

# Human Rights First

## Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

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### Policy Issue Resources

Work With Asylum Seekers

If you are seeking asylum, we can help

Areas of Focus

Current Initiatives

**National security experts from both Democratic and Republican administrations have testified that accepting refugees advances U.S. security.** In a letter to Congress, respected national security leaders wrote that accepting refugees support[s] the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees, and that restricting acceptance of refugees would undermine our core objective of combating terrorism. Signatories to this letter included former CIA Directors General David Petraeus and General Michael V. Hayden; former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff; former Secretaries of Defense William S. Cohen, William J. Perry, Chuck Hagel, and Leon Panetta; former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger; and former National Security Advisors Stephen Hadley and General James L. Jones.

**Accepting refugees supports stability of U.S. allies and U.S. interests.** Former CIA Director Hayden and former NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stavridis write in the *Miami Herald*, Its ironic, to say the least, that today some politicians are seeking to shut out refugees in the name of national security. The global refugee crisis is straining the resources and infrastructures of Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, which are hosting the vast majority of Syrian refugees. By doing more to host and help refugees, the United States would safeguard the stability of these nations and thereby advance its own national security interests. Former U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker writes, Increased assistance would protect the stability of a region home to U.S. allies. The infrastructure water, sewage, medical care and education of these states is overwhelmed. A major resettlement and aid initiative can relieve the strain, adding that this would reduce regional instability and potential for conflict and terrorism.

**Refugees and other immigrants enrich American culture with unique skills and determination and contribute to the country's economy.** A 2015 study shows that Syrian immigrants are thriving in the United States and even outperform a number of other groups in the United States in terms of productivity, including entrepreneurship. These statistics are indicative of how Syrian refugees may fare in this country.

**Refusing refugees helps feed U.S. enemies narrative.** Hayden and Stavridis write that hostility to refugees helps ISIS, and Conversely, welcoming refugees regardless of their religion, nationality, or race exposes the falseness of terrorist propaganda and counters the warped vision of extremists. Former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff also explains, That has a positive impact in terms of the disposition people around the world have toward the U.S. You dont want to play into the narrative of the bad guy. Thats giving propaganda to the enemy. In the above mentioned letter to Congress, a bipartisan group of former U.S. national security leaders and former military leaders state: Refugees are victims, not perpetrators, of terrorism. Categorically refusing to take them only feeds the narrative of ISIS that there is a war between Islam and the West, that Muslims are not welcome in the United States and Europe, and that the ISIS caliphate is their true home. We must make clear that the United States rejects this worldview by continuing to offer refuge to the worlds most vulnerable people, regardless of their religion or nationality.

**Failing to support front-line refugee hosting states could contribute to destabilization of U.S. allies, undermining U.S. interests.** The countries shouldering most of the refugee flow like Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon are already struggling to accommodate them. As former Ambassador Crocker notes, left unaddressed, the strain will feed instability and trigger more violence across the region, which will have consequences for U.S. national security.

**The United States screens refugees more stringently than any group allowed to enter the United States.** As national security experts, including former CIA Directors General Petraeus and General Hayden and former Defense Secretaries Panetta, Cohen, Perry, and Hagel, state in the letter referenced above, The process that refugees undergo in order to be deemed eligible for resettlement in the United States is robust and thorough. Those seeking resettlement are screened by national and international intelligence agencies; their fingerprints and other biometric data are checked against terrorist and criminal databases; and they are interviewed several times over the course of the vetting process. According to DHS-USCIS, A refugee applicant is not approved for travel until the results of all required security checks have been obtained and cleared. Even after these initial screenings, refugees are subject to additional security checks before traveling to the United States and when entering the country.

**Former officials from both Democratic and Republican administrations have confirmed that the refugee vetting process is rigorous.**

Former Homeland Security Secretaries Janet Napolitano and Michael Chertoff, who served in the Obama and Bush administrations respectively, write: The process for any refugee seeking entry to the United States requires the highest level of scrutiny from a law enforcement and national security perspective.

Former U.S. INS Commissioners Doris Meissner and James W. Ziglar, who served in the Clinton and Bush administrations respectively, state in *The Hill*: We can testify to the many steps and safeguards that have been incorporated into refugee admissions screening in recent years to guard against fraud and terrorist or criminal infiltration. In fact, the U.S. refugee program has the most rigorous screening of any such program elsewhere in the world.

A statement of principles signed by former Secretaries of Defense, State, and Homeland Security, along with former ambassadors and other officials from the Defense Department, State Department, and White House who served in both Democratic and Republican administrations, confirm: Refugees are vetted more thoroughly than any other category of traveler seeking to arrive in the United States. The statement also notes, Religious bans and tests are un-American and have no place in our immigration and refugee policies, and Welcoming refugees, regardless of their religion or race, exposes the falseness of terrorist propaganda and counters the warped vision of extremists.

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