

# NORTHWEST ARKANSAS Democrat Gazette

## A difficult journey

*U.S. approach on refugees on rocky ground*

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With a crash of a car into a crowd of people followed by a knife attack, the man who momentarily brought terror to the campus of Ohio State University helped set back earnest efforts of some Americans to embrace refugees from tumult-filled nations.

The attacker's name was Abdul. Whatever names followed wasn't important, at least in the minds of those who view refugees more for their potential to inflict harm than for this nation's capacity to serve as a refuge from it.

What's the point?

United States policy on refugee resettlements must be informed, but not thwarted, by the risks for terrorism demonstrated recently by the attack at Ohio State University.

But his full name was Abdul Razak Ali Ratan. He worked at Home Depot. He was a refugee from Somalia, and he was a Muslim. He was also 18 years old. He spent several years in Pakistan but became a permanent U.S. resident after his arrival in 2014.

He was one man, not a "cell" of terrorists implanted to wreak havoc. He wasn't on anyone's terrorism radar, but according to news reports, he increasingly decried the United States' supposed involvement in the oppression of Muslims.

On Facebook, Ratan blasted the United States for "interfering" with other countries, especially those of Muslim majorities. "We are not weak. We are not weak. Remember that," he wrote.

He had been "vetted" and deemed suitable for relocation into the United States. Law enforcement authorities says Ratan was "radicalized" after he got to this nation with the help of so-called Jihadist material online.

This man, we know now, was a time bomb that no vetting process was capable of spotting. With thousands of refugees flowing into the United States every year -- with some advocates wanting more -- it's clear Ratan was an exception, not the rule. And yet when the one spills American blood on U.S. soil, in the country that welcomed him, it can surprise no one when Americans get

antsy about the entire process of refugee resettlement, particularly from Muslim areas known as terrorist recruitment hotbeds.

The nation and its people face enough threats, the theory goes, without putting out a welcome mat that creates more. It's hard to accept the mathematical certainties that roller coasters are safe right after a rider has met his death on one. Asking the nation to embrace refugees after Ohio State is a monumental task.

There are advocates who expect just that. Canopy Northwest Arkansas hopes to resettle about 100 refugees to this region over the next year. To their credit, the group of local residents have worked hard to clear the path for resettlement for people fleeing violence and political or religious persecution. According to the Cato Institute, the odds of being killed by a refugee in the United States is about one in 3.6 billion. The odds of winning the Powerball grand prize are better than that. How many of us have gotten rich picking those numbers?

And yet one wonders whether such figures can build a compelling case against the emotional, gut reaction to witnessing a man run his car into bystanders, then slashing violently at people who descended on his wrecked car to make sure he was all right.

The question isn't whether an Islam-inspired radical will attack Americans. That's already been answered. The question really is the extent to which Americans are willing to welcome the vast, vast majority of refugees who will live peacefully knowing the open door increases the likelihood of importing a terrorist or someone whose experiences make them ripe for radicalization.

Why are Native Americans and others protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline? After all, the vast, vast majority of oil flowing through those pipes will safely make its journey, aiding the nation's production of energy. But protesters make the same argument as those who oppose refugees: The risk of a spill (oil? blood?) is too great even taking into account the benefits of a steady flow.

Resolving these tensions will not be easy or quick, but it's important Americans maintain some perspective. For every refugee who has committed a jihadist-style attack, how many more home-grown killers have committed atrocities? Dylan Roof was "radicalized" by a different set of ideas before that awful, murderous spree in a Charleston, N.C., church. Are all Christians to be evaluated through the lens created by Eric Rudolph, the man who set off a bomb at Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta as part of his campaign against abortion and homosexuals?

The dangers inherent in the refugee resettlement question can be wildly overblown but also easily underestimated in a drive to help other humans' suffering. At this point in history, the only certainty is it's a difficult balancing act. Can the United States formulate an approach that delivers relief to refugees and security to Americans?

Because of who we are and aspire to be, the difficult answer is this: We have to keep trying.