SYRIA: THE HUMANITARIAN-SECURITY NEXUS

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Contents

Executive Summary

As the Syrian civil war marks its sixth anniversary in March 2017, the plight of Syrian civilians who have been forced to flee their home country over the past six years continues to worsen. The debate around how to most effectively confront the Syrian refugee crisis revolves around an essential question of international security: must countries choose between humanitarianism and security, or are the two inextricably linked so that investing in one promotes the other, while ignoring one deteriorates both? In this report, we argue that in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, humanitarianism and security are mutually reinforcing aspirations, and we call for government policies and responses to the crisis that recognize the complementarity of these two issues.

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, the situation in Syria has continued to devolve while the factors and factions involved have only multiplied. Internationally, developments in the Middle East, Europe, and the U.S. constantly alter the equation while the suffering of civilians intensifies. In light of recent efforts by the U.S. Government to ban Syrian refugee admittance into the U.S. for at least 120 days, a clear and non-partisan summary of the humanitarian and security issues involved is of utmost importance. While we have sought to be comprehensive, the enormity of the task precludes us from asserting any indisputable way forward. Nonetheless, our analysis leads to four general policy recommendations, which should be used as a guide in which the reader can further develop responsible policies that are reflective of the inseparability between humanitarian and security concerns.

Without question, the Syrian conflict is exceedingly complex. Various actors pursue independent interests, contesting territory and trading military offensives. All the while, civilians bear the brunt of the pain, as victims to constant fighting and hopeless ceasefires. Estimates indicate upwards of 400,000 Syrian civilians have been killed since the beginning of the conflict in March 2011. More than 4.9 million Syrians have registered as refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and as many as 6.6 million more have been internally displaced within Syria. Further, upwards of 75% of Syrian refugees are women and children, with 1.2 million displaced women and girls of reproductive age and at least 80,200 pregnant female refugees. By UN estimates, 8.4 million Syrian children—more than 80% of Syria's child population—both in and outside the country, have been affected by the conflict. The experience of war has robbed young Syrians of their youth, and the indignity of prolonged situations as unwanted refugees could prime them to be vulnerable to the messages put forward by violent extremist organizations. Without meaningful international intervention, these young people risk becoming members of a lost generation. Lacking education, agency, and opportunity, the failure to address their current situation could present several major threats to future security.

With refugee camps filled to capacity and routine international failures to meet humanitarian funding benchmarks, the countries on Syria's borders—forced to play an enormously disproportionate role in addressing the refugee crisis—are experiencing increasing strains on internal stability. As host to the largest population of Syrian refugees in the world, the crisis highlights the immense security ramifications for Turkey and the region, as well as Turkey's critical role in geopolitics. The massive influx of refugees into Lebanon threatens to upset the country's already malfunctioning confessional structure. As the burden of the large influx of refugees continues to undermine the stability of the

Jordanian state, the country will have to increasingly reorient its focus to addressing internal instability.

Though Western European countries and the U.S. are among the most economically capable in the world of accommodating large influxes of refugees, the issue has largely been a political non-starter. In Europe, the task of confronting the bulk of the EU refugee crisis has been relegated to economically weaker European states such as Greece and Eastern European countries. The long-term socioeconomic implications of marginalizing refugees will significantly destabilize the EU as refugees struggle to enter the workforce, find adequate housing, or gain access to social services. The refugee crisis has been an important point of disunity for the EU, increasing Euroskepticism among the bloc's members.

In the U.S., the European experience of the refugee crisis has been used to justify a 120-day ban on refugee admittance, despite obvious and substantial differences between the situation in Europe and the U.S. While the connection between refugees and concerns of terrorism in the EU is overstated, it remains a legitimate concern. The proximity to conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa, vast numbers of refugees, lack of influx controls, and open borders within the Schengen Area expose the EU to the real possibility of terror groups exploiting the refugee crisis to infiltrate operatives into Europe. The U.S. does not suffer from any of these challenges. The current processes in place for refugee resettlement in the U.S. involve extensive interviews, biographic and biometric checks, and multi-agency intelligence and security reviews; the entire process can take up to two years to complete. Insulated from the direct impact of the Syrian refugee crisis, and far more capable economically and in terms of security capacity to accept and accommodate refugees than any other country in the world, the U.S. has thus far proven derelict in its duty to lead the Western world in the appropriate and necessary response to the Syrian refugee crisis.

With the prospects for any near-term resolution to the Syrian conflict highly tenuous, a larger and more committed international response to the refugee crisis is essential to prevent a continuing and worsening regional and global security crisis. Even if hostilities were to cease altogether, the consequences of the dual-pronged humanitarian and security crisis will continue for generations. Therefore, it is crucial the international community recognize that the Syrian humanitarian crisis has direct security implications for Syria, the region, and the international community as a whole, and address the myriad issues surrounding the crisis as such.

The humanitarian and security crises cannot be addressed independently of each other. In fact, addressing either one in a vacuum will only prolong and contribute to policies that fundamentally misunderstand the dichotomous nature of the conflict. Only when the international community properly acknowledges the mutually reinforcing and co-dependent humanitarian and security crisis in Syria can it properly strategize how to achieve long-term peace and stability.

Introduction

The Syrian conflict presents a unique amalgam of humanitarian and security concerns, inextricably bonding together these dual dimensions of the conflict. The humanitarian crisis perpetuated by the Syrian civil war is a generational global security crisis in the making. The violence of the war has been ferocious and often indiscriminate, with little regard for civilian life or property. In mid-2014, the United Nations tallied the death toll in Syria at 250,000 people; the UN has since stopped officially counting due to the inability to attain reliable data. In April 2016, the UN's Special Envoy in Syria, Staffan De Mistura, estimated the conflict had cost the lives of 400,000 Syrians; other estimates have indicated that number could be higher than 470,000.[1] In addition, over 11 million Syrians—more than half of Syria's pre-war population—have been forced to flee their homes, whether internally or externally displaced. The resulting refugee crisis is unprecedented in recent history; Syrian refugees now represent the world's largest officially registered refugee population under the United Nations mandate.[2,3]

The majority of Syrian refugees have fled to the countries on Syria's borders. The disproportionate influx of refugees into Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan has put enormous strain on the political, social, and economic infrastructure of these host countries. International humanitarian aid organizations have mobilized a massive amount of resources to provide for these refugee populations, but current efforts are simply not enough—notwithstanding the impossibility of addressing the vast scope of this humanitarian crisis solely with international financial aid. Syrian refugees continue to live either in overcrowded camps with inadequate access to food and water, or outside of camps, often with little access to direly needed social services and assistance. They are left idle, with few opportunities to provide for their families and surrounded by physical insecurity. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian children are out of school, and many have been forced to work to help support their families.[4]

Even when the Syrian war comes to an end, the humanitarian crisis will persist; the longer the humanitarian crisis lasts, the more significant the ramifications for long-term global security. Refugees will continue to scatter, and—as in recent years—many will risk their lives trying to journey to Europe. Large numbers of refugees will move deeper into surrounding countries in search of viable social and economic opportunities. The longer refugee children remain out of school, the more they will struggle to reenter educational systems and grow into productive members of society, whether within Syria or without.

Although the international community has provided a considerable level of humanitarian support, it has largely viewed the humanitarian crisis and the security situation as fundamentally different issues. In fact, they are intertwined. Stability cannot come to the region unless refugees and internally

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[1] Anne Barnard. "Death Toll From War in Syria Now 470,000, Group Finds." *New York Times*. February 11, 2016. Available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/12/world/middleeast/death-toll-from-war-in-syria-now-470000-group-finds.html.

[2] "UN News - Syria: UN and Partners Get Relief Convoy into Besieged Town of Madaya." *UN News Service Section*. January 11, 2016. http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52976#.V3_DtRQrL64.

[3] "Global Forced Displacement Hits Record High." *UNHCR*. Accessed July 8, 2016. http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html.

[4] "Lebanon: 250,000 Syrian Children Out of School." *Human Rights Watch*. July 19, 2016. https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/19/lebanon-250000-syrian-children-out-school.

displaced persons (IDPs) have legitimate future prospects, and the displaced cannot hope to have a future without regional stability. The issues are mutually dependent and reinforcing. In addition, the resultant instability will not be isolated solely to the region, as the complex issues surrounding the EU migrant crisis have demonstrated. Rather, the implications of the Syrian refugee crisis run far beyond the borders of regional host countries. The longer the conflict continues, the longer populations remain displaced, and the higher the chance that it will lead to global insecurity for years to come.

Indeed, the long-term repercussions of the war are themselves a growing security crisis. Failing to properly plan for the assignment of necessary post-conflict resources and support in the present will likely result in the need for larger expenditures of resources in the future, at which point the security stakes may be even higher. This is especially true in the context of the global fight against violent extremism. The rise and proliferation of groups like the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda affiliates cannot be divorced from the humanitarian crisis prompted by the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. To try to understand and counter these groups using only a tactical approach fails to address the mechanisms that led to their assumption and sustainment of power.

The current international response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis indicates that the plight of desperate Syrian civilians is not viewed as the long-term global security crisis that it is. Failing to adequately address the serious and complex issues surrounding those who have faced the consequences of the Syrian war first-hand will ultimately render efforts to achieve long-term stability futile. Even in the event that a negotiated settlement is reached within Syria, millions of displaced people will still be adrift, without a common identity to bridge the sectarian and ethnic divides in their home country. Unless and until the humanitarian situation is addressed, regional—and international—security will continue to deteriorate.

The Trajectory of the Syrian Conflict   2011 - 2017

2011 The Uprising

February/ March

A group of children are arrested and allegedly beaten by authorities in the southern town of Daraa for painting anti-government graffiti on a school wall. The incident sparks large demonstrations in Damascus and Daraa.

Anti-Assad Graffiti (WWM)

April

120 people are killed in what is deemed "Bloody Friday" protests in Daraa, Damascus, and elsewhere. The U.S. and France condemn the regime's response and call for Assad to make concessions.

(NPR)

April

The first Syrian refugees cross into Turkey. Authorities build the first 20 Syrian refugee camps.

May

Islamists are released from Syria prisons from March-May, and Ahrar ash-Sham is formed as an anti-Assad Islamist force in Syria.

June

Regime forces clash with openly armed insurgents in the northwest of the country, around Jisr al-Shughour.

(BBC)

September

Continuous Shabiha (pro-regime paramilitary units) killings of Sunni civilians lead to reprisals against Shi'a communities, giving the conflict an increasingly sectarian tone.

December

The United Nations reports that 5,000 Syrians have died since the beginning of the uprising.

2012 The Rise of Opposition Groups and Jihadist Networks

January

Jabhat al-Nusra flag

Jabhat al-Nusra (the official Syrian al-Qa'ida affiliate) announces its formation.

August

The U.S. closes its embassy in Syria due to security concerns.

February

Al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri calls for Muslims around the world to battle Assad's "pernicious, cancerous regime".

Ayman al-Zawahiri

The Trajectory of the Syrian Conflict   2011 - 2017

2012

July — Al-Tawhid Brigade, an anti-government opposition group, takes control of eastern Aleppo.

al-Tawhid Brigade promotion video (YouTube)

December — The U.S., UK, Turkey, France, and several Gulf States recognize the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

(Flickr)

December — The UN and human rights organizations report that 57,135 people have died, 2 million have been internally displaced, and 497,000 have registered as refugees since the beginning of the conflict.

2013 War Crimes

August — The Assad regime is accused of using chemical weapons in attacks targeting rebel-held suburbs near Damascus, in which reportedly 1,400 people are killed. UN weapons inspectors conclude that chemical weapons, such as sarin gas, were used but do not allocate responsibility.

Syrian children killed in the attacks (HRW)

December — A UN fact-finding team gathers enough evidence to support the claim that the Syrian government is complicit in war crimes to the "highest levels."

December — The UN and human rights organizations report that 130,582 people have died, 6.4 million have been internally displaced, and 2.3 million have registered as refugees since the beginning of the conflict.

2014 The Islamic State Exacerbates the Humanitarian Crisis

January — The infighting amongst moderate and Islamist rebel groups intensifies in early 2014.

February — Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra formally disavows the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, as both groups begin targeting the others leaders leading to open conflict by May.

May — Government forces retake Homs under the terms of a ceasefire agreement that allows rebel-forces to flee the area.

June — Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, head of the so-called Islamic State (IS), declares the existence of an Islamic Caliphate spreading across territory ranging from Aleppo to the eastern Iraqi providence Diyala.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

The Trajectory of the Syrian Conflict

2011 - 2017

2014

September

IS advances on Kobani, a Syrian Kurdish town close to the Turkish border.

October

(ABC)

Syrian government forces advance on rebel-held Aleppo, cutting off major supply chains to the city. Humanitarian organizations express concerns over state of civilians.

October

Lebanon closes its borders to Syrian refugees.

December

The UN and human rights organizations report that 206,603 people have died, 7.6 million have been internally displaced, and 3.7 million have registered as refugees since the beginning of the conflict.

Islamic State execution video. (Amaq News)

2015 The International Community Gets Involved

January

Kurdish forces, with the help of U.S.-coalition airstrikes, push IS out of Kobani.

Airstrikes hit Kobani (NBCNews)

February

The U.S. and Turkey agree to arm and train rebels fighting IS.

March

Rebels carrying different opposition groups' flags in Idlib (Reuters)

Jaish al-Fatah, a coalition of anti-Assad Islamist groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra, expel government loyalist forces from the provincial capital of Idlib.

May

IS seizes the city of Palmyra and subsequently destroys more than two dozen monuments at the World Heritage site, sparking international outrage.

2015

September — Russia carries out its first air strikes in Syria in support of the regime.

December — The UN and human rights organizations report that 261,822 people have died, 6.6 million have been internally displaced, and 4.6 million have registered as refugees since the beginning of the conflict.

2016 Territorial Losses for Opposition, Civilians Pay the Price

February — The U.S. and Russia broker a ceasefire between the Syrian government and major rebel forces, excluding IS.

March —

Syrian government forces, with the help of Russian air support, retake Palmyra from IS. Mass graves are found, many of them containing women and children.

Workers uncover mass grave in Palmyra (South Front)

April — The al-Quds Médecins Sans Frontières-supported hospital in Aleppo is hit by airstrikes, killing 55 people, including the city's last pediatrician.

June — Besieged rebel-held town Darayya receives its first UN food delivery since 2012. Shortly afterwards, regime forces bombed the area.

Remnants of al-Quds hospital (Reuters)

July — U.S. Secretary of State Kerry meets with Russian President Putin to discuss coordinated military strikes against Jabhat al-Nusra and IS.

August — IS suffers significant territorial losses, including the strategic city of Manbij to Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). IS forces retreat from the city using civilians as cover.

August — Turkish military and supported rebels launch Operation Euphrates Shield and cross into Syria, taking Jarablus from IS.

September — On September 9, the U.S. and Russia agree to a cessation of hostilities (CoH) in Syria, which fails after a UN aid convoy is bombed on September 19.

December — Eastern Aleppo falls to a coalition of pro-regime forces supported by Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah.
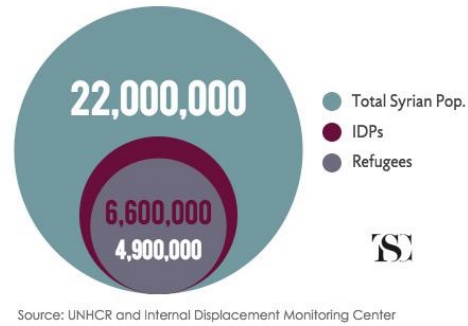
The Scourge of Displacement

As of March 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) put the registered number of Syrians who have fled the country at 4,958,737, with an unknown number of additional unregistered refugees. According to statistics provided by UNHCR, the demographics of Syrian refugees are split almost evenly between men and women, with 51.5% of registered refugees being male, and 48.5% female. Children under the age of 18 account for just under half (47.6%) of the reported 4.9 million refugees.
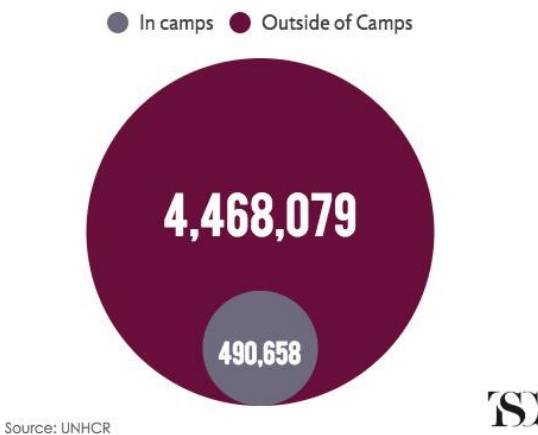

Syria's Refugee Demographics

48.5%   51.5%   47.6%

Source: UNHCR

Scope of the Syrian Crisis

22,000,000

6,600,000
4,900,000

Total Syrian Pop.
IDPs
Refugees

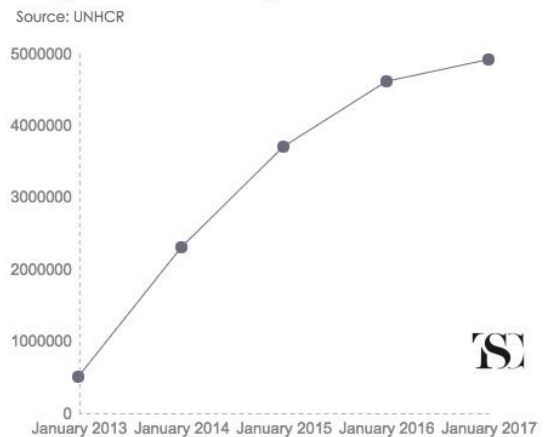Source: UNHCR and Internal Displacement Monitoring Center

In addition to those who have fled Syria, it is estimated that as many as 6.6 million people have been internally displaced within the country. With a pre-war population of 22 million people, over half of Syria's population has been displaced, either internally or externally, since the beginning of the civil war. Currently, Syrians make up the largest number of displaced people in the world. This massive movement of people poses a significant threat to security in both the short and long-term at national, regional, and international levels.

Where Syria's refugees are living

In camps   Outside of Camps

4,468,079

490,658

Source: UNHCR

Registered refugees over time

Source: UNHCR

5000000
4000000
3000000
2000000
1000000
0

January 2013   January 2014   January 2015   January 2016   January 2017

General Impact

Historically, there are certain trends that hold true for refugee situations. Notably, children, youths, and women are among the most threatened by the instability borne from conflict. While every refugee scenario is unique as a result of nation-specific institutions, policies, and history, the displacement of vulnerable populations has over-arching security consequences that will continue to threaten global peace for generations to come if not properly addressed by the international community.

Women, Children, and Youths

Upwards of 75% of Syrian refugees are women and children, with 1.2 million displaced women and girls of reproductive age and at least 80,200 pregnant female refugees.[5] In the context of displacement and conflict, women represent an extremely vulnerable population. Many Syrian refugee women flee Syria alone with their children. Often left with few economic opportunities, and lacking the financial ability to pay for the journey out of Syria, women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and harassment. Even when they make it to refugee or transit camps, many women are afraid of being abused by security officers.[6] The vast majority of refugees live outside of camps, where the threats to women are even greater.[7]

While low-levels of Syrian refugee households reported income from work, only 9% of female-headed households reported any income at all as of a 2014 UNHCR report.[8] In order to acquire some kind of income, many female refugees fall prey to sexual exploitation.[9] In these deeply conservative cultures, the stigma attached to prostitution—and even to sexual assault—makes the sexual exploitation of women that much more damaging to the fabric of the society-in-exile. By some estimates, less than 10% of women who are the victims of sexual violence come forward to report the offense.[10] Especially in a situation where the majority of women feel isolated and insecure in both their own physical safety and the safety of their children, this number may be much lower. There have been reports of harassment from male landlords, including offers of reduced rent in exchange for sexual favors.[11] As a vulnerable refugee population with a high degree of influence in

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[5] "Women and Girls in the Syria Crisis: UNFPA Response." *United Nations Population Fund.* March 2016. http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA_FACTS_AND_FIGURES_2016.pdf

[6] "Female Refugees Face Physical Assault, Exploitation and Sexual Harassment on their Journey Through Europe." *Amnesty International.* January 18, 2016. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/female-refugees-face-physical-assault-exploitation-and-sexual-harassment-on-their-journey-through-europe/.

[7] "Quick Facts: What You Need To Know About The Syria Crisis." *Mercy Corps.* December 9, 2016. https://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis.

[8] "Woman Alone: The Fight for Survival by Syria's Refugee Women." *UNHCR.* 2014. http://www.unhcr.org/ar/53bb8d006.pdf.

[9] Ibid.

[10] "Are We Listening? Acting on Our Commitments to Women and Girls Affected by the Syrian Conflict." *International Rescue Committee.* September 1, 2014. https://www.rescue-uk.org/sites/default/files/document/665/ircwomeninsyriareportweb.pdf.

[11] Johanna Higgs and Liga Rudzite. "Fleeing Violence, Syrian Women Try to Cope in Turkey and Lebanon." *PassBlue.* April 6, 2016. http://passblue.com/2016/04/06/fleeing-violence-to-violence-syrian-women-cope-in-turkey-and-lebanon/.

many refugee households, the marginalization of Syrian women directly impacts the life and worldview of the next Syrian generation.[12]

Although conflict is taxing on all civilians, the impact on young people is especially profound. Particularly in civil conflicts, the creation of a generation of traumatized and displaced children can do irreparable damage to the social fabric of a country, as well as pose complicated regional and geopolitical security concerns. Therefore, understanding the experiences of children in the Syrian crisis is essential.

In Syria, one in three children has grown up in a conflict environment, and more than 2.4 million children have been made refugees.[13] By UN estimates, 8.4 million Syrian children—more than 80% of Syria's child population—both in and outside the country, have been affected by the conflict.[14] Many have been forcibly removed from their homes; over 15,000 children have crossed the Syrian border unaccompanied.[15] Thousands have witnessed death firsthand—often of a family member or friend.

Like children, youths between the ages of 15 and 24 have been gravely affected by the conflict.[16] Prior to the outbreak of violence, the situation for these young people in Syria was already difficult. The youth unemployment rate hovered around 48%, six times that of adults.[17] Furthermore, 75% of all unemployed youth had been unemployed for at least a year, with 54% of youth unemployment occurring in rural areas.[18] The conflict has worsened this situation, pushing youths to the margins and setting them back developmentally, personally, and professionally.

The UNHCR has estimated that most refugees today are in 'protracted refugee situations,' which last an average of 26 years.[19] Should the Syrian conflict follow the same grim trajectory as other similar conflicts, many Syrian children and youths face the prospect of spending more than half of their current lifetimes as refugees.

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[12] "Woman Alone: The Fight for Survival by Syria's Refugee Women." *UNHCR*. 2014. http://www.unhcr.org/ar/ 53bb8d006.pdf.

[13] "1 in 3 Syrian Children Have Grown Up Knowing Only Crisis as Conflict Reaches 5 Year Point – UNICEF." *#ChildrenofSyria*. March 14, 2016. http://childrenofsyria.info/2016/03/14/1-in-3-syrian-children-have-grown-up-knowing-only-crisis-as-conflict-reaches-5-year-point-unicef/.

[14] "No Place for Children: The Impact of Five Years of War on Syria's Children and Their Childhood." *UNICEF.* March 14, 2016. http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/SYRIA5Y-REPORT-12-MARCH.pdf.

[15] Ibid.

[16] "Definition of Youth." *United Nations.* http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf.

[17] "Syrian Arab Republic." *International Fund for Agricultural Development*. 2011. https://www.ifad.org/documents/ 10180/7c26bd8a-48b6-4beb-a78b-6f4760883bdc.

[18] Ibid.

[19] "Protracted Refugee Situaitons." *U.S. Department of State*. Accessed September 5, 2016. http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ policyissues/issues/protracted/. Accessed October 10, 2016.

Impact on Education

The educational system in Syria has been significantly damaged, and the educational future for Syrian children is bleak. As of March 2017, 1.75 million children inside Syria were not in school, and an additional 530,000 Syrian refugee children lack access to education.[20] Since 2011, around 6,000 schools in Syria have been rendered unusable.[21] When compared with the state of education in pre-war Syria, these numbers are especially jarring. Before the conflict, primary school enrollment was nearly universal among Syrian children, with secondary school rates reaching around 67%, and general literacy among 15-24 year olds hovering around 95% of the total population.[22] Six years later, one in three schools in Syria is unfit for use.[23,24] The youngest displaced children have never had any formal education. For those slightly older, the longer the interruption continues, the larger the educational deficit grows.

Meanwhile, the so-called Islamic State has filled the void left by the retrenchment of the Syrian state, becoming the sole provider of education for children and youth in areas under its control. The corruption of children is an intentional part of the Islamic State's strategy; a mechanism through which the group shores up manpower for the future, regardless of territorial and political losses. In Raqqa and other territory under its control, the Islamic State runs schools to re-educate children, especially young boys of different ethnicities. The Islamic State's Bureau of Education has redesigned schools in captured territories, purging the national curriculum in favor of its own version of Sharia.[25] The curriculum includes materials and textbooks in line with the Islamic State's ideology for children of all ages. Most significantly, militarism and violence pervade all aspects of the curriculum.[26]

In addition to classroom instruction, the Islamic State encourages recreational activities that teach children to fight and handle weapons.[27] At a young age, children are taught how to behead dolls and schooled in the strict ideology of the group. In some instances, children are even given drugs in

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[20] "Hitting Rock Bottom: How 2016 Became the Worst Year for Syria's Children." *UNICEF*. March 2017. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/13_03_17_unicef_report_syria.pdf

[21] "No Place for Children: The Impact of Five Years of War on Syria's Children and Their Childhood." *UNICEF*. March 14, 2016. http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/SYRIA5Y-REPORT-12-MARCH.pdf.

[22] "Syria 4 Years On." *Education Cluster*. March 16, 2015. http://educationcluster.net/syria-4-years/.

[23] "Hitting Rock Bottom: How 2016 Became the Worst Year for Syria's Children." *UNICEF*. March 2017. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/13_03_17_unicef_report_syria.pdf

[24] "With 4 million Syrian children out of school, $1.4 billion sought by UN to save 'lost generation.'" February 2, 2016. *UN News Centre*. http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53145#.WML2orYrLfa.

[25] al-Jablawi, Hosam. "A Closer Look at the Educational System of ISIS." *Atlantic Council*. April 26, 2016. http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/a-closer-look-at-isis-s-educational-system.

[26] Katrin Kuntz. "Islamic State's Child Soldiers: First Come the Sweets, Then the Beheadings." *SpiegelOnline International*. July 29, 2016. http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-how-the-is-trains-child-soldiers-a-1103941.html#spRedirectedFrom=www&referrrer=https://t.co/rtBT3B4x6s.

[27] Hosam al-Jablawi. "A Closer Look at the Educational System of ISIS." *Atlantic Council*. April 26, 2016. http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/a-closer-look-at-isis-s-educational-system.

order to lower their inhibitions to killing.[28] Kidnapped children, especially Yazidis, are farmed as child soldiers. Children from these minorities are taught solely in Arabic and drilled in Qur'anic verses in an attempt to sever any remembrance of their pre-Islamic State identities. In order to ensure compliance, the Islamic State publicly executes children as a warning to others, often leaving their young bodies to be seen in public squares or streets.[29] Reports increasingly suggest that there is widespread use of children as executioners and soldiers. In 2016 alone, UNICEF was able to confirm 851 cases in which children were recruited and used in the conflict by various parties— more than double the number of children recruited into the conflict the year before.[30] For child soldiers—exclusively receiving education in warfare, subjected to daily brutality, and suffering psychological trauma—violence becomes the way of life.[31]

Similarly, with little opportunity, and a fractured identity, many young men have joined the numerous factions involved in the war—through conscription or volunteering. As active players in the conflict, today's Syrian youths are immersed in violent sectarian division.

Impact on Health and Development

Despite the best efforts of aid agencies, Syrian refugee children and youth are also experiencing healthcare shortages, increasing the risk of preventable diseases like measles and polio. Around 70% of Syrian children are without access to reliable water, and countless others are without consistent access to food.[32] As a result, child refugees suffer from high levels of malnutrition. Refugee camps in states surrounding Syria have failed to mitigate the effects of malnutrition on child refugees. For the thousands of others outside the reach of NGOs and UN agencies, access to both food and water remains even more uncertain.

Furthermore, within Syria, a number of parties involved in the conflict have intentionally targeted hospitals and killed physicians. By some estimates, the Assad government alone has killed almost seven hundred medical personnel throughout the country.[33] In doing so, the capabilities of healthcare providers inside Syria have been significantly reduced. Without adequate resources, doctors are forced to perform life-saving surgeries that do not necessarily translate into full

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[28] Katrin Kuntz. "Islamic State's Child Soldiers: First Come the Sweets, Then the Beheadings." *SpiegelOnline International*. July 29, 2016. http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-how-the-is-trains-child-soldiers-a-1103941.html#spRedirectedFrom=www&referrrer=https://t.co/rtBT3B4x6s.

[29] "The Harvesting of Children." *The Soufan Group*. December 29, 2014. http://soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-the-harvesting-of-children/.

[30] "Hitting Rock Bottom: How 2016 Became the Worst Year for Syria's Children." *UNICEF*. March 2017. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/13_03_17_unicef_report_syria.pdf

[31] Mark Townsend. "How Islamic State Is Training Child Killers in Doctrine of Hate." *The Guardian*. March 5, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/05/islamic-state-trains-purer-child-killers-in-doctrine-of-hate.

[32] "No Place for Children: The Impact of Five Years of War on Syria's Children and Their Childhood." *UNICEF*. March 14, 2016. http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/SYRIA5Y-REPORT-12-MARCH.pdf.

[33] Taub, Ben. "Syria's War on Doctors." *The New Yorker*. June 27, 2016. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/06/27/syrias-war-on-doctors.

recovery.[34] While many victims of the conflict survive, they will be faced with life-altering wounds. Compounded by the inability of host countries to ensure adequate services, the situation of healthcare for refugees is extremely dire.

Exploitation and Abuse

Syrian refugee children and youths are particularly vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and abuse. Moreover, almost all 2.4 million Syrian children refugees live in poverty.[35] Since a relatively small number are housed in camps, many are left to provide for themselves. Due to restrictions on refugee men obtaining work permits in many host countries, children are often forced to work rather than attend school. For female youths, who were both educated and employed at much lower rates than their male counterparts in pre-war Syria, their only option is often marriage.[36] Both female children and youths are subject to sexual exploitation or forced into early marriage to alleviate the financial burden on their families.[37]

These factors further exacerbate an epidemic of psychological trauma among Syrian refugee children and youths. Previous research on the long-term effects of violence and conflict on mental health indicates that refugees experience high levels of mental distress.[38] The continued insecurity of displacement amplifies the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in children. Absent feelings of permanence or physical security, traumatized children are often unable to internalize the events they have witnessed. By one estimate, the rate of PTSD in Syrian children refugees residing in Lebanon was as high as 76%.[39]

Security Implications

Despite widespread rhetoric in the West intended to vilify refugees, the vast majority of displaced Syrians pose no security threat. Paradoxically, politicized anti-refugee policies—ostensibly enacted to enhance security—in fact threaten to exacerbate drivers of extremism, thereby inadvertently generating the security threat they are intended to counter. Indeed, a failure on the part of the international community to adequately address the needs of large, desperate refugee populations in the present could facilitate the emergence of significant security threats in the future. The experience of war, combined with the indignity of life as an unwanted refugee, could serve to prime some young Syrian refugees to be more receptive to the message put forward by violent extremist

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[34] "Hospitals and Doctors Under Attack in Aleppo 'Difficult to Replace.'" *PBS NEWSHOUR*. April 28, 2016. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/hospitals-and-doctors-under-attack-in-aleppo-difficult-to-replace/.

[35] "No Place for Children: The Impact of Five Years of War on Syria's Children and Their Childhood." *UNICEF*. March 14, 2016. http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/SYRIA5Y-REPORT-12-MARCH.pdf.

[36] "Syrian Arab Republic." *International Fund for Agricultural Development*. 2011. https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/7c26bd8a-48b6-4beb-a78b-6f4760883bdc.

[37] "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan." London: Save the Children, 2014. http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/TOO_YOUNG_TO_WED_REPORT_0714.PDF

[38] Devakumar, Delan et al. "Child Health in Syria: Recognising the Lasting Effects of Warfare on Health." *BioMed Central*. November 3, 2015.

[39] Ibid.

organizations, fostering their potential vulnerability to radicalization. Children refugees who grow up in host countries where they are marginalized or subjected to prejudicial treatment may struggle to develop a sense of identity. Yearning for a sense of belonging and lacking legitimate opportunities in host countries, refugee children who grow up in such unwelcoming environments could be increasingly at-risk for extremist recruitment.[40] If host countries—both in the region as well as further abroad—fail to create conditions for refugees that are less hopeless, the ramifications of such policies will undoubtedly play out in security challenges for years to come. The war has robbed Syrian children of their youth, but the failure of host countries to welcome, assist, and accommodate Syrian children robs them of their future, leaving them increasingly susceptible to radicalization by terror groups.

Regional Host Countries

Large influxes of people have the potential to destabilize society if not properly addressed. As the Syrian refugee situation has increased, instability in the host countries has also accelerated. It is important to recognize that each country faces its own unique challenges when it comes to dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis. Of the 4.9 million Syrian refugees, just three neighboring countries bear the burden of hosting the vast majority of them—Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan; the remaining registered refugees are dispersed throughout Iraq, Egypt, and the rest of North Africa. While the blame for the inadequate response to the refugee influx has shifted between the international community and Syria's neighbors, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan all faced significant challenges prior to the war, and such massive influxes of people threaten to throw the entire region into further crisis. Additionally, Syrian refugees have significantly contributed to the growing wave of migrants flowing into Europe—via both land and sea. Thus, the refugee influx has a direct impact on regional and international security, as resources are pulled away from other vital issues.

Consigning refugees to live in camps has largely failed, as the camps are often overcrowded and underfunded. Most refugees in regional host countries have moved to urban areas in search of employment, with little opportunities in the camps. Limits or bans on work permits force refugees to flood informal labor markets in places like Lebanon and Jordan, further taxing the local populations' tolerance of the large influx of refugees. For example, the Lebanese government refuses to establish official camps out of fear that they will become permanent settlements, as was the case for Palestinian refugees over the years. Rather, displaced Syrians live in 'informal tented settlements,' often organized by humanitarian organizations.[41,42]

For various reasons, the Gulf countries—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait—have been more focused on finding a military or political solution in Syria rather than on resettling refugees.
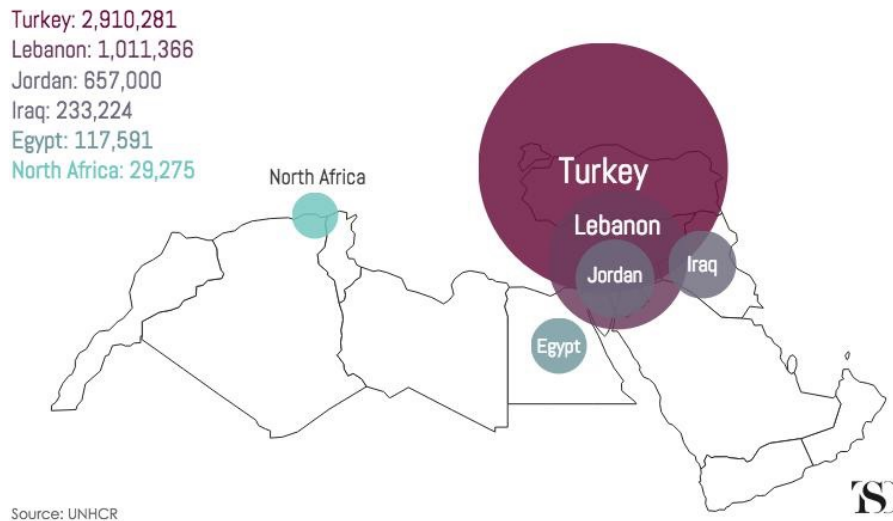
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[40] Ibid

[41] European Commission. "Lebanon: Syria Crisis" ECHO Factbook. May 2016. http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/lebanon_syrian_crisis_en.pdf

[42] "Syria Refugee Response: Informal Tented Settlements (ITS) - 15 March 2014." *Relief Web*. May 15, 2014. http://reliefweb.int/map/lebanon/syria-refugee-response-informal-tented-settlements-its-15-march-2014

As the situation for Syrian refugees in regional host countries continues to deteriorate, the incentive for refugees to risk a dangerous journey to Europe increases dramatically. As the EU has experienced firsthand, the flow of Syrian refugees into Europe has played a significant role in threatening the very fabric of European unity—a union that was in no small part created in an effort to ensure long-term global security.

Syrian Asylum Seekers in the Middle East and North Africa

Turkey: 2,910,281
Lebanon: 1,011,366
Jordan: 657,000
Iraq: 233,224
Egypt: 117,591
North Africa: 29,275

North Africa

Turkey

Lebanon

Jordan   Iraq

Egypt

Source: UNHCR

Turkey

Turkey hosts the largest population of Syrian refugees, with over 2.9 million registered as of February 2017, almost half of whom are children.[43] The refugee population in Turkey—which also hosts individuals fleeing the conflict in Iraq—is extremely diverse, and has been partially concentrated in the already unstable region of Southeast Anatolia, which has witnessed simmering tensions between the government and Kurdish separatists. The introduction of diverse refugee populations including Kurds, Yazidis, Assyrians, Turkomans, and others, will have a serious impact on other local issues.[44]

The crisis has exacerbated domestic security threats in Turkey as the country battles the Islamic State and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Since June 2015, at least 300 people have been killed in terrorist attacks in the country, such as the June 2016 Ataturk Airport bombings, claimed by the

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[43] "UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response." *UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response*. Accessed March 15, 2017. http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224.

[44] Ibid.

Islamic State.[45] While relations between Ankara and the PKK were improving after a cease-fire in May 2013, conflict has escalated in the last few years as Kurdish and Turkish interests diverge in Syria as well. The sheer number of people crossing into Turkey has been identified as a potential cover for terrorists. The chaos on Turkey's borders, including inadequate screening processes and the use of false travel documents, is a security challenge of the highest order.

Terrorist attacks in Turkey have also exacerbated anti-immigration protests and sentiment, and reports of violence against Syrian refugees have increased.[46] As has been the case in some European countries, increased hostility has led to violent outbreaks between the local and refugee populations.

While not a direct result of the refugee crisis, a failed coup in July 2016 has put further strain on relations with Turkey's Western allies. Both Brussels and the U.S. have repeatedly urged Turkish President Erdogan to respect the country's laws and democratic institutions, but the long term consequences of the coup are unclear. An increase in nationalist rhetoric does not bode well for multi-ethnic Turkey, and the future of Syrian refugees is increasingly tenuous as internal divisions grow.

Due to its position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, as well as its membership in NATO, the refugee crisis highlights Turkey's critical role in geopolitics. Cooperation between Turkey and the EU has been vital in limiting the impact of refugees on Europe. Any change in Turkey's policies towards refugees would have important geopolitical implications. Turkey could leverage its control over the refugee flow into Europe to achieve significant political gains. Given a March 2016 refugee deal, the EU appears willing to compromise on select values in order to avoid dealing firsthand with the Syrian refugees. Moreover, the EU's desperation to stem Syrian refugee flows into its territory provides few guarantees to hold Turkey accountable if Erdogan fails to uphold his end of the bargain. Therefore, the Syrian refugee crisis not only impacts Turkish security, but also has immense geopolitical ramifications.

Lebanon

Lebanon hosts the second highest number of Syrian refugees, with over one million registered as of December 2016. Of these, over half are under the age of eighteen.[47] As a relatively small country, Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of Syrian refugees of any country in the world; Syrian refugees now account for almost 20% of the Lebanese resident population.[48] The biggest influx of Syrian refugees in Lebanon occurred in 2013, with more than 730,000 refugees registering

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[45] "Wedding Bombing is the Latest in a Series of Deadly Terror Attacks in Turkey." *The New York Times*. August 21, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/28/world/middleeast/turkey-terror-attacks-bombings.html.

[46] "Attacks on Syrians in Turkey Increasing." 2016. http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/originals/2015/05/turkey-attack-on-syrians-in-country-on-the-rise.html.

[47] (UNHCR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response." *UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response*. Accessed March 15, 2017. http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php.

[48] "Syria's refugee crisis in numbers." *Amnesty International.* February 3, 2016. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/.

in the country.[49] Afterwards, Lebanon officially closed its borders to Syrian refugees in October 2014.[50] This has not entirely prevented unregistered refugees from entering the country, however.

Still recovering from decades of civil war, international intervention, and sectarianism, Lebanon lacks the infrastructure, resources, and laws to adequately integrate the refugee population. The role of Syria in the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), and the involvement of Assad in Lebanese internal politics makes the situation even more tenuous. The links between Assad and Hezbollah have only grown since 2011, with Lebanese militants playing a critical role on the battlefield in Syria. As the majority of refugees come from sects in opposition to Assad, there is significant potential of upsetting Lebanon's already malfunctioning confessional structure.

Extremists have tried to draw Lebanon even further into the conflict in Syria through attacks such as the 2015 Beirut bombings claimed by the Islamic State, which killed over 40 people.[51] While violent extremists may not be hiding amongst the refugee population, refugees are vulnerable to recruitment by such groups.

Jordan

By March 2017, 657,000 Syrians had registered with UNHCR in Jordan, over half of which are under the age of eighteen.[52] There are five main refugee camps in Jordan, concentrated in the northern, more rural part of the country. Approximately 79% of Syrian refugees in Jordan—more than half a million people—live outside the camps.[53] Almost 70% of all Syrian refugees have settled in the Amman, Mafraq, or Irbid Governorates.[54] Of the urban refugees, 90% live below the poverty line.[55]

Jordan has long accepted its responsibility for accommodating people fleeing conflict; first Palestinians, then Iraqis, and now Syrians. However, with refugee camps filled to capacity and international funding rapidly drying up, the refugee crisis has started to undermine the stability of the Jordanian state. In tandem with strained government resources, increasing pressure from frustrated Jordanian citizens could lead to more restrictive policies and deteriorating conditions for Syrian refugees. Fears of terrorist infiltration from Syria engender local frustration with the displaced Syrian population, further exacerbated by events such as the March 2016 counter-terror raids in the northern city of Irbid, and the June 2016 suicide truck bombing near the Ruqban

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[49] "Lebanon: The plight of Syrian refugees is a harsh reality." *International Committee of the Red Cross*. September 18, 2013. https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/photo-gallery/2013/09-18-lebanon-syrian-refugees.htm

[50] "Lebanon Sharply Limits Syrian Refugee Entry." *Al Arabiya English*. October 18, 2014. http://ara.tv/pcpyk.

[51] Greg Botelho, Paul Cruickshank and Catherine E. Shoichet. "Beirut suicide bombings kill 43; suspect claims ISIS sent attackers." *CNN*. November 16, 2016. http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/12/middleeast/beirut-explosions/

[52] "UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response." *UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response*. Accessed March 15, 2017. http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Richards, James. "Number of Syrian refugees living in poverty increases, finds UNHCR." *Public Finance International*. July 7, 2016. http://www.publicfinanceinternational.org/news/2016/07/number-syrian-refugees-living-poverty-increases-finds-unhcr.

informal refugee camp. As a prominent member of the anti-Islamic State coalition, Jordan's fear of retribution in the form of terrorist attacks is not unfounded. However, elevated public suspicion of Syrian refugees in the country can quickly escalate to a situation of large-scale violence—an issue with which Jordan is familiar from its history with the Palestinians.

Considered a regional power that often helps mitigate regional crises, Jordan has been one of the West's most dependable allies. In the context of the Syrian crisis, and despite already hosting millions of refugees, Jordan has maintained an impressive level of internal stability and external engagement. However, as both refugees and hosts grow restless, Jordan will have to increasingly reorient its focus to addressing internal instability, reducing its capacity for constructive external engagement.

Europe and the Refugee Crisis

The dearth of opportunities for displaced Syrians in the Middle East and North Africa has contributed to the ongoing and highly publicized migrant crisis in Europe. Along with other migrant communities from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, Syrian refugees make up a large proportion of asylum-seeking migrants—or those traveling to Europe to flee conflict or persecution. The massive influx of refugees and migrants is causing considerable problems for European Union states. According to UNHCR, nearly 900,000 Syrians applied for asylum in Europe between April 2011 and October 2016.[56] This number does not include the thousands more who have braved the treacherous and often deadly journey to Europe without officially applying for asylum.

In 2015, Syrian refugees made up approximately half of the over 1 million migrants arriving in Europe, representing the largest collective group.[57] According to UNHCR, over 80,000 more arrived in Europe by sea from January through November 2016.[58] This influx has forced European governments to grapple with widespread domestic resentment and anxiety. This anxiety has been fueled in large part by the fear that terror groups could take advantage of the Syrian refugee crisis in order to infiltrate Europe. Recent terror attacks in the EU involving attackers who entered Europe disguised as refugees lend some credence to this fear. Consequently, asylum-seekers in Europe have been confronted with increasingly harsh policies and treatment.

In the early stages of the refugee crisis, certain EU member states such as Germany and Sweden expressed a willingness—even a duty—to accommodate persons in need of international protection. However, as the number of refugees and migrants entering Europe grew exponentially, the issue of Syrian refugees was increasingly politicized. Immigration laws were amended to restrict the influx of refugees. The influence of anti-immigrant sentiment has led to conditions threatening the survival

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[56] (UNHCR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response." *EUROPE: Syrian Asylum Applications.* Accessed February 10, 2017. http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/asylum.php

[57] Clayton, Jonathan and Hereward Holland. "Over One Million Sea Arrivals Reach Europe in 2015." *UNHCR.* December 30, 2015. http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2015/12/5683d0b56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html

[58] (UNHCR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean." Accessed September 7, 2016. http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php

of the EU's borderless Schengen Area, without which many argue the EU would be all but obsolete. Countries that lie on the highly traversed migration route, particularly the Balkan states, responded to the massive movement of people by sealing borders and deploying riot police. Though these harsh responses have been met with international condemnation, such policies underscore the fact that countries on the front lines of the refugee crisis lack the capacity to effectively respond. As bordering nations struggle to accommodate the refugees, and their permanence remains uncertain, the challenges posed by the EU migration crisis will likely continue to worsen.

Having failed to address the crisis internally, EU leaders turned to Turkey as the answer to the bloc's problems. In March 2016, under the terms of a proposal made by former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey agreed to take in all refugees and irregular migrants arriving illegally in Greece by sea. In return for each irregular migrant returned to Turkey, the EU would allow one Syrian in a Turkish refugee camp to legally enter the EU. In addition, the proposal called for a total of more than €6 billion in aid to Turkey. The Turkish government has also demanded that all visa restrictions for Turkish citizens in the Schengen Area be lifted—an issue that threatens to unravel the deal altogether, particularly in the wake of widespread Turkish crackdowns after the July 2016 coup attempt. Turkey—which entered the agreement with the ultimate goal of facilitating its bid for accession into the EU—has sought to use its considerable leverage with Europe over the migrant issue. The willingness of European leaders to even consider such controversial stipulations made by Turkey, whose increasingly harsh anti-terror laws and post-coup government purge conflict directly with requirements for membership to the EU, speaks to the gravity of the challenge posed to Europe by the migrant crisis.

While the political pressure for European leaders to limit the flow of refugees and migrants is mounting, so too is the criticism from human rights activists and foreign policy experts. Many analysts predict the 'one-in, one-out' deal with Turkey will have severe long term ramifications for Europe. The deal also raises significant legal questions. Human rights groups like Amnesty International have consistently argued that such a blanket deal violates international law. However, a February 2017 declaration by the Court of Justice of the European Union in response to a legal challenge to the EU-Turkey migrant deal indicated the Court did not have jurisdiction to review the deal.[59] Nonetheless, the deal seems to have successfully stemmed the flow of Syrian refugees and migrants into Europe for the time being. According to UNHCR, approximately 8,000 irregular migrants landed on the shores of Greece after the deal went into effect between April and July 2016; prior to the deal, around 150,000 irregular migrants landed in Greece between January and March 2016.[60] Yet even as the flow of refugees into Europe has slowed, the conditions for refugees in Turkey and elsewhere in the region remain stark. As Syrian refugees in regional host countries become increasingly desperate, the hope of a better life may motivate many to partake in the risky journey to Europe.

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[59] "Press Release No. 19/17." General Court of the European Union. February 28, 2017. http://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2017-02/cp170019en.pdf

[60] Connor, Phillip. "Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015." *Pew Research Center*. August 2, 2016. http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/.

Security Threats to the European Union

The more accommodative European states such as Germany and Sweden have argued that the migration crisis could have been mitigated if all member states had shared the responsibility. Instead, the EU refugee crisis proved to be a lesson in disjointed and fractured responses—a collective failure with severe long term security ramifications for the bloc. By failing to meaningfully address the issues together, EU member states are setting themselves up for costly long-term problems. As the war in Syria drags on past the six-year mark, the likelihood of Syrian refugees returning to Syria is increasingly dim. The failure to allow refugees to integrate and become contributing members of society will lead to numerous long-term security issues for the EU.

The Challenge of Integration

It is no secret that many EU states have failed to adequately integrate refugees and immigrants into the fabric of their society. Many second-generation immigrants in Europe are disenfranchised and view themselves as outside their respective national identities, leaving them vulnerable to radicalization. The sheer numbers of foreign fighters from Europe—over 5,000 as of December 2015—traveling to Syria and Iraq to join extremist groups underscores this fact. Unfortunately, as recent terror attacks in France, Belgium, Germany, and elsewhere have shown, these foreign fighters may return and pose an imminent security threat to Europe.

The vast majority of Syrian refugees do not harbor extremist views and do not pose a security threat to the European countries they enter. Even though around one million Syrians have applied for asylum in Europe, Syrian refugees make up a very small proportion of the irregular migrants and refugees that have engaged in acts of terrorism in Europe. However, despite the extremely low incidence of terrorism among Syrian refugees in Europe,[61] pushing desperate refugees to the margins of society only facilitates radicalization, and may serve to make refugees easy targets for extremist recruiters in Europe. Syrian refugees in Europe are often confined to informal camps, or sent to secluded, marginalized neighborhoods, both of which are known for being hotbeds of extremism. While the EU's law enforcement agency, EUROPOL, recently found that "there is no concrete evidence to date that terrorist travelers systematically use the flow of refugees to enter Europe unnoticed" the organization voiced concern over "the potential for elements of the (Sunni Muslim) Syrian refugee diaspora to become vulnerable to radicalisation once in Europe, and to be specifically targeted by Islamist extremist recruiters."[62]

As over one million refugees cannot easily enter the workforce, find adequate housing, or reliably gain access to social services, the long-term socioeconomic implications of marginalizing refugees may significantly destabilize the EU. Desperation among refugees will inevitably lead to an increase

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[61] **Note:** To date, there has only been one successful terror attack in Europe that was committed by a Syrian refugee. The successful attack, which occurred on July 24, 2016 in Ansbach, Germany, was a suicide bombing at a music festival that injured 15 people, but killed only the attacker. The attacker was a Syrian asylum-seeker who had been in Germany for two years prior to the attack, and had initially applied for asylum in 2014. According to a CNN report, he had previously received psychiatric treatment, and had attempted suicide twice before the attack. Though it has not been confirmed, the available evidence seems to indicate the attacker radicalized while he was in Germany, not while he was in Syria prior to entering the EU.

[62] European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016. EUROPOL. December 1, 2016. https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016

in crime, and incentivize a black market of labor, goods and services. Due to the threat posed by international health crises like the 2015 Ebola outbreak, fully integrating Syrian refugees into European healthcare systems and sanitary living quarters should be viewed as a public health necessity.

While there is no question a large influx of refugees and migrants over a short period can be highly burdensome, there are few countries in the world as well-suited to absorb such an influx as those in Europe and the United States. The long-term costs and global security ramifications of failing to properly absorb, integrate, and assimilate the refugee population would be far worse for the both the EU and the U.S.

Refugees and the Faltering Cohesion of the European Union

The refugee crisis has exposed deep rifts within European society over the proper role and composition of the EU, leading many in Europe to question the utility of the bloc itself. It is clear that the issues with which Europe has struggled over the last decade—lingering fallout over the 2008 financial crisis, growing skepticism of the value of diversity, and starkly different visions for the future and identity of the European experiment—have all been exacerbated by the refugee crisis.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Great Britain's vote to leave the EU. To be sure, the fears over immigration that helped propel the exit vote were not based solely on Syrian refugees; many who supported Brexit were skeptical of immigration in general. Still, British Euroskeptics tended to give the issue of Syrian and other Middle Eastern refugees overstated attention, arguing that the EU's open internal borders and welcoming immigration policies would increase the threat of terrorism, crowd domestic workers out of the labor market, and strain social services. These concerns are in spite of the fact that the UK is not in the Schengen Area, and has taken in only a small fraction of the refugees that have entered Europe.

Throughout Europe, far-right, ultranationalist, and Euroskeptic political parties have made their strongest showing in years running on platforms that emphasize anti-immigrant sentiments. Given these parties' deep disdain for the EU and its immigration policies, their rise has caused many to anxiously confront the possibility that more countries may withdraw from the EU. The contention that refugees threaten the social fabric of Europe—or worse, that the refugees are intent on attacking it—has become a prominent narrative. The implication is that by virtue of their non-European, Muslim identity, these refugees threaten the social order and do not deserve the safety of Europe. This narrative pushes not just Syrian refugees, but also the millions of European citizens of Middle Eastern descent, out of the European fold. It peremptorily undermines the validity of the identity they share—or hope to share—with Europeans, regardless of how long they have lived in Europe or their individual beliefs. Furthermore, it discourages them from assimilating and investing in their newfound communities. Most importantly, this narrative validates the proposition put forward by the Islamic State and other extremist groups: that because of their religion, Muslims in the West will always be second-class citizens. In short, this narrative cheapens the desire of Syrian refugees to live in Europe with dignity, and it is instrumental in priming vulnerable populations for radicalization.

The migrant crisis has hit some of the EU's most economically vulnerable members. Southern and eastern EU countries—those with the worst performing economies—bear the brunt of incoming refugees. Countries like Greece are in the midst of their own economic crises and have struggled to provide resources for newly arrived refugees. There is strong sentiment that properly sourcing humanitarian aid for refugees would only incentivize more arrivals. Even when Brussels achieves a degree of consensus and proposes collective action, individual members are often quick to thwart such efforts, leading to an EU immigration policy that is at odds with the policies of its member states. For example, as of August 2016, member states had failed to send the promised number of personnel to assist Greece with registering asylum seekers. EU plans to relocate tens of thousands of refugees currently in Greece to other EU countries has seen only 9,971 resettled as of March 2017.[63] Likewise, when EU leaders agreed to spread the burden of hosting refugees by assigning each country a quota, Hungary challenged the plan in court and put the issue to a national referendum. Ahead of the referendum in October 2016, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's administration launched the "biggest advertising campaign in Hungarian history," posting thousands of ads across Hungary that portrayed an inflated threat of terrorism from refugee resettlements in the country.[64] Despite the government's massive anti-immigrant campaign, and the fact that 98% of voters cast their ballots against the EU quota, voter turnout did not meet the 50% threshold required by Hungarian law to be valid.[65] In the aftermath, the Orban administration has vowed to carry on the fight against mandatory refugee resettlement. Other EU states have thumbed their nose at Brussels by taking similar unilateral steps to staunch the flow of refugees.

While the rise in Euroskepticism among EU nations is not driven solely by the refugee crisis, it is an important point of disunity among the bloc's members today. As the Syrian conflict shows no sign of ending, the number of Syrians fleeing to Europe is likely to increase. The question is how many more refugees, and the resulting discord among its members, the EU can handle before its demise becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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[63] "Member States' Support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism." *European Commission*. March 15, 2017. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/press-material/docs/state_of_play_-_relocation_en.pdf

[64] Kingsley, Patrick and Rankin, Jennifer. "Hungarian Jews concerned about toxic referendum discourse." *The Guardian*. October 3, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/03/hungarian-jews-concerned-about-toxic-referendum-discourse.

[65] Lyman, Rick. "Hungary Votes Against Migrants, but Too Few to Clear Threshold." *The New York Times*. October 2, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/03/world/europe/hungary-to-vote-on-accepting-more-migrants-as-europe-watches.html?_r=0.

The United States

In contrast to many of its European counterparts, the U.S. has admitted only around 20,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement since the start of the Syrian conflict.[66] Yet, despite its distance from Syria and the relatively small number of refugees admitted to the U.S., the country's reaction to the crisis has been profoundly negative, based in large part on a politicized interpretation of Europe's refugee challenge. Nowhere is this more evident than in recent policies put forward by the Trump administration.

President Trump came to power riding a wave of populist sentiment based in large part on anti-immigrant rhetoric that emphasized a hard line on refugees from the Middle East. As a candidate, Trump effectively used the refugee crisis in the EU to frame populist counterterrorism and anti-immigration narratives and policies, repackaged for a U.S. constituency still struggling to define the country's tumultuous relationship with Islam and the Middle East since 9/11. This rhetoric found a receptive audience among a significant portion of the electorate and was a pillar of Trump's message on immigration and national security.

The situation in the U.S., however, does not compare in any way to the situation in Europe. While the connection between refugees and concerns of terrorism in the EU is overstated, it remains a legitimate concern. The proximity to conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa, vast numbers of refugees, lack of influx controls, and open borders within the Schengen Area expose the EU to the real possibility of terror groups exploiting the refugee crisis to infiltrate operatives into Europe. To be clear, the vast majority of terror attacks in the EU since 2015 have not involved refugees, nor terrorists who entered Europe disguised as refugees. The notable exceptions, however, were several members associated with the cell involved in the November 2015 Paris attacks and March 2016 Brussels attacks who were believed to have entered Europe by exploiting refugee and migrant routes.[67] The Paris and Brussels attacks demonstrated numerous flaws in EU security protocols, chief among them the inability to properly vet individuals entering the continent in such a chaotic situation.

The notion that people are 'pouring' into the U.S. without adequate vetting—as has been implied by the Trump administration—is a political device not burdened with the reality of the U.S. visa issuance process, and certainly very far removed from the reality of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The process for refugee resettlement in the U.S. involves extensive interviews, biographic and biometric checks, and multi-agency intelligence and security reviews; the entire process can take up to two years to complete. Despite President Trump's efforts to use the situation

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[66] Data extracted from the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS). Syrian Refugee Admissions and Arrivals 03/15/11-03/15/17. *Refugee Processing Center Website.* http://ireports.wrapsnet.org/Interactive-Reporting/EnumType/Report? ItemPath=/rpt_WebArrivalsReports/MX%20-%20Arrivals%20by%20Nationality%20and%20Religion. Accessed March 15, 2017.

[67] **Note:** Though there has been a very low incidence of terror attacks in Europe committed by actual Syrian refugees, there have been a number of documented instances in which the Islamic State has sought to exploit refugee and migrant routes to infiltrate operatives into Europe. In particular, one of the November 2015 Paris attackers is believed to have entered the EU disguised as a refugee. According to a November 2015 U.S. House Homeland Security Committee report, as of October 2015 Germany alone was investigating 10 cases of suspected terrorists who entered Europe by posing as refugees. Additional media reports have provided further evidence of efforts by the Islamic State to infiltrate operatives—some of whom were foreign fighters from the EU—into Europe by masking them amongst the refugee population.

in Europe as justification for limiting refugee entry into the U.S., the highly-controlled processes for refugee admittance into the U.S. cannot be compared to the uncontrolled and chaotic influx of refugees and migrants into Europe. Indeed, the U.S. is far better suited—both economically and in terms of security capacity—to accept and accommodate refugees than any other country in the world.

Neither the refugee influx nor the terror threat in the U.S. is comparable to the EU—to say nothing of countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey that have accommodated staggering numbers of refugees and displaced persons. The number of refugees that the U.S. admits has differed over time, but typically ranges from 75,000-100,000 per year.[68] After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the number of refugees admitted into the U.S. dropped to less than 27,000 for one year, until new security measures were put into place.[69] In fiscal year 2016, the U.S. admitted 84,995 refugees from around the globe; the average length of time it takes for a refugee to be resettled in the U.S. is 18 to 24 months, and the process is highly controlled.[70] Looking at those numbers next to the uncontrolled flow of approximately one million refugees and migrants that entered Europe in 2015 alone, the dissimilarities could not be more drastic.

Trump's campaign rhetoric toward refugees—including a call to ban Muslims from entering the U.S. —was widely viewed to have manifest in official policy on January 27, when the administration issued an executive order calling for the suspension of U.S. visa issuance for people from seven countries including Libya, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen for at least 30 days, a 120-day suspension of all refugee placements under USRAP, and an indefinite ban on Syrian refugees. While almost half of Americans supported the Trump administration's executive order overall, only 36% support indefinitely suspending the Syrian refugee program.[71] The order sparked widespread protests and outcries across the country, and prompted a host of legal challenges. With promises that Christian refugees from the seven Muslim-majority countries would be granted priority entry into the U.S.—amounting to a *de facto* ban on Muslims from the specified countries—legal challenges over the constitutionality of the order caused it to be struck down in court. On March 6, the administration released a revised version of the order, this one excluding Iraq from the list of banned countries and amending the provisions that federal courts had earlier found problematic, but preserving the essence of the original order. Most importantly, the revised order no longer indefinitely bans Syrian refugees, but continues the 120-day suspension of USRAP.

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[68] "America's Failure on Refugees." *The Soufan Group*. February 7, 2017. http://www.soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-americas-failure-on-refugees/.

[69] Jens Manuel Krogstad and Jynnah Radford. "Key Fact About Refugees to the U.S." *Pew Research Center*. January 30, 2017. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/30/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/.

[70] Ibid.

[71] "About Half of Americans Say Trump Moving Too Fast." *Gallup*. February 2, 2017. http://www.gallup.com/poll/203264/half-americans-say-trump-moving-fast.aspx. Accessed March 9, 2016.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The experience of conflicts that parallel the Syrian crisis suggests that allowing the mass displacement and marginalization of Syrians to continue unchecked is likely to result in a lost generation of Syrians whose collective disenfranchisement may make them increasingly vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist organizations. The dire conditions facing Syrian refugees today are strikingly similar to those faced by displaced populations in previous conflicts, namely the decades-old war in Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The destabilizing effects of the mass exodus of civilians from these conflicts, as well as the multigenerational disenfranchisement of their respective diasporas, has led to security repercussions which world powers had never predicted, but now seem obvious. In Afghanistan, children recruited from Afghan refugee camps during the country's war against the Soviet Union would later form the Taliban. In Lebanon, Palestinian refugees living in deplorable living conditions with little opportunity to integrate into Lebanese society would later provide potent recruit pools for militant groups. The relegation of Syria's refugees to lives without adequate opportunities for work, education, healthcare, and safety—the foundations of a dignified life—risks repeating a similar genesis among a lost generation of Syrians.

In hindsight, the secondary and tertiary security effects of marginalizing whole populations fleeing conflict are clear. In previous conflicts, multigenerational disenfranchisement led to a collective societal memory of marginalization, begetting lost generations of refugee diasporas and exacerbating future conflicts. In contrast, the benefit of today's hindsight into previous conflicts grants the international community an opportunity to plan proactively for the second and third order security implications of the refugee crisis. By enacting policies that serve refugees' humanitarian needs and allow for the long-term integration and assimilation of refugees, host countries and the international community can help to lessen the impact and prevent the most dire of the potential negative security implications of the crisis.

Recommendations

1. *Take Meaningful Steps Toward Ending the Syrian Conflict* – Nothing would more effectively serve the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people than an end to the ongoing conflict. At the beginning of 2017, such an end appears nowhere in sight. Achieving a sustainable end to the Syrian civil war will require a paradigmatic shift in the aims of those involved in the conflict—particularly the various regional and international state actors—which until now have prioritized zero-sum power politics in pursuit of strategic and sectarian competition. Such thinking has yielded little tangible benefit to any actor—aside from the most extreme and violent elements—exacerbating the conflict while exacting the heaviest price on Syrian civilians.

   Shifting the emphasis of the conflict away from military victory and toward peacemaking will require compromises on all sides. For the West and Russia, this will mean foregoing the remnants of Cold War-era great power competition that serves little strategic utility in the 21st century. Regional powers jockeying for position over their sectarian counterparts will

need to understand that any potential advantage of military victory in Syria will continue to incur a disproportionate cost from the inevitable instability wrought by the conflict. For both Shi'a Iran and its Sunni adversaries, victory in Syria is unlikely to result in any sectarian or religious dominance in the region. Parties on the ground will have to accept the futility of seeking total military victory over their adversaries and pursue meaningful negotiations toward political settlement to the conflict. Only when the warring parties prioritize peace over victory will Syria's lost generation be saved.

2. *Fully Fund the Humanitarian Needs of Syrian Refugees* – The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently launched a record $4.63 billion appeal for Syrian refugees and to bolster regional resilience. Yet UNHCR funding goals for Syrian refugees have remained underfunded even as the number of refugees started to crescendo in 2013, a trend that looks likely to continue into 2017 and beyond. There is an obvious contradiction in the position of wealthy countries that would deny entry to refugees, yet are unwilling to adequately fund the humanitarian operations designed to make life in Syrian refugee camps a sustainable reality. While many countries have shown remarkable generosity, as long as current levels of funding for Syrian refugees remain inadequate, a lost generation of Syrians will continue to seek sustainable futures elsewhere. The desperation of Syrian refugees unable to attain the basic necessities required to survive and provide for themselves and their families could prove to be a valuable tool to violent extremist recruiters seeking to exploit the plight of refugees.

3. *Build a Preventative Firewall of Stability in the Middle East* – While the Syrian conflict already exceeds the international community's will and capacity for dealing with such crises, the reality is that many countries in the Middle East could face greater instability in the next year and beyond. While some countries in the region have been exceptionally generous in hosting Syrian refugees, the stability of Syria's neighbors—under strain even before the Syrian conflict—is being pushed to the brink. The prospect of more countries in the region succumbing to the pressures of large influxes of refugees should give the world pause. The region simply cannot afford another major crisis erupting concurrently with the conflict in Syria.

   The international community, especially wealthy countries of the West and the Gulf, should take preemptive economic, political, and security measures to increase support for key states that are currently struggling to cope with large influxes of refugees and continued instability on their borders. The cost of economic and political investment in these countries now pales in comparison to the cost in human and financial capital likely required to address any potential future instability. The international community will need to drastically increase the amount of investment and attention it pays to such countries if it is to prevent untenable levels of regional crisis.

4. *Equitably Share the Burden of Hosting Refugees* – While many countries have demonstrated remarkable hospitality in their willingness to accept Syrian refugees, the majority of wealthy nations—i.e. those with the greatest ability to absorb refugees—have largely failed to meet the moral test of the Syrian refugee crisis. Despite the rising tide of anti-refugee sentiment in the West, the U.S. and EU can and should accept more Syrian refugees. While concerns

over terrorism have tempered the hospitality of many Western countries, the preponderance of evidence shows that the threat of terrorism posed by Syrian refugees is overstated. Although a very small number of Syrian refugees have engaged in or supported terrorism in Europe, the far greater threat comes not from refugees themselves, but from non-Syrians attempting to enter the West disguised as refugees. Many of those infiltrating Western countries are European citizens disguised as irregular migrants to avoid detection by security services. The best way to secure Europe from terrorists seeking to enter the continent is not to enforce a shortsighted ban on refugees—even if it is temporary. Those fleeing the conflict in Syria will continue to seek safety wherever it can be found, even if it means attempting dangerous or illegal trips into Europe. Increasing the number of properly vetted refugees allotted to each EU member state, as well as the U.S., would create an incentive for Syrian refugees to take the proper channels—including extensive security checks—to access a new life in the West, depriving terrorists of the convenient cover of irregular refugee flows. Increasing and carefully managing refugee flows into the West would also alleviate the pressure on regional states currently struggling to host millions of Syrian refugees.

The Soufan Center

The Soufan Center is a non-profit organization, dedicated to increasing awareness of global security issues in the United States and around the world. It provides a non-partisan forum for the public, private, philanthropic, academic and NGO sectors, creating a space that allows for the identification, analysis and discussion of issues and strategic dialogue related to emergent threats. We also provide the necessary knowledge and tools to a variety of stakeholders so that communities may successfully confront domestic extremism in an evolving threat landscape and create contextualized, actionable policy solutions.

Through our role as an investigative and analytical resource, we examine a broad range of complex issues facing civil society, from international and domestic terrorism to matters related to law enforcement and cyber security, human rights and rule of law, as well as energy, water and food security. We build strategic partnerships with and among leading institutions across the public, private, NGO, philanthropic and academic sectors, as well as thought leaders and individuals, focusing on common sense solutions for a safer world and creating a comprehensive approach to greater human security

Members of our team have pioneered new and innovative methods to address some of today's most challenging issues. We apply decades of operational experience, supported by academic research to our work in countering extremism.

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