

# Human Rights First

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

<https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/barring-refugees-would-hurt-national-security>

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This blog is cross posted from [The Huffington Post](#):

Just days before the nation celebrated Thanksgiving, an AP photographer snapped a picture of Kris Kobachs proposed Homeland Security plan for the Trump Administration. Kobach, the Kansas secretary of state and a candidate for Department of Homeland Security (DHS) secretary, apparently presented President-elect Trump with a Homeland Security strategic plan to Bar the Entry of Potential Terrorists. But rather than focusing on actual terrorists, the proposed plan appears to broadly target immigrants and refugees from high-risk areas and aims to reduce the U.S. resettlement of Syrian refugees to zero.

The Kobach plan seeks to resurrect the disbanded National Security Exit-Entry Registration System (NSEERS), often referred to as the Muslim registry, which targeted immigrants and refugees from 25 countries based on religion and national origin for registration, interrogation and in some cases deportation. A report issued by the [inspector general](#) for DHS concluded that the program had actually had no discernible public benefit. As the Bush Administrations former INS Commissioner, James W. Ziglar, explained: The people who could be identified as terrorists werent going to show up. This project was a huge exercise and caused us to use resources in the field that could have been much better deployed.

The Kobach plans goal of reducing the resettlement of Syrian refugees to zero makes clear that the true purpose of the Kobach plan is to prevent refugees and immigrants from Syria and other mostly Muslim nations from entering, or being welcomed in, the United States.

The irony is that such a plan would actually hurt U.S. national security interests. Retired military leaders and former high level national security officials who have served both Democratic and Republican Administrations have publicly explained in bipartisan [letters, statements and op-eds](#) that they oppose proposals that would effectively halt or derail Syrian resettlement, and that resettlement actually advances U.S. national security interests.

In December 2015, a [bipartisan group](#) of former national security officials and retired military leaders told the U.S. Congress that: We believe that America can and should continue to provide refuge to those fleeing violence and persecution without compromising the security and safety of our nation. To do otherwise would be contrary to our nations traditions of openness and inclusivity, and would undermine our core objective of combating terrorism. This group included former National Security Advisor Stephen J. Hadley, Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Former CIA Directors General David H. Petraeus, U.S. Army (Ret.) and General Michael V. Hayden, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Admiral James G. Stavridis, U.S. Navy (Ret.) and Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander and Former National Security Advisor General James L. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.).

Earlier this year, another bipartisan group of former national security officials and retired military leaders issued a [Statement on Americas Commitment to Refugees](#), which stressed that Accepting refugees, and encouraging other countries to do so, advances U.S. interests by supporting the stability of our allies struggling to host large numbers on their own. Former U.S. Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, in an op-ed in the [Wall Street Journal](#), explained that resettlement could help relieve the strain on U.S. allies like Jordan, countries whose infrastructures are affected by the stress of hosting many refugees. [L]eft unaddressed, he warned, the strain will feed instability and trigger more violence across the region, which will have consequences for U.S. national security.

In the Statement on Americas Commitment to Refugees, these former officials and retired military leaders also emphasized this countrys strong commitment to protecting the persecuted:

For more than two centuries, the idea of America has pulled toward our shores those seeking liberty, and it has ensured that they arrive in the open arms of our citizens. That is why the Statue of Liberty welcomes the worlds huddled masses yearning to breathe free, and why President Reagan stressed the United States as a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness.

The statements signatories included Former Secretary of Defense and U.S. Senator William S. Cohen, Former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, Former Director of the CIA General Michael V. Hayden, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), Former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center Michael E. Leiter, Former U.S. Senator Carl M. Levin, Former Commander of U.S. Army Europe General

David M. Maddox, U.S. Army (Ret.), Former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center Matthew G. Olsen, Former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Admiral James G. Stavridis, U.S. Navy (Ret.), Former Homeland Security Advisor Frances F. Townsend and Former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff.

Both groups of former officials confirmed that refugees are already more rigorously vetted than any other travelers to the United States. As the second group detailed, Americans are rightly concerned not only for the security of refugees but their own as well. For this reason, refugees are vetted more thoroughly than any other category of traveler seeking to arrive in the United States. The security process includes screenings by national and international intelligence agencies, fingerprint and other biometric data checks against terrorist and criminal databases, and multiple rounds of interviews.

As members of the Trump team move ahead with the transition process, they will have substantial opportunities to be briefed by U.S. intelligence agencies and the Department of Homeland Security on the extensive vetting and security clearance checks employed in the refugee resettlement program. They will also be able to hear from U.S. allies, U.S. intelligence agencies and U.S. embassy staff around the world how important it is in terms of U.S. interests for the United States to support front-line refugee hosting states. By continuing this country's proud tradition of resettling refugees, America will also demonstrate to both ISIL terrorists and the growing far-right movements **emboldening** bias-motivated attacks across Europe that America stands for religious freedom and knows that it has the strength to safeguard its security without abandoning its ideals and targeting religious minorities.

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