

National Security Voices on Refugee Resettlement

IN RESPONSE to misguided anti-refugee proposals, an array of prominent and well-respected former government officials and national security advisors have raised their voices to emphasize the importance of continued admission of Syrian and Iraqi refugees into the United States. These experts have emphasized that while halting resettlement of Syrian refugees would only fuel ISIL's hate-filled rhetoric, maintaining and expanding America's resettlement program advances our national security interests and expounds the ideals of compassion, openness, and generosity that the United States exemplifies. Moreover, America's current process for vetting refugees—including and especially those from Syria—is thorough and robust, and enables the U.S. government to carefully manage associated risks and safely resettle those fleeing persecution and violence.

Refugee Resettlement Represents America's Core Values

"We must remain vigilant to keep our nation safe from terrorists, whether foreign or homegrown, and from violence in all its forms. At the same time, we must remain true to our values. These are not mutually exclusive goals. In fact, resettlement initiatives help advance U.S. national security interests by supporting the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees."

—**Twenty national security leaders**, including Henry Kissinger, General David Petraeus (Ret.), Michael Chertoff, Madeleine Albright, and Leon Panetta, in a letter to Members of Congress dated December 1, 2015.

"The commitment to protecting refugees who have fled political, religious and other forms of persecution reflects this nation's core values. It is a commitment that has been honored by both Republican and Democratic administrations. The United States has provided safety and new lives to refugees from Burma, Cuba, Vietnam, Sudan and many other places where people are targeted for persecution because of who they are or what they believe. Not only does refugee resettlement reflect this country's commitment to protecting the persecuted, it also provides vital support to refugee-hosting states struggling under the strain of providing asylum to large numbers of refugees. By supporting the stability of key states like Jordan, the United States advances its own foreign policy and national security interests abroad."

—**Doris Meissner**, former Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and **James W. Ziglar**, former Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, in a letter to Senators dated November 23, 2015.

Minimal Risks Associated with Admitting Refugees Are Meticulously Managed

“The process that refugees undergo in order to be deemed eligible for resettlement in the United States is robust and thorough. They are vetted more intensively than any other category of traveler, and this vetting is conducted while they are still overseas. Those seeking resettlement are screened by national and international intelligence agencies; their fingerprints and other biometric data are checked against terrorist and criminal databases; and they are interviewed several times over the course of the vetting process, which takes 18-24 months and often longer.”

–**Twenty national security leaders**, including Henry Kissinger, General David Patraeus (Ret.), Michael Chertoff, Madeleine Albright, and Leon Panetta, in a letter to Members of Congress dated December 1, 2015.

“The process for any refugee seeking entry to the United States requires the highest level of scrutiny from a law enforcement and national security perspective. The process takes place while the refugees are still overseas, and it is lengthy and deliberate...[S]o long as [the refugee admittance process] is fully implemented and not diluted, it will allow us to safely admit the most vulnerable refugees while protecting the American people.”

–**Michael Chertoff**, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and **Janet Napolitano**, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, in a letter to President Obama dated November 19, 2015.

“[P]retty much the last approach that any sensible ISIS terrorist would take would be to infiltrate the United States as a Syrian refugee. Here's why: first of all, the ISIS terrorist would have to travel to a refugee camp in a country like Jordan or Lebanon or Turkey, joining the 4 million other Syrian refugees outside Syria. Then he or she would have to be among those selected from the relatively tiny number of 23,000 refugees that the United Nations agency for refugees has flagged to the United States to be worthy for consideration to be admitted. Then he would have to be among the only 10,000 Syrian refugees the States is planning to admit next year. According to the U.S. State Department, the vast majority of those admitted are children, women and the sick and the elderly, while only 2% admitted to the States are “military age males” between 18 and 30. The mathematical odds of an ISIS terrorist getting into the States through the Syrian refugee program are therefore miniscule.”

–**Peter Bergen**, a think-tank director, CNN national security analyst, and *New York Times* bestselling author of several books on Middle Eastern politics and affairs, in a CNN article dated November 21, 2015.

“I think the critical point here is that when it comes to the refugee program, the ones we’ve used in the past and certainly with regards to Syrian refugees, there is really no program in the world that is as extensive as what the United States does in terms of looking at the background information, the intelligence, the biographical information...It includes interviews of each potential refugee, it includes biometric gathering, the process itself takes 18 to 24 months all told, and finally, a decision will be made at that time before anyone is let in. In terms of the populations that are being considered, remember that it is the most vulnerable populations in Syria...no process can eliminate 100% every bit of risk.”

–**Matthew Olsen**, former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, a national security analyst for ABC News, and a Harvard Law School lecturer, At a U.S. House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee meeting held on November 19, 2015.

“[T]he risk of refugee resettlement in terms of moving operatives into the US is low. It is an inefficient way to place operatives. Not only do the operatives have to wait 18-24 months, they have to be selected. We are selecting about 10,000 out of 2.1 million refugees in recognized UNHCR camps. That is a very small figure: they have no control over an operative being selected. And given the way we privilege the most vulnerable populations, it’s highly unlikely they would be.” He later said: “There is some risk [in settling refugees], but the selection process significantly reduces the risk as well as the inefficiency of moving operatives in.”

–**Daveed Gartenstein-Ross** assured Congress that the risk of ISIS operatives entering the United States as refugees is slim, in testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on November 19, 2015.

“We have to conceptualize our idea of safety different [sic]. It is about minimizing risk, maximizing our protection and maintaining a vigorous first response capability. It’s not simple, but that is how we need to think about how our homeland security is. We’ve never had a nation with no risk, and we delude ourselves to think that we can be a nation that can perfectly protect ourselves...We will always be vulnerable, and the truth is we choose to be that way. This is Juliette Kayyem. I am the daughter of Lebanese immigrants who came to this country: a country that embraced them. That is what keeps America safe.”

–**Juliette Kayyem** concluded, In a November 19, 2015 podcast on world security after the November 2015 Paris attacks.

“Americans should feel confident in our system, our process of not just screening, [but] our intelligence, our capabilities...Can anyone give a 100 percent guarantee? No. We are the most open, transparent, mobile society in the world...When you start to allow your rights to be eroded or based on security or any other excuse, it’s going to be difficult to ever get them back.”

–**Chuck Hagel**, former U.S. Secretary of Defense and former U.S. Senator, in a mid-November 2015 interview with the *World Herald*.

Refugee Resettlement Advances National Security Interests

“Increased assistance [to those seeking refugee resettlement] would protect the stability of a region home to U.S. allies, including Jordan, NATO’s Turkey and Lebanon, all of which are hosting refugees. The infrastructure—water, sewage, medical care and education—of these states is overwhelmed. A major resettlement and aid initiative can relieve that strain. But left unaddressed, the strain will feed instability and trigger more violence across the region, which will have consequences for U.S. national security.”

—**Ryan Crocker**, former U.S. Ambassador to several Middle Eastern countries and current Dean of the George Bush School of Government & Public Service at Texas A&M University, in a November 17, 2015 op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*.

“I have argued for a substantial increase in Syrian refugees admissions after thorough vetting. This blunts the Islamic State narrative that we are the enemies of Arabs and Muslims and increases our leverage with others to do more either on resettlement or financially. It is a way that I believe we can start to pull Arab and Muslim states more towards us to have that serious conversation that we badly need to have; what the future of the area is as we look ahead.”

—**Ryan Crocker**, at a U.S. Armed Service Committee Hearing on November 18, 2015.

“To not bring the [Syrian] refugees in, right, you leave these people in desperate circumstances and you see the battlefield [sic] that are the refugee camps to the recruitment of ISIS [and] al Qaeda over the long term. And you leave that -- those soldier [sic] -- those potential new recruits to our children and grandchildren to fight generations later...These people are fleeing ISIS and they represent a real opportunity at gathering human intelligence as you take them in.”

—**Fran Townsend**, former Assistant to President George W. Bush for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism and former Chair of the Homeland Security Council, In a “Face the Nation” interview on November 22, 2015.

“France does not have a refugee problem, it has a France problem. England does not have a refugee problem, it has a British problem...one of the reasons why the United States has been so successful in minimizing radicalization in our own country...is because we have been committed to resettlement process, assimilation, accepting people.”

—**Juliette Kayyem**, former Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Affairs at the Department of Homeland Security and a current faculty member at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, on a November 18, 2015 WBGH newscast.

“Some four million refugees have fled Syria. They are largely in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. France, still reeling from the terrorist attacks, announced that it would take 30,000 more Syrian refugees over the next two years. Germany has taken nearly one million. President Obama had only committed to take 10,000 between now and October 2016, and a bill passed by the House of Representatives would make it effectively impossible for the United States to take any. The message that sends to American allies is stark: We don’t want these people; you have to deal with them and we won’t help you. Sadly, that message would play into the

narrative of a fearful, inconsistent and self-serving America that has built up over a decade and a half of extraordinary rendition, torture, drone strikes and mass surveillance. Accepting more refugees wouldn't single-handedly fix the United States' image in the world, but it would counter some of the damage done, while also laying necessary groundwork for a collective strategy to end the Syrian war."

–**Dr. Jacob Parakilas**, Assistant Project Director for the U.S. Project at Chatham House, in a December 3, 2015 Chatham House article.

Halting Resettlement of Refugees Serves ISIS's Interests

"Refugees are victims, not perpetrators, of terrorism. Categorically refusing to take them only feeds the narrative of ISIS that there is a war between Islam and the West, that Muslims are not welcome in the United States and Europe, and that the ISIS caliphate is their true home. We must make clear that the United States rejects this worldview by continuing to offer refuge to the world's most vulnerable people, regardless of their religion or nationality."

–**Twenty national security leaders**, including Henry Kissinger, General David Petraeus (Ret.), Michael Chertoff, Madeleine Albright, and Leon Panetta, in a letter to Members of Congress dated December 1, 2015.

"A backlash against the refugee population [in Europe] serves their [ISIL's] interests in a number of ways...Having this wedge driven, where [ISIL] is able to intensify the backlash against refugees might help with recruiting efforts by extremists to recruit among the refugee population."

–**Daveed Gartenstein-Ross**, a senior fellow at the Foundation an adjunct assistant professor at Georgetown University's security studies program, in a November 17, 2015 post on the website of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

"I don't know how the United States can say no to people pouring out of [Syria] given the horror of what's taken place and given our contribution to that horror...And listen, some of the voices that are out there are playing right into ISIS's hands. When we talk about, 'Let's only take Christians,' that's a horrific statement. That's what ISIS wants. ISIS wants fragmentation between Muslims and non-Muslims. That's an irresponsible statement to make. We are a country with Muslims in it. Why wouldn't we welcome Muslims and others from around the world, like we've always done, who are being persecuted? We didn't care about their religion or nationality. We cared that they were humans who were running from suffering and death, and there were homes for people like that in America. Come on, this is America! We can do this. We're smart enough to figure out how bring thousands of people into this country and make sure they're not going to hurt us."

–General **Jack Keane** (Ret.), former Chief of Staff and Vice Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army and current national security advisor for *Fox News*, at a November 18, 2015 U.S. House of Representatives Committee Homeland Security meeting on radicalism around the world.

"It is important for the United States to demonstrate to Sunni Muslims that this is not a confrontation between the West and Sunni Islam. It is a confrontation of the civilized world...It is important to defeat the persistent Islamic State narrative that this is the West (crusaders) against the true faith." He later stated: "[I]t [increasing

the number of refugees the U.S. receives each year to 100,000 people] would establish us as being able to lead an international response to a global problem – which we are not doing now. We need to do it. It's not a European crisis, not a Middle Eastern crisis, it's a global crisis and it's our crisis."

–**Ryan Crocker**, at a November 18, 2015 U.S. Armed Services Committee Hearing on Iraq and Syria.

"I do concur [with Ambassador Crocker]. I think the other message it [increasing the number of accepted refugees] sends that ISIS would not like is, 'You're welcome here.' ISIS would like you to think that you're only welcome in their caliphate."

–**John McLaughlin**, former Deputy Director of Intelligence and former Acting Director of the CIA, at the same November 18, 2015 U.S. Armed Services Committee Hearing.

"It [admitting Syrian refugees] allows us to truthfully say that we're not hypocrites or bigoted against Muslims or people from other cultures. That has a positive impact in terms of the disposition people around the world have toward the U.S. You don't want to play into the narrative of the bad guy. That's giving propaganda to the enemy."

–**Michael Chertoff**, former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security in a November 18, 2015 interview by author Jason Riley for the *Wall Street Journal*. □