

Preventing Radicalization in the Al-Hol Camp



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Prepared for the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism
Office of Countering Violent Extremism



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Disclaimer

The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgements and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.

Honor Pledge

On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.



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Acronyms

- **CVE** - Counter Violent Extremism
- **ISIS** - Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
- **AANES** - Autonomous Administration of North and Eastern Syria
- **NGO** - Non-governmental organization
- **UN** - United Nations
- **SDF** - Syrian Democratic Forces
- **SDC** - Syrian Democratic Council
- **IDP** - Internally displaced person
- **TCN** - Third country national
- **FTF** - Foreign terrorist fighter
- **GCTF** - Global Counterterrorism Forum
- **DDR** - Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
- **FY** - Fiscal Year
- **UNICEF** - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
- **USAID** - United States Agency for International Development
- **UNODC** - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- **UNOCT** - United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism

Glossary

- **Terrorism** - premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents (U.S. Department of State, 2008)
- **Violent Extremism** - advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018)
- **Repatriation** - the return of someone to their home country
- **Disengagement** - the process of shifting support away from using violence as a means for achieving political or ideological goals (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020)
- **Rehabilitation** - the process of re-educating and retraining individuals who have committed a terrorist offense or support terrorist activity
- **Reintegration** - the process of integrating someone back into society
- **Radicalization** - process where individuals and groups develop a certain mindset that increases the likelihood of participation in violent extremism or terrorism (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020).
- **Deradicalization** - the process of changing a person's values to align more with mainstream views (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020).
- **Foreign Terrorist Fighter** - individuals who travel to conflict zones to engage in terrorist acts
- **Veto Player** - a political actor that has the power to block a certain action



Executive Summary

The Al-Hol camp was first established in 1991 to house roughly 10,000 refugees fleeing from the first Gulf War (Humud, 2022). However, the camp is now home to roughly 56,000 men, women, and children displaced by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Yacoubian, 2022). As violence both within and around the camp continues to increase, conditions within the camp continue to decline. Only 40% of children have access to school, and lockdowns repeatedly restrict access to humanitarian aid (Save the Children, 2022a; UNICEF, 2022b). This leaves children extremely vulnerable to ISIS radicalization. Refugees are particularly vulnerable to radicalization due to the poor and crowded living conditions in refugee camps and the lack of access to healthcare and economic opportunities. This fuels deep resentment against existing systems, increasing the vulnerability of refugees to radicalization (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). There are roughly 40,000 women and children with actual or perceived ties to ISIS in the Al-Hol camp, so the prevalence of Islamic education is extremely high (Sudkamp, Vest, Mueller, & Helmus, 2023). Without access to a well-rounded education to counter extremist narratives, ISIS can reemerge on the world stage with these children as the next generation of ISIS fighters (Martin-Rayo, 2011).

To prevent ISIS radicalization in Al-Hol, the U.S. government pursued repatriation, military intervention, and humanitarian assistance. If refugees are returned to their home communities, then the quantity of potential ISIS recruits in the camp decreases. At the current rate, it would take 30 years to repatriate all foreign children (Save the Children, 2022b). This report conducted a literature review of possible solutions that could be implemented to both speed up the rate of repatriation and prevent radicalization of current residents. “The Hedayah Blueprint of a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center” and the Global Counterterrorism Forum’s “Rome Memorandum” outline good practices for the rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalized individuals. These recommendations were effective in Somalia for reducing reliance on extremism and increasing the prospects of disengaged individuals. However, the home communities often felt negative about the return of these individuals (Nagai, 2021). Education initiatives focused on moderate Islamic studies were successful in increasing tolerance of other cultures and religions, indicating possible success in preventing radicalization (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). However, countries that engaged in foreign military interventions experienced more transnational terrorist attacks (Piazza & Choi, 2018). Using this outcome as an indicator of radicalization, military intervention in Al-Hol is likely to increase the grievances that fuel radicalization (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). From this review, this report proposes four policy options to address the problem:

1. **Status Quo** – maintain current U.S. policies in Syria such as repatriation, humanitarian and stabilization assistance, joint military operations with the Syrian Democratic Forces, and international sanctions on supporters of terrorism.
2. **Establish a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center in Al-Hol** – allocate \$4.61 million to the United Nations for the construction of a rehabilitation and reintegration center near the annex of Al-Hol. This center would be mandatory for all women and minors identified as ISIS sympathizers to prepare them for reintegration into their home communities.
3. **Increase Access to Education** – allocate \$25.5 million to UNICEF to reopen the 25 learning centers in Al-Hol that closed during the pandemic.



4. **Improve Camp Security from Internal and External Threats** – coordinate with the Department of Defense and the Syrian Democratic Forces to improve the effectiveness of the camp’s security forces. This option requires the State Department to request \$23 million for this initiative under the budget line item for Anti-Terrorism Efforts in Syria.

Each policy alternative is then analyzed on the following evaluative criteria:

1. **Effectiveness** – the extent to which each alternative reduces the risk of radicalization in Al-Hol
2. **Political Feasibility** – the likelihood of acceptance of each policy alternative by relevant stakeholders and veto players
3. **Potential for Repatriation** – the potential rate at which each policy option encourages the repatriation of third country nationals
4. **Cost-Effectiveness** – the amount of funding required per repatriation for each policy option

After a systematic review of each alternative, this report recommends that the Office of Countering Violent Extremism pursue Alternative 2 and establish a rehabilitation and reintegration center in Al-Hol. This option rates the highest on effectiveness by directly addressing two root causes of radicalization, while the other options only address one root cause. In Somalia, terrorist attacks increased by 306 attacks in the period two years before and after the establishment of a rehabilitation and reintegration center (Global Terrorism Database, 2022a; See Appendix B). However, the ability of this alternative to address two root causes of radicalization indicates that this change is likely less than what would have occurred in the absence of this policy. Increasing access to education ranks equal to the rehabilitation and reintegration center in terms of effectiveness and higher on political feasibility by gaining the support of three relevant stakeholders. However, the recommendation ranks the second highest on political feasibility, and is the strongest option in terms of potential for repatriation. A rehabilitation and reintegration center has the potential to repatriate roughly 28.5% of the camp’s population and cost the State Department roughly \$7,929.32 per repatriation. Therefore, this option also ranks the best on cost-effectiveness.

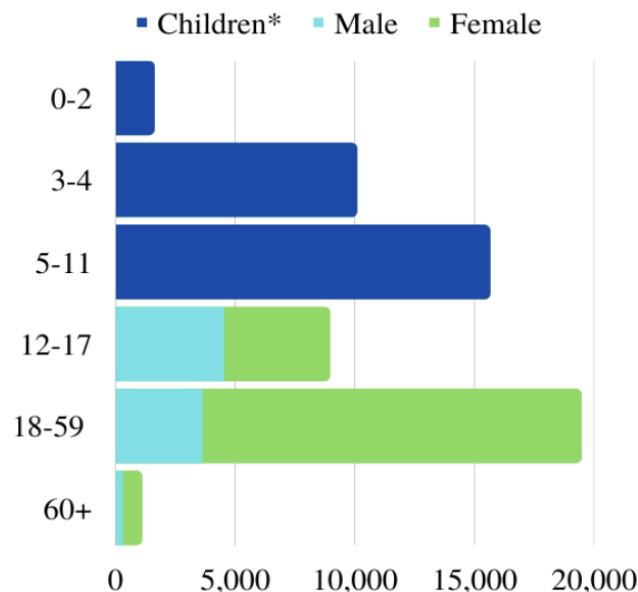
To implement the proposed recommendation, this report suggests coordinating with the Bureau of International Organizations to request the needed funds and partnering with relevant UN agencies to construct and administer the center. The federal budget is due to Congress on February 5, 2024, so the Office of Countering Violent Extremism should work on preparing the budget for their office now. Between February and December of 2024, State Department officials should be ready to respond to requests for Congressional hearings on counterterrorism efforts in Syria. After the budget is approved, construction will begin in January 2025 with a pilot program for the center beginning in June 2026. If the State Department is effectively able to remove radicalized individuals from Al-Hol and disengage them from ISIS ideology, the U.S. government can reduce the risk of an ISIS resurgence.



Introduction

Currently, there are roughly 56,000 individuals in Al-Hol, and each of them are living under the constant threat of extremist violence (Yacoubian, 2022). 93% of the population are women and children, 70% are under the age of 18, and 50% are under the age of 12 (Savage, 2022; Yacoubian, 2022; United Nations Iraq, 2022). Figure 1 illustrates that the camp's residents are mostly women and children. As the declining security and humanitarian assistance generate poor living conditions, these children are at increased risk of radicalization (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). In January 2022, ISIS militants launched a 10-day attack on the Al-Sina'a prison, resulting in 500 deaths and an unknown number of ISIS fighter escapees (Yacoubian, 2022). The prison break sparked fears of radicalization as it is unclear where these escapees fled to. A grave concern is that many made their way to Al-Hol. On March 28, ISIS militants attacked Al-Hol with rocket-propelled grenades, killing three and injuring 11. A lockdown was imposed across the camp, limiting the supply of water in Al-Hol (UNICEF, 2022b). ISIS spokesperson Abu Omar al-Muhajir threatened more attacks on the camp on April 17, 2022. Since that threat, at least 20 attacks were reported in the region (Yacoubian, 2022). The UN Human Rights Office verified the killing of at least 42 people in the Al-Hol camp in 2022 (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). Increased violence prevents humanitarian aid from reaching those in need, leading to the closure of learning centers for children. Currently, women are the main educators of children, and with approximately 30% of women in the camp continuing to support ISIS ideology, these children are at risk of radicalization (Saleh, 2021). Children in the camp are vulnerable as they are deprived of rights and marginalized from their home communities. If action is not taken to improve the lives of these children, this set of deprivations will fuel the resentment that inspires acts of terror.

Figure 1: Population Breakdown by Age and Gender (December 2021)



*Disaggregation by gender not available

Source: World Health Organization Syrian Arab Republic, 2021



Problem Statement

With declining security and humanitarian conditions leaving only 40% of minors with access to education, too many children in Al-Hol refugee camp are vulnerable to ISIS radicalization, dramatically increasing the risk of an ISIS resurgence (Save the Children, 2022b; Martin-Ray, 2011).

Client Overview

For the Applied Policy Project, my client is the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Office of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). CVE is the Department of State's recognized home of expertise for countering violent extremism across multiple lines of effort, including but not limited to, rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist offenders and related family members. The office works to develop and implement good practices to advance the psychological well-being of women and children in displaced persons camps like Al-Hol. CVE is also responsible for countering terrorist use of the internet and developing intervention programs to break the lifecycle of radicalization to terrorism and violent extremism.

According to the "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," a policy priority of the United States is to prevent a resurgence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Biden, 2021). In the National Security Strategy, President Biden further expressed U.S. commitment to the fight against ISIS through a "partner led, U.S. enabled" approach" (The White House, 2022a). Core policy priorities of the United States in Syria include sustaining the U.S. government and coalition campaign against ISIS, sustaining local cease-fires in place across the country, supporting the expansion of humanitarian access throughout Syria, pressing for accountability and respect for international law while promoting rights and nonproliferation, and supporting a political process led by the Syrian people. U.S. officials stated that defeating ISIS "includes ensuring that the terrorist group cannot reconstitute its forces, plan, and execute attacks, and control population and territory (Humud, 2022).

The Counterterrorism Bureau established the interagency Al-Hol Working Group in September 2022 to carry out this mission by improving "the coordination of U.S. efforts to address the security and humanitarian situation in northeast Syria" (Humud, 2022). My client is a member of this working group. The Office of Countering Violent Extremism collaborates with the Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and the United States Mission to the United Nations to coordinate action relating to Al-Hol.

Structure of the Report

To address the identified problem for the Department of State, this report will first outline the background of the political and security conditions in Syria, along with the root causes and consequences of inaction. Then, the report will evaluate evidence on current solutions to reduce the risk of radicalization in refugee camps. After contextualizing the current state of U.S. and international counterterrorism efforts, this report will outline four evaluative criteria and four policy alternatives to address the identified challenge. The criteria will provide a systematic way for analyzing each policy alternative on how well it meets the goals of the State Department and allow for easy comparison between each policy option. After analyzing each policy option on the criteria, this report will propose a recommendation and outline steps for implementation.



Background on the Problem

The Rise and Fall of the Islamic State

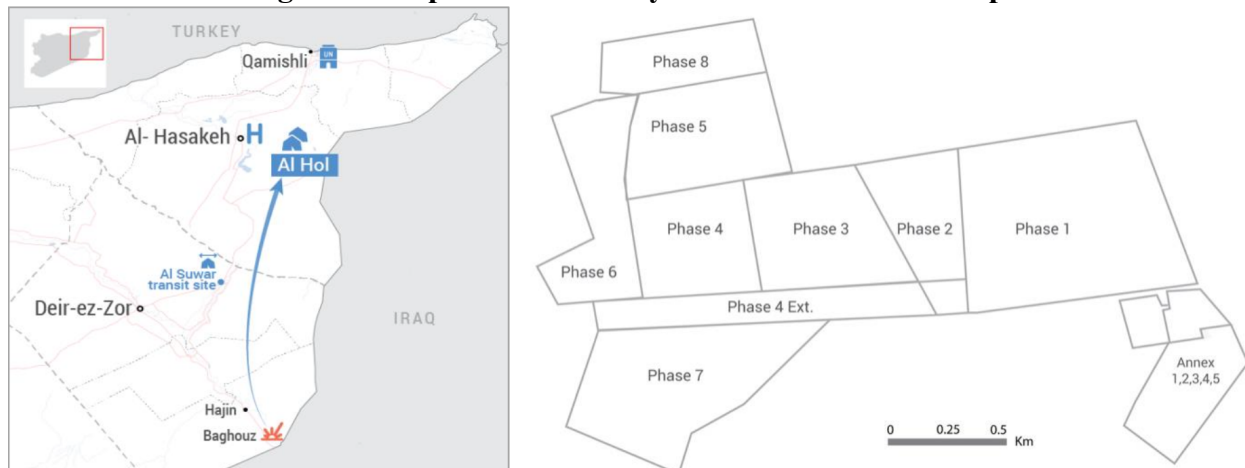
The Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh, was established in 2004 from the remnants of Al Qaeda in Iraq. After the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2007, the group decreased in prominence, only to reemerge again in 2011. The group officially came to be known as the Islamic State in 2014 after ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi announced the formation of a caliphate stretching from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq. On August 7, 2014, a U.S. led coalition began airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq, expanding the campaign to Syria in September 2014. The mission against ISIS came to be known as “Operation Inherent Resolve.” The coalition conducted roughly 8,000 airstrikes over the next year, and by December 2017, ISIS lost 95% of its territory. On December 19, 2018, President Donald Trump declared that ISIS was defeated and planned to withdraw all 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria. The group was formally defeated on March 23, 2019, after the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) recaptured Baghouz. The era of ISIS ended after Baghdadi was killed in a U.S. raid in northern Syria on October 26, 2019 (Wilson Center, 2019).

History of the Al-Hol Camp

The Al-Hol camp was established in northeast Syria in 1991 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to receive Iraqi refugees from the first Gulf War. At this time, roughly 15,000 refugees were housed in Al-Hol (Saad, 2020). The camp closed in 2013 after Iraqis were successfully resettled but reopened in May 2016 as individuals fled from ISIS controlled territories. By late 2018, the population of the camp stood at around 9,400, but extremist violence during late 2018 and early 2019 increased the camp’s population to almost 70,000 individuals (Global Protection Cluster, 2022). The camp’s population peaked at 75,000 in 2018 as women and children fled the last ISIS stronghold of Baghouz, Syria. With increased repatriation efforts, current estimates are at around 56,000 residents (Yacoubian, 2022). However, Al-Hol was built to only accommodate 10,000 individuals, greatly reducing the quality of life for those in the camp (Humud, 2022). The camp is currently divided based on nationality and ethnicity. One part of the camp is for Iraqis, another part for Syrians, and a fenced off annex for third-country nationals (TCNs). See Figure 2 for a map of the region and the camp. Al-Hol is controlled and administered by the SDF, a Kurdish led militia governing the Autonomous Administration of North and Eastern Syria (AANES). United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) currently provide aid to camp residents (Saad, 2020).



Figure 2: Map of Northeast Syria and the Al-Hol Camp



Source: OCHA, 2019

Contributing Factors to the Problem

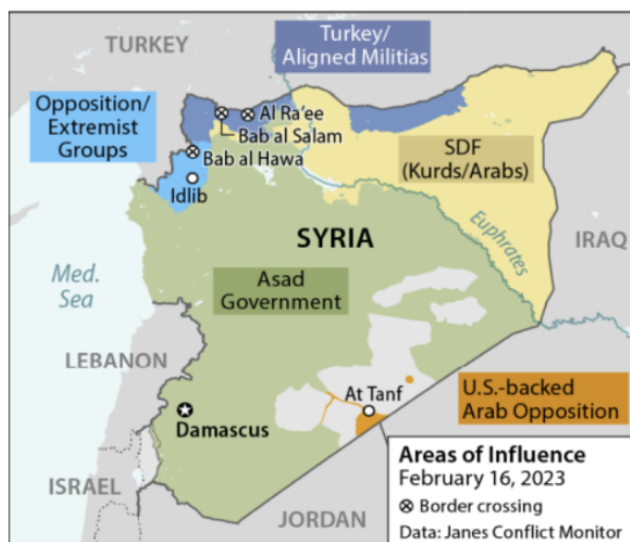
The War in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic are exacerbating the poor humanitarian and security conditions in the camp. Access to healthcare remains limited with the COVID-19 Treatment Facility suspended since March 2022 (Health Sector Syria, 2022). Children are extremely vulnerable to the consequences of COVID-19 such as decreased child protection services and reduced access to education (Save the Children, 2020). The war in Ukraine also severely limits access to food in the region. Ukraine is a major provider to the World Food Programme, and the war increased food prices by 50% since January 2022. In addition, crude oil prices increased by 33%, limiting the ability of Kurdish forces to maintain the camp (UN Women, 2022). The pandemic coupled with rising food and fuel prices worsen the living conditions of the camp, increasing the vulnerability of youth to radicalization (Kuznar et al., 2020). As a result, affected governments are detaining ISIS fighters and sympathizers and repatriating foreign nationals to prevent a resurgence of ISIS in the region. In September 2022, U.S. and Syrian forces apprehended dozens of suspected ISIS operatives. This was the seventh joint military operation on the camp between American and Syrian forces, and each raid resulted in the arrest of 40 to 120 individuals (Demirjian, 2022). However, there is evidence that women affiliated with ISIS are forcefully imposing ISIS ideology on camp residents (Saleh, 2021). As the number of supporters of ISIS ideology has increased, attacks on aid workers and journalists has increased as well (Saleh, 2021). With more children in the camp expressing sympathy with the ISIS ideology, a resurgence of the group seems more and more likely (Saleh, 2021).

However, the instability of Syria's political landscape threatens the sustainability of any interventions in Al-Hol. Currently, the Syrian government controls roughly $\frac{2}{3}$ of the country, while Kurdish and Arab authorities hold the AANES in northeast Syria. This area is led by the SDF and its political wing the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). Opposition and extremist forces under the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) hold areas in northwest Syria, and Turkish forces control the areas in northern Syria that border the SDF administered region (See Figure 3). However, increased Turkish aggression in SDF controlled areas threatens the ability of the SDF to continue counter-ISIS operations (Vugteveen & Farrell-Molloy, 2022). In late November of



2022, Turkey conducted numerous airstrikes against the SDF on areas surrounding A-Hol. The airstrikes killed eight guards, temporarily cut off power, and restricted the delivery of food, water and medical supplies (Human Rights Watch, 2022). In addition, there is a possibility that the Assad regime launches military operations to reclaim SDF territory, further limiting the sustainability of any intervention in Al-Hol (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2023).

Figure 3: Areas of Influence in Syria



Source: Congressional Research Service, 2023

Consequences of the Problem

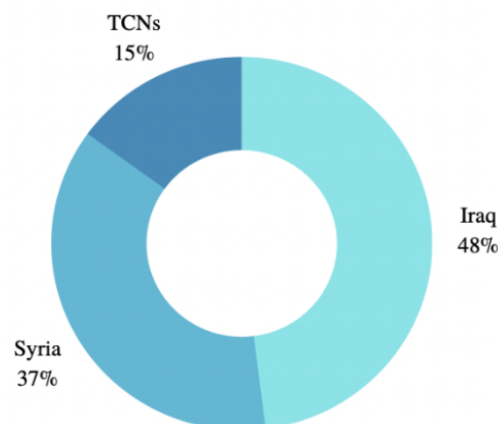
To counter the terrorist threat in Al-Hol, the Biden Administration is seeking \$143 million for assistance programs in Syria in the FY2023 budget request. \$8 million would be devoted to Anti-Terrorism efforts (Congressional Research Service, 2023). The U.S. government is also projected to spend \$155 million to train and equip the SDF and to bolster ISIS prisons to prevent escapees from entering the camp (Savage, 2022). These funds will help pay for guards and infrastructure in Al-Hol and for logging the biometric data of adult male prisoners. If the U.S and its allies are unable to reduce the risk of radicalization within Al-Hol, then these costs to society will increase dramatically. The War on Terror cost roughly \$8 trillion and resulted in the death of 900,000 individuals (Brown University, 2021). As of June 2017, the cost related to ISIS military operations was \$14.3 billion with an average daily cost of \$13.6 million for 1,580 days of conflict (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). Before the military defeat of ISIS in 2019, the United States engaged in military operations that resulted in civilian deaths. After an April 2016 airstrike, the U.S. military acknowledged that 20 civilians were killed and 11 were injured in the air strike (Glenn, 2016). The war effort prompted the U.S. military to absorb most of the federal discretionary budget, decreasing the government's ability to fund programs that support American citizens and contributing to the increasing national debt (Brown University, 2021). If ISIS can re-establish a caliphate, operating costs for the U.S. military can reach this level again.



Evidence on Potential Solutions

A policy priority of the U.S. government is the repatriation of TCNs. As seen in Figure 4, 48% of the camp is Iraqi, 37% are Syrian, and 15% are foreigners from 60 different countries including the United Kingdom, Australia, China, Spain, France, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Sweden, and Malaysia (Yacoubian, 2022; Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2022). U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) leaders stated that slow repatriation of individuals in IDP camps and detention centers remains “the biggest impediment to ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS.” They also state that if the refugees in Al-Hol are not repatriated to their home countries, “we’re going to face ISIS 2.0 down the road.” (Humud, 2022). In May 2020, Save the Children reported that of the 43,000 children in Al-Hol, roughly 7,000 were foreign children (Save the Children, 2020). Iraq repatriated about 600 ISIS fighters and 2,500 other individuals from Al-Hol (Savage, 2022). However, Iraq suspended the repatriation of its citizens from Al-Hol on November 2, 2022 (Kittleson, 2022). In July 2022, France repatriated 16 women and 35 children (Savage, 2022). Since January 2019, Germany repatriated 69 children and 22 women, Belgium repatriated 32 children, and Kosovo repatriated at least 74 children (Mehra et al., 2022). However, the repatriation of men is severely lagging behind that of women and children as only 2.3% of all repatriations from Al-Hol were men (Rights and Security International, 2023). If countries can reduce the population in Al-Hol, then fewer individuals will be at risk for radicalization, reducing the risk of an ISIS resurgence.

Figure 4: Population Breakdown of Al-Hol



Source: Yacoubian, 2022

Root Causes of Radicalization for Refugees

The more time an individual spends in a refugee camp, the more likely they are to be radicalized. The average refugee spends seventeen years in a camp, increasing the probability of developing deep resentment and grievances against the governing system that can fuel radicalization (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). Lack of access to healthcare, youth insecurity, and lack of economic opportunities are common factors across refugee populations that increase a refugee’s vulnerability to radicalization. Also, if refugees feel alienated from their host countries or are governed by extremist organizations within the camp, then they are at greater risk for radicalization. Poor and crowded living conditions in refugee camps negatively affect the physical and psychological health of refugees and restrict economic opportunities, increasing grievances that place refugees at increased risk for radicalization (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). Other causes of radicalization in refugee camps include the prevalence of Islamic education and restrictions on movement. However, the primary factor increasing the risk of refugee children to radicalization is the lack of access to a well rounded education (Martin-Ray, 2011).



The Hedayah Blueprint of a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center

To reduce the risk of radicalization through repatriation, countries have turned to rehabilitation and reintegration programs to disengage former extremists. Hedayah is an international organization that seeks to provide research and evidence-based recommendations to counter violent extremism. In their “Blueprint of a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center,” they outline general principles for rehabilitating and reintegrating returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families. Hedayah recommends establishing a rehabilitation and reintegration center that builds upon a country’s existing legal frameworks. In terms of rehabilitation, Hedayah recommends that children and adults should be separated, as children are more likely to have impulsive and self-harming behavior. However, mothers should not be separated from their young children to fulfill the nursing needs of the child. Families who traveled to the region together can be rehabilitated together if the individuals are determined to be low-risk (Gyte et al., 2020).

These centers should also engage civil society organizations to increase community support around reintegration, and they should address social welfare outside the center to prevent recidivism. Many individuals join extremist groups because they are dissatisfied with their governments, so implementing policies that increase access to healthcare, education, unemployment compensation, and other public services can reduce such grievances and promote successful reintegration. According to Hedayah, governments should also consider incorporating incentives and sanctions to ensure compliance with the program. Possible incentives include financial payments for work programs and sentence reductions if incarcerated. Hedayah maintains that individuals should have personal case managers to ensure successful reintegration. The language, gender, ethnicity, and religious background of the case manager should be considered when they are paired with an individual. Hedayah recommends that case managers should incorporate mentors and life coaches into the reintegration process to support participants after they are released from custody. Using this model, the Advocacy for Women in Peace and Security (AWAPSA) in Kenya assisted more than 100 women and girls to reintegrate into their communities after leaving Al-Shabaab, and community-based mentorship, counseling groups and open dialogues helped to increase trust between individuals and security agencies in the reintegration process. Along with combining individual case management and community engagement, governments should note conditions in which communities are willing to take back returning FTFs and promote positive narratives surrounding returning FTFs to reduce harm to the disengaged individual and their community (Gyte et al., 2020).

Good Practices for Reintegration from The Global Counterterrorism Forum

The Global Counterterrorism Forum’s (GCTF) *Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders* provides information about good practices to aid governments in rehabilitating and reintegrating disengaged terrorists. This memo recommends including cognitive skills programs into rehabilitation efforts to allow extremists to recognize the factors that radicalized them and to develop solutions to prevent recidivism. Education and vocational skills training should be included to end an individual’s dependence on the direction of an extremist authority by improving their self-confidence and ability to secure a job. Like the Hedayah Blueprint, GCTF recommends incorporating incentives into rehabilitation programs to encourage prosocial behavior and ease the return to society. To promote the safety of



both offenders and their communities, GCTF recommends using pre-release questionnaires to determine if there are “threats to life” and relocate a former inmate and their family if needed. Finally, reintegration programs should closely monitor disengaged terrorists while also fostering a positive sense of community to reduce recidivism and promote long-term success (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2015). The Addendum to the Rome Memorandum stresses the importance of establishing appropriate domestic legal frameworks that allow for personalized rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. In addition, roles and responsibilities should be clearly established to ensure effective reintegration (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2020).

Case Study: Somalia

To reintegrate defectors from Al-Shabaab, Somalia employed a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) approach. Currently, there are three rehabilitation centers in Somalia (Nagai, 2021). The center in Mogadishu is funded by a donor government and run by the British contractor Adam Smith International. The centers in Baidoa and Kismayo are administered by the International Organization for Migration. The center in Baidoa is also partnered with Somali government officials and funded by the German government. Only low-risk adult male defectors receive access to these centers for up to one year (Sarfati & Donnelly, 2022). The program offers defectors vocational training in trades, primary and secondary education, religious re-education, and counseling (Nagai, 2021). Beneficiaries must go through an exit interview to determine if the individual is ready for reintegration and is referred to local civil society organizations for community-based reintegration support. Low-risk adult women can enter the centers in Baidoa and Kismayo if a rehabilitation program is available. These programs tend to be shorter with women remaining in their communities and visiting the center three days a week (Sarfati & Donnelly, 2022).

Yosuke Nagai and his team conducted fieldwork in the Somali cities of Mogadishu and Baidoa in July 2016 and April 2019 to determine the conditions needed for successful reintegration. After conducting 47 interviews with 10 disengaged combatants, 20 members of the local community, eight UN officials, six Somali government officials, and three private practitioners, Nagai determined that the combatants were generally satisfied with the rehabilitation program and were generally optimistic about returning to their communities. They intended to continue their personal and professional development and were confident that their local communities would accept them back. However, community members generally felt negative about disengaged combatants returning to their communities. They feared being attacked by Al-Shabaab and did not feel as though they could trust the former combatants to not harm them. However, Nagai’s team finds that the community will accept these individuals if they have the necessary skills to find a job, they voluntarily defect from the extremist group, and they support the community (Nagai, 2021). Therefore, reintegration programs should encourage professional development, voluntary participation, and community support to promote successful reintegration of disengaged terrorists.



The Effect of Education on Radicalization

Most programs to counter radicalization in youth rely on education to prevent children from getting involved in extremist organizations. These educational initiatives teach children cognitive and emotional skills to allow them to correct their own behaviors and the extremist behaviors of those around them. In Algeria's refugee camps, the National Union of Sahrawi Women improved the literacy rate from a rate of 90% illiteracy to 95% literate through their support of the health and education systems of the camps (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). However, the evidence on whether this intervention prevented radicalization is inconclusive as researchers are unable to determine whether these children would have engaged in terrorism without the education initiatives. In contrast, classes in moderate Islamic studies decreased support for more militant interpretations and increased tolerance of other cultures and religions in the Dadaab camp in Kenya (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). Therefore, educational programs tailored to the extremist narratives perpetuated in Al-Hol have the potential to prevent radicalization amongst children.

The Effect of Military Intervention on Radicalization

To prevent terrorist recruitment inside of refugee camps, relevant security authorities intervene to protect residents from extremist violence and ideology. In Al-Hol, the United States engages in military operations with the SDF to detain ISIS operatives. However, researchers hypothesize that foreign military interventions increase feelings of resentment, motivating non-state militant organizations to "strike back" through terrorist attacks. To test this hypothesis, Piazza and Choi analyzed the effect of international military interventions on the amount of transnational terrorist attacks for the period 1970 to 2005. The authors used two terrorism datasets to increase the robustness of their findings and found positive, highly statistically significant effects for both models. Countries that engaged in no military interventions experienced less than one transnational attack per year; however, countries that engaged in roughly 22 interventions experienced between 2.6 and 4.9 attacks in the subsequent year (Piazza & Choi, 2018). Since radicalized individuals conduct transnational terrorist attacks, this outcome can be used as an indicator of radicalization as well. Therefore, attempts to increase camp security through military intervention may increase grievances against the governing organizations, increasing the risk of radicalization (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020).



Evaluative Criteria

The goal of the State Department in countering radicalization in Al-Hol is to prevent an ISIS resurgence. The terrorist group was formally defeated in 2019, but the State Department wants to ensure that the terrorist group cannot reconstitute its forces, plan, and execute attacks, and control its population and territory (Humud, 2022). I will analyze the extent to which each policy alternative meets these goals through the following criteria:

Effectiveness

The effectiveness criterion will measure the extent to which each alternative reduces the risk of radicalization in Al-Hol. Research on the root causes of radicalization demonstrates that multiple factors contribute to extremism. First, the poor and crowded living conditions in refugee camps negatively impact the physical and psychological health of refugees, limiting their economic opportunities and creating dissatisfaction with existing institutions (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). In crisis situations, the prevalence of Islamic education, restrictions on movement, and the lack of a well-rounded education further contribute to the risk of radicalization (Martin-Rayó, 2011). This criterion will be measured by the projected degree of prevented radicalizations, ranked on a low-medium-high scale. A policy that ranks high on effectiveness will directly address three or more root causes of radicalization. If a policy ranks medium on effectiveness, it addresses two root causes of radicalization. Finally, a policy ranking low on effectiveness does not address the root causes of radicalization (See Appendix A).

Political Feasibility

The political feasibility criterion measures the likelihood of acceptance of each policy alternative by relevant stakeholders. A stakeholder analysis of the relevant veto players will help gauge political feasibility. Public statements and legislative history will be used to estimate the likelihood of policy adoption. This criterion will analyze four stakeholders, President Biden, State Department Leadership, Congress, and the Syrian Democratic Forces, and be measured on a scale of low-medium-high. A policy with high political feasibility will have three or more stakeholders supporting policy adoption. Medium political feasibility indicates support from two stakeholder groups, and low political feasibility demonstrates support from one or no stakeholder groups (See Appendix A).

Potential for Repatriation

This criterion will assess the ability of each alternative to encourage countries to repatriate their citizens. Foreign governments are concerned with bringing ISIS sympathizers or former terrorist fighters into their countries that could pose national security threats (Kube & Lee, 2022). The repatriation criteria will be measured by the percentage of people returning to their home countries compared to the total population of refugees in the Al-Hol camp after the successful implementation of each policy.



Cost-Effectiveness

The cost-effectiveness criterion will assess the relationship of the costs of each policy alternative relative to its benefits. The key outcome that will measure the benefit of each policy will be the number of potential repatriations. The cost of each alternative will be measured in the 2023 U.S. dollars needed to implement the policy. The alternative that scores best on the cost-effectiveness criterion will have the lowest amount of dollars spent per repatriation.

Policy Alternatives

Alternative 1: Status Quo

Alternative 1 requires no additional action by the State Department. Current U.S. policies to counter ISIS in Al-Hol are to repatriate American citizens, train and equip the SDF, cut off funding through economic sanctions, and provide humanitarian and stabilization assistance. The U.S. government is strongly encouraging and aiding other countries in repatriation. In 2014, Congress authorized the Syria Train and Equip program to prepare Syrian opposition forces to combat ISIS and other terrorist organizations in Syria. For the fiscal year 2022, \$155 million was enacted for the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund in Syria, and \$160 million was appropriated in the FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Congressional Research Service, 2023). The United States Department of Defense also engages in joint military operations with the Syrian Democratic Forces in Al-Hol. The September 2022 mission was the seventh time American and Syrian forces engaged in such an operation with each raid resulting in the detention of 40 to 120 individuals (Demirjian, 2022). The U.S. Treasury Department maintains sanctions on Syria and individuals across the globe for their support of terrorism. In 2022, the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) spent roughly \$852 million on humanitarian assistance in Syria and nearby countries (Graham, 2022). Overall, the current policy is a coordinated interagency effort to counter ISIS in Syria.

Alternative 2: Establish a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center in Al-Hol

Alternative 2 calls on the State Department to allocate \$4.61 million to the United Nations for the establishment of a rehabilitation and reintegration center just outside of the annex of Al-Hol within the next five years (Kube & Lee, 2022). Between 2020 and 2021, the British government allocated £3.7 million to the Serendi rehabilitation center in Mogadishu, Somalia that focused on countering the influence of Al-Shabaab in the region (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2020). This converts to roughly \$4.61 million (See Appendix B). The center will be mandatory for women and minors who are identified ISIS sympathizers and will focus on preparing those who are not from Iraq or Syria for reintegration into their home countries. A coalition of SDF and American troops will be responsible for identifying the ISIS sympathizers. This alternative may receive opposition from refugees in the camp and human rights activists, but this action is in line with international law under the Refugee Convention. According to Article 1F of the Refugee Convention, a person with whom there are serious reasons for considering that “he has been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations” is not entitled to the protections of the Refugee Convention. Since “acts, methods, and practices of terrorism” contradict the principles of the United Nations, this policy alternative complies with international law (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009). Currently,



roughly 180 boys are detained in the following rehabilitation centers: Houry Center, Alaya prison, and the Orkesh Center. Women who are identified as ISIS operatives are sent to a prison in al-Hasakah instead of to a rehabilitation center (Human Rights Watch, 2022). To decrease the risk of radicalization in the camp by reducing the prevalence of Islamic education, identified ISIS sympathizers should be moved out of the living quarters and into a separate rehabilitation center (Martin-Rayó, 2011). The center will be based on the good practices outlined in Hedayah's *Blueprint of a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center* and the GCTF's *Rome Memorandum* discussed in the literature review section.

Alternative 3: Increase Access to Education for Children

Alternative 3 requires the State Department to allocate \$25.5 million to UNICEF to reopen the 25 learning centers in Al-Hol that closed during the pandemic. This option would reduce the risk of radicalization by providing refugee students with access to a well-rounded education to counter extremist narratives (Martin-Rayó, 2011). In 2019, UNICEF established three learning centers in Al-Hol using donations from Canada and Educate a Child. The schools reached 5,500 children, and UNICEF planned to establish four more centers to reach over 13,000 children (UNICEF, 2019). As of 2021, UNICEF and Kurdish authorities had 25 learning centers, but many of them have closed since March 2020 due to the pandemic (Al Abdo & Mroue, 2021). Now, only 40% of children in Al-Hol are receiving an education (Save the Children, 2022b). Currently, there are 56,000 individuals in Al-Hol with 70% under the age of 18 (Yacoubian, 2022). Therefore, there are roughly 39,200 minors in the camp in need of education (See Appendix B). If three learning centers covered 5,500 students, then one learning center can accommodate roughly 1,834 students. If the new learning centers maintain an average enrollment of 1834 students per center, then the 25 centers could accommodate about 45,850 students (See Appendix B). If UNICEF were to reopen and administer the learning centers using State Department funds, 100% of the children would receive an education if the school was made mandatory for all minors in Al-Hol.

Alternative 4: Improve Camp Security from Internal and External Threats

To improve camp security from both internal and external threats, the State Department should coordinate with the Department of Defense and the Syrian Democratic Forces to improve the effectiveness of security forces in Al-Hol. By improving security, this option will reduce the risk of radicalization by allowing for the continuation of humanitarian aid and education services and reducing the prevalence of extremism in the camp. Currently, there are about 900 U.S. troops in Syria sharing bases with SDF personnel in Northern Syria (Lamothe & Loveluck, 2022). The SDF is responsible for overseeing Al-Hol and conducted roughly seven missions on the facility with U.S. forces, detaining hundreds of ISIS operatives (Demirjian, 2022; Lamothe & Loveluck, 2022). However, roughly 20 attacks by ISIS operatives occurred on the camp since April 2022 (Yacoubian, 2022). To increase security both internally and externally, the State Department should work with their counterparts at the Department of Defense to increase funding for training and equipping the SDF to carry out more military operations within Al-Hol. Along with funding military operations inside and outside the camp, these funds will also help pay for guards and infrastructure inside Al-Hol, such as metal detectors and internal fences to be used to secure areas during riots or clear out smuggled weapons. The budget request for FY2023 for the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund in Syria stood at \$183 million, but only \$160 million was



appropriated in the FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations Acts (Department of Defense, 2022; Congressional Research Service, 2023). Since this fund is part of the Department of Defense's budget, the State Department can request the \$23 million difference in their department's annual budget under Anti-Terrorism Efforts in Syria (Humud, 2022).

Assessment of the Alternatives

Alternative 1: Status Quo

Effectiveness

In 2013 and 2014, there were roughly 50 attacks in northeast Syria. In 2015 and 2016, there were roughly 70 confirmed ISIS attacks in the region. Since U.S. interventions against ISIS began in 2015, terrorist incidents increased by 20 attacks after policy implementation (Global Terrorism Database, 2022b; See Appendix B). However, research conducted by Seung-Whan Choi and Idean Salehyan revealed that as the number of refugees increases, the number of terrorist events increases as well. Choi and Salehyan hypothesized that since an influx of refugees leads to an increase in humanitarian assistance, terrorism is more likely as extremist groups target the aid. To test this hypothesis, the researchers analyzed 258 reports from the Global Terrorism Database and a large share of them point to attacks on aid workers and relief supplies (Choi & Salehyan, 2013). Such attacks often lead to imposed lockdowns, restricting the movement of refugees in the camp and exacerbating the conditions to promote radicalism. Therefore, this option has low effectiveness by not mitigating any root causes of radicalization, and the 20-attack increase is likely more than what it would have been without these current policies (Martin-Rayó, 2011).

Political Feasibility

Overall, Alternative 1 ranks low in political feasibility as it does not have the support of any of the mentioned stakeholders.

1. President Biden - President Biden expressed that it is a policy priority for his administration to reduce the population of Al-Hol through repatriation. However, many countries are still reluctant to repatriate their citizens, so the president is not likely to support maintaining the status quo as current actions are insufficient (Kube & Lee, 2022).
2. State Department Leadership - The State Department agrees with President Biden that there needs to be an increased level of repatriation, so State Department leadership is unlikely to support no additional action (Moss, 2022a).
3. Congress - Since funding for counterterrorism initiatives in Al-Hol was successfully appropriated in previous Congresses, it is reasonable to assume that there is general support for maintaining these efforts. However, members of the 117th Congress proposed legislation to strengthen U.S. relationships with local partners and the security infrastructure, indicating that Congress may want to see increased action on countering ISIS in the region (Humud, 2022).
4. Syrian Democratic Forces - Due to increasing military engagement between Turkey and the SDF, the SDF is calling on the Biden administration to increase U.S. support to the region. The political arm of the SDF wrote a letter to President Biden calling on the U.S. to stop the violence, so they are unlikely to support this policy option (Seligman, 2022).



Potential for Repatriation

This option is highly effective for repatriating U.S. citizens as the U.S. repatriated 39 citizens since December 2022. This represents nearly all U.S. citizens in the camp (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Since the United States began combating ISIS in Syria in 2015, the international community repatriated a total of 2,524 individuals (Rights and Security International, 2023). When repatriation began after the fall of Baghouz in March 2019, the camp's population was roughly 70,582 people (United Nations Population Fund, 2019). Therefore, the potential repatriation rate for this policy option is 3.6% (See Appendix B).

Cost Effectiveness

The United States has spent about \$1.3 billion dollars on humanitarian and security assistance in Syria thus far (Congressional Research Service, 2023). In total, the international community repatriated about 2,524 individuals (Rights and Security International, 2023). Therefore, this alternative costs roughly \$515,055.47 per repatriation (See Appendix B).

Alternative 2: Establish a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center in Al-Hol

Effectiveness

A rehabilitation and reintegration center opened in Mogadishu in 2012 for defectors from Al-Shabaab, an Islamist extremist group based in Somalia. Roughly 2 years before the center opened, there were about 61 confirmed terrorist incidents committed by Al-Shabaab. In the two years after the center opened, there were 367 confirmed incidents by Al-Shabaab. Therefore, attacks increased by about 306 attacks (Global Terrorism Database, 2022a; See Appendix B). The Somali rehabilitation and reintegration program is for defectors, not active members (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023). Therefore, it is unlikely that the program caused these individuals to renounce an extremist ideology. However, by decreasing the quantity of extremist individuals, the centers address two root causes of radicalization by reducing the prevalence of Islamic education and reducing exposure to extremist civilian organizations (Martin-Rayó, 2011; Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). Therefore, this option has medium effectiveness, and the 306-attack increase is likely less than what it would have been without the rehabilitation and reintegration program.

Political Feasibility

Overall, Alternative 2 ranks medium on political feasibility as it has the support of two out of the four veto players analyzed.

1. President Biden - President Biden ran his campaign on “redemption and rehabilitation” for incarcerated individuals (Biden, 2022a). Also, President Biden expressed it is a policy priority for his administration to reduce the population of Al-Hol through repatriation (Kube & Lee, 2022). Since this center is committed to returning individuals to their home societies through rehabilitative means, the president is likely to accept this policy option.
2. State Department Leadership - On June 16, 2022, Deputy Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism Ian Moss stated that “rehabilitation and reintegration is a policy priority for the Bureau of Counterterrorism.” He also stated that the Department collaborates with UN bodies on these efforts and established a rehabilitation and



reintegration team in the Counterterrorism Bureau (Moss, 2022a). Therefore, the State Department is likely to accept this policy option.

3. Congress - A report in the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) expressed concern “about threats from Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) detainees held in partner-run detention facilities” after the February 2022 attack on a detention center in Hasakah, Syria (Humud, 2022). Therefore, Congress is unlikely to accept this center without increased efforts to secure it.
4. Syrian Democratic Forces - Following Turkish aggression in northeast Syria, the SDF wants the United States to focus their attention on deterring Turkish military action (Schiffrin, 2022). Since the United States is the SDF’s main partner in combating ISIS, they may be supportive of increased international efforts to combat the terrorist group while they are focused on countering Turkey. However, since this option does not address the security needs of the SDF or Al-Hol, this stakeholder is unlikely to support this policy alternative.

Potential for Repatriation

In 2019, roughly 525 individuals participated in Somalia’s national rehabilitation and reintegration program with 259 successfully completing the program and returning to their home communities (United Nations Security Council, 2021). This is a completion rate of 49% (See Appendix B). Roughly 40,000 women and children with actual or perceived ties to ISIS reside in Al-Hol. Since this option is mandatory for identified sympathizers, all 40,000 individuals would enter the program (Sudkamp, Vest, Mueller, & Helmus, 2023). If we assume the same 49% completion rate, 19,600 refugees will be successfully rehabilitated and repatriated. In November 2019, there were roughly 68,744 individuals in Al-Hol, so this option has a potential for repatriation rate of 28.5% (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019; See Appendix B).

Cost-Effectiveness

For 2020 and 2021, the British government provided £3.7 million to the Serendi rehabilitation center in Mogadishu, Somalia that focused on countering the influence of Al-Shabaab in the region (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2020). This converts to roughly \$4.61 million. Adjusted for inflation, this equals \$5,376,078.71 (See Appendix B). In 2020 and 2021, the international community repatriated roughly 678 individuals from Al-Hol (Rights and Security International, 2023). Therefore, this option costs roughly \$7929.32 per repatriation (See Appendix B).

Alternative 3: Increase Access to Education for Children

Effectiveness

UNICEF first established learning centers in Al-Hol in mid-2019 (UNICEF, 2019). Between 2017 and 2018, there were roughly 19 confirmed terrorist incidents perpetrated by ISIS in northeast Syria. In 2019 and 2020, there were roughly 38 confirmed incidents in the area, so confirmed attacks increased by 19 incidents after implementation (Global Terrorism Database, 2022b). According to Harvard University’s Dubai Initiative, access to a well-rounded education is the most effective way to reduce the risk of radicalization in refugee camps (Martin-Rayó,



2011). Education also increases employment opportunities for refugees, decreasing their risk of being radicalized (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). Therefore, this option has medium effectiveness by addressing two root causes of radicalization, and the 19-attack increase is likely less than what would have occurred in the absence of the learning centers.

Political Feasibility

Overall, Alternative 3 ranks high on political feasibility as it has the support of three out of the four stakeholders analyzed.

1. President Biden - President Biden has repeatedly expressed support for refugee education. On February 4, 2022, President Biden signed Executive Order 14013 establishing a higher education pathway for refugees in the United States (Magaña-Salgado, 2022). In his 2022 statement on World Refugee Day, President Biden stated “the United States will do [its] part to ensure that those who have sought refuge [in the U.S] have access to the life-saving assistance they deserve, including ... education” (Biden, 2022c). Biden’s prior support for refugee education indicates he is likely to support this policy option.
2. State Department Leadership - The Department of State and USAID is the largest provider to UNICEF for humanitarian assistance contributing \$884 million to the organization in 2021 (UNICEF, 2022a). After signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Tent Partnership for Refugees in December 2022, Secretary Blinken reaffirmed his commitment to improving the livelihoods of refugees, indicating State Department leadership is likely to support this policy option (Blinken & Noyes, 2022).
3. Congress - Congress approved roughly \$15.8 billion since FY2012 for humanitarian assistance in Syria and \$884 million for UNICEF alone for FY2021 (Congressional Research Service, 2023; UNICEF, 2022a). Both amounts are greater than the \$21.9 million asked for in this policy option, indicating that Congress is likely to approve this policy option for the next fiscal year.
4. Syrian Democratic Forces - The SDF’s main request for U.S. action is to aid in countering Turkish aggression in northern Syria (Schiffrin, 2022). Since funding for refugee education does not address this new security need, the SDF is unlikely to support this policy option.

Potential for Repatriation

Since 2019, the international community has repatriated roughly 2,524 refugees (Rights and Security International, 2023). In November 2019, there were roughly 68,744 individuals in the camp (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019). Therefore, this alternative has a potential repatriation rate of roughly 3.7% (See Appendix B).

Cost-Effectiveness

In 2020, a joint report published by the World Bank and UNHCR stated it costs roughly \$557.67 (2020 US\$) to educate one refugee student for one year (The World Bank & UNHCR, 2021). This equals \$650.34 in 2023-dollar terms. Since there are 39,200 minors in need of education in Al-Hol, the total cost of education would be roughly \$25,493,328. In 2020, the international community repatriated 323 individuals from Al-Hol. Therefore, it costs roughly \$78,926.71 per repatriation (See Appendix B).



Alternative 4: Improve Camp Security from Internal and External Threats

Effectiveness

After ISIS was defeated militarily in 2019, President Trump announced a decrease of U.S. military presence from over 2,000 advisors and troops in Iraq and Syria to only 400 in Syria (Glenn, 2016). Responsibility shifted more toward building the capacity of the SDF to combat ISIS in Syria and toward joint military operations in the Al-Hol camp. Since 2019, there have been roughly 38 confirmed ISIS attacks in northeastern Syria. However, roughly 19 attacks occurred in the region between 2017 and 2018. Therefore, security efforts in Al-Hol are correlated with a 19-attack increase in the number of confirmed terrorist incidents (Global Terrorism Database, 2022b). However, researchers hypothesize that foreign military interventions increase feelings of resentment, motivating non-state militant organizations to “strike back” through terrorist attacks. Piazza and Choi demonstrated that countries that engaged in foreign military interventions experience more transnational terrorist attacks than those who do not engage in military operations (Piazza & Choi, 2018). Since transnational attacks were a measure of radicalization, it is reasonable to assume that military interventions in Al-Hol could increase radicalization amongst the refugees by increasing feelings of resentment toward governing institutions (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020). Therefore, this policy has low effectiveness by not mitigating any root causes of radicalization, and the change in the quantity of attacks is likely higher than what it would have been in the absence of military operations.

Political Feasibility

Overall, Alternative 4 ranks low on political feasibility as it has the support of only one out of the four stakeholders analyzed.

1. President Biden - On February 3, 2022, President Biden applauded the efforts of the U.S. military in removing the global leader of ISIS, indicating support for direct military operations to counter the terrorist group (Biden, 2022b). However, in July 2022, the president indicated support for military operations that did not involve the deployment of U.S. troops (The White House, 2022). Since this alternative emphasizes capacity building efforts for the SDF instead of direct use of the U.S. military, President Biden is likely to support this alternative.
2. State Department Leadership - In April 2021, the State Department stated that “maintaining security in and around Al-Hol remains essential to safeguarding innocent civilians that live there, including thousands of young children, and facilitating humanitarian access. Security threats in Al-Hol, left unaddressed, will target and exploit vulnerable populations, many of whom are in the camp through no choice or fault of their own” (Seldin, 2021). However, leadership may be hesitant to allocate part of their budget to the Department of Defense, so it is unclear whether the State Department will support this alternative.
3. Congress - Democrats and Republicans in Congress both condemned the current treatment of detainees in Al-Hol. Senator Lindsay Graham (R-S.C.) and Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) planned to introduce a bill in September 2022 to appoint a senior coordinator for Al-Hol policy issues and to make it policy for the U.S. to repatriate camp residents. Shaheen also pushed to establish an ISIS detainee coordinator in the 2020 defense policy bill, but the mandate for the position expired in 2021 (Politico, 2022). However, a report in the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) expressed



concern “about threats from Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) detainees held in partner-run detention facilities” after the February 2022 attack on a detention center in Hasakah, Syria (Humud, 2022). Therefore, Congress is unlikely to support this policy without safeguards to ensure proper treatment of detainees and repatriation of foreign nationals.

4. Syrian Democratic Forces - In June 2022, an SDF official stated that a Turkish invasion of Syria could cause the group to pause ISIS operations (Vugteveen & Farrell-Molloy, 2022). With Turkish aggression increasing in the region, the political arm of the SDF wrote a letter to President Biden calling on the U.S. to stop the violence (Seligman, 2022). Therefore, the SDF would prefer increased military aid to deter Turkey, so they are unlikely to support this policy option.

Potential for Repatriation

Since 2019, the international community has repatriated roughly 2,525 refugees (Rights and Security International, 2023). In November 2019, there were roughly 68,744 individuals in the camp (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019). Therefore, roughly 3.7% of the camp’s population was repatriated since responsibility for security in Al-Hol shifted to the SDF in 2019 (See Appendix B).

Cost-Effectiveness

For this option, the State Department should request \$23 million in the FY2025 budget. In 2022, the international community repatriated 589 individuals (Rights and Security International, 2023). If we assume that the same number of individuals will be repatriated in 2025, then this option would cost \$39,049.24 per repatriation (See Appendix B).

Outcomes Matrix

	Status Quo	Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center	Increase Access to Education	Increase Camp Security
Effectiveness	Low	Medium	Medium	Low
Political Feasibility	Low	Medium	High	Low
Potential for Repatriation	3.6%	28.5%	3.7%	3.7%
Cost-Effectiveness	\$515,055.47 per repatriation	\$7,929.32 per repatriation	\$78,926.71 per repatriation	\$39,049.24 per repatriation



Recommendation

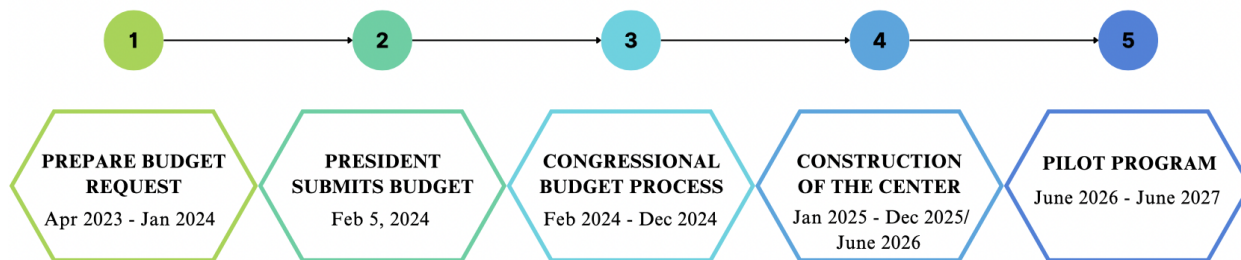
Based on the analysis of the proposed policy alternatives, I recommend that the Office of Countering Violent Extremism pursue Alternative 2, establishing a rehabilitation and reintegration center in Al-Hol. Both the proposed recommendation and Alternative 3 have the highest efficacy in preventing radicalization as they target two root causes of radicalization in refugee camps, while the other two alternatives only mitigate one root cause. Alternative 3 does rank the highest in political feasibility through its appeal to three out of four analyzed stakeholder groups. Therefore, a tradeoff of this recommendation is that it does not have the same support from Congress as Alternative 3 does. Despite this, the recommendation most closely aligns with the goals of the Biden administration by having the highest potential for repatriation. Even though this score was based on completion rates from a Somalian rehabilitation and reintegration center, the results can be generalized to repatriation in Al-Hol as both deal with the successful return of individuals to their home communities. Alternative 2 also is the most cost effective option, requiring the least amount of money per repatriation. The Status Quo option is extremely ineffective in terms of cost per repatriation as the U.S. government spent roughly \$1.3 billion to counter ISIS in Syria, but the benefit of repatriation was not sustained throughout the entirety of policy implementation. For Alternatives 3 and 4, the benefits of repatriation were present throughout the entirety of both policies. However, both options are significantly more expensive than the recommended option. Therefore, establishing a rehabilitation and reintegration center is the best policy for preventing radicalization and ensuring repatriation for the lowest cost possible.



Implementation

To begin the implementation of this policy, the Office of Countering Violent Extremism must coordinate with the Bureau of International Organizations to request \$4.61 million to be allocated to the United Nations for the construction and staffing of the Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center. Since the funds are going to the UN, they should be included under the line item for “Contributions to International Organizations” in the FY2025 budget request. The FY2024 Budget Request for this line item was roughly \$1.7 billion, so this request represents only 0.3% of the total funds (U.S. Department of State & USAID, 2023; See Appendix B). It will be essential to gain the support of the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Organizations Michele J. Sison to ensure the appropriate funding is requested. Once the FY2025 Budget Request for the Department of State, Foreign Aid Operations, and Related Programs is finalized, it will be included in the President’s FY2025 budget. The President’s Budget will be due to Congress on February 5, 2024. Fiscal Year 2025 will begin on October 1, 2024, but the budget may not get approved until the beginning of 2025. After Congress approves the federal budget, the \$4.61 million will be sent to the UN. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will negotiate with the SDF to procure the needed materials for the center and to construct the building. Construction will then occur for 12 to 18 months, and UN officials will then launch a year long pilot program to determine the center’s efficacy in disengaging former combatants and encouraging repatriation. The coalition of SDF and American forces will be responsible for identifying ISIS sympathizers and operatives to be enrolled in the program, and the pilot program will support 50 women and children. If the program is successful, future programs will involve 100 participants. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT) will be responsible for implementing and staffing the program in consultation with the Office of Countering Violent Extremism.

Figure 5: Proposed Implementation Timeline



Implementation Challenges

- 1. Failed Appropriation of Funds** - Congress has the final approval over how much money will be appropriated to implement this policy alternative, so funding may be decreased or cut during this stage of implementation. State Department officials may be called to testify at hearings to justify funding for this policy option, so the Office of Countering Violent Extremism should prepare to provide persuasive responses to these requests to ensure full appropriation of funds.



2. **Access Constraints:** In response to the earthquakes on February 6, 2023, President Asad authorized the UN to deliver aid through the Bab al Salam and the Al Ra'ee border crossings. However, only one border crossing was available for use prior to the earthquakes, so it is possible that the Assad regime reduces the number of authorized entry points in the future (Congressional Research Service, 2023).
3. **Lack of Compliance:** After transfer from the living quarters to the center, participants may be unwilling to comply with the rehabilitation and reintegration curriculum. If compliance with the program is low amongst participants, then completion rates for the program would decrease. This would negatively impact repatriation efforts. To increase compliance amongst participants, the center should include staff of similar ethnicity, gender, and religious background to the program's participants (Gyte et al., 2020).

Impact on Stakeholders

1. **The Syrian Democratic Forces** will be primarily responsible for securing the center, with the State Department and UN aiding in designing the rehabilitation curriculum and hiring appropriate staff. In June 2022, an SDF official stated that a Turkish invasion of Syria could cause the group to pause ISIS operations (Vugteveen & Farrell-Molloy, 2022). Some Turkish attacks even targeted Al-Hol resulting in the deaths of seven security officials and the escape of six foreign detainees. General Abdi of the SDF stated the attacks would negatively impact his forces' ability to hold the camp (BBC News, 2022). Therefore, the SDF may not have the resources needed to secure the center. The State Department can mitigate this resistance by coordinating with members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to address the short-term security needs for the center if the SDF shifts their attention to Turkey. Therefore, the Office of Countering Violent Extremism needs to partner with the Office of the Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in the Counterterrorism Bureau to gain the support of the coalition members.
2. **Staff** in the center may feel concerned about their safety, limiting the available candidate pool. In January 2022, an armed individual entered a health facility in Al-Hol and killed an aid worker. Between 2021 and 2022, the United Nations received reports of 90 murders of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Al-Hol, including two aid workers (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022). To overcome this possible resistance from staff members, the State Department can coordinate with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and the Syrian Democratic Forces to increase security in the center.
3. **Refugees in Al-Hol** may feel a loss of autonomy as the center will be mandatory for women and children who are identified as ISIS sympathizers or operatives. This could potentially limit their compliance with the rehabilitation program, preventing successful disengagement from extremist ideologies. Unfortunately, there is little the State Department can do to address the resistance surrounding the loss of autonomy, but they can ensure that the staff members in the center are members of the countries of origin for the program participants. *The Hedayah Blueprint of a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center* recommends assigning personal case managers who have similar genders, ethnicities, languages, and religious backgrounds to their clients to increase compliance (Gyte et al., 2020).



Worst Case Scenario Analysis

The worst-case scenario is that ISIS successfully reconstitutes their forces and takes over the Al-Hol camp. In early 2022, operatives attacked the Ghweiran prison to free affiliated individuals, and in September 2022, an ISIS cell attempted a suicide attack in Al-Hol (Margolin, 2022). These attacks are evidence of a broader trend of increased ISIS activity in northeast Syria, indicating that a potential resurgence is likely. With SDF forces preoccupied with a possible Turkish invasion, the likelihood of this outcome is even higher. To address these concerns, the State Department should establish a rehabilitation and reintegration center in Al-Hol to decrease the prevalence of extremist ideology in the camp and to encourage countries to repatriate their citizens.

Conclusion

The Al-Hol camp is home to 56,000 refugees, most of whom are children (Yacoubian, 2022). Many children have spent their entire lives in the camp, severely damaging their hope for the future. According to Nathalie Nyamukeba, a clinical psychologist with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), “they're living in a camp where there is no hope, no education, where they don't know what will happen tomorrow. They live amid fear and violence every day” (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2023). As a result, these children are extremely vulnerable to ISIS ideology. The poor and crowded living conditions, restrictions on movement, and lack of access to healthcare and education in the Al-Hol camp further increase their risk of radicalization (Kuznar, Jafri, & Kuznar, 2020; Martin-Ray, 2011). If enough children in the camp accept terrorism, then ISIS can re-establish a caliphate. The State Department can strengthen children’s resiliency against extremist ideologies and to aid them in returning to their home communities. This report proposed four policy alternatives to achieve these goals: maintaining current U.S. policy of humanitarian and stabilization assistance, establish a rehabilitation and reintegration center in Al-Hol, increase access to education, and improve camp security from internal and external threats. After analyzing each policy option on its effectiveness in preventing radicalization, political feasibility, potential for repatriation, and cost-effectiveness, the report recommends establishing a rehabilitation and reintegration center. This option will both prevent the spread of ISIS ideology and empower children to secure a better future for themselves. The center is the most effective in preventing radicalization by directly addressing two root causes of radicalization. It also has the highest potential for repatriation and requires the least amount of spending per repatriation. To implement this recommendation, the Office of Countering Violent Extremism should coordinate with the Bureau of International Organizations to request and allocate the necessary funds to the United Nations for the construction and administration of the center. This option was proven effective in disengaging former combatants in other countries, but this policy needs to be tested through a pilot program in northeast Syria before expanding to everyone in the camp. It is the hope of this author that this report serves to support current and future rehabilitation and reintegration efforts and encourages the repatriation of refugees.



Appendix

Appendix A: Rubric for Evaluative Criteria

	High	Medium	Low
Effectiveness	The option directly address 3 or more root causes of radicalization, so the estimated change in attacks is likely less than what it would be without the policy	Directly addresses 2 root causes of radicalization, so the estimated change in attacks is likely a little less than what it would be without the policy	Directly addresses 1 root cause of radicalization or does not address any root causes, so the estimated change in attacks is likely more than what it would be without the policy
Political Feasibility	3 or more stakeholder groups are likely to accept the policy option	2 stakeholder groups are likely to accept the policy option	0 to 1 stakeholder groups are likely to accept the policy option

Disclaimer for effectiveness criterion: the available data does not allow me to estimate a counterfactual, preventing me from making a causal claim regarding if each policy option reduced the number of confirmed attacks. Therefore, the discussion of change in the quantity of attacks is a correlational relationship. To strengthen my analysis, I am using existing literature on the root causes of radicalization to predict what the counterfactual would have been.



Appendix B: Relevant Calculations

Alternative 1: Status Quo

Effectiveness Analysis

In 2013 and 2014, there were roughly 50 attacks in northeast Syria. In 2015 and 2016, there were roughly 70 confirmed ISIS attacks in the region.

$$70 \text{ attacks} - 50 \text{ attacks} = 20 \text{ attack increase}$$

Potential for Repatriation Analysis

$$2524 \text{ repatriations} \div 70582 \text{ refugees in Al-Hol} = 0.0357 \approx 3.6\%$$

Cost Effectiveness Analysis

$$\text{\$1.3 billion} \div 2524 \text{ repatriations} = \text{\$515055.47 per repatriation}$$

Alternative 2: Establish a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center in Al-Hol

Conversion of pounds to dollars using an exchange rate of 1 GBP = 1.246015 USD Apr 05, 2023 20:54 UTC (Forbes Advisor, 2023)

$$\text{£3.7 million} \times 1.246015 = \text{\$4610255.50} \approx \text{\$4.61 million}$$

Inflation adjustment using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)

CPI Inflation Calculator

\$

in

has the same buying power as

in

Effectiveness Analysis

Roughly 2 years before the center opened, there were about 61 confirmed terrorist incidents committed by Al-Shabaab. In the two years after the center opened, there were 367 confirmed incidents by Al-Shabaab.

$$367 \text{ attacks} - 61 \text{ attacks} = 306 \text{ attack increase}$$

Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

$$\text{\$5376078.71} \div 678 \text{ repatriations} = \text{\$7929.32 per repatriation}$$



Potential for Repatriation Analysis

$259 \text{ successful reintegrations} \div 529 \text{ total participants} = 48.96\% \approx 49\%$
 $40000 \text{ ISIS sympathizers in Al-Hol} \times 49\% \text{ program repatriation rate} = 19,600 \text{ repatriations}$
 $19600 \text{ repatriations} \div 68744 \text{ refugees in Al-Hol} = 0.285 \approx 28.5\%$

Alternative 3: Increase Access to Education

Number of school-aged children in Al-Hol

$56000 \text{ refugees in Al-Hol} \times 70\% \text{ under the age of 18} = 39200 \text{ school-aged children}$

Number of children educated in 25 learning centers

$5500 \text{ children} \div 3 \text{ learning centers} = 1,834 \text{ children per learning center}$
 $1,834 \text{ children per learning center} \times 25 \text{ learning centers} = 45,850 \text{ educated children}$

Effectiveness Analysis

Between 2017 and 2018, there were roughly 19 confirmed terrorist incidents perpetrated by ISIS in northeast Syria. In 2019 and 2020, there were roughly 38 confirmed incidents in the area.

$38 \text{ attacks} - 19 \text{ attacks} = 19 \text{ attack increase}$

Potential for Repatriation Analysis

$2524 \text{ repatriations} \div 68744 \text{ refugees in Al-Hol} = 0.0367 \approx 3.7\%$

Inflation adjustment using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)

Cost of 1 year of education for 1 refugee

CPI Inflation Calculator

\$

in

has the same buying power as

in

Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

$\$650.34 \text{ per refugee} \times 39200 \text{ school aged children} = \$25,493,328 \text{ per year for education}$
 $\$25,493,328 \text{ per year for education} \div 323 \text{ repatriations} = \$78926.71 \text{ per repatriation}$

Alternative 4: Increase Camp Security from Internal and External Threats

Effectiveness Analysis

Since 2019, there have been roughly 38 confirmed ISIS attacks in northeastern Syria. However, roughly 19 attacks occurred in the region between 2017 and 2018

$38 \text{ attacks} - 19 \text{ attacks} = 19 \text{ attack increase}$



Potential for Repatriation Analysis

$$2524 \text{ repatriations} \div 68744 \text{ refugees in Al-Hol} = 0.0367 \approx 3.7\%$$

Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

$$\text{\$23 million} \div 589 \text{ repatriations} = \text{\$39,049.24 per repatriation}$$

Implementation Calculations

Comparison of level of funding for the recommendation to the total funding requested for international organizations for FY2024

$$\text{\$4.61 million} \div \text{\$1,703,881,000} = 0.0027 \approx 0.3\%$$

Appendix C: List of Figures

- Figure 1: Population Breakdown by Age and Gender (December 2021)
- Figure 2: Map of Northeast Syria and the Al-Hol Camp
- Figure 3: Areas of Influence in Syria
- Figure 4: Population Breakdown of Al-Hol
- Figure 5: Proposed Implementation Timeline



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