



Trump highlights a North Korean refugee and his own stunning hypocrisy

Sasha Chanoff

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President Trump last week used his State of the Union Address to highlight the plight of Ji Seong Ho, a refugee from North Korea who now lives in Seoul. His quest for freedom, Trump said, is “an inspiration to us all.”

As the executive director of RefugePoint, an agency that works with the State Department to help fulfill the annual refugee resettlement ceiling, I am happy that Ji is safe. But the president's hypocrisy in holding up this case as an example of American virtue is as startling as it is unbearable.

We in the humanitarian and refugee world are painfully aware of the cruelty of this administration's refugee policies, cruelty that disgraces us in the eyes of the world and, more significant, in our own eyes. I am intimately familiar with many other refugees who suffered torture at the hands of their own governments and unspeakable violence, and on whom we have senselessly slammed the door shut.

Most of us know of the Yazidis, victims of ISIS genocide, whose girls and women have been rounded up to serve as sex slaves. But do most know that only three Yazidi refugees were resettled to the USA in the last four months? Does that cruel fact “inspire” us? Do we know that even a tiny fraction of the most vulnerable are being denied the chance to rebuild their lives here and contribute to our own nation?

Trump has reduced the 2018 resettlement ceiling to 45,000, the lowest in modern history. This number should be easy to reach since on average, we have brought in nearly 90,000 annually since the 1980 Refugee Act. The pipeline of fully vetted refugees is full, and Congress has already allocated the necessary resources.

Yet it doesn't look like the president wants to uphold even his limited yet critically important commitment. In the first quarter of this fiscal year (which started last Oct. 1), 5,323 refugees arrived. At this rate, we won't even reach half of the 45,000 ceiling.

The administration's efforts to impose various travel bans have dramatically limited this lifesaving program. At the same time, leadership staff at the State Department who have helped our country reach previous presidential ceilings are being sidelined.

The president has touted security and jobs for Americans as reasons to limit refugees and immigrants. But his own words — seeking “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering

the United States” and reportedly saying of Africa that he doesn’t want people from "shithole" countries coming to the U.S. — suggest more malignant motivations.

Dismantling this global flagship program has significant self-destructive consequences.

Officials in Trump’s own Defense Department argued for a higher 2018 resettlement ceiling. Leading Republican security advisers highlight the importance of resettlement as a tool to promote national interests.

The risk of an American being killed by a refugee terrorist is one in 3.64 billion a year, according to the Cato Institute. Before refugees arrive, they go through strict vetting that takes an average of 18 months to 24 months.

Our own government found that refugees contribute \$63 billion more to the economy than they take in services. Muslim refugees and immigrants contribute immeasurably to our country through science, medicine, entrepreneurship and in countless other ways. Yet we want to ban Muslims?

Only 13% of refugees who have resettled to the U.S. in the last four months are Muslims, compared with nearly 50% in 2016. Access to our resettlement program is shamefully no longer fair or equitable. This is a gift to terrorist organizations that use American anti-Muslim sentiment to bolster recruitment.

Given other outrages against immigrants — ending “temporary protected status” for El Salvadorans and Haitians and threatening the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which protects some undocumented immigrants from deportation — perhaps it’s not surprising that Trump is dismantling the resettlement program. But it makes no sense. And it’s beyond the pale to highlight Ji’s freedom while callously rejecting so many who deserve refuge.

America stands on the shoulders of countless refugees (my own great-grandparents among them), those pioneering first-generation leaders of our families whose grit, will, determination, creativity and perseverance saw their offspring succeed and America bettered. The refugee spirit renews us. Scorning and denying refugees shames us.

We must ensure the viability of this program. Doing so enables us to wield our might more effectively to further democracy, justice, peace and freedom. Our decisions about saving deserving and desperately endangered lives, such as those of the Yazidis and torture survivors, will mark us as decent people — and a decent nation — or not. If we wish to increase our security and demonstrate our essential morality, we will hold President Trump to his promise of resettling 45,000 refugees.