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Resettling Syrian Refugees in the U.S.: Regional Stability and Saving Lives

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Washington Semester Program

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It Started With Graffiti

The international community is witnessing the worst refugee crises since the 1940s as one in every hundred-twenty people throughout the world are currently displaced. In Syria, more than half of the population has been forced from their homes since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011.¹ The Syrian conflict began with a few adolescents scribbling graffiti on their school walls. It has turned into the greatest humanitarian catastrophe since World War II. As millions of Syrians have fled to escape chemical weapons, barrel bombs, sectarian dimensions, extremism, and Russian intervention, they have flooded into neighboring Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. However, Jordan and Lebanon in particular are small, resource scarce states whose economics are buckling under the stress of hosting millions of Syrians. While the vast majority of Syrian refugees have opted to remain in their home region, around 10% have sought new lives in Europe.² The Syrian refugee crisis has become a global problem and thus, needs a global response. While the response to this humanitarian crisis will need to be multi-faceted and international, this thesis will focus on the need to resettle vulnerable Syrians in America.

Although the United States has been the largest donor to the Syrian refugee crisis in the world, giving over \$5.1 billion so far, remarkably few Syrians have been resettled in the country.³ In fact, America has resettled just 3,100 Syrians while Germany has granted asylum to 98,700, Sweden to 64,700, Denmark to 11,300, and the United Kingdom to 7,000.⁴ Even when President Obama pledged to welcome an additional 10,000 Syrians within the next year, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4038 (the American Security Against Foreign Enemies

¹ Salam Neighbor. Directed by Chris Temple and Zach Ingrasci. Living on One & 1001 Media, 2016. Georgetown University.

² "Children of Syria." Save the Children.

³ Anjalina Sen (Department of State) in correspondence with the author, April 2016.

⁴ Martinez, Michael. "Syrian Refugees: Which Countries Welcome Them." CNN. September 10, 2015.

Act) to essentially freeze the Syrian resettlement program and 30 state governors have refused to accept Syrians in their states.

I will argue that the U.S. needs to resettle more Syrian refugees to prevent further destabilization in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Specifically, the United States should go above President Obama's current proposal to accept 10,000 Syrians this year and follow the recommendation of former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and resettle 65,000 additional Syrian refugees over the next five years. In addition, most of these 65,000 refugees should be families with young children and women: children, because child refugees who remain in the region are largely deprived of education, and women, because they are disproportionately subjected to sexual abuse in refugee camps, in Jordan in particular.

From Dream to Nightmare: The Syrian Civil War and Refugee Crisis

“The medieval barbarians on one side, the pitiless dictator on the other, the only two images we retain of a reality far more complex, opposing them when in fact they are but two sides of the same coin.”⁵ As Jonathan Littell describes in *Syrian Notebooks*, the Syrian civil war has become defined by its extremes- the medieval barbarians (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant)⁶ versus the pitiless dictator (Bashar al-Assad and his regime). The world has been so mesmerized by the cinematographic and horrifying images (mass executions, severed heads, triumphant columns of looted American armor, bearded men riding Toyotas, and black flags) that we forget how it all began.⁷ The Syrian civil war did not start as a battle of Salafi and Jihadi Islam (ISIS) pitted against the brutality but supposed ‘stability’ of the al-Assad regime. Instead, it started with a call of reform put forth by the opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA) to end generations of authoritarian al-Assad family rule. When this hope was crushed by regime attacks,

⁵ Littell, Jonathan. *Syrian Notebooks: Inside the Homs Uprising*. New York: Verso, 2015. Page 2.

⁶ I will use ISIL and ISIS (Islamic State in Syria and Iraq) interchangeably.

⁷ Littell, Jonathan. *Syrian Notebooks: Inside...* Page 1.

barrel bombs, Western inaction, and polarization, Syrians started to flee their homes by the millions. This section will chronicle both the beginning of the war and the subsequent polarization that has shaped the crisis, and the view that Syrian refugees could be a potential danger for America.

While Syrians' discontent and frustration with the al-Assad regime exploded in March 2011, it had been bubbling since the 1980s. Bashar's father, Hafez al-Assad's rule was marked by authoritarianism and brutal crackdowns similar to, and often worse than, those of Bashar. As both Hafez and Bashar al-Assad are from the Shia Alawite sect that constitutes around 12% of Syria's population of 22.85 million, they have traditionally relied on other religious minorities (Christians and Druze) to legitimize their rule. This has long left the 70% majority Sunni population with a feeling of disenfranchisement.⁸ In the 1980s, Hafez al-Assad's repressed a Sunni Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the city of Homs, killing thousands of Syrians. Hafez al-Assad also continued the country's emergency law, in place since 1963, throughout his rule. When Hafez died in 2000, Bashar took over and gave only lip service to reforms, continuing the emergency law and mass arrest of political prisoners.⁹

In March 2011, a handful of Syrian adolescents in Dara'a scribbled the famous mantra of the Arab Spring on their local schools' walls: "the people want the fall of the regime."¹⁰ When they were arrested and tortured, the flame of the revolution was lit. At first, the protests were overwhelmingly peaceful and non-violent. On March 16, female government workers in Damascus, many from Dara'a, led a sit-in to demand the release of unfairly jailed political prisoners. The Syrian security forces responded by dragging the protestors by the hair and beating them. A day later, a sit-in in Dara'a was shut down by security forces opening fire on

⁸ "Guide: Syria's Diverse Minorities." BBC News. December 9, 2011.

⁹ Sterling, Joe. "Daraa: The Spark That Lit..."

¹⁰ Abouzeid, Rania. "Syria's Revolt: How Graffiti Stirred an Uprising." Time. March 22, 2011.

protestors, killing four. As the protests escalated, residents threw rocks at Bashar al-Assad posters, demolished a statue of his late father, and burnt down official government buildings. Syrian activist Mohamed Masalmeh accredits Dara'a as the start of the uprising because Dara'a residents broke the people's "wall of fear" by protesting day after day.¹¹

By April, the protests had spread from Dara'a to cities throughout the country: Baniyas, Dair Elzour, Douma, Homs, Zabadani, and Damascus. Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch released a report called "Syria: Rampant Torture of Protestors" detailing the arbitrary detention and mistreatment in prison. The report claimed that many prisoners had experienced torture from electro-shock devices, cables, and whips as well as sleep deprivation. By mid-April, the U.N. demanded that the Syrian government stop the repression that had killed over 200 civilian protestors.¹² In July, a group of military officers tired of firing on civilians defected from the army and founded the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to present a unified opposition to al-Assad. The FSA believed that its primary mission was defensive, to protect the opposition neighborhoods and the demonstrators from the regime. Even from the beginning however, the FSA was fractured, consisting of at least ten armed-rebel groups commanding thousands of men each. Many of the factions hoped that YouTube videos of calls for democracy, justice, and Western intervention would spark international action against the regime. The FSA urged the U.N. and the international community to set up a no-fly zone to prevent regime bombings that seemed not to discriminate between rebel bases and schools and hospitals.¹³

Later in October, opposition groups including the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria, the Revolution Forces, the Public Council for Revolution Forces, and the Superior Council of the

¹¹ Abouzeid, Rania. "Syria's Revolt: How Graffiti Stirred..."

¹² Abdelaziz, Salma, Rima Maktabi, and Arwa Damon. "Protesters Hit Syrian Streets as Report Describes Torture." CNN. 2011.

¹³ "Guide to the Syrian Rebels - BBC News." BBC News. December 13, 2013.

Revolution merged to create the Syrian National Council. The Syrian National Council aimed to create a new government representing the opposition and topple al-Assad.¹⁴ However, the FSA and Syrian National Council were doomed to fail as they were far too fractured and dependent on international intervention to turn the tide. As the West stood paralyzed, Russia and Iran filled every inch of the political void arming al-Assad, sending in Hezbollah to fight alongside him, and bombing moderate rebel positions. Far more nefarious, the Damascus-Tehran-Moscow axis released a plan to spread radical Islamists amidst the rebels. In the spring of 2011, Syrian secret service (the “mukhabarat”) released scores of jihadist cadres from jails so they could infiltrate rebel ranks.¹⁵ As noted in *Spiegel*, al-Assad’s plan from the beginning was to turn moderate Syrian rebels into hardline Islamists so they could be easily discredited.¹⁶ Or as Jonathan Littell describes, since the state assumed that radical forces had little social base, they would be easy to eliminate once the far more popular and representative moderates were crushed.¹⁷

Furthermore, the al-Assad regime targeted rebel strongholds rather than Islamist-occupied lands for bombing. As Secretary John Kerry remarked, “It is one thing, obviously, to be targeting ISIL. We are concerned, obviously, that is not what’s happening.”¹⁸ Then, the regime began targeting Sunni families for sectarian killings, hoping to inspire a similar response by the rebels. One *Guardian* report in 2013 noted that al-Assad and pro-regime gangs had started massacring and expelling Sunni families from coastal Alawite areas to sectarianize boundaries.¹⁹ By February 2012, the U.N. reported that over 100 civilians were being killed every day with the

¹⁴ "Guide to the Syrian Rebels - BBC News

¹⁵ Littell, Jonathan. *Syrian Notebooks: Inside...* Page 7.

¹⁶ Salloum, Raniah. "From Jail to Jihad: Former Prisoners Fight in Syrian Insurgency." SPIEGEL ONLINE. October 10, 2013.

¹⁷ Littell, Jonathan. *Syrian Notebooks: Inside...* Page 9.

¹⁸ Cooper, Helene, Michael R. Gordon, and Neil Macfarquhar. "Russians Strike Targets in Syria, but Not ISIS Areas." The New York Times. September 30, 2015.

¹⁹ Beaumont, Peter. "Syria: Massacres of Sunni Families Reported in Assad's Heartland." The Guardian. May 04, 2013.

overall death toll well over 7,500.²⁰ In August of 2013, the regime fired sarin gas at the rebel Ghouta suburbs of Damascus killing around 1,400 including 400 children. The U.N. argued that the attack was the most significant use of chemical weapons against civilians since 1988 when Saddam Hussein targeted Kurds in northern Iraq.²¹ Although the United States had promised to intervene if al-Assad used chemical weapons against his own people, President Obama decided to stand down.²² As veteran jihadists from Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) flooded over the border and joined forces with their counterparts in Syria, a new terror organization was born. In June of 2014, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi spoke from Raqqa, Syria to declare a new Caliphate in Syria and Iraq and the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Yet still, the al-Assad regime avoided bombing ISIL targets. As of September 2014, the regime had killed 124,752 civilians while ISIL had killed 831.²³ While this statistic by no means defends ISIL's horrific actions, it explains why many Syrians feel more strongly about removing al-Assad than they do about removing ISIL. However, the reign of terror groups such as ISIL in the chaotic Syrian landscape has colored many Americans perception of Syrian refugees.

While much of this section strays from the issue of Syrian refugees, it is exactly this backdrop that has produced the refugee catastrophe seen today. The extent of this humanitarian crisis is mind-boggling. 13.5 million Syrians (around 60% of country's population) are in need of humanitarian assistance. An estimated 10.6 million (around 50% of the population) have been forced to flee their homes and while 6.6 million are internally displaced, the remaining 4.8 million have left the country. The vast majority of Syrian refugees have remained in the Middle East and primarily Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, while only 10% have moved to Europe.

²⁰ "U.N.: Syria Death Toll 'Well Over' 7,500." CNN. February 28, 2012.

²¹ Charbonneau, Louis, and Michelle Nichols. "U.N. Confirms Sarin Used in Syria Attack; U.S., UK, France Blame Assad." Reuters. September 16, 2013.

²² Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Obama Doctrine." *The Atlantic*, April 2016.

²³ Littell, Jonathan. *Syrian Notebooks: Inside...* Page 13.

Furthermore, more than half of the 4.8 million Syrians who have become refugees are children. According to Save the Children, the war has disrupted the education of millions of Syrian children, both inside and outside the country. One in four Syrian schools have been destroyed or occupied with over 4,000 attacks on schools since the start of the war. Thus, the destruction of the conflict is threatening to create a “lost generation.”²⁴

The Need for Resettlement

Although the U.S. needs to increase resettlement programs for Syrian refugees, it is also true that the vast majority of Syrians should, and desire to, stay in the region to eventually return home. A 2015 poll of Syrian refugees in Europe found that only 8% of respondents wanted to stay in Europe indefinitely.²⁵ This finding makes sense, considering that most refugees give up everything and risk their lives to escape the violence in their country. Furthermore, Syrian refugees, whether in camps or urban centers, overwhelmingly live in poverty. In Jordan and Lebanon respectively, 87% and 93% of Syrian refugees live below the poverty line and often lack access to the labor market, health care, and proper education.²⁶ Evidence of the desire to return home, temporary shelters that house tens of thousands of Syrians have formed on the border of Syria and Turkey, allowing refugees to quickly return home once the violence subsides. Anas Kasim, a refugee in one of these temporary border shelters, said, “We just need to go back to our country, our schools and our homes. We're so tired of living in exile. We've had enough.”²⁷

The website of the global advocacy group “the Syria Campaign” features a post written by Abo Adnan, a Syrian now living in Germany, that expresses the extent of Syrians’ desire to

²⁴ “Children of Syria.” Save the Children.

²⁵ The Syria Campaign. “Care About Syrian Refugees? Listen To Them.” The Huffington Post. December 7, 2015.

²⁶ Lecture, From Homs to Hamburg: Refugee Movements from Syria to Europe and Beyond, Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C., March 15, 2015.

²⁷ Smith, Bernard. “Syrian Refugees in Turkey Wait for Fighting to End.” Al Jazeera English. December 19, 2015.

return home. Adnan was a 22 year old medical student in Ghouta, Syria when the fighting started in 2011. Ghouta, a suburb of the capital Damascus under the control of the Free Syrian Army, was quickly targeted by the al-Assad regime as a critical battleground. In 2012 al-Assad placed Ghouta under siege, blocking supplies of all food and medicine from entering. In 2013, as mentioned earlier, the regime fired chemical weapons into the suburb. Yet, Adnan believes despite all this, Syrians would not have fled Ghouta if not for the barrel bombs. "World leaders have to act to stop the bombs from the sky. We can survive sniper fire, chemicals but the barrel bombs are unbearable. A no-fly zone or creation of safe zones would save lives instantly. And I would be the first person on the plane home."²⁸

Besides the fact that the vast majority of Syrians want to stay in the region to eventually return to their home country, it is far more cost-effective for the U.S. to aid Syrian refugees hosted in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey than it is to resettle them. The Center for Immigration Studies recently calculated that it costs twelve times as much to resettle a refugee in the United States than it does to care for that same refugee in a neighboring Middle Eastern country by paying for health care, food, and more (\$5,300 over five years vs. \$64,000). Faced with the decision to either bring one refugee to America or provide for eleven more in Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey, many have concluded that refugee resettlement in the U.S. or Western countries more generally is just immoral.²⁹

While it is true that the large majority of Syrians want to stay in the region and that it is more economical to aid rather than resettle Syrians, there is a great need for resettlement because it is unrealistic to ask Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to accept additional Syrians. These countries' economies are threatened by the demands and consequences of hosting millions of Syrians.

²⁸ The Syria Campaign. "Europe: Listen to Syrian Refugees." Accessed April 24, 2016.

²⁹ Krikorian, Mark. "Refugee Resettlement Is Immoral." National Review Online. November 16, 2015.

Furthermore, no amount of humanitarian aid can solve every problem Syrian refugees face. For example, disturbingly large percentages of Syrian refugee children are out of school, crippling the prospects of rebuilding their country in the future. Amongst girls, reports of sexual abuse and adolescent marriage are far too common. I will summarize why it is unrealistic for Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to continue to accept millions of Syrians and also why resettlement of up to 65,000 refugees in the U.S. is needed to help Syrian children and women, who are the most vulnerable segment of the refugee population.

Jordan:

For decades, Jordan has welcomed millions of Palestinians, Iraqis, and now Syrians but this February, King Abdullah of Jordan said, “For the first time, we can't do it anymore.”³⁰ The roughly 1.5 million registered and non-registered Syrian refugees residing in Jordan, a country of 6.5 million, constitute a significant source of instability to the Kingdom both politically and economically. The impact on Jordan is the equivalent to the United States accepting 29.4 million refugees over the next four years. The largest refugee camp in Jordan, Za’atari, is home to 85,000 Syrians, making it the fourth largest city in the country. However, 80% of the 1.5 million Syrians in Jordan actually live outside of camps such as Za’atari.³¹ In 2015, the costs of just housing Syrians were 17.5% of Jordan’s national budget, contributing to the country’s overall \$2 billion budget deficit. Moreover, Jordan's economy has little room to accommodate the refugees due to a high unemployment rate (12%) and youth joblessness rate (30%). As the Council on Foreign Relations explains, “Refugees competing for scarce jobs could fuel further social tension.”³²

³⁰ Doucet, Lyse. "Syria Conflict: Jordanians 'at Boiling Point' Over Refugees." BBC News. February 2, 2016.

³¹ Francis, Alexandra. "Jordan's Refugee Crisis." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. September 21, 2015.

³² Satloff, Robert, and David Schenker. "Growing Stress on Jordan." Council on Foreign Relations. March 2016.

Besides economic tensions, the influx of Syrians into Jordan also represents a security and political concern. An estimated 3,000 Jordanians have gone to Syria to join ISIL. As many of these fighters return home, terrorist-related incidents in Jordan are on the rise. Arguably more dangerously, “As prospects for a resolution to the Syrian conflict become increasingly elusive and the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan swells, public disenchantment has turned back toward the Jordanian government.”³³ The refugee crisis has exacerbated existing qualms in Jordanian society over depleted resources, increased job competition, overburdened infrastructure, and strained social services, like healthcare and education. Furthermore, the public narrative in Jordan has become overwhelmingly critical of the Syrian presence. According to a report by the International Labor Organization, 85% of Jordanians believe that Syrians should not be allowed to enter Jordan freely, and 65% believe that all Syrians should live within refugee camps.³⁴ These perceptions subsequently constrain the Jordanian Government’s response to the refugee crisis.

Besides foreboding political and economic prospects to Jordan, many Syrian children there cannot access proper education and women in the camps are subject to high levels of sexual abuse and adolescent marriage. In Za’atari, only 3 out of 12 camp districts at the moment have schools. While exact attendance rates are unknown, best estimates are that more than 50% of children are out of school.³⁵ A lack of education coupled with the difficult life of being a refugee significantly damages Syrians ability to become contributing members of society and ultimately rebuild their country. Furthermore, the number of marriages with brides under 18 in Syrian communities in Jordan shot up to 25% in the year 2013. The rate of child marriage has swelled

³³ Francis, Alexandra. "Jordan's Refugee Crisis."

³⁴ Francis, Alexandra. "Jordan's Refugee Crisis."

³⁵ Weston, Phoebe. "Inside Zaatari Refugee Camp: The Fourth Largest City in Jordan." *The Telegraph*. August 5, 2015.

because Syrian refugee families are reliant on dwindling resources and lacking economic opportunities and at the same time hoping to protect their daughters from the threat of sexual violence. 48% of Syrian child brides are marrying men at least ten years older.³⁶ These issues of education and child marriage are often connected, as most young brides drop out of school and do not return after their marriage.

The threat to Jordan's stability is of great concern to the United States because Jordan is a critical ally. Not only is Jordan a main partner in fighting ISIL, but also in supporting a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Council on Foreign Relations warns that “Domestic instability in Jordan—especially turmoil that threatens the leadership status quo—would endanger these important U.S. interests. Mounting pressures on Jordan's meager resources from refugees—as well as corresponding austerity measures—could feed destabilizing anti-regime sentiment.”³⁷ While the solution will inevitably have to incorporate increased international aid to Jordan, resettlement will also help alleviate the strain on Jordan’s economy and aid those Syrians who are most vulnerable.

Lebanon:

The roughly 1.3 million Syrian refugees living in Lebanon, a state geographically smaller than Maryland, constitute around 25% of the country’s population.³⁸ Unlike in Turkey and Jordan, Lebanon does not run formal refugee camps and instead, refugees either live in host communities or in informal tented settlements.³⁹ This situation has made it hard to estimate the exact number of Syrians in Lebanon; while around 1 million have been officially registered with

³⁶ "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan." Save the Children. 2014.

³⁷ Satloff, Robert, and David Schenker. "Growing Stress on Jordan."

³⁸ Marsi, Federica. "Syrian Refugees Overwhelm Lebanon to the Breaking Point." USA Today. November 21, 2015.

³⁹ Culbertson, Shelly and Louay Constant. Education of Syrian Refugee Children: Managing the Crisis in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015.

the Lebanese Government, 1.3 million are estimated to be in the country. 93% of Syrians in Lebanon live below the poverty line and lack access to the labor market, health care, and education.⁴⁰ Making matters worse, Lebanon's economy has suffered with tourism dropping 23% and exports to Syria falling 7.5% since Syria's civil war erupted in 2011. The Syrian refugee crisis has had the equivalent effect on Lebanon as if the U.S. was forced to host 64 million refugees from Mexico, more than half the country's population.⁴¹

In March, I sat down with Sarkis Naoum, a senior Lebanese columnist for *An-Nahar*, to discuss the effects of the estimated 1.3 million Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. Naoum informed me that Lebanon has resisted forming official refugee camps for Syrians because of sectarian fears.⁴² As is reflective of Syrian society, the vast majority of Syrian refugees are Sunni so Lebanon is worried that accepting millions of Sunnis will upset the country's delicate Sunni/Shia/Christian⁴³ balance and spark another civil war. Furthermore, Naoum claimed that even if Lebanon wanted to create official refugee camps, they would not be able to. For a country that has not had a president in over a year and has mountains of trash lining the streets of its capital, there is not enough political will and authority to organize refugee camps. Naoum ended our discussion with a foreboding warning, telling me the last time Lebanon hosted millions of refugees [Palestinian refugees in the 1960s and 1970s] the country collapsed and fought a brutal civil war.⁴⁴

In an effort to better understand the risk for Lebanon, I spoke with Joseph Bahout, a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Bahout agreed with Sarkis that the Syrian refugee crisis was changing the fabric of Lebanese society. This change, he added, might

⁴⁰ Lecture, From Homs to Hamburg: Refugee Movements from Syria to Europe and Beyond.

⁴¹ Marsi, Federica. "Syrian Refugees Overwhelm Lebanon to the Breaking Point."

⁴² Sarkis Naoum, in discussion with the author. March 30, 2016.

⁴³ Christians are estimated to be 40% of Lebanon's population, Sunnis 30%, and Shias 30%.

⁴⁴ Sarkis Naoum, in discussion with the author. March 30, 2016.

be permanent as usually only 30% of refugees in conflicts worldwide ever return to their home country, meaning 70% of the 1.3 million Syrians in Lebanon will likely stay. He added that the Syrian refugees are taking much of the low-level labor opportunities in Lebanon, increasing tensions that are quickly taking a sectarian tone.⁴⁵ Another danger, is that a significant amount of the refugee population are young boys, aged 10-16, with no education and a high exposure to violence. Tragically, Bahout predicted, these adolescents could become recruits for terror groups 10 years down the road. He warned, “The next Abu Bakr [leader of ISIL] of 2025 will be a refugee who lived in Lebanon or Jordan.”⁴⁶

The Brookings Institution argues that Lebanon’s stability should be important to the U.S. because it denies adversaries like Iran the ability to exploit Lebanon, boosts U.S. security interests in the Middle East and those of its ally, Israel, and because the United States has a strategic interest in supporting democratic countries and in strengthening democratic institutions around the world. While Lebanon is certainly an imperfect democracy, Brookings argues that its “liberal impulses” play an important cultural-intellectual role in the region.⁴⁷ As the Syrian crisis has pushed the Lebanese economy to the breaking point, the U.S. must act to alleviate the burden. Furthermore, enrollment of Syrian refugees in formal education at the beginning of the 2014 school year was about 25% in Lebanon (with 102,000 Syrian refugee children enrolled out of an estimated 408,000 school age children).⁴⁸ Thus, the U.S. should use resettlement programs to alleviate the immense burden on Lebanon and aid Syrian children who have virtually no education.

Turkey:

⁴⁵ Joseph Bahout, in discussion with the author. April 5, 2016.

⁴⁶ Joseph Bahout, in discussion with the author. April 5, 2016.

⁴⁷ Saab, Bilal. "A More Viable U.S. Strategy for Lebanon." The Brookings Institution. July 20, 2010.

⁴⁸ Culbertson, Shelly and Louay Constant. Education of Syrian Refugee Children: Managing the Crisis in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015.

Turkey, a nation of 75 million and host to more than 2.7 million Syrian refugees, has fared better than Jordan and Lebanon in hosting millions of Syrians due to its greater population and economy. Turkey's GDP is \$798 billion as compared to Jordan \$35 billion and Lebanon \$50 billion. In fact, the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other observers have lauded the "consistently high standard" of Turkey's response to the crisis.⁴⁹ So far, Turkey has spent over \$8 billion providing for the Syrians in the country. Surprisingly, Turkey's economy also grew 5.7% in the last quarter of 2015, which most economists attribute to the boost in consumption from Syrian refugees.⁵⁰ The question though is how long Turkey's economy can continue to grow. As Economist Murat Ucer told *Al-Monitor*, "The Syrians' impact on growth was a one-off thing, meaning they will not be boosting growth at the same rate every year. But as long as they stay, they will continue to push up unemployment and pressure wages."⁵¹ Thus, the millions of Syrian refugees living in Turkey could soon have a negative impact on the economy if the international community does not step in.

Of the estimated 2.7 million Syrians in Turkey, only around 260,000 reside in the 26 camps throughout the country and while they have access to health care and other basic needs, they cannot work and even need a permit to leave the camp.⁵² Outside the camps, Istanbul alone has officially registered over 400,000 Syrian refugees. Syrian refugees in Turkey are under temporary protection status and while they have access to health and education through a provisional identity card, they do not have internationally recognized refugee status or a path to citizenship. Also worth noting, under a new agreement, Europe is sending refugees back to Turkey if they enter Greece illegally. In exchange, the European Union offered Turkey \$6.8

⁴⁹ "When I Picture My Future, I See Nothing: Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey." Human Rights Watch. November 08, 2015.

⁵⁰ Karakaya, Kerim. "Syrian Refugees Boost Turkish Economy, But for How Long?" US News. April 7, 2016.

⁵¹ Karakaya, Kerim. "Syrian Refugees Boost Turkish Economy, But for How Long?"

⁵² Anjalina Sen (Department of State) in correspondence with the author, April 2016.

billion to help with the crisis. This agreement and the overall Syrian refugee crisis have left Turkey scrambling to create long-term solutions for millions of people it had expected to house only temporarily.⁵³

The largest problem Syrian refugees in Turkey face is lack of education as only one-third of the estimated 700,000 school-aged refugees are in school.⁵⁴ Shaza Barakat, founder of a Syrian temporary education center in Istanbul, warned that “If a child doesn’t go to school, it will create big problems in the future—they will end up on the streets, or go back to Syria to die fighting, or be radicalized into extremists, or die in the ocean trying to reach Europe.” The Turkish Government seems well aware of this risk as in October, 2015 the deputy undersecretary for education Yusuf Buyuk stated, “If we cannot educate these students, they will fall into the wrong hands, they are going to be exploited by gangs, criminals.” Human Rights Watch found that Syrian refugees in Turkey face three barriers to education: language (Arabic vs. Turkish), economic hardship, and social integration.⁵⁵ While aid is certainly needed to address the systematic lack of education for refugees in Turkey, resettlement can and should be part of the solution.

Furthermore, Turkey has been a key U.S. ally since the Cold War and despite serious disagreements over Syria; Turkey continues to be a major actor in the Coalition against ISIL along its 780 mile land border with Syria and Iraq. While the 60 year old alliance with NATO member Turkey is now strained, the U.S. still needs Turkey’s cooperation in everything from ending the Arab-Israeli conflict, stabilizing Iraq, and destroying ISIL. As the *Washington Post*

⁵³ PeÇanha, Sergio. "How Turkey’s Promise to Stop the Flow of Refugees Is Creating a New Crisis." *The New York Times*. April 25, 2016.

⁵⁴ "When I Picture My Future, I See Nothing: Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey."

⁵⁵ "When I Picture My Future, I See Nothing: Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey."

editorializes, “Without Turkey’s cooperation, no U.S. policy to bring stability to the region can succeed, analysts and officials on both sides say.”⁵⁶

The Syrian conflict’s perpetual nature is generating thousands of Syrian refugees by the day, especially as the latest diplomatic negotiations in Geneva continue to break down. The Syrian refugee crisis has stretched three important U.S. allies in the region to the breaking point and thus it is unrealistic for the United States to ask them to accept more Syrians. For if Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey were to collapse economically or politically, the ensuing chaos would provide fertile ground for ISIL expansion. Additionally, while increased international aid will have to be part of the solution, no amount of money can stop sexual abuse in camps or make Syrian refugees go to school. This is where resettlement programs which only target the most vulnerable refugees can help.

The Screening Process: Looking for “Liars, Criminals, and Terrorists”

I will now move to describe the resettlement process for Syrian refugees as the overwhelmingly majority of Syrian refugees have arrived in the U.S. through the resettlement process, and not asylum. In contrast, the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Europe, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey are asylum seekers and thus the difference is important to understand. As the Century Foundation explains, “America’s refugee resettlement process has nothing in common with the massive spontaneous human wave of displaced people that has swept into Europe this year by boat and in long, marching columns.”⁵⁷ This is because under resettlement, America has complete control of who comes in, where they go, and what they do.

Asylum is a “voting with your feet” of sorts in that people seek sanctuary in another country of their choice to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material

⁵⁶ Sly, Liz. "Can Turkey and the U.S. Really Be Called Allies?" Washington Post. October 29, 2014.

⁵⁷ Long, Katie. "Why America Could-and Should-Admit More Syrian Refugees" The Century Foundation. December 16, 2015.

assistance.⁵⁸ Syrians become asylum seekers when they cross international borders and arrive in a new country, whether in Europe or the Middle East region. Some Syrian asylum seekers attempt to evade formal registration in countries with scarce economic opportunities, such as Greece, in order to continue their journey to more prosperous countries like Germany.⁵⁹ States are under international obligation to consider claims for asylum and not to immediately return asylum seekers to Syria. One of the critical differences is that Syrian asylum seekers obviously do not undergo security checks before arriving in their new country. Except for a handful of anomalous cases in which Syrian refugees turned up at the Mexican border, no Syrians arrive in the U.S. as asylum seekers.⁶⁰

Resettlement, however, “is an option whereby a third country (i.e. not the one the refugee has fled from, or the country of first asylum or habitual residence) offers refugee status in its territory to an individual.”⁶¹ For example, resettlement occurs when the U.S approves and offers reception and integration support to a Syrian refugee living in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey. The resettlement process is run through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and will be described at greater detail below. Currently, the United States approves around 85,000 cases from the United Nations for resettlement annually which makes it the largest resettlement country in the world.⁶²

First, Syrians in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, register with UNHCR to be legally designated a refugee. As part of the application, a UNHCR official takes a photograph and iris scan to verify the applicant’s identity, which can take anywhere from a couple months to a few

⁵⁸ Employee in refugee services agency, U.S. Department of State, in conversation with the author. April 21, 2016.

⁵⁹ Long, Katie. "Why America Could-and Should-Admit More Syrian Refugees “

⁶⁰ Hennessy-Fiske, Molly. "Syrians' Arrival at U.S. Border Crossing Raises Concern of a Flood of Asylum Seekers." Los Angeles Times. November 19, 2015.

⁶¹ Bassoul, Joelle. "Rich Countries Have Resettled Just 1.39% of Syrian Refugees, Need to Step up Efforts." Oxfam International. March 29, 2016.

⁶² Employee in refugee services agency, U.S. Department of State, in conversation with the author. April 21, 2016.

years. Next, the UNHCR representative schedules an in-person interview with the applicant to determine if they are lying about their identity or past. As one UNHCR official said, “We detect lies based on what’s happened in the country of origin. It’s not just hour-by-hour events; it’s ethnicity, region, family. We know the custom — we know what their dresses look like.” UNHCR will then advocate for the most vulnerable 10% to be resettled and chooses the best country based on various criteria specified by host countries.⁶³ Once a UNHCR resettlement application is referred to the United States, an American Resettlement Support Center (RSC) will take over the case.

America focuses mostly on resettling women, children, and the sick and even though UNHCR seeks to refer the most vulnerable 10% of refugees, the U.S. usually only targets the most vulnerable 1%. As such, the U.S. deprioritizes single males and anyone with military experience and instead concentrates on single women with children and people with special medical needs.⁶⁴ When an application reaches a U.S. funded RSC, the Department of State pre-screens the eligibility of refugees and puts them through health and security checks. Department of Homeland Security officers then fly out to conduct in person interviews with the candidates. The officers state that they are looking to weed out “liars, criminals, and terrorists.” If candidates pass the interview, they are referred to US intelligence services where they are “subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States.”⁶⁵ The details of the investigations the intelligence community conducts are classified. Meanwhile, refugees undergo additional medical tests and treatments before they can step foot on American soil.

⁶³ Griswold, Eliza. "Why Is It So Difficult for Syrian Refugees to Get Into the U.S.?" The New York Times. January 20, 2016.

⁶⁴ Employee in refugee services agency, U.S. Department of State, in conversation with the author. April 21, 2016.

⁶⁵ Griswold, Eliza. "Why Is It So Difficult for Syrian Refugees..."

If Syrians complete all these steps, known as the “Enhanced Syrian Review”, they are finally admitted to the United States. Before arriving on American soil, refugees take orientation classes which explain everything from what to pack to cultural differences between the United States and Syria.⁶⁶ Once admitted, the federal government and NGOs that help to relocate refugees in the United States select cities with readily available housing and jobs and a low cost of living. Currently, the process takes between 18 and 24 months from the time of UNHCR recommendation and referral to the time of admission to the United States.⁶⁷ Added to the timeframe of UNHCR verification, the whole process can sometimes take more than four years. Thus, it is not surprising that the United States has only approved about 3,100 Syrian refugees for resettlement or about 50% of the total referrals.⁶⁸

More than 4.8 million of 22.8 million Syrians have officially become refugees since the 2011 onset of the Syrian civil war.⁶⁹ As millions flee war, persecution, and terrorism, the question is where they go. Thus far, neighboring Lebanon has accepted over 1.3 million Syrian refugees, more than 25% of Lebanon’s total population. Meanwhile, Turkey has spent over \$8 billion to feed and shelter the 2.7 million Syrian refugees living in the country; yet most refugees in Turkey still live in destitution. Additionally, as many Syrians seek new life in the West, Europe has taken in over 500,000 refugees. The United States of America, however, has accepted just 3,100 which is less than .06% of the total number of Syrian refugees.⁷⁰ In September 2015, President Barack Obama announced that the United States would accept 10,000 more Syrians within the next year after criticism that America wasn’t doing enough.

⁶⁶Griswold, Eliza. "Why Is It So Difficult for Syrian Refugees..."

⁶⁷ Clark, Dave. "How the US Plans to Welcome 10,000 Syrian Refugees." Business Insider. September 12, 2015.

⁶⁸ Koran, Laura. "How Do Syrian Refugees Get Into the U.S.?" CNN. November 17, 2015.

⁶⁹ Bremmer, Ian. "These 5 Facts Explain America's Shameful Reaction to Syrian Refugees." Time. November 30, 2015.

⁷⁰ Gambino, Lauren, Patrick Kingsley, and Alberto Nardelli. "Syrian Refugees in America: Separating Fact from Fiction in the Debate." The Guardian. November 19, 2015.

However, in response, the House of Representatives voted 289-137 in November on H.R. 4038 to change the current system and make it more difficult for Syrian refugees to come to America. The bill would require the FBI Director and Homeland Security and intelligence officials to personally certify the background investigation for refugees and absolutely guarantee they are not national security threats. Attorney General Loretta Lynch responded that “To ask me to have my FBI director or other members of the administration to make personal guarantees would effectively grind the program to a halt.”⁷¹ This certification would be on top of the pre-existing screening processes for refugees described above. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) stated that the bill was intended to effectively halt the Syrian refugee program for more than six months.⁷² While President Obama has vowed to veto the bill, thirty state governors have defiantly declared that they would not accept refugees in their states due to security concerns: at time of writing, the bill has not made it to the Senate.

Increasing the Number of Syrians Resettled in the U.S.

There are four main arguments presented by American policymakers and commentators who oppose accepting additional Syrian refugees. They argue that ISIL fighters or sympathizers would be indistinguishable from other Syrians, Syrian Muslims could not adjust and contribute to American democratic society, a significant amount of money would be spent resettling Syrians, and that this money could be better spent aiding Syrians already resettled in the region. I will summarize and rebut each argument in turn.

Security and Possible ISIL Infiltration:

⁷¹ DeBonis, Mike. "House Passes Bill to Tighten Flow of Syrian Refugees over Obama's Objections." Washington Post. November 19, 2015.

⁷² House, Billy, and Kathleen Miller. "House Passes Syrian Refugee Restrictions That Obama Would Veto." Bloomberg. November 18, 2015.

Many American elected officials, primarily but not exclusively Republicans, argue that increasing the number of Syrian refugees in the country would increase the chances of an ISIL attack on domestic soil, as supporters of ISIL will be indistinguishable from other Syrian refugees. They contend that the poor and sometimes nonexistent databases on Syrians cannot effectively prove their allegiances. Last year, FBI Director James Comey acknowledged in Congressional testimony that the records of Syrian refugees were so poor that there was no absolute 100% assurance of safety. Comey also testified that the FBI currently had over 900 active investigations of ISIL activities. Drawing from this, House Intelligence Committee member Representative Peter King (R-NY) said, "There is virtually no vetting because there are no databases in Syria." Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) expressed similar concerns claiming that it was impossible to determine the allegiances of these refugees. Additionally, a recent poll by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies claims that as many as 10-15% of Syrian refugees have sympathies for ISIL, strengthening the rhetoric against them.⁷³ The poll found that around 13% of Syrians said their view of ISIL was either "positive" or "positive to some extent". Thus, even if they are not ISIL fighters, ISIL sympathizers among Syrian refugees could be potential threats down the road.⁷⁴

In a Republican presidential debate last November, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) explained that it wasn't a matter of America's desire to welcome refugees, but its ability. Senator Rubio said, "If we allow 9,999 Syrian refugees into the United States, and all of them are good people, but we allow one person in who's an ISIS killer -- we just get one person wrong, we've got a serious problem." Indeed, many Republican leaders are united by this belief, that the potential costs of accepting Syrian refugees outweigh any moral benefits. After the House passed

⁷³ Lalor, Kieran. "New York Can't Risk Taking in Syrian Refugees." New York Post. November 19, 2015.

⁷⁴ Thiessen, Marc. "13% of Syrian Refugees Sympathize With ISIS." American Enterprise Institute. November 20, 2015.

H.R. 4038 halting the Syrian refugee program, co-sponsor of the bill Representative Richard Hudson (R-NC) said, “Republicans and Democrats came together in a veto-proof majority to respond to the will of the American people and do our primary job to keep them safe.”⁷⁵ Speaker of the House Paul Ryan later echoed the same belief saying that the first and most important duty of government is national security.

The argument that current systems of vetting Syrian refugees are inadequate to block ISIL supporters is unpersuasive. To begin with, the UNHCR chooses the country that will resettle the refugees. Therefore there is no guarantee that an ISIL fighter smuggled into the refugee system would even end up in the United States. As an executive director of a refugee resettlement non-governmental organization (NGO) said, “You’d have to be a really stupid terrorist to come this way.”⁷⁶ In fact, the current system of vetting refugees has been both thorough and successful. UNHCR only recommends the most vulnerable 10% of refugees for resettlement such as female heads of households who have been tortured or require some form of advanced medical treatment. Even though 10% of refugees fall into this category, only 1% are ever actually resettled. Of the 2,034 Syrian refugees who had entered America as of earlier last year, half of them were children.⁷⁷ None of the over two-thousand have been arrested on terrorist charges according to the U.S. Government. More broadly, of the 784,395 refugees the U.S. has taken in since 9/11, including many from Iraq and Afghanistan, only 3 have been arrested on terrorism charges, a number less than .000004%.⁷⁸

This infinitesimally low number is not surprising given that refugees go through interviews, fingerprints, retinal scans, medical evaluations, interagency screening efforts, and

⁷⁵ House, Billy, and Kathleen Miller. "House Passes Syrian Refugee Restrictions"

⁷⁶ Griswold, Eliza. "Why Is It So Difficult for Syrian Refugees..."

⁷⁷ Ott, Stephanie. "'I Came to Live in Dignity': Syrian Refugees in the US." - Al Jazeera English. November 25, 2015.

⁷⁸ Gambino, Lauren, Patrick Kingsley, and Alberto Nardelli. "Syrian Refugees in America..."

sometimes years of waiting before reaching America. Syrians must also undergo the ‘Enhanced Syrian Review’ which requires caseworkers at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in Washington to assess each Syrian case individually and select some for processing through the Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate office.⁷⁹ This step is in addition to the Department of Homeland Security, National Counterterrorism Center, Department of State, Department of Defense, and FBI investigations and screenings. Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas testified that the vetting process was “the most stringent security process for anyone entering the US.”⁸⁰

The problem with ending the Syrian refugee resettlement program is that it will probably do nothing to prevent terrorist attacks from occurring in the United States. Even if one abides by the theory that the presence of Muslims from “high risk countries” (such as Syria) accompanies the possibility of radicalization and terrorism, Syria is not home to all the world’s Muslims. For example, Europe has millions of Muslims with full citizenship in their countries of residence that can travel to the United States on an easily acquired tourist visa. It is estimated that Europe (notably France, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden) is home to around 44 million Muslims many of whom originate from “high risk countries” such as Iraq, Pakistan, Algeria, and Tunisia. Furthermore, the EU’s Counterterrorism Chief Gilles de Kerchove warned last year that more than 3,000 Europeans had joined ISIS. *The Guardian* published even higher numbers claiming more than 30,000 foreign fighters and 5,000 Europeans had joined the so-called Caliphate. In the United Kingdom, more than half of the 700 jihadists who joined ISIS have now returned to the country.⁸¹ As *The American Conservative* concluded, “If ISIS is planning on infiltrating the U.S.,

⁷⁹ Griswold, Eliza. "Why Is It So Difficult for Syrian Refugees..."

⁸⁰ Ott, Stephanie. "'I Came to Live in Dignity': Syrian Refugees..."

⁸¹ Norton-Taylor, Richard. "Up to 30,000 Foreign Fighters Have Gone to Syria and Iraq Since 2011." *The Guardian*. November 17, 2015.

taking this route would be easier and faster.”⁸² Unless Donald Trump and his counterparts want to cut all ties with the 100 countries home to ISIS fighters, the security argument against admitting refugees from Syria makes little sense.

Last November’s terrorist attacks in Paris left 129 dead and exacerbated Americans’ concerns of the country’s ability to accept and properly vet Syrian refugees. When a Syrian passport was found aside the body of one of the insurgents, these concerns turned into an outcry. Donald Trump said, “To take in 250,000-- some of whom are going to have problems, big problems -- is just insane. We have to be insane. Terrible.”⁸³ The passport bore the name Ahmad Almohammad, a Syrian national, who seemed to have arrived in France through the refugee channel after passing through Greece in October. However, European authorities soon confirmed that Almohammad was actually a soldier fighting for Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian civil war. More importantly, Almohammed had died months before the Paris attacks. The passport was a fake, planted at the scene of the crime by ISIS to aggravate tensions in the West.

Indeed, European investigators eventually concluded that all of the attackers responsible for the tragedy in Paris were European nationals, mostly from Belgium and France.⁸⁴ Thus, any of the Paris attackers could have conceivably traveled to the United States on an easily acquired tourist visa. If they had tried to use the refugee channel to arrive in the U.S., they would have been put through years of tests and waiting to likely hear that they were not in the most vulnerable 10% and not recommended for resettlement. As the *Washington Post* analyzes, ISIS hopes that a small number of terrorist attacks will strengthen Western Islamophobia and give Muslims living in the West a very hard choice, abandon their religion to keep their life in the

⁸² Raimondo, Justin. "The Dangers of Refugee Humanitarianism." *The American Conservative*. December 8, 2015.

⁸³ Diamond, Jeremy. "Trump: Paris Massacre Would Have Been 'Much Different' If People Had Guns." *CNN*. November 14, 2015.

⁸⁴ Tharoor, Ishaan. "Were Syrian Refugees Involved in the Paris Attacks? What We Know and Don't Know." *Washington Post*. November 17, 2015.

West or escape persecution by immigrating to the Islamic State.⁸⁵ Thus, there is an added incentive for the United States to accept additional refugees, to help defeat the rhetoric and hopes of ISIL.

Assimilation and Clash of Culture:

A second argument is that even if Syrian refugees accepted into the United States are not supporters of ISIL, they accept anti-democratic, and sometimes misogynistic, viewpoints that would threaten American democratic norms. Some use a clash of culture lens to claim that Syrian Muslims could not assimilate to Western society because of their adherence to sharia Law. While in Germany last year, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan seemed to support this notion by saying that pressuring Muslims to assimilate in their new Western countries is "a crime against humanity." He argued that Muslims should not be forced to abandon their religious beliefs just because they were in Europe; a contention that angered many German politicians. *The National Review* argues that sharia rejects American democracy since the people are subjects rather than citizens and are powerless to question law. The *Review* argues that "unlike the Judeo-Christian principles that informed America's founding, classical sharia does not abide a separation of spiritual from civic and political life."⁸⁶ Thus, because of an adherence to sharia, opposition politicians argue that Syrian refugees would not adapt and contribute to secular and democratic life in America.

Last December, Donald Trump issued a press release calling for "a complete and total shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on." His defense was an alarming poll conducted by the Center for Security Policy (CSP) which found that a majority of Muslims in America (51%) agreed that "Muslims in

⁸⁵ Taylor, Adam. "The Islamic State Wants You to Hate Refugees." Washington Post. November 16, 2015.

⁸⁶ McCarthy, Andrew. "The Controversy over Syrian Refugees Misses the Question We Should Be Asking." National Review Online. November 28, 2015.

America should have the choice of being governed according to sharia”. Also in the poll, nearly a quarter believed that “it is legitimate to use violence to punish those who give offense to Islam”, and nearly one-fifth said that “the use of violence in the United States is justified in order to make sharia the law of the land in this country.” This poll has also been cited by Senator Ted Cruz and indeed, CSP’s founder Frank Gaffney serves on Senator Cruz’s foreign policy advisory.

Opponents of resettlement also fear that male Muslim refugees will act inappropriately towards American women. For example, more than 600 German women in Cologne claimed that they were sexually assaulted by men of North African and Arab origin last New Year’s Eve. After the incident, German public opinion soured on accepting refugees as only 29% of the public still agreed with Prime Minister Merkel that the country could handle it. Even prominent German feminist Alice Schwarzer said that Germany is “naively importing male violence, sexism and anti-Semitism”.⁸⁷ As Fox News claims, the migration of 1 million Muslim refugees to Germany has resulted in a “clash of cultures.”⁸⁸ In the United States, conservative politicians pointed to Cologne as proof of why America could not accept Syrian refugees. Donald Trump took to Twitter to warn that if America accepted Syrians, it should expect Cologne-type attacks to occur. Conservative icon Phyllis Schlafly remarked, “This massive immigration is simply changing the face of the world. It’s already changed Germany. Germany isn’t German anymore.”⁸⁹

As *The New Yorker* observed, anti-immigrant right wing nationalists groups have grown in popularity in Europe and America since the refugee crisis. For example, Marine Le Pen’s

⁸⁷ "Cologne's Aftershocks." *The Economist*. January 16, 2016.

⁸⁸ Weinthal, Benjamin. "Germans Battle Refugee Sex Assaults With Signs, Cartoons." *Fox News*. January 22, 2016.

⁸⁹ Chokshi, Niraj. "German Sexual Assaults Lead to 'I Told You So' Claims on Muslim Immigrants in U.S." *Washington Post*. January 11, 2016.

National Front party in France recently had their most successful election in years largely campaigning on an anti-immigration platform. Initial exit polls in December had the National Front winning approximately 30% of the vote. Le Pen has frequently called for France to end all immigration to the country to annihilate Islamic fundamentalism. Similarly, presidential frontrunner Donald Trump has made frequent headlines calling for a complete ban on Muslims entering the United States. Many observers have argued that Trump has gained popularity with each attack on domestic soil because of his hardline stances. As Trump himself noted, “every time things get worse, I do better.”⁹⁰ Not only are there worries of refugees being radicalized, but also that their presence and a possible attack could radicalize dormant right wing politics.

The notion that Syrian Muslims would not contribute to, and possibly damage, American society because of their religion is extremely Islamophobic. A recent poll of the American Muslim community by The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) disproves many arguments against accepting Syrian refugees; that they want to implement sharia law, their religious beliefs would preclude them from being American, and that they would not contribute to civic society. The ISPU survey concluded that the Muslim community in America is “pious and patriotic, optimistic and weary of discrimination, similar to Jews in its politics, and much like Protestants in its religious practice.” Specifically, the poll found that Muslims were as likely as any other religious group to cooperate with people in their neighborhoods to solve problems. Additionally, actually more Protestants (41%) than Muslims (37%) favor a role for religion in American law. Furthermore, Muslims who did have strong religious identities were also more likely to have strong American identities. And while Trump advocates for closing mosques for their link to radicalization, the survey found that mosque attendance was correlated with higher levels of civic engagement. Finally, around 65% of Muslims answered that military attacks

⁹⁰ Cassidy, John. "Donald Trump Is Now America's Marine Le Pen." *The New Yorker*. December 07, 2015.

against civilians were never justified; the next highest answer by faith group was Jews at around 43%.⁹¹

Even polls of Muslims worldwide show inconsistencies in the argument that Syrians could not adapt and contribute to American society and politics. While many are concerned that Syrians might advocate for sharia law here in the U.S., a 2015 Pew Research Center poll found that not all Muslims in fact desire a sharia system. In Turkey and Lebanon, only 12% and 29% of Muslim respondents respectively answered that they support sharia as official law. Meanwhile, virtually all respondents in Lebanon and Jordan, 99.9% and 94%, held strongly unfavorable views of ISIL. The Pew poll also surveyed American Muslims and concluded, similar to the IPSU poll above, that “Muslims in the U.S. are roughly as religious as U.S. Christians, although they are less religious than Muslims in many other nations.” Furthermore, according to the findings, 68% of American Muslims believe that gender makes no difference in the quality of political leaders which is roughly the same rate as the American public, 72%. Also interesting is that a much higher percentage of Muslim Americans than the American public do not see a conflict between science and religion, 59% vs. 37%. Finally, 70% of American Muslims identify with the Democratic Party; probably in part due to the fact that Republicans, on average, hold a more negative view of Islam than Democrats.⁹²

The Center for Security Policy poll used by Donald Trump is deeply flawed and comes from an extremist organization. The Center’s founder Frank Gaffney was described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as “one of America’s most notorious Islamaphobes” after insisting for years that Barack Obama was America’s first Muslim president. Gaffney has also called for

⁹¹ Mogahed, Dalia, and Fouad Pervez. "American Muslim Poll." Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. March 2016.

⁹² Lipka, Michael. "Muslims and Islam: Key Findings in the U.S. and Around the World." Pew Research Center RSS. December 07, 2015.

Muslims to be investigated by a "new and improved" House Un-American Activities Committee. Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and John Boehner (R-OH) denounced the Center in 2012 for insisting that Huma Abedin, one of Hilary Clinton's top aides, was a secret member of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁹³ According to Georgetown's Bridge Initiative, the CSP survey was an online, self-selecting poll of 600 people which means that respondents opted to taking part. This is significant because according to the American Association for Public Opinion Research, opt-in surveys cannot be considered representative of the intended population, in this case Muslims, because "the pollster has no idea who is responding to the question" and that these kinds of "polls do not have such a grounded statistical tie to the population."⁹⁴ Georgetown also reports that the questions were not neutral, but imbued with assumptions in an interrogative form. Not mentioned in Donald Trump's press release, or Fox News's coverage of the poll, was that a majority of respondents defined jihad as "Muslims' peaceful, personal struggle to be more religious."⁹⁵

Independent journalist Nabila Ramandi warned, "The refugee-as-rapist construct is the kind that has been used to demonize people throughout history."⁹⁶ It is also an argument eerily similar to Nazi Germany's claim that the Jews were Untermenschen, inferior people threatening pure European culture. In fact, once the hysteria in Cologne died down it became evident that very few Syrians were actually involved in the incident. Cologne prosecutor Ulrich Bremer noted that of the 59 suspects pinpointed so far, only four were from war-torn Syria or Iraq. Most of the assaulters were of Tunisian and Moroccan origin with a few German citizens involved.⁹⁷ As

⁹³ "Trump's 'Muslim Lockdown': What Is the Center for Security Policy?" BBC News. December 8, 2015.

⁹⁴ "Trump Calls for Ban on Muslims, Cites Deeply Flawed Poll." Georgetown: The Bridge Initiative. December 07, 2015.

⁹⁵ "Trump Calls for Ban on Muslims, Cites Deeply Flawed Poll."

⁹⁶ Ramdani, Nabila. "Cologne Sex Assaults: Muslim Rape Myths Fit a Neo-Nazi Agenda." *The Independent*. February 13, 2016.

⁹⁷ Ramdani, Nabila. "Cologne Sex Assaults: Muslim Rape Myths..."

Tunisia and Morocco are far more stable countries, the argument that Muslims from war-torn countries would assault western women seems invalid. In fact, more German citizens than Syrians were involved in the attacks.

After the Cologne sexual assault incident, a publicity campaign called #ausnahmslos (#noexcuses) tried to shift the public debate away from the alleged Muslim perpetrators and to the victims. The organizers of the campaign argued that sexual assault in Germany has long been a prevalent and unaddressed problem. According to last year's European Agency for Fundamental Rights study, one in three German women are victims of sexual assault after the age of 15.⁹⁸ Strangely, sexual assault in Germany is only criminally punishable when the act involves force. So in Cologne, where many of the men supposedly groped women from behind, the aggressors would likely not be found guilty of assault in the first place. In a horrific case years ago, a German adult was not convicted of rape after penetrating a 14 year-old girl because there was no violence and it was done in surprise. This loophole in German law has been frequently exploited according to Joachim Renzikowski, a criminal law professor at Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg. Elke Ferner, the parliamentary state secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, said "When you make it a problem involving people from North Africa, of the Muslim faith, you're making the problem smaller than it actually is."⁹⁹ In early February, 2016 when Belgian reporter Esmeralda Labye was covering the annual Cologne carnival, three men touched her breast, kissed her, and simulated intercourse behind her. However, this time the perpetrators were caught on camera and all three

⁹⁸ Somaskanda, Sumi. "Nein Doesn't Mean Nein." Foreign Policy Nein Doesn't Mean Nein Comments. January 26, 2016.

⁹⁹ Somaskanda, Sumi. "Nein Doesn't Mean Nein."

were of white, European origin.¹⁰⁰ As Germany, and most of Europe, has a pandemic sexual assault problem, the belief that Muslim refugees will import a misogyny and aggression previously unseen in Europe is also false.

The Strain on the Economy:

A third argument against accepting Syrians into the United States is that it will cost a significant amount of money to resettle the refugees. The Center for Immigration Studies finds that 90% of refugees are on food stamps and more than 75% are on Medicaid. As such, an estimated \$64,370 of taxpayer money is spent on each refugee for their first five years in the United States.¹⁰¹ All in all, President Obama's Syrian refugee plan would cost the country an estimated \$640 million according to *The Federalist Papers*. The news outlet argues that adding more people to the country's already broken welfare system, which the vast majority of Syrian refugees will rely on, will only make the problem worse.¹⁰² As the Center for Immigration Studies concludes, "The federal budget deficit was more than \$400 billion in 2015 and 47 million U.S. residents live in poverty, including one-fifth of the nation's children. Resources to deal with the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East are finite."¹⁰³ Additionally, as the *Washington Examiner* observes, there is the typical worry that refugees will steal jobs. This is precisely why, they argue, the Arab Gulf states, which rely heavily on low-paying jobs, have not opened their door to Syrians.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Oppenheim, Maya. "Journalist Sexually Assaulted on Live Television in Germany." *The Independent*. February 5, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Zeigler, Karen, and Steven Camarota. "The High Cost of Resettling Middle Eastern Refugees." Center for Immigration Studies. November 2015.

¹⁰² Morin, Kimberly. "This Is How Much Money Syrian Refugees Will Cost Taxpayers." *The Federalist Papers*. November 23, 2015.

¹⁰³ Zeigler, Karen, and Steven Camarota. "The High Cost of Resettling..."

¹⁰⁴ Boland, Barbara. "Why the Islamic Gulf States Aren't Taking Syrian Refugees." *Washington Examiner*. March 18, 2016.

This economic argument is especially weak as research finds that moderate numbers of refugees often have a positive impact on their local economy. In 2012, Cleveland refugee services found that although \$4.8 million was spent helping refugees settle in the area, there was a ten-fold return on investment; the refugees had a positive impact on the economy worth about \$48 million. A U.N. report noted that “At the local level, refugees provide increased demand for goods and services through their new purchasing power and can be particularly revitalizing in communities that otherwise have a declining population.”¹⁰⁵ *Forbes* adds that in many cases refugees both take jobs that natives do not want, meeting the demand of unskilled labor, and set up business of their own.¹⁰⁶ Thus in the long term, refugees make their new country richer, not poorer. As *The New Yorker* concludes, “The biggest challenges in accommodating refugees are social and political, rather than economic.”¹⁰⁷

Also, a researcher at Princeton University found indications in the 1990s that refugees may work harder than other economic migrants; those not displaced by war, persecution, or disaster. Princeton postdoctoral research associate Kalena Cortes concluded that refugees living in the United States have higher annual earnings growth than economic migrants. Refugees even improved their English by 11% more than economic migrants. Dismissing other misconceptions, refugees do not get a long term housing stipend and in fact, only get \$1,000 to cover their first three months in America. Refugees must even pay back the government for their plane ticket to the country when they have the money.¹⁰⁸ Despite all this, influxes of refugees only have positive impacts on economies with resources that can handle the population increase. For example, in Jordan, where resources are scarce, the country spent \$8.2 billion in 2012 and 2013

¹⁰⁵ Soergel, Andrew. "Refugees: Economic Boon or Burden?" US News. September 15, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Worstall, Tim. "No, Refugees Don't Lower Wages Or Reduce The Number Of Jobs Available, Not In The Long Term." *Forbes*. November 20, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Cassidy, John. "The Economics of Syrian Refugees." *The New Yorker*. November 18, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Welsh, Teresa. "8 Facts About the U.S. Program to Resettle Syrian Refugees." US News. November 20, 2015.

on Syrian refugees while economic benefits clocked in at only \$5.8 billion.¹⁰⁹ Jordan's inability to cope with millions of refugees is why the United States should alleviate the burden by both increasing aid and accepting additional refugees.

The Money Could Be Better Spent:

This leads to a fourth argument against resettlement which is partially persuasive. While refugees often bring more to a host country's economy than they take away from it, and thus Syrian refugees could be expected to be net economic gain for the U.S., it is also true that resettling refugees here costs much more than resettling them in countries on Syria's borders. The Center for Immigration Studies calculated that it costs twelve times as much to resettle a refugee in the United States than it does to care for that same refugee in a neighboring Middle Eastern country by paying for health care, food, and more (\$5,300 over five years vs. \$64,000). Faced with the decision to either bring one refugee to America or provide for eleven more in Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey, many have concluded that refugee resettlement is just immoral. *The National Review* analogized, "Faced with twelve drowning people, only a monster would send them a luxurious one-man boat rather than twelve life jackets."¹¹⁰ Furthermore, some believe that little can be done to lower the costs of refugee resettlement. In fact, most of the costs come from social services such as food stamps and Medicaid. Thus, with limited resources, the humanitarian solution is to aid refugees already in the Middle East, rather than resettlement.¹¹¹

In response to this argument, while it is only realistic that the vast majority of Syrian refugees remain in the region, it is also critical that the United States does its part and resettles the most vulnerable and disadvantaged refugees. There are certainly advantages for Syrian refugees to remain in the region; namely that they can return to Syria if the situation ever

¹⁰⁹ Soergel, Andrew. "Refugees: Economic Boon or Burden"

¹¹⁰ Krikorian, Mark. "Refugee Resettlement Is Immoral." *National Review Online*. November 16, 2015.

¹¹¹ Krikorian, Mark. "Refugee Resettlement..."

improves. However the U.N. calculates that refugees spend 17 years living in camps on average meaning that it could be quite a while before Syrians can safely return.¹¹² For the reasons laid out earlier, Jordan, Lebanon, and to a lesser degree Turkey cannot survive another 17 years of hosting millions of Syrians unless they receive ample support. In the meantime, the United States should resettle those disadvantaged refugees who are primarily women and families with children to provide them with dramatically superior education and a refuge from sexual abuse.

Save the Children has estimated that the long-term cost of the millions of Syrian children out of school could be 5.4% of Syria's future GDP, crippling the country's future even once it emerges from the brutal conflict.¹¹³ Syrian refugees in Jordan and especially Lebanon and Turkey suffer from scarce access to education as disturbingly large numbers of refugees are out of school. As of March 2015, 60% (128,000) out of an estimated 220,000 school age Syrians in Jordan were enrolled in school. Meanwhile in Lebanon, the school enrollment rate was only about 25% as 102,000 out of an estimated 408,000 Syrian children were attending school. Finally, in Turkey, one-third of the estimated 700,000 school-aged refugees were enrolled.¹¹⁴

However, not only is there a problem with lack of access to education, but also with the quality of the education available to Syrian refugees. There are many barriers to education for Syrian refugees and not all of them can be solved through increased aid. UNHCR identifies that dropout rates, treatment in school, transportation and distance, language differences, disabilities, and mixed priorities are all factors that keep Syrian refugee children out of school. 20% of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon drop out of school which is a rate twice the national average for Lebanese children. Attributing to the high dropout rate is the fact that most teachers are not trained in educating refugee children suffering from extraordinary levels of psychological stress.

¹¹² Lecture, From Homs to Hamburg: Refugee Movements from Syria to Europe and Beyond.

¹¹³ "The Challenge of Education." UNHCR: The Future of Syria.

¹¹⁴ Culbertson, Shelly and Louay Constant. Education of Syrian Refugee Children: Managing the Crisis in Turkey

A recent UNICEF report also noted that corporal punishment is widespread in Jordanian schools, with one teacher in Za'atari refugee camp supposedly rebuking her student for ruining Jordan.¹¹⁵

Particularly in Lebanon where the population is extremely dispersed, Syrian refugee families living in remote villages are not able to afford taxi or bus fares to send their children to school. Many parents also fear sending their young children to walk sometimes miles alone. Language is also a major educational issue for Syrian refugees in Lebanon because while they are used to an Arabic curriculum, many Lebanese schools operate in French and English. Thus, Syrian refugees often are forced to learn a second language, if accelerated language programs are available, before even enrolling in school. Furthermore, children with disabilities have almost no hope of receiving an education. UNHCR recently surveyed 60 Syrian refugee children in Lebanon with disabilities and found that not find a single child was enrolled in school or other educational activities.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile in Za'atari, UNHCR reports suggest that children with disabilities generally do not attend school. Finally, many Syrian refugees have such horrific memories that it is impossible for them to focus on school. Tamer, a 17 year old Syrian refugee, said, "Our brothers are dead. How can we focus on school while our families are being slaughtered?" Despite the hardships, some children have insisted on going to school. In Lebanon, two brothers ages 10 and 11 get up a 7 a.m. to go to school before working until closing time in a local restaurant. Resettlement programs should be expanded to target families with children unable to receive an education they so desperately need.¹¹⁷

The issue of sexual abuse in refugee camps is also one of child abuse since the fear of sexual abuse leads many mothers to marry their adolescent daughters off early; although of course a husband having sex with an adolescent wife is sexual abuse in and of itself. Save the

¹¹⁵ "The Challenge of Education." UNHCR: The Future of Syria.

¹¹⁶ "The Challenge of Education." UNHCR: The Future of Syria.

¹¹⁷ "The Challenge of Education." UNHCR: The Future of Syria.

Children's 2014 report on sexual abuse explains that while adolescent marriage existed in Syria before the war, the rate has doubled in Syrian refugee communities in Jordan. Specifically, the percentage of registered marriages with a bride under 18 in the Syrian refugee community in Jordan increased from 12% in 2011 to 25% in 2013.¹¹⁸ Also, far fewer Syrian boys were registered as married meaning that young Syrian girls are being married off to older males. In fact, 48% of Syrian refugee brides in Jordan married a man at least ten years older. Furthermore, Save the Children reports that child marriage is also on the rise in Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon and Turkey.¹¹⁹

Syrian refugee families are opting for child marriage for their young daughters primarily because they are reliant on dwindling resources and are lacking economic opportunities. Also, many families hope that a marriage can protect their daughters from the threat of sexual violence. As Abudallah, husband to a 13 year old Syrian bride, explained, "If we were in Syria and she was around this age, her father wouldn't marry her off. She's too young. Only in these circumstances, where there are fears of sexual harassment, are they marrying their daughters off."¹²⁰ However, child marriage has a litany of negative consequences. For one, child marriage often denies the bride the right to her education meaning she is less likely to take advantage of economic opportunities and subsequently, remain poor. Research also suggests that child marriage removes girls from their family and friends which leads to psychological isolation and long-term mental health consequences. Aside from mental health, "a girl under 15 is five times more likely to die in childbirth than a grown woman."¹²¹ Finally, adolescent girls who marry before the age of 18 are far more likely to experience domestic violence and because of the

¹¹⁸ "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan."

¹¹⁹ "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan."

¹²⁰ "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan."

¹²¹ "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan."

psychological isolation that accompanies child marriage, are unable or unwilling to access protection services.

The Save the Children report also notes that while child marriage is on the rise in Syrian refugee communities, at the same time there has been a determined resistance from families. UNHCR interviewed 135 Syrian refugee women who are heads of households in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey and found that although 13 of them received marriage proposals for their daughters, all of them refused. They reportedly “resented the image being perpetuated of Syrian girls as ‘easy and cheap’.”¹²² Furthermore, it appears that education and awareness programs in refugee camps are effective in preventing child marriages. One mother, Zada, changed her mind about marrying her daughter off after participating in an education session run by Save the Children in the Za’atari refugee camp. Zada said after the session, “I will not let my daughter get married to the wrong person, even if we end up staying in this camp for 20 years.”¹²³ However, not all Syrian refugees are fortunate enough to have access to programs like the one Zada participated in. Only 3 out of 12 districts in Zada’s Za’atari refugee camp have a school. Furthermore, more than 50% of Syrian refugee children in Jordan are not receiving an education.¹²⁴ This reality is why resettlement is needed to target the most vulnerable of Syrian refugees who are at risk of sexual abuse and adolescent marriages.

Why 65,000

I am advocating for the U.S. to resettle specifically 65,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years because it is politically feasible and practical for the resettlement system. Former Secretary of State Clinton first announced this platform on the Syrian refugee crisis in an interview last September, shortly after former Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley put forward

¹²² "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan."

¹²³ "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan."

¹²⁴ Weston, Phoebe. "Inside Zaatari Refugee Camp: The Fourth Largest City in Jordan."

the same proposal.¹²⁵ She acknowledged in the interview that the international community was facing the worst refugee crisis since World War II and that the United States would have to do more. Secretary Clinton also stated that the focus should be on the most vulnerable refugees, including victims of persecution such as young Yazidi women; ISIL has notably trafficked Yazidi women as sex slaves.¹²⁶

Furthermore, it appears as if this 65,000 proposal has some political support in Congress; an important concern considering the House recently attempted to freeze the Syrian resettlement program. Last year, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) led a group of 14 senators in an open letter to President Obama calling upon the U.S. to significantly increase the number of Syrian refugees resettled in the U.S. The senators wrote, “While the United States is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees, we must also dramatically increase the number of Syrian refugees that we accept for resettlement.”¹²⁷ The senators cited the tremendous strain on front-line countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey as well as a great moral duty as reasons for increasing resettlement.¹²⁸

Despite many Republican politicians’ opposition to accepting Syrian refugees, evangelical faith groups, a core group in the Republican electoral base, have spoken out in support of Syrians. After New Jersey Governor Chris Christie’s remarks that the U.S. should not even admit Syrian orphans under the age of 5, Christian evangelical groups were quick to criticize him. One advocate told Politico, “There’s a proud tradition in the Republican Party of welcoming those who are fleeing persecution, and this takes the party in a negative direction.”¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Kaplan, Rebecca. "Hillary Clinton: U.S. Should Take 65,000 Syrian Refugees." CBSNews. September 20, 2015.

¹²⁶ Kaplan, Rebecca. "Hillary Clinton: U.S. Should Take 65,000 Syrian Refugees."

¹²⁷ "Senators Urge President to Allow More Syrian Refugees to Resettle in U.S. Office of Senator Dick Durbin-Press Release. May 21, 2015.

¹²⁸ "Senators Urge President to Allow More Syrian Refugees to Resettle in U.S."

¹²⁹ Toosi, Nahal. "Christian Groups Break with GOP over Syrian Refugees." Politico. November 17, 2015. Accessed April 04, 2016.

Jenny Yang, Vice President for advocacy at World Relief, an evangelical organization that helps resettle refugees, added that the push by Republican presidential candidates to ban Syrian refugees “does not reflect what we've been hearing from our constituencies, which are evangelical churches across the country.”¹³⁰ If evangelical groups continue to support, and work for, resettling Syrian refugees, Republican politicians may soon have to change their stances on the issue or they risk alienating their support base.

More broadly, the American public was very sympathetic to the Syrian resettlement cause up until the Paris terrorist attacks in November, suggesting that public opposition to Syrian refugees is not long held, and therefore could be reversed. The Brookings Institution found that as recently as September 2015, 75% of Americans supported the Obama administration’s proposition to accept 10,000 refugees into the United States this year. Almost half (44%) felt the U.S. should be doing more to deal with the crisis and 54% agreed that the U.S. bore some degree of responsibility for the Syrian refugee crisis.¹³¹ After the November attacks in Paris, public sentiment shifted as 53% of Americans said the U.S. should no longer accept Syrian refugees. However, it appears that this change of opinion was due to doubts about the security vetting process. Interestingly a majority, albeit a slim majority, of Americans still agreed after the Paris attacks that Syrians should be admitted to the U.S. if they could pass a security clearance.¹³²

Furthermore, Pew Research Center delineates that America has largely opposed admitting refugees throughout its history as 71%, 55%, and 57% of the American public was against admitting Cubans asylum seekers in 1980, Hungarians in 1956, and displaced Europeans immediately after World War II. However, in the end, all but 2% of the Cuban asylum seekers

¹³⁰ Toosi, Nahal. "Christian Groups Break with GOP over Syrian Refugees."

¹³¹ McElvein, Elizabeth. "What Do Americans Really Think about Syrian Refugees?" The Brookings Institution. March 04, 2016.

¹³² McElvein, Elizabeth. "What Do Americans Really Think about Syrian Refugees?"

were allowed to remain in the U.S., the Hungarians were admitted under the Hungarian Refugee Act of 1958, and 415,000 displaced Europeans were accepted after the Displaced Persons Act of 1948.¹³³ Thus, especially because a smaller percentage of Americans are opposed to Syrians (53%) than the three examples above, it is realistic that the U.S. could follow Secretary Clinton's recommendation and resettle 65,000 Syrians over the next five years.

Aside from the political feasibility, accepting 65,000 Syrians over the next five years would not risk the security processes of the resettlement program. The primary reason why the resettlement process can span 18-24 months is because of the thoroughness of the interagency security checks. However, the security clearances should not be drastically expedited. Aside from American national security, if a terrorist slipped through the Syrian refugee system and committed an act of violence on American soil, the resettlement system would probably be terminated amidst the public outcry. In light of this, it is better to admit fewer refugees annually with more confidence of their security clearances than risk the entire future of the resettlement system. Some domestic organizations, including Church World Service, are arguing for the U.S. to resettle 65,000 Syrians just by the end of 2016, a proposition according to a Department of State employee in refugee services that would totally overwhelm the resettlement system. However, the employee agreed in our conversation that admitting 65,000 Syrians over the next five years would not compromise the security clearance process.¹³⁴

Thus far, the U.S. has only resettled 1,285 Syrians this fiscal year which is less than 13% of the goal of the Obama administration to resettle 10,000 Syrians. As such, a 'surge' operation

¹³³ DeSilver, Drew. "U.S. Public Seldom Has Welcomed Refugees into Country." Pew Research Center. November 19, 2015.

¹³⁴ Employee in refugee services agency, U.S. Department of State, in conversation with the author. April 21, 2016.

has been underway at the America Resettlement Support Center (RSC) in Jordan.¹³⁵ The ‘surge’ in Jordan has involved appropriating additional funding, staff, and Department of Homeland Security officials to the RSC. The ‘surge’ has also reportedly incorporated even higher levels of prioritizing high-risk groups of Syrian refugees such as victims of torture and gender-based violence and unaccompanied minors.¹³⁶ These are all tactics that the U.S. Government can employ in ramping up programs to resettle 65,000 Syrians over the next five years.

Conclusion:

Joseph Bahout, scholar at the Carnegie Endowment, warned me that “The refugee problem is becoming a time-bomb that is threatening two things at the core of American national interests.”¹³⁷ One, the stability of close friends in the Middle East, namely Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey is deteriorating and threatening to yield to more ground fertile for ISIL expansion. Two, as hundreds of thousands of desperate Syrians take the migrant trail to Europe, European economies, and the European Union, are threatened and right wing parties are rejuvenated. America has far too much at stake to take the isolationist path on the Syrian refugee issue. Ultimately, the only way to solve the Syrian refugee crisis is to solve the horrific Syrian conflict that is driving millions from their homes. However, as al-Assad seems highly unwilling and unlikely to depart, the Syrian conflict could continue to drag on for years to come. In the meantime, the U.S. needs to be active in mitigating the calamities befalling its allies in the Middle East and subsequently Europe. A major component of this effort should be resettling 65,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years.

¹³⁵ Sakuma, Amanda. "The U.S. Is Way Behind Its Goal of Accepting 10,000 Syrian Refugees." NBC News. April 7, 2016.

¹³⁶ Ortiz, Erik. "First Syrian Family in 'Surge' Program Departs for U.S." NBC News. April 6, 2016.

¹³⁷ Joseph Bahout, in discussion with the author. April 5, 2016.

Aside from national interests, America has moral questions to answer. Namely, are we still a country of immigrants? While the majority of the American public has historically opposed accepting refugees, the U.S. Government has led the way since World War II in acting to aid vulnerable people and ultimately, make our country a stronger and more diverse nation. Five years into the Syrian conflict, millions of Syrians are in dire need of assistance in order to keep living and hope that one day they can rebuild their country. What will be most difficult in our response to the Syrian refugee crisis is the need to maintain hope; something intangible but absolutely imperative. The need to maintain hope is something outside the auspices of the resettlement system but yet part of it at the same time. For the Syrians who wish to start a new life, in a new country, with a new school for their children, resettlement can be their answer. During Noorhan al-Haj Ali's time in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, the thought of a new life in the United States kept her going. In her words, she and her husband hoped to "live in a simple house, with a car outside, and just to watch our kids grow up."¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Griswold, Eliza. "Why Is It So Difficult for Syrian Refugees..."