



Slashing refugee admissions would be tragic and irrational

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As someone who leads an organization working in refugee crises around the world to help those in greatest peril, I know what's true and what's not about these matters.

It is simply not true that refugees are a security threat and therefore need to be kept out of America. Yet this fiction may influence President Trump to slash the resettlement admissions number to the lowest in decades, a decision he will make in the coming days.

The Cato Institute estimates that the chance of an American being killed by a refugee terrorist is one in 3.64 billion.

Less than 1% of the world's refugees have a chance to resettle to America, and those who do are hand picked and go through an average of up to two years of extreme vetting by multiple national security agencies.

Both the Bush and Obama administrations took steps to increase security measures and did so while maintaining a robust resettlement program. We don't have to shut refugees out to keep ourselves safe.

Republican and Democratic presidents have on average kept the annual resettlement admission ceiling above 95,000 over the past few decades.

Trump should set next year's ceiling at a minimum of 75,000, a number in line with admissions over the past few years, and the very least we can do in the face of an unprecedented global refugee crisis with more than 22.5 million refugees.

Many lives hang in the balance with this decision.

Take Emad Tamo, a boy from northern Iraq who is a Yazidi, a religious minority that the Islamic State has targeted for genocide and slavery. The Islamic State captured Emad when he was 9 years old and enslaved him and other family members. With the Iraqi army's recent liberation of Mosul, Emad managed to escape. He was wounded, traumatized and desperate. Canada had already resettled Emad's mother and that's where we helped him to resettle and reunite with her.

Our staff person in northern Iraq has met with many other Yazidi children who have faced similar unspeakable hardships, but the Islamic State has killed their parents. We also have child protection experts working with orphaned and unaccompanied children in Africa and with

Rohingya Muslim children in Malaysia. Some are pre-teen girls whom traffickers have captured, or who are threatened with forced marriage, or who face sexual abuse and slavery.

While there are 37 countries that actively take in refugees, the U.S. is the only one that includes a special program for unaccompanied minors. Some of these urgent cases were in the U.S. resettlement process, but are now on hold due to Trump's travel ban. If the U.S. resettlement program is slashed they will likely be shut out permanently.

Maintaining our resettlement program is not only the right thing to do for those few refugees who have no other options for safe survival, it's also good for our economy. A new study by the Department of Health and Human Services found that refugees brought in \$63 billion more in government revenue over the past decade than they cost. Refugee entrepreneurs also start businesses, create jobs and rejuvenate depressed city centers.

Leading Republican and Democratic national security advisers also support resettlement, writing in a 2015 letter to Congress that "resettlement initiatives help advance U.S. national security interests by supporting the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees."

During the Cold War we resettled over 200,000 refugees in one year who were threatened by communist regimes. Resettlement today is still a unique tool to support those who fight against or are threatened by our enemies, including Iraqis who risked their lives for U.S. troops and are now waiting for us to make good on our promise to get them out of danger.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., writes that, "Depriving the oppressed of a beacon of hope could lose us the world we have built and thrived in. It could cost our reputation in history as the nation distinct from all others in our achievements, our identity and our enduring influence on mankind."

Slashing the program would damage it for years to come and be like shooting ourselves in the foot.

Resettlement is perhaps the only chance for a small percentage of refugee children and select others. We cannot turn our backs on them. We must not throw away the proudest of our traditions and a unique tool to save lives and advance freedom, justice, our own self-interest, and global leadership.