

Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy

White Paper

January 2016

The United States and the Syrian Refugee Crisis

A Plan of Action

By **Michael Ignatieff**

Edward R. Murrow Professor of Press, Politics and Public Policy

Students: Rana Abdelhamid, Juliette Keeley, Lina Dakheel, Merissa Khurma, Rihab Elhaj, Alex Maza, Nikola Ilic, Betsy Ribble, Uran Ismaili, Shannon Thomas, Brynna Quillin



HARVARD Kennedy School

SHORENSTEIN CENTER

on Media, Politics and Public Policy

Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/).

Table of Contents

1. Chapter One: A Plan of Action	3
2. Chapter Two: Implementing the Plan	9
3. Chapter Three: Supporting the Front Line States	18
4. Chapter Four: Promoting Peace and Refugee Return in Syria	22
5. Chapter Five: Assembling a Coalition of Support	25

Chapter One: A Plan of Action

The Western world is witnessing the largest forced migration of peoples since World War II. America's closest ally in Europe, Germany, has opened its frontiers to admit over a million refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea, while Italy has been struggling to cope with a flood of migrants and refugees from failed states and conflict zones in Africa. Greece has seen nearly eight hundred thousand refugees and migrants cross its borders in a single year.

The refugee and migration crisis is much more than a humanitarian drama. It is also a strategic challenge for the United States. Since 1945 Europe has been America's major strategic ally and most important trading partner. American engagement and support has helped Europe consolidate peace and prosperity on the continent. The United States will be weakened if Europe comes out of the refugee crisis weakened and divided. Thus far, while Europe has buckled under the crisis, America has remained a bystander.

This paper—a collaboration between Harvard Kennedy School faculty and students¹—argues that it is in America's national interest to help Europe manage and overcome this crisis by lending strong political support to its major European allies, particularly Germany, and by re-asserting its leadership role in refugee resettlement and integration. We propose a plan of action that renews American leadership and supports Europe while strengthening the national security of the United States.

Any refugee policy of the United States must strengthen, not weaken the security of its own citizens. In the wake of the terrorist attacks in San Bernardino, Paris,

¹ Michael Ignatieff is the Edward R. Murrow Professor of the Practice of the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School. Rana Abdelhamid, Lina Dakheel, Rihab Elhaj, Nikola Ilic, Uran Ismaili, Juliette Keeley, Merissa Khurma, Alex Maza, Betsy Ribble, Shannon Thomas, Brynna Quillin are Masters' and Mid-Career Students at the Harvard Kennedy School.

the Sinai, Beirut, Ankara, Bamako and Ouagadougou, a public debate has erupted over whether the U.S. should take any Syrian refugees. Republican Presidential candidates have declared that the security of American citizens must prevail over America's long-standing commitments to resettle refugees. Thirty governors, mostly Republican but also including some Democrats, have vowed to bar Syrian refugees from settling in their states. Congress is moving forward on bills that would make it significantly more difficult to accept refugees. President Obama has vowed to veto these measures and has stood by his plan to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees on top of America's annual 70,000 quota from different lands. He has argued that America can keep faith with its commitment to Syrian refugees without jeopardizing the safety of American citizens.

This debate is a test of American commitment to the international refugee conventions. It is also a moment of truth for U.S. policy in the battle against jihadi extremism. In our view, the question is whether the U.S. will allow its refugee policies to be dictated by fear or by hope. We believe the U.S. must stand with its European and Middle Eastern allies to provide shelter and hope for families fleeing conflict in the Middle East. By doing so, U.S. refugee policies will refute jihadi messages of hate and division. We propose security measures that will allow the United States to accomplish these goals without compromising the security of American citizens.

We believe that by responding with generosity, vision and optimism, the refugee crisis offers the United States a historic opportunity to:

- 1. Reaffirm its historic leadership in refugee resettlement.**
- 2. Demonstrate that refugee resettlement will not endanger national security.**
- 3. Send a powerful message to counter jihadi extremists' portrayal of the United States.**

- 4. Support and stabilize European allies against resurgent anti-immigrant and anti-American populism.**
- 5. Support and stabilize Middle Eastern front line states: Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.**

Our specific policy recommendations are that the U.S. should:

- 1. Surge resettlement in 2016 for 23,000 UNHCR Syrian refugees through U.S. military installations at Fort Dix.**
- 2. Select UNHCR vetted refugees and repatriate them by air directly from camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.**
- 3. Increase U.S. processing facilities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey to resettle a further 40,000 refugees deemed vulnerable and in need of resettlement by the UNHCR.**
- 4. Mandate full Federal funding for 8 months of integration and resettlement payments to Syrian refugees in American communities.**
- 5. Increase U.S. assistance to UNHCR and WFP to stabilize and improve conditions in refugee camps in front line states.**
- 6. Use all U.S. leverage and influence with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Russia to negotiate a stand-in place cease-fire in Syria that would permit the eventual return of refugees.**

In our view, these policies would affirm America's best historical traditions, confirm its humanitarian commitments to desperate people and support its strategic objectives in the fight against jihadi extremism.

U.S. policy so far has not met these objectives. Since the civil war began in 2011, the U.S. has taken in fewer than 2,000 refugees. The President's commitment to resettle 10,000 refugees is laudable, but it fails to meet the scale of the problem and fails to seize the opportunity for leadership that the refugee crisis presents.

While the U.S. has provided the lion's share of existing financial support to the international agencies—UNHCR and WFP—that provide relief in the camps, these agencies remain substantially underfunded. Deteriorating camp conditions and overcrowding helped precipitate the refugee exodus of 2015. As long as conditions in the camps in the front line states do not improve, refugee flows will continue. Refugee camps are also incubators and recruitment centers for jihadi extremism. To contain jihadi penetration of the refugees, it is important both to stabilize and improve conditions in the camps and also to provide hope for those who are desperate to leave and start a new life elsewhere.

In 2014, the UNHCR designated 130,000 Syrians in refugee camps in need of resettlement by 2016.² The U.S. has traditionally resettled at least half of UNHCR-designated refugees. We believe the U.S. should fulfill this role and take in 65,000 Syrian refugees. Taking this number would relieve the pressure on the front line states and send a message of solidarity to the European states struggling to cope with the refugee influx on their own. Refugee resettlement in the U.S., therefore, plays a critical role in strengthening and stabilizing critical American allies in Europe and the Middle East.

No refugee policy is viable if it compromises the security of Americans. Existing refugee screening processes are rigorous and effective. Of the 784,000 refugees that America has taken in since 9/11, fewer than ten have been charged with terrorist-related offenses and none have committed attacks.³ This record of safe

² UNHCR has since increased this initial goal and focused on a longer-term objective: resettling the estimated 10% of the roughly 4.6 million in nearby refugee camps who are particularly vulnerable (e.g. victims of violence or torture, orphans, those with special medical needs) and in need of resettlement to a third country. Providing places for 50% of the initial request continues to provide a symbolic and politically feasible target for the U.S. Sources: “UNHCR Syria Refugee Response” (<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>) and “UNHCR: 66th Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme Agenda” (<http://www.unhcr.org/56150fb66.html>).

³ At least six refugees resettled in the U.S. have been arrested for terrorism-related offences. Two Bosnians, Ramiz Zijad Hodzic and Sedina Hodzic were charged with conspiring to provide material support and resources to terrorists, and with providing material support to terrorists. Ramiz Zijad Hodzic was also charged with conspiring to kill and maim persons in a foreign country. One Uzbek, Fazliddin Kurbanov was

refugee admission can be maintained and strengthened, especially if the refugees we propose to admit are repatriated directly to U.S. military installations and kept there until the vetting process is complete. In this report, we propose additional reforms of the admission and vetting process to increase the security it provides to Americans.

Some Americans question why Syrian refugees should be resettled here, but the fact is that there are no viable alternatives. The existing refugee camps in the Middle East are overcrowded and underfunded. The President has considered and rejected safe zones that could harbor displaced civilians inside Syria. Safe zones require air cover and ground troops. A safe zone is not safe without perimeter protection by combat capable ground troops and continuous air cover. No country has stepped forward to provide these ground troops, and the available ground forces—Kurdish fighters and Sunni militias—are unsuitable for the mission of civilian protection. Meanwhile the Syrian civil war grinds on, rendering refugee return currently impossible.

Nor can the U.S. safely assume that Europe can continue to absorb indefinite numbers of fleeing refugees. Sooner rather than later, Germany and other countries will find themselves unable to provide further assistance. When Europe closes its doors, pressure will increase on other countries, especially the United States, to step in and provide an alternative. If the refugees lose all hope of a better life, if they feel they have been abandoned, some of them will be easy targets for radicalization and terrorist recruitment. Keeping doors of refuge open for Syrian refugees is critical if the West is to prevail against jihadi extremism.

If the United States remains a bystander in the refugee crisis, existing strains in the U.S.-European alliance will grow and the disunity and instability of Europe

convicted in Idaho of supporting terrorist organizations and building explosives in his garage. Two Iraqis, Waad Ramadan Alwan and Mohanad Sharif Hammadi, who were insurgents in Iraq, were arrested in Kentucky for terrorism charges including transporting money and weapons to Al Qaeda in Iraq. One Somali, Abdirahman Yasin Daud, was arrested after trying to obtain a fake passport to join the Islamic State in Syria.

will continue to increase, jeopardizing American and European unity of action in the face of Russian pressure in Ukraine and elsewhere. It is time for the United States to use its refugee policy to support Chancellor Merkel and other European leaders. Doing so will reinforce these leaders, strengthen the Western alliance and help prevent anti-American, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant voices gaining power in Europe.

Nor can the U.S. continue to look to the front line states—Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan—to handle the refugee problem. They are all at capacity and further refugee flows will destabilize the fragile political order of all three. Taking 65,000 refugees will allow the U.S. to encourage other allies to take refugees; it will send a strong message of support to its front line allies; and it will assert a common front against jihadi propagandists who would like nothing more than to stop Western countries from providing refuge for civilians fleeing their murderous caliphate.

The most important dimension of refugee policy is strategic communication in the U.S. battle with jihadi extremism. The leaders of the Islamic State (IS) are masters of strategic disinformation. They want to convince Western publics that refugees fleeing barrel bombs and IS terror pose a security threat to states that give them refuge. It serves the strategic interests of terrorists if Western democracies begin to close their doors to desperate people. In this context, it is vital that U.S. refugee policy directly rebuts IS' strategies of disinformation. It is in the U.S. national interest to demonstrate that it can accept refugees and, in doing so, strengthen rather than weaken the security of its citizens in the battle against jihadi extremism.

Chapter Two: Implementing the Plan

1. A Resettlement Surge

Over the next six months, the United States Government should transport 23,000 Syrian refugees from existing refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (MDL) for rapid screening and resettlement into American cities. The purpose of this temporary resettlement surge would be to quickly work through the backlog of Syrian refugees referred to the U.S. by UNHCR over the last several years that have not been resettled due to delays in U.S. screening.⁴ Only refugees already screened and accorded refugee status by UNHCR will be brought to America for processing at the base. Families, orphans, and victims of torture and recent combat in Syria will receive priority.

This operation will follow the example of Operation Provide Refuge in 1999, when over 4,000 Kosovar refugees were brought into the U.S., screened and resettled within one month. Like Operation Provide Refuge, multiple government agencies will participate to ensure rapid screening in a secure but humane environment. The U.S. military will be responsible for securing the operations and providing logistical and medical support. Each department that participates in security screening will have delegations at MDL under the leadership of the Department of Homeland Security.

Refugees will be airlifted directly from Incirlik Air Base in Southern Turkey to MDL. At MDL, the U.S. military will set up facilities for both the refugees and the U.S. government employees that will process them. As in Operation Provide Refuge, the refugees will stay in the barracks and all the entrances and exits to the base will be secured by the military. Food and medical care will be provided through MDL facilities.

⁴ Refugees, United Nations High Commissioner for. "Factsheet on Resettlement: Syrian Refugees." *UNHCR*. <http://www.unhcr.org/52b2febafc5.html>.

The refugees will undergo all standard security and medical screening, but the process will be expedited because all the relevant U.S. government actors will be centralized in one place.

While refugees are being processed they will receive ESL lessons and cultural orientation from NGOs. Placement with a sponsoring organization will also be determined during this time.

After security and medical screening is complete, the refugee will be transported to the communities where they will be resettled and the sponsoring organization will take over responsibility for their integration.

The cost of a resettlement surge is difficult to estimate. The Canadian government is currently in the process of resettling 25,000 refugees in a similar manner to what is proposed here. Like our proposal, the refugees are being flown directly from camps in the Middle East to Canadian facilities where they are being screened and processed. A recently leaked budget estimate for the total cost of the Canadian resettlement was \$826 million over the next six years, with \$600 million in the first year.⁵ The per refugee cost is therefore approximately \$33,000. This includes the cost of transporting the refugees, as well as the screening costs and all housing, food and education required to fully integrate them into society over a number of years.

The President has the power to authorize refugee admissions, but Public Law 96-212 (1980) requires him to designate the measure as a response to an ‘emergency refugee situation’ and then demonstrate to Congress that the Syrian situation is such an emergency. It will be important for the President to mobilize public support to secure Congressional support. In Chapter 5, we identify the

⁵ “The Cost of the Liberal Government’s Plan to Resettle 25,000 Syrian Refugees Is Pegged at \$1.2 Billion over the next Six Years.” *The Toronto Star*, November 19, 2015. <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/11/19/cost-of-syrian-refugee-plan-pegged-at-12b-over-six-years.html>.

constituencies and organizations that he will have to rally in order to maintain public and Congressional support.

Forceful action by the President to take more Syrians will provide immediate short-term relief to the countries bordering Syria that are struggling to deal with the refugee flow. It may also reduce refugee movement into Europe, assisting European leaders feeling domestic pressure to bar further refugees. Most importantly, it will give the U.S. standing to engage on refugee issues with other countries and the legitimacy to press for further resettlement and aid.

Screening refugees rapidly and in a controlled environment like Fort Dix is a more effective way to prevent any dangerous individuals from entering the country. A faster process is a more secure process. When a refugee passes a security check, U.S. security agencies are making a determination that this person does not pose a threat at the time of the investigation. If the resettlement process continues after that investigation for more than a year, the usefulness of that determination is reduced. Under the existing system, that forces the U.S. to run multiple, redundant checks. This proposed surge is a more secure and efficient alternative, because when a refugee passes security screening, he or she would be resettled within days, with no risk of radicalization in refugee camps.

2. Establish Additional Resettlement Support Centers in Europe

In addition to the surge resettlement through Fort Dix, the United States government should establish Resettlement Support Center (RSC) facilities in Athens, Greece and Munich, Germany to process approximately 40,000 additional refugees as close to their point of arrival in Europe as possible. This would supplement existing RSCs in Vienna and Istanbul. RSCs are the U.S. government hubs for all resettlement processing, including paperwork, security screening and medical checks. Greece and Germany receive the largest flow of refugees. Locating U.S. government capability there to screen refugees for resettlement in the United States would relieve pressure on our European allies and show that

the U.S. stands shoulder to shoulder with their efforts to shelter those fleeing the conflict.

3. Streamline the Screening Process

The current screening process for refugees takes 18 to 24 months and involves multiple layers of medical and security screening, with built-in redundancy for checking and rechecking. Speeding up this process is important because refugees kept waiting in camps or in hostile foreign cities can easily be radicalized.

More processing should be done in parallel. For example, medical screening should begin at the same time as security screening so that lengthy medical tests have time to be completed. Medical screening should be contracted out to selected local clinics where the refugees can go directly. This will reduce the burden on U.S. government staff and the backlog of refugees waiting for medical clearance.

The current immigration vetting process is mostly paper-based, costly and slow. The U.S. government physically transfers paper files 6 times over thousands of miles to different processing centers within the U.S. and abroad to Embassies and Consulates. The process takes between 18 and 24 months. While this time frame has been touted as a strong security measure, it is the detail of security and medical checks and not the length of time that make the process secure. The time frame itself is reflective of inefficient administrative processes.

Several promising initiatives are under way which will enable the U.S. Customs and Immigration Service (USCIS) to enhance its capacity to process more refugee applications more quickly, all the while maintaining security integrity.

The following are policy recommendations that capitalize on these efforts:

- 1. Deploy a “whole of government” approach for refugee visas:** Once one agency has determined that a case merits expedited processing, all agencies (Department of Homeland Security, Department of State and USCIS) should comply.
- 2. Introduce new digital tools to speed the adjudication process:** USCIS and the Department of State are currently collaborating on a pilot program, the Modernized Immigrant Visa (MIV) Project, which digitizes the visa application and adjudication process. The MIV project is aimed at improving the visa applicant experience and increasing efficiencies in the adjudication process by digitizing as much of it as possible. A suite of applications, mainly belonging to USCIS and State, will more efficiently process and manage electronic immigrant records. The MIV pilot is being rolled out in Montreal, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Frankfurt, Hong Kong and Sydney, with a wider launch in 2016. The U.S. could adapt the MIV tool for use with refugee populations in consular posts in Europe and the Middle East. The U.S. Digital Service, a team within the federal government that seeks to improve and simplify digital services, can create a cross-agency digital service team to support the implementation of the overall MIV pilot. The U.S. Digital Service has a proven track record and is already seeking to assist USCIS in this project.⁶ They would be well positioned to oversee development of a refugee version of the MIV tool.
- 3. Help refugees navigate the application process:** In 2015, the U.S. Digital Services and 18F, a consulting group within the General Services Administration, developed [MyUSCIS](#), a platform that allows users to access information about the immigration process and find immigration options. This tool could easily be enhanced to better respond to refugee needs by offering the location of the nearest U.S. embassy or UNHCR center capable of conferring refugee status.

⁶ “Modernizing & Streamlining Our Legal Immigration System for the 21st Century.”
https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/final_visa_modernization_report1.pdf

4. Help Refugees Integrate Quickly

The U.S. already has a well-established partnership between federal, state and local agencies to assist refugee integration and resettlement. This existing set of partnerships and networks needs to be strengthened.

Resettlement agencies receive a stipend of \$1,875 per refugee from the Department of State's Reception and Placement program as mandated by the Refugee Act of 1980.⁷ This money is given to these resettlement agencies to help refugees with airport pickup, initial rent, food, clothes, costs of agency staff salaries and other preliminary integration efforts.⁸ During the first eight months, local agencies also provide language and vocational training as well as job placement.⁹ In total around 300 agencies and organizations across the nation oversee refugee resettlement.¹⁰ In 2014, the Department of State spent \$616.3 million on refugee resettlement inside the United States.¹¹

Under the Refugee Act of 1980 Syrian refugees will receive \$420.00 per month for a two-person household for eight months with some additions for special cases. Through the office of Refugee Resettlement, Syrians will also benefit from a Refugee Cash Assistance program that will help subsidize their medical expenses until they are employed. The funding is immediately discontinued when a family finds employment income of more than \$800 per month.¹² Syrian refugees will also be required to repay the cost of travel to the United States.¹³

⁷ "The Refugee Act | Office of Refugee Resettlement | Administration for Children and Families." <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/the-refugee-act>.

⁸ Other activities include: safety orientation and apartment basics, initial home visit, initial intake, community orientation, Social Security application, state benefits applications, employment counseling and referral, health screening, school registration, pocket money, grocery shopping, clothes shopping, banking, public transportation orientation, English referral, registration and testing, state ID application, follow-up home visit, medical appointments, hospital emergencies, laundry assistance, mail, case notes and other paperwork, interpretation. Source: "The Real Cost of Welcome: A Financial Analysis of Local Refugee Reception." <http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/RPTREALCOSTWELCOME.pdf>.

⁹ Ibid, The Refugee Act.

¹⁰ Ibid, The Real Cost of Welcome.

¹¹ Department of State. "Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2015." September 18, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/231817.htm>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, The Refugee Act.

While the current grant provided per refugee amounts to \$1,875, research by refugee resettlement agencies has shown that the actual cost of initial resettlement is \$3,492.¹⁴ In fact, federal funding currently accounts for only 39 percent of the total cost of refugee resettlement, with the remainder coming from private fund-raising.¹⁵

Leaders of the State Department's budget committee in the Senate, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), have proposed a funding model in the Middle East Refugee Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (S.2145, October 2015).¹⁶ This bill would provide an additional \$1 billion in emergency funds to be used for refugee resettlement. Invoking an emergency requirement would exempt funds from discretionary spending limits and other budget enforcement rules. In return, the White House would need to report to Congress within 45 days on how it will use the money.¹⁷

We recommend that federal funds for resettlement increase to meet the total needs of local agencies for the entire 8-month resettlement period.¹⁸

To speed up integration, we recommend increased funding for the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration for refugees.

ETA has previously awarded grants to train refugee workers, in partnership with community organizations, to be able to acquire the necessary certifications,

¹⁴ Ibid, The Real Cost of Welcome.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Graham And Leahy Introduce Bipartisan Emergency Funding Bill To Strengthen U.S. Response To The Syrian Refugee Crisis | U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont." <https://www.leahy.senate.gov/press/graham-and-leahy-introduce-bipartisan-emergency-funding-bill-to-strengthen-us-response-to-the-syrian-refugee-crisis>.

¹⁷ Graham, Lindsey. "S.2145 - 114th Congress (2015-2016): Middle East Refugee Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2016." Legislation, October 6, 2015. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2145>.

¹⁸ Ibid, The Real Cost of Welcome.

licenses and English language skills to pursue their professions in the U.S. **These grants should be offered to states for Syrian refugees to ensure their proper economic integration.**¹⁹ When new Americans can leverage and improve their skills, they are able to become successful entrepreneurs and self-sufficient members of society.

Refugees can also access U.S. Department of Education adult education and family literacy programs that provide basic English acquisition. **Specific to refugees is the Refugee Impact School Program, which should be extended to states that will be receiving Syrian refugees.** Administered by the Department of Education, it provides refugees with orientation, tutoring, after-school programming, parent-teacher conferences, interpretation assistance and additional information on school systems.

We endorse the recommendations of the White House Task Force on New Americans and we recommend their adoption for Syrian refugee resettlement, viz,²⁰

- 1. Settlement Resources Information:** As soon as refugees arrive in the States, the Departments of State and DHS should identify opportunities to provide approved immigrant visa applicants and beneficiaries of an approved immigrant visa petition with information on critical settlement resources, including available English language learning opportunities.
- 2. Identify Refugee Leaders Early:** Make citizenship more accessible by identifying and elevating community leaders who will raise awareness about naturalization processes and the importance of civic engagement and who will engage with the broader community to highlight the needs of the refugee community.

¹⁹ “FACT SHEET: The Federal Role in Immigrant & Refugee Integration.” *Whitehouse.gov*, July 16, 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/16/fact-sheet-strengthening-communities-welcoming-all-residents>.

²⁰ “The New Americans Project.” *The White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/node/350671>.

- 3. Increase funding for the Ethnic Community Self-Help Program:** This program provides support to refugee community-based organizations, cultural organizations and religious organizations that will facilitate the social integration processes for refugees.²¹

²¹ "STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES BY WELCOMING ALL RESIDENTS: A Federal Strategic Action Plan on Immigrant & Refugee Integration." The White House Task Force on New Americans, Apr. 2015. Web. https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/final_tf_newamericans_report_4-14-15_clean.pdf.

Chapter Three: Supporting the Front Line States

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), an overwhelming majority of the total number of Syrian refugees (4,603,363) has sought a safe haven in neighboring countries, which include Turkey (2,503,549), Jordan (635,324), Lebanon (1,069,111), Iraq (245,022) and Egypt (123,585).²²

Funding Shortages

Significant reductions in international donor aid, particularly to UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP), have put more strain on the Syrian refugee communities in the front line states as well as on host governments and local host communities. UNHCR did not fulfill its funding requirements for 2015 with only 58 percent of the funding covered.²³ Recent European donations have boosted UNHCR funding but its Syrian program still remains substantially underfunded. Funding shortages have also forced WFP, which relies completely on volunteer contributions, to cut its food assistance by fifty percent to both the more than 4 million Syrian refugees as well as the internally displaced Syrians (estimated at more than 7 million).^{24,25} According to the WFP spokesperson in the Middle East, 1.5 million Syrian refugees affected by the cuts are now getting less than 50 cents a day in food assistance.²⁶ Aid workers in host countries are concerned that the funding shortage is leading to a continuous deterioration of conditions in the refugee camps, which in turn forces Syrian refugees to make the arduous and risky journey to Europe.^{27 28}

²² (UNHCR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response." *UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response*. Accessed January 20, 2016.

<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

²³ "UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response." *UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response*. UNHCR, 29 Dec. 2015. Web. 19 Jan. 2016. <<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>>.

²⁴ "Syria Emergency | WFP | United Nations World Food Programme - Fighting Hunger Worldwide."

<http://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria>.

²⁵ "Syria." *IDMC* ». Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, July 2015. Web. 19 Jan. 2016.

<<http://www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/>>.

²⁶ Northam, Jackie. "For Syrian Refugees, Needs Are Growing And Aid Is Declining." *NPR.org*.

<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/09/14/440280540/for-syrian-refugees-needs-are-growing-and-aid-is-declining>.

²⁷ Ibid.

Funds Donated to Syria in 2015 by Country²⁹

Country	Amount Contributed (USD)
United States	\$1,565,258,523
Germany	\$568,295,180
Russia	\$6,740,087
China	\$0

As per the chart above, the United States tops the list of donor countries, with countries like Russia and China lagging behind significantly in funding relief efforts.³⁰ Moreover, while Gulf Arab countries such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have financially supported host countries in addressing the refugee crises, they could do more to support Lebanon and Jordan in particular.

Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt have upheld their humanitarian responsibility to provide a safe refuge and basic services for the Syrian refugee population. Failure to support the front line states, especially as the conflict prolongs, would further aggravate tensions on the economic, political and security fronts in each host country to a boiling point and risk heightening the current geopolitical disequilibrium across the Middle East region.

The U.S. should lead in ensuring full financing of the United Nations Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP).

²⁸ “Relief Shortfall Forcing Syrian Refugees to Leave Jordan - UNHCR.”

<http://www.venturemagazine.me/2015/09/relief-shortfall-forcing-syrian-refugees-to-leave-jordan-unhcr/>.

²⁹ “Emergency(ies): Syrian Arab Republic - Civil Unrest 2015, Group by Donor Representative Country.” Financial Tracking Service. https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=search-reporting_display&CQ=cq020315114425TxF7oSVtRX.

³⁰ Ibid.

The UN's 3RP plan combines global life-saving humanitarian efforts with a "development-oriented approach to build the resilience of individuals, households, communities and institutions"³¹ in host countries. By coordinating directly with host governments and more than 150 national and international humanitarian and development NGOs, the 3RP is "specifically designed to provide a consistent regional strategy, reflecting the realities and strategies outlined in each [host] national plan."³² The successful implementation of the 3RP, the first for the UN globally, would also help improve emergency and humanitarian response approaches to similar crises in the future.

By leading the effort to support the UN's 3RP, the U.S. would also help local host governments address both economic and political challenges. Given the developmental component of the plan, the assistance will ensure that long-term development projects are not only addressing challenges for locals, but for refugee and local host communities together. This means finding formulas for Syrians to work in these countries, which would bring economic benefits for the host country economies. The U.S. should support the UN 3RP's promising and pragmatic approach to addressing the Syrian refugee crisis.³³

Leverage Major Global and Regional Players to Fund UN-led Refugee Efforts

The United States should call on its Gulf Arab allies to contribute more significantly to international relief and resilience efforts to address the Syrian refugee crisis.

According to UN funding data and various media reports, China, the world's second largest economy, has supported the UN with a modest \$23 million, but has

³¹ "3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016-2017." *3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016-2017*. <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/the-3rp/>.

³² "3RP: Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan." *United Nations Development Programme in the Arab States*. <http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/ourwork/SyriaCrisis/projects/3rp.html>.

³³ "King Abdullah: ISIL 'a War inside of Islam' That We Need to Fight Together." *Euronews*. <http://www.euronews.com/2015/11/11/exclusive-king-abdullah-ii-on-syrian-refugees-in-jordan-and-the-islamic-state/>.

not given any money to Syrian relief efforts since 2014.³⁴ Further, Russia, whose military role in the Syrian conflict has increased significantly in recent months and whose staunch support to the Assad regime continues, has only given \$6.7 million to support Syrian relief efforts.³⁵ Given these meager contributions by two major global players in the Syrian conflict, the U.S. should exert more pressure on both Russia and China to contribute more significantly to UN efforts to address the Syrian refugee calamity.

³⁴ “Refugee Crisis Country Aid Contributions: Russia and China in ‘Bad List’ amid UN Funding Shortfall.” <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/refugee-crisis-countries-aid-contributions-russia-china-bad-list-amid-un-funding-shortfall-1527405>.

³⁵ Ibid.

Chapter Four: Promoting Peace and Refugee Return in Syria

In the long term, the Syrian refugee crisis can only be resolved once violence ceases in Syria and refugees can begin to return. As the U.S. government seeks to implement effective policies for resettling refugees, it must simultaneously promote both diplomatic and military strategies to end the conflict.

On December 18, 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted UN Resolution 2254 (2015), endorsing the peace plan developed in Vienna and reiterating the need for a cease-fire, talks between the Syrian government and opposition, and a two-year timeline for holding elections. The resolution also tasks the Secretary-General to present options for a cease-fire monitoring, verification and reporting mechanism within a month.³⁶

The United States has consistently called for the fall of the Assad regime and the creation of a transitional government, but it has been unwilling to commit ground troops or impose a no-fly zone, and its support of anti-Assad forces has been limited. It has worked closely to support Kurdish forces against IS, but these tactics have been viewed warily by allies such as Turkey, a country which strongly opposes the Kurdish independence—a cause pushed by the PKK, an affiliate of the U.S.-backed YPG and Peshmerga forces in Syria.

Recently, with the IS threat looming stronger over Western countries after the Paris attacks, the U.S. has begun to accept that Assad might be the lesser of two evils for the time being. United States allies in NATO and the European Union also are coming to this view, hoping to gain a cease-fire even at the cost of maintaining the Assad regime, if it means that stability will halt the flow of both terrorists and refugees into Europe. As the primary impetus for intervention in

³⁶ “Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 2254 (2015), Endorsing Road Map for Peace Process in Syria, Setting Timetable for Talks | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12171.doc.htm>.

the Syrian crisis has been refocused on the destruction of IS rather than the ousting of Assad, the U.S. government has signaled it may be willing to allow the Assad regime to remain in power in the short-term if that enables the Russians and Iranians to agree to a peace deal.³⁷

The Vienna negotiations represent a new opportunity for a negotiated solution to the Syrian Civil War. For the first time, the United States, Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia are all seated at the negotiating table. This new development, along with the war-exhaustion of the combatants and converging interests to combat IS, may be creating conditions for a cease-fire.³⁸

The Vienna parties have agreed to start formal negotiations in the coming month between the Assad regime and the opposition, with a six-month time frame for the formation of a Syrian unity government and an 18-month deadline for free and fair elections.³⁹ The P-5 countries may be willing to authorize a UN cease-fire mission in order to prepare the ground for a truce.⁴⁰

Despite these external powers coalescing around a cease-fire and a transition process, there are still serious barriers to peace in Syria. First, the parties to the conflict may still believe victory can be achieved on the battlefield. While this mentality persists, there is little hope of a cease-fire. Moreover, neither representatives of the regime nor leaders of the rebel forces are at the Vienna II discussions.⁴¹ To bring all parties to the table, external actors will have to agree on who is a legitimate negotiating partner and who is a terrorist. This list is

³⁷ Vienna, Valentina Pop in, and Jay Solomon in Washington. "Foreign Ministers Agree to Back U.N.-Led Diplomatic Process for Syria." *Wall Street Journal*, October 31, 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/diplomats-meet-in-vienna-for-syria-talks-as-gap-appears-to-be-narrowing-over-assad-future-1446204142>.

³⁸ Lundgren, Magnus. "Peacemaking in Syria: Barriers and Opportunities." *Swedish Institute of International Affairs* 1 (2015): 27. <http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/111609.pdf>.

³⁹ Norman, Laurence. "World Powers Push Timetable for Syria Solution." *Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/diplomats-gather-in-vienna-for-syria-talks-1447490764>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Why Were No Syrians Invited to the Peace Talks in Vienna?" *Mcclatchydc*. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/middle-east/article41967216.html>.

currently being drafted by Jordan and will then require approval from the Security Council in order to determine who can be targeted by military action.⁴²

Another obstacle to a cease-fire is international disagreement on the fate of Bashar al-Assad. Agreement on this issue is critical not only to a cease-fire but to any refugee return. A recent survey of 900 Syrian refugees in German investigated what would need to change in Syria before they would be able to return. After “war has to stop” (67.8 percent of respondents), the next highest qualification was “Assad has to go” (51.5 percent).⁴³ So while the defeat of IS and the cessation of violent conflict are necessary to allow for refugees to return to Syria, U.S. leadership must consider whether leaving Assad in power, for the sake of a cease-fire and a transition, will actually result in refugee returns.

Western governments may have to accept a difficult peace-justice trade-off. i.e. securing a stand-in-place cease-fire, monitored by the UN, which leaves Assad in power and the various rebel factions in possession of what they hold. Leaving the Assad regime in place is repugnant, but the continued carnage of an indefinite civil war might even be worse. If a stand-in-place cease-fire could be made to last, and if, as a result, momentum towards a political transition began to emerge, then at least some Syrian refugees would begin to trickle back from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and if the cease-fire consolidates, from Europe itself. Returns in any number will not be possible, of course, if returning refugees believe they will be targeted either by the regime or by rebel factions. In addition to a durable cease-fire, therefore, a robust and enduring UN military presence with a robust protection mandate is essential for any eventual refugee return.

⁴² “Nations Find Common Ground on Stopping Syrian War.” <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/vienna-talks-syria-agree-disagree-assad-151030163430369.html>

⁴³ “Majority of Syrian Refugees in Europe Are Running from the Assad Regime, Not Isis, Says Survey.” *Adopt a Revolution*. <https://www.adoptrevolution.org/en/pr-survey/>.

Chapter Five: Assembling a Coalition of Support

Political Barriers

After a Syrian passport was found next to the bodies of one of the suicide bombers in the Paris attacks, the admission of Syrian refugees has become politicized. The recent passage of the American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act of 2015 (American SAFE Act) in the House of Representatives demonstrates that opposition to refugee resettlement crosses party lines: 242 Republicans and 47 Democrats voted for the bill.⁴⁴ The SAFE Act was blocked in the Senate with a 55-43 vote.⁴⁵

Closely following the Paris attacks, more than half of the nation's governors publicly asked for the resettlement of Syrian refugees to be halted, citing security concerns.⁴⁶ While authority over admitting refugees rests with the Executive Branch, individual states can make the acceptance process much more difficult by refusing to cooperate with the federal government or refusing refugees access to services.⁴⁷

The American public opposes Syrian refugee admissions by a slim margin. According to a Bloomberg Politics poll conducted immediately after the terror attacks, 53 percent of Americans now believe the United States should no longer accept Syrian refugees. A more recent poll puts that figure at 51 percent.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ "H.R. 4038: American SAFE Act of 2015 -- House Vote #643 -- Nov 19, 2015." *GovTrack.us*. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/114-2015/h643>.

⁴⁵ Lardner | AP, Richard. "Senate Democrats Block Syrian Refugee Bill from Advancing." *The Washington Post*, January 20, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/congress/senate-leader-says-no-fearmongering-on-syrian-refugee-bill/2016/01/20/3adc8d24-bf54-11e5-98c8-7fab78677d51_story.html.

⁴⁶ Seipel, Arnie. "30 Governors Call For Halt To U.S. Resettlement Of Syrian Refugees." *NPR.org*. <http://www.npr.org/2015/11/17/456336432/more-governors-oppose-u-s-resettlement-of-syrian-refugees>.

⁴⁷ CNN, Ashley Fantz and Ben Brumfield. "Syrian Refugees Not Welcome in 31 U.S. States - CNN.com." *CNN*. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/16/world/paris-attacks-syrian-refugees-backlash/index.html>.

⁴⁸ 23, Rebecca Shabad CBS News December, 2015, and 5:55 Am. "Poll: Majority Opposes Accepting Syrian Refugees into U.S." <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/poll-majority-opposes-accepting-syrian-refugees-into-u-s/>.

Changing the Political Narrative

Regaining support for settling Syrian refugees in the United States requires a messaging strategy built around the following arguments:

- 1. Minimized Risk:** In response to public concerns about the security implications of refugee admissions, an effective political strategy must assure the public that refugees are not a national security threat. Our current vetting procedure is thorough and rigorous. The proposed policy changes in this report will further streamline and strengthen the process.
- 2. National Security Concerns:** Framing national security narrowly, opponents of refugee admission argue that it is needlessly risky for the U.S. to admit any refugees at all. But resettling more Syrian refugees would in fact strengthen our national security interests.

Firstly, responding negatively towards Syrian refugees plays into the IS narrative. Welcoming Muslim refugees not only undermines their anti-Western recruitment strategy; it also demonstrates that the U.S. is serious in our mission of securing freedom and safety for all.⁴⁹

Secondly, resettling refugees addresses a larger national security need to support and stabilize both our European allies and the Middle East. Assistance to refugees *must* be part of our broader strategy on fighting IS and jihadi extremism.

- 3. Moral Values and Humanitarian Concerns:** The United States is a nation of immigrants and has a strong tradition of welcoming those escaping persecution and harm.

⁴⁹ Taylor, Adam. "The Islamic State Wants You to Hate Refugees." *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/16/the-islamic-state-wants-you-to-hate-refugees/>.

Building a Coalition

Using these arguments to assure politicians and the public will take time. The following people and organizations should be approached to join the coalition and voice their support for admitting more Syrian refugees.

1. **Former Administration Officials:** In November, former Secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano (2009–2013) and Michael Chertoff (2005–2009) wrote a letter to President Obama stating that our vetting process is thorough and robust enough to safely admit the most vulnerable refugees while also protecting the American people.⁵⁰ Gaining additional support from former Administration officials directly involved in the vetting process will be crucial to showing the public the rigor of our process.

2. **Bipartisan Experts:** Think tanks and experts on both sides of the aisle have come out in support of admitting Syrian refugees. On the right, the Heritage Institute has advocated for a thoughtful path forward in admitting refugees that is based in fact rather than emotion.⁵¹ The Cato Institute has called for taking in all possible Syrian refugees,⁵² stating that the security threat posed by refugees is insignificant and resettling them would make America safer.⁵³ On the left, the Center for American Progress has released a report arguing that accepting more refugees is in line with our American

⁵⁰ “Two Former Homeland Security Secretaries Wrote President Obama on Safely Welcoming Syrian Refugees.” *Whitehouse.gov*, November 19, 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/19/two-former-homeland-security-secretaries-wrote-president-obama-safely-welcoming>.

⁵¹ Bucci, Steven, and David Inserra. “The Rising Tide of Migrants and Refugees: Due Diligence and Adherence to Law Required.” *The Heritage Foundation*. <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/10/the-rising-tide-of-migrants-and-refugees-due-diligence-and-adherence-to-law-required>.

⁵² Thrall, A. Trevor. “Paris Changed Nothing. We Still Have Every Reason to Welcome Syrian Refugees.” *Cato Institute*, November 23, 2015. <http://www.cato.org/blog/paris-changed-nothing-we-still-have-every-reason-welcome-syrian-refugees>.

⁵³ Nowrasteh, Alex. “Syrian Refugees Don’t Pose a Serious Security Threat.” *Cato Institute*, November 18, 2015. <http://www.cato.org/blog/syrian-refugees-dont-pose-serious-security-threat>.

values, which are powerful tools against IS.⁵⁴ Soliciting additional research from a diverse range of thought leaders will increase the strength of the research available and bolster humanitarian pleas with hard evidence.

3. NGOs and Faith-Based Organizations: NGOs both at home and abroad have been among the first responders to the refugee crisis. A large number of faith-based organizations have campaigned for an increase in refugee assistance, including evangelical Christian organizations like World Relief as well as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and the Church World Service.⁵⁵ These organizations can provide political cover for conservative politicians who typically rely on the religious right's votes and donations.

4. Mayors: Mayors across the country have spoken out in support of refugees, sometimes despite the position taken by their governors.⁵⁶ The U.S. Conference of Mayors issued a letter signed by 62 mayors to Congress that reiterated their support for accepting additional refugees.⁵⁷ Any plan to accept more refugees should seek to build on support from state and local politicians across the country.

5. Private Sector Corporations and Officials: In addition to local authorities, it would be wise to gain the support of corporations and companies across the country as part of the coalition. A growing number of companies, from Google and Airbnb to American Express and Starbucks,

⁵⁴ Singh, Vikram, Ken Gude, Peter Juul, William F. Wechsler, Hardin Lang, Brian Katulis | Thursday, November 19, and 2015. "After the Paris Attacks."

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/report/2015/11/19/126018/after-the-paris-attacks/>.

⁵⁵ Toosi, Nahal. "Christian Groups Break with GOP over Syrian Refugees." *POLITICO*, November 17, 2015. <http://social.politico.com/story/2015/11/refugees-christians-215991>.

⁵⁶ Capps, Kriston. "Governors Don't Want Syrian Refugees. Mayors Are Asking for Even More." *CityLab*, November 19, 2015. <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2015/11/governors-who-dont-want-syrian-refugees-versus-mayors-who-are-asking-to-take-more/416718/>.

⁵⁷ Capps, Kriston. "Governors Don't Want Syrian Refugees. Mayors Are Asking for Even More." *CityLab*, November 19, 2015. <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2015/11/governors-who-dont-want-syrian-refugees-versus-mayors-who-are-asking-to-take-more/416718/>.

have donated to causes in support of the refugees. These companies should be tapped to do more than donate.

Conclusion

A broad-based and bipartisan constituency can be mobilized in support of a generous and humane refugee policy. Generous refugee policy is both a humanitarian and a strategic imperative. We are in a battle for hearts and minds. If we allow fear to dictate policy, terrorists win. If we give refugees hope, terrorists lose, America's allies take heart, our alliances are strengthened and U.S. national security is enhanced.