, ECHO stopped programming funding for Iraq in 2004 and adopted a wait-and-see approach. ECHO had decided to allocate 100 million euros for humanitarian operations in 2003. Its decision not to channel more funds to Iraq was based on the following:

- Limited security
- Limited access
- Lack of reliable/measurable humanitarian indicators and limited monitoring capacity
- Overemphasis on the development agenda versus the humanitarian one (the great majority of NGOs were submitting proposals that were more developmental than humanitarian).

<sup>36</sup> See [http://www.sigir.mil/reports/QuarterlyReports/Jan06/pdf/Report\\_Complete\\_-\\_January\\_2006.pdf](http://www.sigir.mil/reports/QuarterlyReports/Jan06/pdf/Report_Complete_-_January_2006.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> IRIN, 'Mixed Motivations Behind Kidnappings', 29 January 2006.

<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A23470-2003Oct27?language=printer>.

The political mandate of the UN explains why it is still present in Iraq, and why it is ready to accept higher risks than in the past or in other contexts. Moreover, the UN's operational strategy is to implement projects through Iraqi authorities and contractors, but also international and local NGOs.

Many INGOs are doing non-life-saving activities, and are putting at extreme risk their national staff and expatriates, if any are on the ground. Only a handful actually have life-saving operations, while others may be motivated by a sense of solidarity with the victims of the war or by a religious agenda.<sup>39</sup> In those two cases, INGOs consider that the risks taken by their staff do not outweigh the moral values of their mission. Nonetheless, the majority of INGOs are motivated by funding issues, especially when they draw the majority of their funding from governmental donors.<sup>40</sup> Some of the INGOs interviewed did not have a defined risk threshold and were relying on the 'last resort option', that is to say when:

- A staff member is killed or seriously injured
- An INGO partner has a staff member killed or seriously wounded in direct connection to their work with the INGO partner
- For INGOs operating in a 'clandestine approach', when someone finds out that one of their staff works for a foreign organisation (as stated by an INGO head of mission in Amman).

INGOs that have extremely weak field–HQ links, and where turnover of expatriates has rendered any institutional memory almost non-existent, risk thresholds do not exist. Expatriates in charge just 'keep the mission going as they found it'. As mentioned previously, some INGOs give up on treating security with the required level of commitment because they consider that, in the current environment in which they operate, there are too many threats and it is too difficult to plan security responses accordingly.

As for INGOs, when asked about their risk thresholds, they often answer that insecurity is part of their environment regardless of the job they do.

#### 4.2.2 Liability issues in case of security incidents

HAs have raised their risk thresholds, but this was not necessarily followed by a higher sense of the necessity to protect employees, or new-found ethics to assume greater responsibility. Some HAs do not provide expatriates with the minimum insurance policies one would expect in such an environment as Iraq. Some expatriate aid workers employed by middle and small INGOs have complained that the insurance packages are not satisfactory. Also, it appears that insurance policies vary greatly from one aid agency to another. But the employees facing the worst conditions are the nationals.

With the exception of the worldwide ICRC programme centred on visits to detention centres, which relies on expatriates, HAs depend heavily and sometimes exclusively on their national staff. This poses the ethical question of risk transfer to others. Not all HAs see this as an ethical issue. Some just see it as a contractual issue.

Most HAs have been forced to terminate part of their national staff contracts. Some HAs just asked their former staff to create an INGO to either finish programmes or implement new projects in order to bypass security constraints such as liability issues. Others have changed the contract of their employees into consultancy agreements which are more flexible for the employer, and which have the 'great advantage' of bypassing all internal security policies and procedures, liability issues and image problems in case of security incidents.

<sup>39</sup> 'Bible Belt Missionaries Set Out on a "War for Souls" in Iraq', *The Telegraph*, 27 December 2003: 'Organising in secrecy, and emphasising their humanitarian aid work, Christian groups are pouring into the country, which is 97 per cent Muslim, bearing Arabic Bibles, videos and religious tracts designed to "save" Muslims from their "false" religion', [http://www.portal.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/12/27/wirq27.xml&Sheet=/news/2003/12/27/ixh\\_ome.html](http://www.portal.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/12/27/wirq27.xml&Sheet=/news/2003/12/27/ixh_ome.html).

<sup>40</sup> In an article dated 8 April 2004, entitled 'Aid World Rethinks Role in Iraq', Alertnet wrote: 'As aid agencies continue to evaluate their work in Iraq, many are coming to the uncomfortable conclusion that their decision to deploy was driven more by politics than local needs', <http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/108144450549.htm>.

It is also possible to see in the activity of LNGO capacity-building a way to be present in Iraq through proxies, and therefore circumvent the issue of exposing one's own personnel to risks. As explained by a well-established LNGO: 'The first reason for INGOs to develop partnership with LNGOs is insecurity. If an INGO enters in a partnership relation with a LNGO then a lot of resources should be dedicated to building the capacity of the LNGO. Unfortunately most of the relationship between INGOs and LNGOs are about contracting rather than partnering'. Review of security standards and practices

As for field-HQs links, the larger the organisation is the more likely it is to have security standards in place, regularly reviewed and adhered to.<sup>41</sup> HQs play the leading role in ensuring that security policies are in place, and that they are kept to in a context of high expatriates turnover rates and complex management strategies.

Usually, when the agency has a security adviser based in HQ, security standards and practices are of better quality compared to those that do not have a security advisor. The same applies for security advisers/officers within the field mission. However, many HAs view security management as directly linked to general management, and feel that having a security officer de-links this and removes the responsibility/accountability of the country director. Often, INGOs are reluctant to have a security officer because of the image conveyed since such staff usually have a military profile, and will work more on hardening the target (therefore raising the NGO profile) rather than developing strategies that reduce the profile of the NGO and are as closely as possible based on acceptance. They have concerns that the security officer would not understand the NGO's work, disrupt management systems and lines of communication and in the end 'militarise' the agency's security. Also, some do not see the use of an expatriate security officer if he/she is based abroad with the rest of the expatriates and lacks the necessary skills to conduct context analysis.

An estimated one-third of INGOs have hired and trained full-time Iraqi security officers. When those security officers are in place, they ensure that security procedures are followed, gather security information and transfer it to those who need it, give advice to staff and pass on information to expatriates based abroad and/or directly to HQs. Those who have expatriate security officers usually hire one or several Iraqi counterparts.

LNGOs do not have formalised security policies in place even when they have a full-time person in charge of the NGO's security. They usually rely on oral briefings and individuals' security awareness. Their security practices are usually based on common sense and lack the necessary anticipation required to deal with sudden specific threats or security incidents.

A minority of INGOs do not have security protocols in place, and rely exclusively on their national staff capacity to manage their own security. Due to high expatriate turnover, replacements do not know exactly how their national staff operate with respect to security, and assume that they can manage their own security without external help or without the help of a trained Iraqi security officer. Usually, the burden of reporting to expatriates on security matters is left with Iraqi programme staff or the administrator. When expatriates are asked how they explain why no major security incident has struck them so far, they attribute this to the quality of their Iraqi staff and/or to security training they have undertaken and/or simply to luck. Some expatriate heads of mission did not know whether their staff had undertaken security training.

#### **4.2.3 Security training at individual and collective level**

While among staff and in particular among expatriate staff, awareness of the danger in operating in Iraq has risen, knowledge and skills have not necessarily followed. After a clear gap in security management in 2003, large organisations have made substantial efforts to build the capacity of their

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<sup>41</sup> Although the UN has made remarkable efforts to better manage its security since the bombing of its HQ in Baghdad, it must be noted that important security lapses occurred such as the unavailability of an up-to-date staff list at the moment of the bombing, the absence of a consolidated security plan for Iraq as a whole and MOSS compliance not systematically reviewed, assessed and approved. –UN, 'Report of the Security in Iraq Accountability Panel (SIAP)', 3 March 2004, <http://www.un.org/News/dh/iraq/SIAP-report.pdf>.



staff, while smaller agencies have benefited from collective security training programmes provided by NCCI, for instance. However, the large expatriate turnover rates are an impediment to the sustainability of such training programmes.

Few medium-sized INGOs have the human and financial resources to provide security training, and this is even more the case for small INGOs and LNGOs. However, NCCI, as a collective body, managed to obtain the necessary funding to provide security training opportunities to the INGO community including two LNGOs and Iraqi staff of INGOs who set up their own LNGO later. The UN has funded two of those trainings. These were the only instances where the UN has provided better means for INGOs and LNGOs to enhance their security as compared to other countries where the UN operates. Very few, if any, have thought to implement their own guidelines for UN/NGO security collaboration.<sup>42</sup>

International HAs often hide behind the myths that ‘There is nothing they can do for LNGOs’ security’, ‘They created their NGO at their own initiative, we are just providing them external help in the conduct of their operations’, ‘They know better how to manage their security, they are the ones on the ground’. International HAs can actually provide support by, for instance, developing and providing adapted security training in collaboration with trained and experienced Iraqi security managers. This would certainly enhance LNGOs’ security, and would also help to improve international HAs’ security by plugging into LNGOs’ security information networks, and by improving the image Iraqis have of foreigners.

### 4.3 Security strategies

#### 4.3.1 Acceptance

Internationally, HAs have historically focused on developing security strategies based mostly on acceptance. Due to the negative perceptions of Iraqis and of the majority of parties to the conflict there, HAs have stopped using security strategies based exclusively on acceptance. In Iraq, the vast majority of HAs use a combination of acceptance and protection strategies. This is the case for instance with the ICRC.<sup>43</sup> Few agencies were found to have used a combination of acceptance, protection and deterrence. Only a small minority of LNGOs appeared to be using acceptance strategies almost exclusively.

Time constraints and the lack of a unified insurgent command have been the most important impediments preventing HAs from developing acceptance strategies. However, HAs that have worked extensively in a given area through, for instance, community development or integrated approaches (intervening in the fields of education, watsan and health in one given neighbourhood for instance), have built ties with local authorities and the population. Acceptance has therefore worked very well and some expatriates even feel that they could go and meet Iraqis in those areas. However, these are limited in size and cannot be dissociated from the rest of the country. Simply using the roads to reach those ‘safe haven’ areas where an acceptance strategy has been successfully put in place can prove extremely hazardous.

The larger the Iraqi staff base, the easier it is to promote acceptance strategies. Indeed, having a large number of staff who feel that they ‘own’ the agency enables it to interact with a wider number of contacts in the local community, and provides more opportunities to meet local leaders through staff acquaintances.

Even when an HA has a proven record of integrity and other similar credentials in the eyes of Iraqis, being viewed as an independent HA requires sustained daily efforts to maintain this reputation, which can be altered by the smallest incident.

<sup>42</sup> Office of the UN Security Coordinator, ‘Guidelines for UN/NGO/IGO Security Collaboration’, 14 February 2002.

<sup>43</sup> ICRC, ‘The ICRC’s Approach to Contemporary Security Challenges: A Future for Independent and Neutral Humanitarian Action’, September 2004, [http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/66CM82/\\$File/irrc\\_855\\_Krahenbuhl.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/66CM82/$File/irrc_855_Krahenbuhl.pdf).

### 4.3.2 Protection

Among the first initiatives HAs took due to insecurity was to increase their protection, particularly during the summer of 2003. Their first protective tactics were to reduce visibility and adopt a low profile, reduce exposure by withdrawing non-essential expatriate staff, avoid high-risk areas, reinforce communications and harden their facilities (including the UN and the ICRC). With the intensification of the violence and the start of a protracted conflict, most international HAs evacuated expatriates from Iraq. The few HAs keeping an expatriate presence have placed them in bunkers and under armed protection, or in safe areas such as the three northern governorates. A few HAs opted for sending expatriates from time to time to Iraq on short visits.

Finding a balance between putting appropriate protection measures in place and giving outsiders the impression that something is being 'hidden' or 'guarded' is not easy. Blast walls, guards outside buildings, visible radio communication equipment, armoured four-wheel drives and flak jackets cannot be easily accommodated into low-profile postures. Those who have opted for visible protection usually also accommodate a deterrence strategy. It must be noted that a high-profile security set-up increases the insecurity of immediate neighbours and antagonises the population.

With the exception of those HAs operating in the three northern governorates, all HAs in Iraq have adopted a low-profile posture. The three northern governorates are more secure than the rest of the country, and HAs have fewer incentives to adopt a low-profile strategy there. However, HAs have made themselves more discreet as a precautionary measure.

Low profile characteristics are a combination of the following items:

- Absence of visibility (no donor visibility, no logo).
- No mention of HAs' work in Iraq on the agency's website.
- Expatriates' physical features blend into the general environment.
- Use of private cars that blend in, as opposed to the usual four-wheel drives.
- No use of ID badges (just normal national ID cards).
- No movements with documents written in English.
- No movements with radio or satellite communication equipment.
- Drivers change their cars as often as possible.
- Beneficiaries do not know who they are receiving assistance from. Decision to tell beneficiaries is often left at the discretion of staff, without any specific policy in place
- Origin of the funds not disclosed and even fabricated if the actual source of funding represents a potential vulnerability.
- Office looks like a private house.
- Office shared with a vocational centre. This creates a public environment where many people come and go, while also taking advantage of the security arrangements of the vocational centre.
- Regular change of office location. In particular, Iraqi NGOs tend to rent an office when new programmes start, and end the rental agreement with the end of the programme. They reopen another office in another location when new funding becomes available. However, INGOs have tended to change offices less often since expatriates stopped being based in Iraq.
- Share office with a private business such as an internet centre and/or advertise themselves as a private company. The NGO takes advantage of the company security setup (armed guards) although, in most cases, guards are not informed about the real purpose of the NGO's activities.
- Supplies are bought locally. Relief supplies cannot be easily brought in large quantities from abroad because this would involve transportation by trucks in convoys that are prone to targeting by insurgents mistaking them for MNF supplies.
- Use of large houses as warehouse facilities.
- Extensive use of laptops and flash memory sticks. Laptops are convenient in the Iraqi context because they can be moved from one place to another in a matter of minutes, and they have batteries that enable the user to work even when electricity shuts off. They can be taken home where the user can continue working late, or when the next day he/she is confined to the home because of insecurity. However, their transportation can disclose the fact that the user either has a

well-paid job or that he/she works for foreigners. In both cases, this is sufficient to be the target of violent elements. Therefore, many HAs have developed systems where they can transport laptops unnoticed. For instance, some use shopping bags to transport their laptops.

- Hiring on an occasional basis staff from the various local governmental bodies (Health, Agriculture) to conduct assessments instead of using HAs' own staff.

While low profile was certainly a necessary security policy it has nonetheless had negative impacts that HAs have not yet managed to solve.

Low profile posture has the following negative shortcomings:

- HAs who use a mix of the two or three elements of the security triangle (acceptance, protection and deterrence) have not been able to strike the optimum balance they wished for because of the low-profile tactic that considerably hinders their capacity to reach out to beneficiaries, Iraqi authorities, parties to the conflict.<sup>44</sup>
- Absence of visibility makes it impossible for parties to the conflict to identify HAs and grant them the rights they are entitled to – providing that they wish to – such as simply not firing at them.
- Decreased accessibility of HAs and willingness to share information about programming, staff, plans and security experiences.
- Minimal interaction with actors on the ground implies that HAs can barely advocate for issues such as access to beneficiaries, protection of humanitarian actors.
- Reduced visibility means that, for a number of actors including donors, HAs are not operating in Iraq.
- Lack of external communication may lead unauthorised and unwanted parties to communicate on behalf of HAs.
- Low-profile postures deprive HAs of the possibility of communicating on a large scale with the population to explain what they are doing in the country and what their principles of action are. However, it can be argued that, with the lack of homogeneity of HAs, it is impossible to have a sound collective communication strategy.
- Hiding may be understood by local actors and the population as meaning that the agency has something to hide.
- Not informing neighbourhoods of your presence and your activities can have detrimental consequences. Some NGOs rent houses in residential areas to be used as warehouses or as offices without informing the neighbours, as part of their low-profile strategy. In some cases, neighbours called the Iraqi security forces because they are suspicious of movements in and out of the property, and it is raided.

### 4.3.3 Clandestine operations

A small minority of HAs have gone beyond a low-profile approach to a clandestine security approach. Many Iraqi NGOs have adopted a 'clandestine' security approach, but only a minority of INGOs, as well as the UN, also have their Iraqi staff adopting such a strategy because of their fear of being targeted due to their links with foreigners.

Drawing a line between low profile and clandestine is difficult. It appears that only a minority of HAs have adopted this strategy, but with the increase of violence in the country, particularly sectarian violence, HAs are increasingly drawn towards it.

The characteristics of the clandestine strategy are:

Offices:

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<sup>44</sup> A senior UN official declared: 'In Iraq we have a "silent visibility". We have been delivering for the past 3 years humanitarian aid. When this aid is delivered through NGOs, it looks like an NGO operation only. Our donors also complain because our action is not visible. The more we will deploy in the country, the more we will interact with Iraqis. However we still face the problem of having to move out with MNF escort'.

- No office. Employees work from home.

#### Iraqi staff:

- In extreme cases, if there are specific threats, a person would not sleep in the same place for more than two nights in a row. It is not an uncommon security procedure when facing great threats but, in a clandestine approach, staff may use this procedure frequently even if there are no specific threats.
- Staff do not necessarily know all their colleagues. Physical contact between staff will be limited to essential purposes.
- When in the field, Iraqi staff do not give their real names and change their appearance frequently (growing a beard then switching to a moustache, for example).
- When in the field and interacting with beneficiaries, Iraqi staff pretend to be from the Department of Health or another local body which does not raise suspicions.
- Staff can push the clandestine approach to a situation in which they are not telling their family that they work for an international organisation.
- The origin of funds is not disclosed, or is fabricated.

#### Reaching communities:

- Pyramidal system: example: An NGO has a core staff recruited and trained in 2003–2004, at a time when it was possible for expatriates to have a permanent presence in Iraq. This core group of trustworthy and competent staff can work independently. Each member of the core group will recruit X number of people on the basis of programme requirements (specific skills, knowledge of a particular community) and, more importantly, on trust. These X persons are trained and know their agency trainer's name, but not necessarily about the agency itself or other members of the agency. Those same trainers will go and recruit Y more trainers in much the same way. If anyone in the system is compromised for any reason, it will not go up the line. This is one of the rare systems that can be extendable and fairly reliable.

#### Humanitarian needs:

- Technique of 'hit and run' for emergency distributions.
- No storage capacity maintained (warehouse), contractors or trusted local partners do the job.
- When in the field, Iraqi staff of an international organisation when pretend to work for a local NGO.

### 4.3.4 Deterrence

The only credible counter-threat in Iraq consists of physical deterrence, with the exception of Kurdish-controlled areas where the US government has sufficient weight to exert diplomatic deterrence. In other cases, 'diplomatic deterrence' is bound to fail because it would associate HAs to a foreign agenda.

The deterrence strategy was implemented by HAs as early as their arrival or redeployment in Iraq after the invasion. For instance, the UN was under the armed protection of the occupation forces and the Italian Red Cross in Baghdad under the armed protection of the Italian contingent.

Some deterrence strategies involve armed guards on top of roofs, armed escorts of expatriates in four-wheel drives, MNF armed escorts to convoys. Add to that protection components such as blast walls and concertina wire and you have the highest profile an HA can reach. Since HAs are not necessarily familiar with deterrence strategies or in a position to put together the human resources necessary to form armed escorts, they often tend to outsource the function to the MNF and/or to private security companies (PSC), especially when the donor encourages them to do so and provides them with the necessary financial means. Those agencies may have reduced their vulnerability to a number of threats, but become highly dependent on a single factor (i.e. who provides them with armed

protection), and this may compromise the future of their humanitarian action. For instance, the UN staff ceilings in Iraq and their mobility are almost purely conditioned by the MNF.<sup>45</sup>

Although Iraqi PSCs exist, it seems that HAs do not use their services. Instead, foreign PSCs will be preferred which in the great majority of cases will militarise the deterrence strategy. An extremely limited number of foreign PSCs in Iraq have worked out 'low-profile deterrence strategies', although this term seems to contradict what deterrence is about.

Within the INGO community, the use of weapons has been a heated debate.<sup>46</sup> Most NGOs in Kurdistan paid armed guards for their protection in the 1990s during the Kurdish civil war. Given the security environment and the impossibility of expatriates to monitor effectively what is happening in their NGO facilities, Iraqis in charge of offices and the staff present in the base will be unwilling not to have a weapon in the office. Rules for the use of these weapons are not clear and, in the absence of an acknowledgment that most INGOs do have weapons in their premises, this problem cannot be resolved.

Deterrence strategies can be extremely expensive when managed by foreigners. In order to minimise costs and avoid having to deal with a large number of staff to manage deterrence strategies, some INGOs have regrouped into heavily fortified and armed compounds. These compounds are often managed by private companies or not-for-profit companies that have greater financial means than HAs, such as RTI.

Deterrence strategies have proved to be part of the solution available to agencies to enable a presence in Iraq but often at the cost of losing touch with Iraqis,<sup>47</sup> increasing the vulnerability of Iraqi employees and undermining the future of humanitarian action in Iraq and beyond.<sup>48</sup>

Armed escorts are in most cases highly aggressive. Since most of those armed escorts are for foreigners, Iraqis have associated foreigners to those aggressive convoys that do not have any respect for civilians.

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<sup>45</sup> Some UN senior staff wonder if the stringent security policies in place do not simply aim at putting the UN under virtual house arrest in order to better control the institution. They often see the lack of independent means made available to them in Iraq such as UN airplanes and UN armed escort as restrictions imposed by the members of the Security Council. One even took the case of the UN mission in DRC as an example where a whole fleet of aircraft and helicopters has been available for years, but not a single plane can be provided to Iraq.

<sup>46</sup> InterAction NGO Security Assessment Mission to Iraq: 'Armed guards: A hot-button issue in the NGO community is over the use of armed guards. Several NGOs have global policies prohibiting the use of armed guards and argue vociferously that the use of armed guards clouds the definition of humanitarianism and may actually undermine the security of those who use them, as well as those who don't. There are several other NGOs which are using armed guards arguing that armed guards are the norm in Iraq and/or that it is a matter of being accountable to protect assets from theft'.

<sup>47</sup> The UN declared in October 2003 in a UNOHCI 'Iraq Crisis Update' that: 'The UN need to have access and be accessible to the people and be able to work with Iraqi authorities. While the present circumstances would indicate the need to operate from armored vehicles, barricades and armed guards, the UN – whose ultimate goal is to contribute for the improvement of the life of the Iraqi – cannot operate from a fortress'.

<sup>48</sup> OCHA produced an interesting study on how to maintain a humanitarian presence in high-insecurity settings based on the experiences of non-UN organisations. None of those recommendations was applied in Iraq. OCHA, 'Maintaining UN Humanitarian Presence in Periods of High Insecurity', 5 April 2006, [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900SID/LHON-5ZXLQG/\\$FILE/OCHA\\_security\\_2004.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900SID/LHON-5ZXLQG/$FILE/OCHA_security_2004.pdf?OpenElement).

## 5 Implications of changing security policies on humanitarian action

A number of issues have arisen regarding the continuation of humanitarian programming in the volatile Iraqi context. The essential functions of conducting need assessments, formally setting up monitoring systems and more generally evaluating the quality and relevance of programmes has been greatly hampered by rising insecurity. Donors have not responded effectively to these challenges- by either leaving Iraq (ECHO in June 2005) or by imposing dangerous conditions on their partners (USAID's requirements to have expatriates in Iraq, for example).

Depending on organisational structures and cultures, three main remote-programming options developed alongside each other, each with its specificities, advantages and constraints. Differing mainly over the amount of independent decision-making that the national staff in Iraq could undertake and the degree to which management functions would remain in Iraq, remote strategies were implemented on an *ad hoc* basis.

Other challenges appeared once the security situation in Iraq became too risky for expatriates to be based there on a continuous basis. Of particular interest was the sharp increase in support costs, which was linked to the setting up of remote programming structures. This was not well understood by donors. Limitations in access required inventive solutions from HAs in order to convince donors that they still had the capacity to conduct operations in the field: while some HAs went directly into the development of locally based contact networks in 'hot spots' to continue their activities, others used military convoys to access specific areas.

Another issue is the management of human resources. HAs engaged in remote programming often faced problems in recruiting experienced expatriate staff to manage such complex endeavours. The usual high expatriate turnover limited the effectiveness of long-term remote strategies and jeopardised any progress that might have been made via the presence of expatriates that had previously dealt with high-risk environments, and that specialised in developing the skills of national staff. National staff in turn have become difficult to recruit, particularly at a distance.

The challenges presented by the security situation in Iraq led to the shutting down of operations for a great deal of agencies, to a reduction in the level of programming as compared to the needs of the general population, to a shift in the locations of programmes in order to avoid the 'hot spot' areas where access was not guaranteed and risks were too high, and to changes in the nature of programming itself (away from 'hard' health and watsan infrastructure rehabilitation operations and towards 'soft' democratisation, human rights and civil society development projects).

### 5.1 Humanitarian coordination

HAs have been deeply divided over their role and stance in Iraq, as well as their relationship with the CPA and the MNF. These centrifugal forces were balanced by the need to collaborate and exchange information in such an insecure environment. The scattered distribution of HAs in Iraq, Jordan and Kuwait and reduced mobility however, complicated coordination efforts further.

Although several coordination bodies exist (UN sectoral coordination mechanisms, NGO coordination, several military coordination bodies (CIMIC, CIMOC, ROC, IAC, HOC) and governmental coordination bodies (Kurdish Regional Government, Ministry of Displacement and Migration Crisis Center, individual ministries), this multiplication has not necessarily improved coordination.

With respect to NGOs' coordination, insecurity has also led some NGOs to ask for more collective representation to reduce their exposure to risk. For instance, representation before the Iraqi authorities on administrative issues was a recurrent demand, but it also posed the problem of finding common

messages that the NGO community wanted to convey. The scarcity of funding also leads to more competition between HAs, including within the UN system, which in turn threatens to disrupt the fragile coordination mechanisms in place.

On the positive side, insecurity has forced some HAs to harmonise their resources and capabilities, which has resulted in links of interdependence and improved humanitarian action. These links have enabled actors to gather and coordinate beyond the usual compartmented sectoral groups (specialised working groups in watsan, health). As an example, increased reliance on local capacities has enabled LNGOs to play a greater role. Under extreme conditions, some INGOs have created networks of solidarity whereby some INGOs support other NGOs with:

- independent funding to enable other NGOs to continue operating and not to turn towards ‘tainted funding’;
- expertise other NGOs lack; and
- information for advocacy purposes to NGOs not present in Iraq and therefore able to speak out without fear of putting their staff in danger.

## 5.2 Civil–military interaction

The issue of HAs’ interaction with the military emerged well before the start of the military offensive in 2003. Indeed, military planning took place with HAs prior to the war.<sup>49</sup> Military actors have created a number of tools in Iraq (and elsewhere) to interact with civilians, and in particular with the HAs: the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center (HACC), the Humanitarian Operation Center (HOC), the ROC (Reconstruction Operation Center), the CIMOC (Civil Military Operation Center) and the IAC (Iraqi Assistance Center).

Military actors have been heavily involved in non-military activities such as the provision of humanitarian aid<sup>50</sup> through the CERP,<sup>51</sup> ‘hearts and minds’ operations,<sup>52</sup> reconstruction through the PCO and civil society work.<sup>53</sup> The level of military engagement represented a challenge to HAs, which had to coordinate with the military, especially under the CPA, in order not to duplicate effort and also to be granted access to regions where military activities were taking place.

In May 2003, OCHA established guidelines for interaction between United Nations personnel and military and civilian representatives of the occupying power in Iraq,<sup>54</sup> but the guidelines were not systematically followed. After the UN HQ bombing of August 2003, insecurity forced further interaction between the UN and the military, to the point of dependence for some entities. The UN, for example,

<sup>49</sup> Interaction, ‘Civil–Military Cooperation in Post-Conflict Rebuilding’, 22 March 2004, <http://www.interaction.org/library/detail.php?id=2860>: ‘To build better communication with, and understanding of the NGO community, the Special Operations Training Group of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force contacted InterAction in early January seeking NGO representatives willing to conduct basic NGO training at Camp Pendleton in California. The training was part of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit’s preparation for deployment to the Gulf later that year and was provided to 50 Marines representing the unit’s leadership’.

<sup>50</sup> AP, ‘UN Says Conflict in Iraq Is “Wreaking Havoc” on Children’, 23 November 2004, <http://www.wtnh.com/Global/story.asp?S=2604834>: ‘Lt. Gen. Lance Smith, deputy commanding general of the US Central Command, told reporters in Washington last week that humanitarian assistance in Fallujah was being provided by US military forces, Iraqi security forces and “other humanitarian organizations”’. Also, UNSC Resolution 1546 gives to the MNF a humanitarian mandate.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Appropriations Committee Chairman Ted Stevens Remarks on the Commander’s Emergency Response Program’, 19 May 2004, <http://www.senate.gov/comm/appropriations/general/releases/record.cfm?id=221739>.

<sup>52</sup> AP, ‘Soldiers Adopting Schools’, 6 April 2005: ‘Col. Bradly MacNealy, commander of the 185th, said humanitarian efforts give American soldiers, and the people back home who donate, a sense of participation in winning the trust of the Iraqi people, which MacNealy said will help bring Americans home sooner. “We’ve got to win the hearts and souls and minds of the Iraqi people,” MacNealy said. “The best way to do that is through the children.” MacNealy said when the 185th first arrived in Iraq, children in the area would throw rocks at the troops. However, he said, after distributing candy, school supplies, medicine and hygiene products, the Iraqi children began to build friendships with the soldiers.’

<sup>53</sup> Task Force Liberty, ‘A New Dawn for Iraq, Task Force Liberty NGO Conference Dyalala, Tameem, Sulayimania and Salah Al Din, 27/02/05’, <http://news.soc.mil/releases/05MAR/050304-05.html>.

<sup>54</sup> See <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/96433123da7412db85256d08007393ee>.

can only travel to and in Iraq under close MNF escort. A limited number of INGOs received funding from the military to implement projects, and used the military to send supplies to Iraq.<sup>55</sup> A few US-based NGO expatriates were issued Department of Defense badges to facilitate entry into Iraq.

Most HAs refuse military escorts, but a limited number of INGOs, almost exclusively US-based ones, have resorted to MNF escorts to ship medical supplies in hot-spot areas, raising the risks for other HAs.

On top of the existing ROC, CIMOC and IAC, the US administration has started developing PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) similar to those in Afghanistan. New rounds of USAID funding<sup>56</sup> require complete collaboration of its partners, including NGOs, with PRTs. This has contributed to the decision of two large US NGOs in March 2006 not to apply for new federal funds for their Iraq operations.<sup>57</sup> The UN has expressed reservations over the impact of PRTs on other coordination mechanisms, and has declared that it would not be part of this system.<sup>58</sup> Other HAs are concerned that the military will make access to the population conditional on integration into PRTs.

The issue of HAs' interaction with the military is one aspect among many others, and should not be seen as the central issue with regard to Iraqis' perception of HAs. The real issue in Iraq has to do with the wider integrated project of regime change. The military is only one component of this project, even though it is the most visible.

### 5.3 Impact on human and financial resources

#### 5.3.1 Financial impact

Insecurity has had a major financial impact on HAs because of:

- Higher security costs, especially for those who use a deterrence strategy, such as UN agencies. Protection as a security strategy also involves higher costs.
- Longer time spans for project completion.
- For some HAs, outsourcing monitoring and evaluation activities.
- Diversion of funding in the absence of effective control and auditing.
- Remote management, which involves:
  - communications equipment and billing;
  - additional travel;
  - additional training costs for national staff; and
  - maintaining offices abroad. In particular, Kuwait is extremely expensive.

Donors have generally responded positively to increased costs linked to security.

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<sup>55</sup> CPA, 'Polish Help Hospitals in South Central Iraq', 7 May 2004, [http://www.cpa-iraq.org/pressreleases/20040507\\_poles.html](http://www.cpa-iraq.org/pressreleases/20040507_poles.html). 'Polish Caritas Said To Have Donated Supplies to Polish Army for Distribution in Hilla and Kerbala'.

<sup>56</sup> See USAID Call for Proposal 'Stabilization in Strategic Cities Initiative' launched in November 2005, <http://www.grants.gov/search/search.do?mode=VIEW&oppld=3365>.

<sup>57</sup> An official of one of these NGOs declared: 'All future humanitarian programs undertaken where US forces are engaged as belligerents should be approached very carefully. It is essential that we adhere to our core humanitarian principles and be seen as doing so in order to maintain the acceptance at the heart of our security posture'.

<sup>58</sup> A senior UN official declared: 'The PRT system is a reality, nothing will stop it. They represent a real challenge. When rolled out they should complement and not compete with other schemes. It has been our effort to bring all actors together. Our [UN] position is based on proper coordination including Iraqis and donors and the National Development Strategy. We will not be part of the PRT system'.



### 5.3.2 National and expatriate staff recruitment and skills

#### 5.3.2.1 Expatriate staff

The expatriate turnover rate varies from six to 12 months on average, while periods exceeding one year are exceptional. An extremely small number of INGOs have dedicated staff that stay on the mission for years.

While NGOs did their best to send skilled and experienced staff in anticipation of a humanitarian crisis in 2003, the expatriates who have followed are often younger and less experienced. Ironically, the reduction of INGOs' expatriates based in Iraq has enabled a proportional diminution of that trend. Insecurity has also forced expatriates and HQs to take into better account cultural considerations.

Experienced expatriate staff are difficult to hire because of:

- the negative image Iraq has in terms of insecurity;
- the difficulty in finding adequate expatriate profiles (Arab speakers, culturally sensitive);
- the perceived absence of *humanitarian* needs; and
- most of the job postings are for remote management positions. Expatriates are usually not interested in running programmes remotely or by proxy.

The great majority of international staff are based abroad and have never been to Iraq. For those who travel to Iraq, stays vary from a couple of days to less than a month, with one trip every few months. For those who go to fortified locations (the 'Green Zone', military-secured compounds, embassies), stays can be longer. The strategy is to stay for the shortest time necessary in order to reduce exposure to risks. Almost all Iraqi aid workers feel insecure when expatriates are present. Indeed, expatriates pose an indirect threat to their security by their very presence.

Where expatriates have never been to Iraq, this often means that they do not know their Iraqi staff; at best they will only have met the upper management national staff.

While a number of HAs have made great efforts to hire staff of Arab origin, this is not necessarily the best solution because of the context of sectarian violence and the pride of Iraqis, who may look down at other Arabs. However, when expatriates of Arab origin have been recruited, HAs have been able to substantially improve their work.

Among agencies that have adopted remote management strategies, almost all aid workers had no previous experience in remote management.

#### 5.3.2.2 Iraqi staff

Iraqi staff turnover is usually lower than expatriate turnover. In a context of high unemployment rates, Iraqis tend to keep their jobs as long as possible. Although the foreign private sector is often more attractive in terms of salary, some Iraqis prefer to continue working for an aid agency with a lower salary than for a higher-profile foreign company, where work may be more dangerous. Iraqis have generally benefited from their experience with international NGOs, and some have gone on to establish their own NGOs.

Most HAs have dedicated substantial resources to building the capacity of their staff. However, these efforts have been hampered by:

- The lack of pro-activity of HAs in developing strategies early enough to build on their national staff capability, in particular during the 'window of opportunity' (2003–early 2004), during which the transfer of skills would have been most efficient.
- The high turnover of expatriate staff.
- The inexperience of some international staff.

- Difficulty in building the capacity of national staff from abroad. Training abroad is possible, but it is expensive and is not always designed to enable constant monitoring, readjusting and upgrading of skills.
- Capacities were built but limited to the job employees were undertaking, with little chance to switch from one position to another.
- In order to minimise the risks during long road trips, HAs do their best to employ personnel at local level who have a good network and can move relatively easily in the area under consideration. But this also leads to:
  - having to recruit more staff than normal since the more difficult an area is to access because of security, the more staff members are required to do the job; and
  - looking at recruiting locally means that HAs may not get the quality of staff they need, or the quality they could find in larger towns. This requires a lot more training, but implies also that capacities to provide training and maintain distance communication are in place.

When expatriates are based overseas and have not managed to delegate key functions such as local recruitment, it becomes very difficult to recruit new personnel. Indeed, because of insecurity HAs cannot advertise job postings in the press. Arranging face-to-face interviews with expatriate staff is costly and may not be practical. Therefore, the recruitment reservoir is often limited to the relatives and friends of existing staff.

## 5.4 Access and effectiveness

### 5.4.1 Access

Access to vulnerable populations is extremely difficult in Iraq, especially when they are located in areas of open conflict.<sup>59</sup> Indiscriminate targeting, heavy use of air strikes in populated areas, car bombs or IEDs (improved explosive devices) in urban areas, targeting of ambulances, health facilities rendered inaccessible, combat zones inaccessible and power cuts illustrate the little concern given to the protection of civilians<sup>60</sup> and IHL in general.

In this context, religious leaders, political leaders, local representatives (tribal leaders, religious leaders) and local managers of health facilities and water authorities play an important role in the delivery of humanitarian aid by facilitating assistance, reaching communities and providing assessments. They know the local environment and are known by parties to the conflict. They therefore represent very important points of entry for HAs. The IRCS, ICRC, local NGOs and a limited number of INGOs are among those who provide assistance with the help of religious, tribal and local authorities in hot-spots.

In a context of growing sectarian violence, the principles of impartiality and neutrality are essential components of any humanitarian activity. Many NGOs are working only in the three northern governorates, where almost all of their programme beneficiaries are Kurds. Very few HAs work in all parts of Iraq. Only seven INGOs were found to work in the north, centre and south. Larger bodies like the UN or international organisations manage to strike a balance through partnerships with NGOs, for instance. The ICRC integrates impartiality issues in programming by ensuring that its interventions in the various parts of Iraq are well balanced. But for NGOs, it is more difficult. Some NGOs try to strike a

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<sup>59</sup> NCCI, 'Iraq Emergency Situation – Preliminary Report, 21 March 2006: 'Insecurity and lack of access are fundamental challenges to emergency response in Iraq, challenges that will only increase if violence spirals even further out of control. The lack of access afforded to humanitarian organisations trying to reach those in need, and the prevention of those in need from accessing support, have severe impacts on the ability of humanitarian organisations to respond to emergency situations in a timely and effective manner. Local NGOs in Iraq continue to operate under conditions that the majority of international actors have long since shunned, whilst the few INGOs that have decided to remain in the country have been forced to develop alternative ways of operating to maintain their presence'. [http://www.ncciraq.org/article.php3?id\\_article=640](http://www.ncciraq.org/article.php3?id_article=640).

<sup>60</sup> The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, ICRC, Amnesty International and others have expressed deep concern about the situation of civilians caught up in fighting as a result of the parties to the conflict failing to take the necessary precautions to protect non-combatants.

balance by partnering with local NGOs, for instance in areas where they deem their operations deficient with respect to impartiality.

Impartiality and neutrality are two principles that the majority of HAs have not valued highly in Iraq so far, and it is doubtful that HAs will engage successfully in the challenge of retaining real and perceived neutrality and impartiality in the midst of a complex all-out civil war.<sup>61, 62</sup>

In order to ensure that assistance reaches those in need while maintaining security for aid workers, HAs have deployed elaborate programming techniques. For instance, in contentious areas such as Kirkuk, in order to reach all communities (Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs), some HAs work with several LNGOs from those communities and send their staff only for monitoring and evaluation purposes. In other areas, working with populations that are viewed as harbouring enemies by the MNF and the government is a real challenge.

## **5.4.2 Assessment, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian action**

### **5.4.2.1 Assessment**

Due to insecurity, most actors face difficulties collecting reliable data on such things as vulnerabilities, population movements and needs. Guesstimates, non-measurable information, no up-to-date information and conflicting reports, as is often the case, do not contribute to convincing donors on humanitarian needs. The fact that donors and expatriates are based abroad and interact outside the Iraqi environment means that their discussions and exchanges can be driven by donors' perceptions and agendas, rather than those of HAs, in the absence of reliable data to discuss the situation in Iraq and humanitarian needs. Remote organisational strategies may work in projects that started when expatriates could still visit Iraq. However, they often meet their limits when it comes to launching assessments to eventually start new operations.

### **5.4.2.2 Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)**

M & E components of humanitarian activities have been greatly hampered by insecurity, in particular hindering HAs' accountability to beneficiaries and donors. If HAs are sometimes reluctant to share security experiences, some tend to inflate their capacity to conduct M&E of their operations, to ensure that the flow of funding from donors continues.

After a relief distribution in a hot spot or in an area of mixed communities, it may be difficult for HAs to go back to beneficiaries to evaluate the work. Risk thresholds for relief activities are higher than those set for M&E operations. Delaying M&E exercises may mean that there is little left to monitor or evaluate when an opportunity to go back to a specific area arises. Insecurity is also a fertile ground for all types of diversion of inputs.

Some HAs have developed sophisticated means of M&E to ensure that it is not a one-person monitoring/evaluation. Here are some examples of techniques adopted to undertake monitoring and evaluation:

- An internal 'committee' goes to the field to undertake ME.

<sup>61</sup> A representative of a large INGO declared: 'There was extraordinary ignorance with which many agencies were hardening the target – probably exposing themselves even more; ie those NGOs taking fuel from the US forces compound every evening, even though taxis could not buy fuel. Those making use of US army/marine escorts, and even one NGO that was sharing the same compound as the US forces ... it makes such an impact on perceptions. That's what we faced in Iraq – a perception challenge. We argued that these tactics were completely destroying our chances at being accepted in Iraq, but some NGOs may have argued that our advocacy strategies were putting others at risk as well. We certainly could not claim to be neutral, and you could count that agencies on one hand that were'.

<sup>62</sup> Greg Hansen, an independent consultant, wrote in June 2004, while engaged in an independent evaluation of NCCI: 'The case of Iraq has been exceptional: most humanitarian agencies, NCCI included, have established working contact with only one set of combatants which, strictly speaking, is a departure from real and perceived neutrality and impartiality'.

- Participatory monitoring and evaluation, involving not only the agency personnel but also those who have a stake in the project.
- Peer evaluation, whereby a group of agencies evaluates each others' projects on a rotating basis.
- Use of a local governmental body to counter-check.
- Hiring an external consultant (international or local).

Some donors have complained about the methods used in M&E, noting that there is room for improvement. Due to the lack of an effective monitoring and evaluation system, donors are concerned about the risks of fraud and corruption, which are aggravated by the lack of basic information on who is doing what where (also due ironically to the multitude of donors and poor coordination). The scandal of the Oil for Food Programme is in the back of many stakeholders' minds.

Given the particular context of Iraq, where corruption is pervasive and donors and expatriate aid workers are in most cases not able to visit project sites and meet beneficiaries and other stakeholders, evaluations have focused on outputs, rather than outcome/impact and processes. In particular, evaluation of processes would include the evaluation of HAs' organisational adaptation to the Iraq context, since the performance of any project often depends on the agency implementing it. Process evaluations would certainly have helped to promote organisational learning, and may have improved the effectiveness of humanitarian programmes.

## **5.5 Impact on programming**

### **5.5.1 Closure of humanitarian operations**

Insecurity has forced most INGOs to leave Iraq. While HAs' HQs have looked at what the other HAs' decisions were in terms of staying or leaving, little debate took place among HQs which could have helped to conceive new operational modalities to work in Iraq. There was often pressure from senior management to continue operating in Iraq for various reasons (i.e. solidarity with the victims of the conflict and/or humanitarian needs and/or availability of funding and/or visibility); and at the same time, there was resistance from the operations department regarding how the NGO might operate in such an insecure environment. The absence of internal consensus and firm decisions on whether to maintain operations in Iraq or to bring them to an end was a major impediment to conceiving new modalities on how to operate in Iraq.

### **5.5.2 Reduction in the level of programming**

Many HAs in 2003 and 2004 reduced drastically their programming to rethink their strategy in Iraq and to reorganise.<sup>63</sup> After a few months, they had increased their level of activity, but not to previous levels and certainly not to the levels they had envisaged had insecurity not hampered their efforts.

### **5.5.3 Changes in geographical distribution of programming**

Many HAs have chosen to concentrate on areas where there was clearly a lack of 'humanitarian imperative', as compared to other areas where the status of war has been almost continuous for the past three years. Indeed, most HAs tend to work in areas where their resources and capabilities with respect to security conditions have the greatest chances of yielding results and enabling them to assume the security responsibility for their staff. Therefore, HAs tend to prioritise those areas which are fairly safe and stable to the detriment of the most difficult areas in terms of access and security. This

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<sup>63</sup> As Yacoub El Hillo, UN Deputy of the Deputy SRSR for humanitarian coordination, put it: 'For about a year after the UN HQ attack, the UN did not know what to do. There was a lot of soul searching. Not only was there no self-capacity to deliver, but NGOs which the UN work with were also in the same process. That affected everything. We talk about a 1 billion dollar budget and almost total reliance on NGOs who were in remote at the time and where there was no government in place yet. Since August 2004 things started to shift slowly. The encouraging news is that, from August 2004, we started to re-establish a presence in Iraq. We work through our local staff, contractors, INGOs, LNGOs, line ministries and local authorities to a lesser extent'.

geographical distribution of programming led HAs to distance themselves not only from the humanitarian imperative principle, but also from the impartiality principle.

The table below gives an indication of where INGOs operate.

Area of operation	Number of INGOs present
North (three northern governorates)	12
Centre	9
South	9
North, centre and south	7
North and south	1
North and centre	9
Centre and south	8
Operational through other NGO partners (no staff in Iraq)	5

The frequency of long road trips has been considerably reduced in order to decrease the exposure of HAs to risks. This has resulted in a concentration of HAs in large urban areas at the expense of rural areas.

#### 5.5.4 Changes in the nature of programming

Due to insecurity, most HAs have had to alter the nature of their programming by reducing the scope of their humanitarian programmes and reducing their proximity to beneficiaries by channelling aid through partners (INGOs, LNGOs, local bodies such as mosques). Those changes resulted in a decrease in the overall quality and accountability of aid. Atrophied assessment, monitoring and evaluation added to the challenges in maintaining quality.

Some programmes were forced to be cancelled because they required expatriate technical expertise or extensive leadership skills. When they did not cancel projects they reduced their scope, which often had an impact on their quality by, for instance, concentrating on the hardware (rehabilitation, distribution of supplies) rather than the software (operation and maintenance, capacity building).

The UN and IOM are heavily reliant on NGO partners (INGOs and LNGOs) and contractors to undertake their work. Their level of programming is therefore largely tied to NGO capacities. IOM is present in 15 governorates through a system of NGO focal points in each. Almost half of their partners are LNGOs, while they were all internationals in 2003.

International actors usually find local partners through their own Iraqi staff network when they have staff present on the field, and through INGOs that have built up contacts with local NGOs. LNGOs start with small projects to prove that they are reliable. Once a relationship of trust has been built, the LNGO can aspire to develop its activities through new partnership agreements with other international HAs. This system of networking has the great value of ensuring that a relationship of trust is built in the group, and that a common language is promoted. However, it can also lead to a 'nepotistic' system, where resources are in the hands of a restricted group that pursues and imposes a specific agenda, and where favoured LNGOs, picked to enter the 'club', are those that are culturally close to the international humanitarian community – ie, young, urban, secular, educated, middle/upper class. The system may therefore exclude grassroots organisations, with the danger that the system will institutionalise the disconnectedness of HAs with the reality on the ground and antagonise those who are left outside the system.

Potential partners can be reluctant to work with foreigners for security reasons. They can become a target for insurgents and criminals because of this relationship. As put by an Iraqi NGO funded exclusively by Iraqis, when asked if Iraqi NGOs were viewed as collaborating with foreigners: 'The Iraqi people know very well which NGO is in relation with the foreigners and which one is not. The society (NGO) is not intending to be related to any foreign donor so as not to lose our donors'.

### 5.5.5 Considerations for re-engagement

Although some INGOs left, they continued to monitor the situation in Iraq in expectation of a time when risk/benefit ratios would make possible re-engagement in Iraq. Since humanitarian needs have increased, a number of INGOs are thinking of re-engaging in Iraq, and are doing feasibility studies. Solidarity with Iraqis contributes also to the decision of some INGOs to envisage a reengagement in Iraq. In addition, HQs' decision to suspend operations in Iraq has allowed more time to think over their strategy, and has resolved their internal debates and dilemmas. They also now have a better picture of what operation modalities they can use, based on the experiences of those who remained.

However, since increased humanitarian needs are a direct and indirect consequence of greater insecurity across the country, finding appropriate means to start operations in Iraq, let alone to operate in the midst of a civil war, are still a high-stakes challenge.

### 5.6 Organisational strategy

Since insecurity has forced most HAs to relocate expatriates outside Iraq, agencies have had to integrate the 'distance factor' into their programming. Although aid agencies' organisational cultures are known for being rigid, HAs have had to undertake serious organisational reviews and transformation in order to continue operating in Iraq. This included a profound change in the role and responsibilities of expatriates. The most rigid agencies adopted a remote control approach to their operations, while the most flexible favoured a remote support approach, whereby the centre of gravity for decision-making leans towards Iraqi personnel. Most agencies have opted for an approach in between those two, called remote management. However, the most robust approach appears to be the remote support option.

Ideally, agencies would move from one mode to another linearly until such time as Iraqis filled all key positions, and the agency's structure and systems would have to be continuously adapted to reflect the progressive handover of responsibility. However, this is never the case because of the following factors:

- Change in the security environment. A deterioration of the security environment can force an agency to halt its strategy and revert to a different operating mode.
- Agency organisational structure. The agency's organisational culture can be too rigid and imply a minimum expatriate control not conducive to the adoption of a developmental approach to humanitarian work. This explains why some agencies have no plans for moving into a remote support mode.
- Lack of trust in Iraqi personnel. This factor underlines the importance of the length of time the agency has been operating in Iraq.
- Ability to provide the required level of capacity-building. The agency has a limited ability to provide the required level of capacity-building for its personnel. This is usually linked to the disposition of donors to funding intensive training and mentoring of Iraqi personnel.
- Internal conflict. Internal conflict among Iraqi personnel over who will have the leading role. The agency will often favour a flat organisational structure to overcome this problem, but this is not compatible with a remote support approach.
- Lack of a clear HQ strategy. If the agency's HQ has not made clear what its programming strategy is, expatriates will have great power over determining the strategy. The high expatriate turnover rates will impact on the definition of clearly defined strategy and a commitment to achieving it.

Because of those factors, agencies are not always clear about their strategy and may shift suddenly from one mode to another, or fail to make a clear choice between the two modes. This partly explains why agencies' structure and systems are built on an *ad hoc* basis and are rarely clearly defined.

In all cases, agencies face tremendous challenges in the implementation of any remote mode. The most important challenges HAs have had to face because of distance relate to:

- communication flow and quality;
- quality of assessment, monitoring and evaluation functions;
- donors' negative perception of remote programming;
- personnel management; and
- logistics, administration and finance.

### **5.6.1 Continuous expatriate presence in country but with reduced expatriate personnel**

Excluding those operating in the north, very few HAs fall under this category. This organisational strategy involves security strategies mainly based on deterrence. This is the posture that the UN has chosen to adopt. However, the UN maintains only a limited number of expatriates in Iraq. The majority of the UN's expatriate personnel present in Iraq are security-related, and the rest include mainly the political pillar personnel, as well as logistics and administrative personnel. Very few UN expatriate employees present in Iraq are related to humanitarian programmes. The bulk of the UN humanitarian expatriate personnel is based abroad and forced to operate remotely.

### **5.6.2 Remote control**

'Remote control' is defined as the situation where all the decision-making is made by the international staff, and where no special importance, time or financial resources are dedicated to the transfer of skills to the national staff or to the capacity-building of national staff.

By the end of 2003, the majority of the aid agencies that relocated expatriates abroad referred to their operations as 'remotely controlled'. Since 2005, and much earlier for a few pro-active agencies, HAs have come to realise that remote control was not a viable option because it was not working from the strategic and operational point of view. Moreover, remote control is probably the most expensive organisational structure. It is highly demanding in terms of number of expatriates, and incurs costs such as accommodation, per diem, to manage the mission in this fashion and to collect and process information. Indeed, field information resides with national staff in Iraq, and often requires important channels of information (internet, phone) and travelling of national staff that need to be seconded when they leave their job to go abroad to meet expatriates.

### **5.6.3 Remote management**

'Remote management' is defined as a reactive position where, by necessity, international staff are remote from national staff and, by necessity, there is a transfer of decision-making and skills to national staff, and capacity-building of national staff in order to get the originally proposed job done. Remote management is sometimes viewed as a temporary phase, after which there will be a return to 'normality' (international staff are back in place to 'run the show'). The great majority of HAs currently use a remote management strategy.

After more than two years of experience in remote management, it appears that this remote programming option has reached its limits and works only in specific cases. Indeed, remote management requires that a number of criteria are met, such as a certain level of autonomy for national staff and a high level of trust. Most important, it appears to work almost exclusively when expatriates can meet their staff in Iraq regularly. In the midst of a highly volatile and insecure environment, relying on regular visits of expatriates in Iraq is high-risk, rather than an acceptable assumption. It also means that the agency increases its vulnerability to a number of lethal threats. Also, the high turnover of expatriate staff is not conducive to adopting such an organisational strategy.

In the short term, remote management offers the possibility of a flat organisational structure. But in the long term, remote management with a flat organisational structure can lead to tensions among Iraq-based staff, and to conflicting lines of communication and responsibility.

Most HA expatriates we met told us that remote management was either frustrating or very frustrating. Iraqis typically spoke of 'patronizing expatriates' based in safe, pleasant environments. This frustration appeared to impact on how aid strategies were defined. Expatriates of INGOs that have adopted a

remote control or management strategy are the driving force for building programme strategies. When building their aid strategy, some expatriates add a new criterion: the frustration of being far from the field. It was found that, in a limited number of cases, this criterion was ranked higher than needs assessments. For instance, they will look for programmes that can 'bring the field to them'. Such programmes are, for instance, programmes of civil society capacity-building on issues that are of interest to the expatriates, rather than priority needs. For instance, programmes aiming at building local emergency response capacities are not ranked high on the expatriates' priority lists, even though they would represent a good compromise between their forced phasing out of emergency responses and their wish to transfer skills. It is not uncommon to hear expatriates declaring that: 'I am fed up with those emergency interventions that last for a couple of weeks and where I cannot see their impact'. To some extent, although expatriates may envisage such emergency response capacity-building programmes, donors are not always keen on such programmes, and prefer capacity-building programmes that 'foster democratisation'.

#### **5.6.4 Remote support**

'Remote support' is defined as a proactive position, where the clearly defined plan is to hand over the decision-making prerogative, transfer skills to national staff and to structure and organise work in such a way as to facilitate their autonomy.<sup>64</sup> For those who argue that overall management components (planning, organising, leading and controlling resources) cannot be conducted by remote control and should remain within the staff based in Iraq, remote support represents the best organisational strategy. So far, a minority of HAs have opted for this strategy, but it appears that there is a trend among HAs to turn to remote support solutions.

#### **5.6.5 'Expatriate-free' (complete nationalisation of expatriate positions)**

Three INGOs were found to have developed a sense of ownership of the organisation among national staff, and the responsibilities that go with it, to the point where all the staff of the INGO were Iraqi. In one case, the programme coordinator was an expatriate based abroad, but in a remote support position, while the head of mission is Iraqi and based in Iraq. In any case, nationalising all positions does not mean that expatriates are not involved in the conduct of operations in Iraq. In the first case, for instance, the INGO has a regional office in Amman, staffed with one expatriate who provides guidance to the mission. Also, as in any other humanitarian operation, expatriates come as consultants for brief periods of time.

The INGOs were present in Iraq before the conflict in 2003, though this does not mean necessarily that only INGOs who have been working in Iraq for a long period of time can aspire to nationalising all positions. It is first of all a matter of trust between the HQ and the staff based in Iraq. In the three cases, the driving force in the nationalisation of expatriate positions was not insecurity, as the decision and process started before insecurity increased. This suggests that the nationalisation of all key mission positions is more a question of HAs' organisational culture rather than the capability of Iraqis.

Although donors are used to dealing with nationals from their home country or Western expatriates, mentalities are changing and donors tend to integrate and increasingly appreciate dealing with Iraqis.

The main challenges to an 'expatriate free' strategy are:

- Building trust between donors and national staff.
- Ensuring the security of essential staff who, unlike expatriate staff, are not a 24-hour security responsibility of aid agencies (although it is feasible to envisage such an arrangement).
- Ensuring that staff are not overloaded by intensive training and the conduct of daily operations.
- Ensuring that trained staff will not leave to seek more attractive job opportunities elsewhere.

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<sup>64</sup> NCCI/Greg Hansen, 'Remote Management of Humanitarian Programmes in Iraq', 16 December 2004.



## 6 Conclusion

Iraq is one of the world's most dangerous operational environments for HAs.

The rise of protection and deterrence strategies in Iraq has not necessarily led to greater security for aid workers. In some cases, deterrence strategies have focused on the security of expatriate personnel, and have put at risk Iraqi personnel by increasing the profile of agencies. Protection strategies have undermined the exchange of security information as well as coordination activities and, have resulted in reduced interaction with local communities, leaders and armed groups, therefore making it more difficult for HAs to change the perception various actors have of them.

Insecurity has also forced HAs to rethink their programming and organisational approaches. Programming has been seriously reduced and the great majority of international HAs have deserted the worst areas of Iraq. This poses the question of the overall impartiality of international humanitarian action in Iraq. The ICRC and a handful of international HAs have addressed this in their programming, but there has been no such reflection among other HAs. Local coping mechanisms exist in those areas and need serious support, but HAs have preferred more donor-fashionable programmes of 'civil society capacity-building'.

Programming strategies have also involved increased collaboration with local NGOs, but it often appears that the terms of this collaboration are more about a transfer of risk than a genuine partnership focused on building the capacity of the local partner.

With regard to new organisational approaches, and in particular the role and responsibilities of expatriate personnel, it appears that HAs' organisational cultures are often too rigid and do not leave much room for 'thinking outside the box'. In most cases organisational approaches have involved an over-reliance on expatriates based abroad, and have not left much room for a transfer of responsibility. HAs' rigidity is not the only cause. Donors are often willing to support increased security costs for operations in Iraq, but are less responsive when it comes to providing the means for an adaptation of HAs' operational approaches.

In a country where HAs are associated with the governments funding them, donors have an important role enabling HAs to work. They have usually ensured that their policies do not make HAs more vulnerable, with the exception of USAID whose funding requirements involve the presence of expatriates in Iraq and full collaboration with PRTs.

Finally, insecurity and the difficulties faced by HAs in adapting to the operational environment have had a negative impact on overall aid quality and accountability. Monitoring and evaluation functions have been seriously hindered by insecurity.

While some will argue that, in Iraq, humanitarian action has reached its limits, a few HAs still provide humanitarian assistance in less accessible parts of the country. HAs need to be more inventive in their approach, and need to improve their collective organisational learning from their experiences within and beyond Iraq.

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## 8 Links to annex documents (1 – 9)

The annexes for this background paper are available by clicking on the individual heading below.

[Iraq general time line](#)

[List of security indicators](#)

[Direct or indirect target of security incidents in Iraq](#)

[Iraq security incidents data sheet](#)

[Support structure presentation](#)

[Threat risk vulnerability](#)

[Iraq humanitarian risk analysis](#)

[Baghdad hostage working group presentation](#)