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Getting ready Agencies plan to help Iraqi refugees in case of war; neighbors fear exodus

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — Fearing a repeat of the refugee crisis sparked by the Gulf War and its aftermath, aid agencies and governments are quietly drawing up plans and stockpiling supplies to help Iraqis who may flee their country if new fighting breaks out.

Neighboring countries, which took in more than three million displaced people a decade ago, hope to avoid a flood of migrants by sealing their borders and setting up refugee camps inside Iraq. Aid officials doubt, however, that the flow of frightened Iraqis can be halted at the border.

Either way, huge amounts of supplies could be needed on short notice.

International relief agencies are rapidly trying to fill warehouses in the region.

Most worrying is a scenario in which a cornered Saddam Hussein unleashes the biological or chemical weapons that Washington alleges he has.

"Here is the nightmare,"

Preparing for Iraqi refugees

Fearing a refugee crisis on the scale of that seen during the Gulf War, countries neighboring Iraq and international aid agencies are making preparations in the event of war.

Plans for aid from neighboring countries

Syria has not publicly laid out plans but the United Nations is building a camp for 10,000.

Turkey is stockpiling food and supplies but will likely try to prevent many from entering.

Iran has drawn up plans to shelter 150,000 to 900,000 people in camps just inside Iraq.



SOURCE: Associated Press

said Jamal Hattar, director of Caris imminent or inevitable operations in Jordan. "I cannot pretend we have the capacity to respond to such a thing."

Christer Aqvist, head of the

regional delegation of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said antibiotics or other antidotes are not part of the stockpiles.

"But of course we can easily mobilize."

Red Crescent societies from all of Iraq's neighbors — Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran and Turkey — held an unpublished meeting in Geneva on Oct. 16-17 to coordinate contingency plans. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society participated by phone, Aqvist said.

Talks have also been underway with U.N. agencies, but preparations have been low-profile to avoid giving the impression that war is imminent. Most governments are expected to try to keep displaced people in Iraq, to avoid being saddled with the burden of taking them in.

Of Iraq's neighbors, Turkey and Iran have signed international agreements on accepting and caring for refugees. But in the end, public pressure may force all the surrounding countries to open their doors once again, aid officials say.

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By Jeremy THE BATT
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