**Aiding Lebanon with Its Refugee Crisis**

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The United States has a population of about 323 million people.⁠1 Now imagine if 64 million of those 323 million people were poor Syrian refugees. Many people probably can’t imagine how that would impact their lives and the nation. However, Lebanon is living that situation right at this very moment. The United States should aid Lebanon with its Syrian refugee crisis with monetary aid, training, and intelligence.

Lebanon cannot cope with the number of Syrian refugees that have flooded in since the start of the Syrian Civil War. There are 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon.⁠2 In addition, Lebanon is already buckling under the weight of 500,000 Palestinian refugees.⁠3 So the total number of refugees in Lebanon is 2 million in a country of 4 million.⁠4 To compare these numbers with the United States, that is the equivalent of 170 million refugees flooding into the U.S. These would be 170 million people living in abject poverty, in makeshift huts and shelters, scattered all over the place.⁠5 Meanwhile, the United States has accepted just 2,174 Syrian refugees since 2012.⁠6 That’s only about 0.0007% of the U.S. population. The scale of what is happening in Lebanon is unheard of elsewhere. According to the UNHCR, Lebanon has the highest per capita number of displaced people, more than double the next nine countries combined!⁠7 Lebanon’s infrastructure was already strained before this massive influx of refugees. For example, in 2012, electricity consumption exceeded 2,400 MW during the day, but the government only produced 1,500 MW.⁠8 The difference is made up for with rolling blackouts and private generators. Also, in 2012, 27% of the population was living in poverty.⁠9 Now, with 1.5 million new Syrian refugees, it is a wonder how a country that can’t even provide basic utilities for its own citizens, manages to function. When it comes to children, the situation is even worse. There are 250,000 Lebanese children in the public school system, but there are 450,000 Syrian refugee children needing education.⁠10 Somehow, Lebanon has powered through and opened its doors. Lebanon currently educates 200,000 Syrian refugee children through a double-shift system.⁠11 This means that there are two school days in one day, so that one school can accommodate double the amount of children. Lebanon plans to accommodate all 450,000 children by the end of the 2016-2017 schoolyear, but desperately needs funds to accomplish this.⁠12 Lebanon is already drowning in debt and as mentioned before, can’t even provide basic electricity services to its people, much less triple the size of its school system on its own. Lebanon wants to provide healthcare, education, and shelter from war until the Syrian refugees can go back, but cannot do so without the help of wealthier nations like the United States. As Khalid Ibo, an 11-year-old Syrian refugee, puts it, “It’s better here, because we’re not being bombed.”⁠13 From a humanitarian perspective, the United States should feel obliged to help Khalid Ibo and others like him to weather out the deadly storm that has fallen upon Syria and stayed there for the last 5 years.

The United States should also aid Lebanon with its refugee crisis because it is in its best interests to do so. First, there is the issue of terrorism. When children are out of school, or when they live in such abject poverty, they are easy targets for organizations like ISIS to come in and recruit or to use as child labor.⁠14 Famously demonstrated by the Paris attacks, terrorists can travel from the Middle East easily to strike the Western world. By allowing millions of Syrians to wallow in horrible conditions, the U.S. creates a breeding ground for future terrorists. For example, the Free Syrian Army, the U.S.-backed rebel group, only pays its fighters $100 a month. Al-Nusra, a terror group, pays its fighters between $300 and $400 each month, making the choice of organization clear for any young man in poverty.⁠15 The effects can be seen partly in the consistent bombings and attacks by ISIS and its affiliates as part of the spillover of the Syrian Civil War into Lebanon.⁠16 Aid to Lebanon doesn’t have to just be monetary. Aid could include security personnel to advise and train the Lebanese government on how to prevent terrorism from taking root in an already fractured country and threatening the Western world. Second, it is in the United States’ best interests to relieve some pressure off of its European partners. As previously mentioned, the United States has accepted just 2,174 Syrian refugees since 2012. Meanwhile, European countries have received over a million asylum applications since the start of the war.⁠17 Germany alone expects to spend 50 billion euros on Syrian refugees in 2016.⁠18 By aiding Lebanon with its refugee crisis, the United States will make Lebanon a more habitable place for refugees, reducing the number of refugees that feel the need to flee to Europe. The U.S. will also be able to deflect international criticism alleging that it has not taken its fair share of burden in helping those fleeing Syria.

In conclusion, the United States must aid Lebanon with its Syrian refugee crisis from a humanitarian and moral perspective, as well as a self-interest perspective. Lebanon, a country already fractured and in disarray, could buckle completely at any moment due to the strain placed upon it from 1.5 million new Syrian refugees. Morally, the United States, as a very wealthy country, should feel obliged to help the people who have gone through the worst the world has to offer. In addition, from a self-interest perspective, the United States should work to prevent Lebanon from becoming too great of a terrorist breeding ground, and should work to relieve pressure off of its European partners. Khalid Ibo and others like him don’t want to join a terror group. They don’t want to starve. They don’t want to not go to school. They want to have a normal life just like you. The United States must work to make that happen.

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10 Ibid.

11 CNN, "Interview with Italian Prime."

12 Ibid.

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