

# The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Moral and Ethical Obligation of Resettlement or “I’ll Pass on the Poisoned Skittles”

*by Joel D. Funk*

What are the relationships between the migration of refugees and conflict? The conventional logic presumes that demographic factors and how they interact with resources are potential causes of conflict. To survive, all creatures seek to acquire food, water, and territory. Where those needs are not met for the individual and subsequently the group, conflict is assured. Additional system stresses, such as rivalry, environmental factors, and resource depletion, will eventually lead to violent conflict if the system is not balanced. Resources within a complex and multilayered system, such as humanity, are not just real but also symbolic and ethereal. Capital, purchasing power, education, personal-integrity rights, healthcare, political power, and social mobility are a few aspects of modern society that frame social stability and security. Understanding the causes, implications, and remedies for refugee crises is of utmost importance especially within Syria.

The civil war in Syria is the worst humanitarian disaster of our time. The conflict has its roots in the Arab Spring and the subsequent attempt to oust the autocratic regime of Bashar al-Assad from power. Starting in March 2011, the war is now in its sixth year.<sup>1</sup> It has destabilized the region and brought untold human suffering to the civilian populace. The most current data has the death toll at 470,000, the externally displaced diaspora at 4,900,000, and the internally-displaced population at 6,300,000,<sup>2</sup> which equates to 11,670,000, over half the pre-war Syrian population of 22,000,000.<sup>3</sup> Almost twice as many Syrians are dead or displaced now as the total number of Jews that were exterminated by the Nazi regime during World War II.<sup>4</sup>

The conflict has emboldened religious extremist organizations, most notably Daesh (also known as the Islamic State [IS], the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS], and the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant [ISIL]) and allowed them to maneuver freely and expand. The war pits the policies and strategic objectives of the U.S. against those of Russia, and allows the two regional powers

**Major Joel D. Funk is the Group Aviation Officer for 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). He earned a B.A. in Political Science (International Relations and Military Affairs) and a B.A. in Modern Languages (German) from The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina and a Master of Arts in Security Studies from Kansas State University.**

of Iran and Saudi Arabia to use the conflict as a proxy war for regional hegemony.<sup>5</sup> Global trade markets have been affected; flagrant human rights violations have been committed; and no reasonable end is in sight. The international community is at odds with itself. Sensible and rational people argue over various means of involvement, engagement, and conflict resolution. The forced migration of millions of people attempting to flee the threat of bodily harm, human-rights violations, enslavement, and death is not just a regional destabilizing force and an ethical catastrophe, but a global

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blight of instability and a breeding ground for devolutionary societal constructs and liberties.

Building on the research and findings of Idean Salehyan with regards to refugees as a cause of conflict, this paper proposes that migration is not causal with regards to conflict outside of neighboring states and that migration and resettlement can be used as an effective tool to reduce regional instability, conflict duration, and human suffering. In developed countries, such as the U.S., where immigration now accounts for more than a third of the annual population increase, immigration of refugees is not just a good tool to reduce conflict in destabilized regions of the world but essential to economic, social, and human-capital recruitment and development.

Salehyan's work focuses exclusively on refugee crises and forced migration patterns. He states that there are four main causes of conflict or friction with regards to refugees:

1. Refugee migration can inflict an economic burden on host countries.
2. Refugees may entail negative public health consequences for their host countries.
3. Refugees may upset the ethnic balance in their host countries through what may be thought of as a "demographic" externality.
4. Refugee flows may directly affect the security and stability of the host country by contributing to organized armed conflict on the host's territory.<sup>6</sup>

Along with the refugees themselves, foreign fighters, arms, and ideologies that contribute to violence may stream across the border.

The wars in Iraq and Syria provide support to this argument. The available water supply in Syria was halved in the last decade in large part due to state mismanagement but also the absorption of approximately 1.5 million Iraqi refugees starting in 2004. The population's liberties were restricted, essential services were limited, upward mobility was practically nonexistent, and the state was failing to respond to the needs of the people.<sup>7</sup> The conflict in Syria has spilled over and destabilized its neighbor Turkey now as well. Turkey's negative attitude toward the Syrian regime and its support to radical Sunni Islamists groups fighting against the Assad regime in Syria has also had a disturbing influence on the environment of its southern population centers:

Following the outbreak of war in Syria, Turkey was overwhelmed by an influx of refugees. The inadequacy of the support offered by Turkey to the refugees and the changes occurring in city life stemming from the waves of new arrivals, which have brought about feelings of unease among the local people, have paved the way for the exclusion of the refugees by the local people. The local inhabitants, who perceive these people as a threat to the security of their environment, have taken a hostile stance against them.<sup>8</sup>

Salehyan dissects the factors and variables that are tied to a refugee population and explains how those factors and not the actual refugees themselves are the cause for conflict:

Both refugee-sending and refugee-receiving states are more likely to initiate militarized disputes. More generally, the issues and actors in civil wars frequently span national boundaries and become part of a regional security nexus, blurring firm distinctions between domestic and international conflict.”<sup>9</sup>

Although Salehyan finds the refugee-producing states and refugee-receiving states might engage in conflict to stop refugees from entering their country, he notes “that while refugee flows may raise the probability of international conflict, not all refugee crises lead to an escalation of violence, and future research should take into account how policy responses can mitigate potential security risks.”<sup>10</sup>

Salehyan also claims that hegemonic states have a duty to help stabilize refugee populations to ensure regional stability, but often they do not: “Yet, powerful countries— most notably the United States—have been reluctant to resettle refugees from these conflicts, even though this could relieve the burden on regional hosts.”<sup>11</sup> The resettlement of refugees by powerful, hegemonic, or developed states is not a new undertaking. Between 1975 and 1990, over 2.5 million refugees from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East gained residence in the First World.<sup>12</sup> He takes the criticism further by calling out apparent policy hypocrisy. The refusal of the U.S. to admit sizable numbers of refugees significantly contrasts with the approach taken after the Vietnam War, when large numbers of refugees were resettled to prevent regional destabilization:

In 1975, the United States responded to the influx of 130,000 refugees with an aggressive, targeted program and, through

the following years continued this initiative with selective programs that responded sporadic outflows of smaller groups. In 1979, the expanded U.S. commitment to resettle 14,000 refugees a month transformed the resettlement program from a relatively temporary program into a longer-term, institutionalized effort.<sup>13</sup>

This was not an easy undertaking and required effort, capital, and human resources, but the political will existed to execute the endeavor. As a result, roughly 750,000 refugees from Southeast Asia were resettled permanently in the U.S.<sup>14</sup> Similar resettlement efforts could significantly improve economic and security conditions in other volatile regions as well.<sup>15</sup> Forced migration and refugee crises occur disproportionately in the countries with the lowest standard of living and are prone to be caused by ethnic conflict.<sup>16</sup>

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Salehyan and Kristian Gleditsch detail a similar list of factors that can cause refugee populations to increase the probability of conflict:

Refugees can change the ethnic composition of the host state; exacerbate economic competition; bring with them arms, combatants, and ideologies that are conducive to violence; and mobilize opposition directed at their country of origin as well as their host country.”<sup>17</sup>

There is rampant evidence of this to be true within the Syrian refugee populations in states bordering Syria. “Among the refugees who do not stay in the camps, there are many who

are poor and will work for very little, and this has affected the locals who can no longer find work.”<sup>18</sup>

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Salehyan and Gleditsch argue that refugee populations can be causal with regards to regional violence clusters, which often is a result of conflict bleed over. This view puts a different perspective on the refugee/conflict relationship. They argue that conflicts do not just cause refugees, but that refugees can cause conflicts. “Thus, population movements are an important factor contributing to the regional clustering of violence and the diffusion of conflict.”<sup>19</sup> They do caution that the majority of refugees are not violent, do not seek violence, and do not engage in violence. “The vast majority of the world’s refugees never directly engage in political violence but are rather the unfortunate victims of it. Furthermore, most refugee hosts never experience armed violence.”<sup>20</sup>

The key distinction in their argument is that the key enabler of conflict with regards to refugee populations is the proximity of those refugees to their former host country:

We believe the most important factor in raising the risk of conflict is the presence of refugees from neighboring countries. Refugees from distant countries are less likely to have ethnic kin in the host country. They are also less likely to mobilize militarily, bring in arms, and concentrate in large numbers in particular areas. Accordingly, we do not expect the risk of civil war in the United States to be affected by the influx of refugees from Somalia, but Somali refugees could increase the risk of civil conflict in Ethiopia.<sup>21</sup>

Their analysis shows that a state’s probability of conflict both inter and intrastate increased from 3 percent to 10 percent when refugees were present.<sup>22</sup> They caution that although there is statistical correlation and arguable causation, the results are not earthshattering:

However, it is also clearly the case that the relationship between refugees and conflict is not a deterministic one. Although civil wars are more common in countries that are refugee recipients, the majority of cases in which a country hosts refugee populations are not violent.<sup>23</sup> We have shown that refugees from neighboring countries can increase the risk of intrastate conflict.<sup>24</sup>

Salehyan and Gleditsch also argue that turning away refugees is counterproductive:

Closing the border to refugees is, furthermore, likely to be a counterproductive response to refugee influxes. Despite the ethical problems with such an approach, restricting exit options, an alternative to fighting, may lead to the escalation of violence in neighboring states, which could yield even greater security risks.<sup>25</sup>

This paper builds upon these findings and looks at the effects of refugee migration outside their neighboring country and the effects on the gaining host country and analyzes and applies other cases of refugee migration and assimilation to dispel the common myth that refugees seamlessly merge into the multicultural melting pot of the U.S. My research indicates that refugee migration does cause friction, but it does not violate a tolerable level of violence. Evidence supports the positive impacts on host states that accept and assimilate refugee populations. This paper presents a coherent and logical argument that has policy implications with regards to accepting refugees.

## U.S. Historical Context and Lessons

The U.S. immigration and refugee policy is the product of two very different, engrained, and deeply-conflicting strands of American nationality identity. There exists a “‘cosmopolitan and democratic ideal of nationality,’ an optimism and faith in nation’s capacity for assimilation—a faith that remained fairly unshaken, at least through the early part of the nineteenth century.”<sup>26</sup> This view stands in stark contrast to the other view of American national identity commonly referred to as nativism, which is a belief that “...the important problems faced by the nation, and the threats to its survival and integrity, are not the result of internal causes, but of foreign influences from abroad.”<sup>27</sup>

This fear and loathing has been focused at many groups over the centuries to include communists, French Jacobins, anarchists, socialists, East Asians, Africans, Eastern Europeans, Italians, Germans, the Irish, Hispanics, and Muslims, just to name a few. There is hardly a demographic other than ethnically-pure Anglo-Saxons that at one point or another has not received widespread discrimination at the hands of nativists. Ironically, even Native Americans have suffered discrimination at the hands of nativists.

On the surface, it might appear that the migration of Germans to the U.S. seems devoid of the cultural incompatibility concerns that exist with modern Syrian refugees, but there are vast similarities. The German migrants were also refugees and were not a homogenous, docile, submissive, and easily assimilated people:

With the collapse of the liberal movement, so fateful for Germany and the world, a large number of the revolutionists migrated to the United States, many with prison sentences, or worse, hanging over their heads. It would be misleading to say that the majority in the tidal wave of German

immigration to America in the last half of the nineteenth century were intellectuals, university graduates, professional men, or members of the higher social classes. They were not.<sup>28</sup>

The migration of Germans to the U.S. was massive. From 1850 through 1900, 10,956,436 Germans immigrated to the U.S.—583,774 in 1850 and 2,663,413 in 1900.<sup>29</sup> Compare this to the total population of the U.S.—23,191,876 in 1850 and 76,212,168 in 1900.<sup>30</sup> In 1850, 2.5 percent and in 1890, 3.5 percent of the total U.S. population in the previous decade were German. As recently as 2014, 14.4 percent of the U.S. population or 46,047,113 individuals claimed German ancestry.<sup>31</sup>

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The German migrants were not as culturally, religiously, or ideologically compatible with Anglo-Americans as many now believe. There were stark cultural differences, especially among radical elements of the German population, known for social revolution and at times militant secularism:

The Forty-eighters ridiculed such American habits as rocking in chairs, chewing and spitting tobacco, standing up to a bar to down a drink, getting “eye-openers” each morning, wearing hats crooked, and sticking feet on tables and window sills. They were not impressed by the “anarchical noise” of Fourth of July or firemen’s parades, or by the muddy streets, the corrupt shirt-sleeve, tobacco cud politics of the cities, and the

“human bull fighting” known as pugilism. They preferred sausage and sauerkraut to pie and pork and beans. They were shocked to find slavery firmly established and nativism rampant in a free republic. They hated American sabbatarianism, blue laws, and “the temperance swindle,” and the more radical ridiculed what they called the religious superstitions of the American people. They were determined to preserve their language and customs and to resist assimilation to an inferior culture. In politics, they became “politically hyper-conscious,” and the flattery of American politicians, angling for votes, gave them a false sense of importance.<sup>32</sup>

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Until World War I, the second most-spoken language in the U.S. was German. Throughout the U.S. many classrooms in German-American enclaves taught exclusively in German or, at the very least taught the lectures bilingually. It was not until after the Civil War that German-Americans really began assimilating:

The war record of the Germans greatly speeded their amalgamation with their fellow Americans, for their sacrifices on the battlefield quieted even the nativists, and their efforts in defense of the Union gave them a real sense of belonging to the American enterprise. Now they were entitled to consideration for political jobs, both elective and appointive, and each administration, beginning with Lincoln’s, paid its debt to the German element by distributing political spoils among their leaders.<sup>33</sup>

Once the nativists accepted the Germans, the process of assimilation and cultural merging could truly begin.

Irish immigration to the U.S. was equally massive. The Irish were the largest immigrant group in the U.S. in the 1840s totaling 45 percent of total immigration and second only to the Germans in the 1850s.<sup>34</sup> Irish refugees were also fleeing colonial persecution at the hands of England as well as death, disease, and famine in Ireland.

Most of the early Irish immigrants were Protestants.<sup>35</sup> A disproportionate number of them would settle in the cities, work in the factories, and serve as domestic servants. The Irish did not assimilate quickly or completely peacefully. Irish-Americans adopted and asserted their own ethno-nationalism in order to strengthen their collective identity and make their own way in the U.S., in spite of the nativists. They joined together collectively and formed gangs, unions, and secret societies to progress their agenda, influence, and power.

Both the Irish and German immigrants were forced to operate within a framework of society with distinct values and governmental structures:

From the outset the immigrants were drawn into the universalistic framework of American society, with its strong emphasis on formal criteria and achievement orientated status which helped to dissolve their own traditional grouping and patterns of life.<sup>36</sup>

The U.S. was built on the backs of these immigrants whose language, culture, and religious views often ran contrary to the nativists.

Societal constructs, cultural norms, values, and worldviews are malleable. All it takes is the right societal structures, immigration and assimilation system, and encoding of secular and liberal values. Eisenhart explains mechanisms and processes by which different groups assimilate or fail to. To facilitate

assimilation, the government must avoid a state where “immigrants continue to maintain a culturally closed and distinct community, based to a large extent on ascriptive (usually traditional) values, with little institutional change and intermingling with the formal economic and political structure.”<sup>37</sup> Irish and German immigrants resisted assimilation for so long by doing exactly what Eisenhower describes. The German’s migrated in bulk, lived in mass, and maintained their cultural homogeneity by distancing themselves from more native American populations. The Irish developed a counter culture to draw strength and extend their influence.

No population assimilates immediately or without friction, but the government structures and the American culture is strong and deep enough to absorb those that flee their homelands to seek a better life in the U.S. It has absorbed diverse populations from across the globe. The lack of persistent and intolerable levels of violence as a result of refugee acceptance is indicative of this success.

The history of U.S. refugee policy since the nineteenth century has ebbed and flowed between the forces of nativism and multiculturalism mixed with national security policy. Overcome by fear of population and labor saturation and fooled by a new science that claimed intelligence and other personal traits were inherited and racially based, the U.S. Congress enacted its first numerical controls on immigration.<sup>38</sup> “The 1924 national origins system was enacted to keep out what were described in the legislative records as “the innately inferior new immigrants of eastern and southern Europe.”<sup>39</sup>

After World War II concluded, a new tune developed as part of the Cold War and struggle against communism: “In welcoming and encouraging refugees from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, United States foreign policy-makers saw the power and utility of evoking the national historical mission as a haven for

freedom-loving peoples.”<sup>40</sup> The Congress still balked at admitting refugees and mandated restrictions; nativism abounded in their halls. The executive branch was usually more liberal in its view of accepting refugees and saw it as a means to project and influence foreign policy. Essentially, if a refugee’s plight was in line with the U.S. national security policy and justifiable within the scope of the Cold War, the executive branch sought their admittance. Thus, a conflict between the two branches existed, but it was not unassailable.

The parole power, a small loophole in the Immigration and Nationality Act, became the major vehicle for refugee admissions until the 1980 Refugee Act. It was used for Hungarians in 1956, for Cubans in the 1960s and 1970s, and for Russian Jews and the Indochinese in the late 1970s. Hundreds of thousands of refugees were admitted under the parole power. Congress often balked and complained about this extraordinary exercise of power, but in each case, it conceded in the end.<sup>41</sup> The 1980 Refugee Act is now the law of the land and caps the admission of refugees to the U.S. at 50,000 per year, except for in emergency situations as deemed by the President.

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## Ethics

With regards to admission of refugees, a state must ask two questions to determine the right course of action: “What is the ethical answer?” and “What is the pragmatic answer that best serves the interest of the state?” Ethics is “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation.”<sup>42</sup> Ethical constructs help us face the dilemmas of life and, subsequently, determine how we are to act.

Humanity attempts to quantify and categorize right and wrong behaviors and thoughts through ancient texts, scholars, reason, logic, codes of conduct, law, cultural norms, and pragmatism.

As part of the international community, each state must determine what is more just with regards to the probable outcome of certain actions. The empirical evidence points to an increased probability of perpetual conflict in a region, which is further destabilized by a refugee crisis. Furthermore:

The easy availability of arms and smuggling networks allow for refugee “militarization.” Refugees can also pose economic burdens on their host states, many of which are already poor to begin with, explaining why so many countries do not want refugees semi-permanently settled. Communities of displaced people foster competition with the local population over scarce resources. They drive up prices for food, rent, and fuel, angering locals in the process. Terrorism scholars have found that refugee camps are fertile ground for recruitment, while activists have documented vast human rights violations both within camps and between refugees and local populations, especially concerning the trafficking of humans.<sup>43</sup>

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If a state can offer assistance to reduce human suffering and reduce the probability the conflict will spread, is it not ethical to act? In a world that is growing more networked, more globalized, and more interdependent and where conflict spillover is no longer easily contained regionally, does it not behoove global powers to defuse the situation by all means necessary, to

include accepting refugees and asylum seekers?

## **The Irrational Fear of Poisoned Skittles**

Isolationist, xenophobic, and nationalistic fervor is on the rise. Identity politics is beginning to take center stage yet again. There is a growing concern among developed countries that change will lead to decline, a loss of national identity, and a gradual watering down of their cultures by multicultural influences. A narrative of ethno-purification is once again taking root in Europe and the U.S. The target audience of the vitriol is new, but the roots of this nativism run deep. Cummings and Lambert, using data from a 1992 National Election cross-sectional survey, found that:

Variations in support for tougher immigration restrictions were not systematically associated with actual or perceived levels of economic deprivation... the data showed a moderately high level of support for explanations of support for the exclusion of immigrants based upon simple prejudice and group stereotypes. Respondents showing the highest levels of support for tougher immigration policies also registered high levels of nationalistic and nativistic sentiment... tend to be somewhat pessimistic about the future, and some believe that their standard of living is slowly eroding.<sup>44</sup>

This nativism takes many forms and has varying degrees of extremism and logical irrationality. On April 17, 2017, Iowa U.S. Representative Steve King posted on Twitter that “We can’t restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies.”<sup>45</sup> This statement contradicts the reality of U.S. history. Furthermore, unless King is a Native American, he and his family are themselves “somebody else’s babies.” Cummings and Lambert conclude that, “variations in prejudice, nativism, and

learned-group stereotypes appear to explain current political ideas about immigration policy more effectively than theories premised upon labor market competition and conflict.”<sup>46</sup> This deduction helps to explain Donald Trump, Jr.’s September 19, 2017, Twitter post of a bowl of skittles with the caption, “If I had a bowl of skittles and I told you just three would kill you. Would you take a handful? That’s our Syrian refugee problem.” He further proclaimed that “This image says it all. Let’s end the politically correct agenda that doesn’t put America first. #trump2016.”<sup>47</sup> Is the fear of transnational terrorism and Trojan-horse-style attacks against the U.S. a real and tangible threat or an overly-exaggerated menace used by xenophobic nationalists to betrumph the public?

Two authors from the Business Insider combined data from a 2016 report by the National Safety Council and a 2013 National Center for Health Statistics report on causes of death in the U.S. to compare the threats of terrorism to U.S. citizens to other causes of death.<sup>48</sup> According to their datum set, U.S. citizens have a 1 in 45,808 chance of being killed by a foreign-born terrorist and a 1 in 46,192,893 chance of being killed by a refugee terrorist. This is in stark contrast to other causes of death such as choking on food (1 in 3,409), motorcycle accidents (1 in 949), all other vehicular accidents (1 in 565), falling (1 in 133), and cancer or heart disease (both 1 in 7). A U.S. citizen is 264 times more likely to be killed by lightning than by a refugee terrorist.<sup>49</sup> Alex Nowrasteh used a larger data set and his probabilities were even more stunning:

Foreign-born terrorists who entered the country, either as immigrants or tourists, were responsible for 88 percent (or 3,024) of the 3,432 murders caused by terrorists on U.S. soil from 1975 through the end of 2015... including those murdered in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), the chance of an American perishing in a terrorist attack on U.S. soil that was

committed by a foreigner over the 41-year period studied here is 1 in 3.6 million per year... the chance of an American being murdered in a terrorist attack caused by a refugee is 1 in 3.64 billion per year....<sup>50</sup>

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Terrorism is a threat and by very definition terrifying, but the cost of a threat should merit the benefit of a policy both with regards to lives saved, public money well spent, and economic costs. The irrational fear of terrorism is affecting refugee acceptance policy and driving the expenditure of billions of U.S. tax dollars annually:

The irrational fear of poisoned skittles has pushed the US legislature to the point that it... spends about \$100 billion per year seeking to deter, disrupt, or protect against domestic terrorism. If each saved life is valued at \$14 million, it would be necessary for the counterterrorism measures to prevent or protect against between 6,000 and 7,000 terrorism deaths in the country each year.... The total number of people killed by terrorists within the United States is very small, and the number killed by Islamist extremist terrorists since 9/11 is 19, or fewer than 2 per year.<sup>51</sup>

To be irrational with other people’s money and public policy is irresponsible. It is a dereliction of duty that cannot be justified by political pressure, bureaucratic constraints, or emotional drives. The irrational fear of “poisoned skittles” blinds the policymakers and general population at large from the tangible and intangible benefits of immigration. That immigrant is just as or more likely to develop a new vaccine or cancer treatment than to kill you.

Looking past the threat of terrorism, the perception that refugee acceptance and immigration will result in increased crime is also misguided. Research and the resultant literature shows that immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born Americans.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, U.S. cities with sizable immigrant populations have lower crime rates than cities with negligible or non-existent immigrant populations.<sup>53</sup> In an article published last year Adelman et al. utilized census data from 1970 to 2010 for 200 randomly selected metropolitan areas and found that for murder, robbery, burglary and larceny, as immigration increased, crime decreased, on average.<sup>54</sup> The only crime that immigration had no impact on was aggravated assault. There are numerous explanations for why this trend exists, but the leading explanation is that immigration leads to revitalized urban neighborhoods, which creates economic growth and prosperity.<sup>55</sup> There

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are a few studies, which run contrary to these findings and find that immigration leads to an increase in crime. As Adelman states: "...there were 2.5 times as many findings that showed immigration was actually correlated with less crime. And, the most common finding was that immigration had no impact on crime. The upshot? We find no evidence to indicate that immigration leads to more crime and it may, in fact, suppress it."<sup>56</sup> This runs contrary to the fear mongering and nativist narrative that immigrants bring blight and pestilence to the host country, but what is further damning is the research that shows the economic gain that is derived from refugee acceptance and immigration.

**The Financial Benefits**

Some argue there is no economic benefit to

the arrival, integration, and potential assimilation of refugees. Refugees are demonized as being parasites on the social welfare state or worse yet, for competing with native labor and driving down wages. However, the empirical and academic literature paints a different picture. Refugees and immigrants do compete with native jobs and wages especially with regards to unskilled labor pools, but the net result to the state is positive in multiple ways:

Immigrants buy goods and services produced by American firms, increasing the demand for native workers; they can lower the price of services in many industries, such as construction, benefiting American consumers; and immigrant entrepreneurs open up firms, create jobs, and possibly make a large contribution to economic growth.<sup>57</sup>

Prominent economists have shown that immigrants bring a net gain to the overall U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). Harvard economist George Borjas argues that a complete moratorium on U.S. immigration would cost \$35 billion annually. That figure only accounts for what is deemed the immigration surplus, which is the increase in American wages caused by immigration. Benjamin Powell took the work of Borjas and included the economic gains to the immigrants themselves and projects a moratorium on U.S. immigration would cost the \$229 billion annually.<sup>58</sup> Refugees to the U.S. account for a fraction of this total figure, but the logic stands, if not for refugees, the U.S. would have a decreased GDP and tax base.

Surprisingly, over time immigrants make more and work more than natives. Chiswick found that the initial earnings of newly-arrived immigrants were approximately 17 percent less than those of native-born workers. Chiswick deduced that at the time of arrival immigrants earn less than natives because of their lack of specific skills, such as language proficiency.

As immigrants acquire additional skills and accumulate country-specific human capital, they experience faster wage growth than native-born workers. He found that immigrant earnings surpass native earnings within 15 years after immigration. After 30 years of living in the U.S., a typical immigrant earns approximately 11 percent more than a native-born worker.<sup>59</sup> It has been found that refugees stand even further part in their success stories than economic immigrants:

In 1980 refugee immigrants in this cohort earned 6% less and worked 14% fewer hours than economic immigrants. Both had approximately the same level of English skills. The two immigrant groups had made substantial gains by 1990; however, refugees had made greater gains. In fact, the labor market outcomes of refugee immigrants surpassed those of economic immigrants. In 1990, refugees from the 1975-1980 arrival cohort earned 20% more, worked 4% more hours, and improved their English skills by 11% relative to economic immigrants. The higher rates of human capital accumulation for refugee immigrants contribute to these findings.<sup>60</sup>

The logic behind this distinction can be found in the ambition to attain what is deemed human capital. Human capital is made up of skills and abilities that allow a person to engage with and derive benefits from society. They are both intangible and tangible and include language proficiency, social skills, networking, and civil understanding. The argument asserts that refugees are unable to emigrate back to their homeland and thus have a longer time horizon in the host country. They are subsequently more inclined to invest in country-specific human capital. This line of reasoning suggests that refugee immigrants are more likely to assimilate to the earnings growth path of the native-born population.<sup>61</sup> Of equal importance is the finding

that: “The striking comparisons between refugee and economic immigrants are not attributable to any single country of origin or ethnic group.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, the benefits of accepting and absorbing refugees are not dependent on the specific culture. It should also be noted that the ages of refugees are not clustered and are more indicative of the average age demographics of their native country, whereas economic immigrants are concentrated between the ages of 18 and 35.<sup>63</sup>

**After 30 years of living in the U.S., a typical immigrant earns approximately 11 percent more than a native-born worker.**

There are attributes and factors of resettlement and integration that are more conducive to the overall success of the refugee migrant. The societal constructs and cultural norms of the refugee’s native state are factors. In 1961, Judith R. Kramer of Brooklyn College and Seymour Leventman of the University of Pennsylvania reported that nearly 90 percent of the third generation of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe attended college. This is even more impressive when one considers that the first generation had little or no education when they arrived in the U.S. The researchers concluded that emphasis on family and culture was held to be instrumental in this success.<sup>64</sup> The resettlement and assimilation program of the new host country was also indicative of refugee success rates. Their research finds that “those who participate in the labor force are significantly more likely to have been resettled by an American family”;<sup>65</sup> whereas, “refugees sponsored by their formerly-resettled relatives have a significantly lower rate of labor force participation.”<sup>66</sup> The number one most important variable was language proficiency: “English language proficiency for the entire refugee population positively influences labor force

participation.”<sup>67</sup> Various studies have found a positive relationship between language skills and immigrant success (Carliner, 1996; Chiswick, 1986, 1991, 1998; Chiswick and Miller, 1996; Funkhouser, 1995; Rivera-Batiz, 1990; Shields & Price, 2001). The assimilation process is a two-way street, and the refugee must exist in an accepting and native environment conducive to assimilation and acceptance. Refugees are incorporated into the U.S. through the interaction of social and economic relationships in local geographical areas and communities:

These various modes of incorporation distinguish one group from another not only on the basis of their different backgrounds or skills, but in terms of the resources they bring with them or can accumulate in the United States and, perhaps most importantly, that they confront in the hands of other groups and institutions that are already established in the United States.<sup>68</sup>

The interaction between the refugees and the native population is imperative for the success of the refugee. That relationship will influence not only the success of the refugee, but the length of time it takes for assimilation to occur as well.

**Nativists argue that accepting refugees will dilute, change, or conflict with American culture, government, and law.**

### **The Fallacy of Cultural Incompatibility**

Nativists argue that accepting refugees will dilute, change, or conflict with American culture, government, and law. The U.S. is a melting pot of cultures, religions, and ethnicities, and when cultures come into contact with each other, they are undoubtedly changed by the interaction. Over time, as people from distinct

backgrounds begin to intermingle, marry, and bear offspring, the mergers become something entirely new and distinct. Such is the nature of a heterogeneous society such as the U.S. A brief history of the U.S. with regards to the concept of cultural relativism will argue that the nativists are correct. The U.S. is and will be different in the future, just as it is a different state than at any other point in its history, which is something all Americans should be thankful for. It was not better in the good ole days.

The ethical code of cultural relativism maintains “that morality is grounded in the approval of one’s society—and not simply in the preferences of individual people... and hold[s] instead that moral values in fact change from society to society throughout time and throughout the world.”<sup>69</sup> This concept is borne out in the history of the U.S. The country and world we live in today is vastly different than it was in every preceding generation, and it bears the scars of the long march toward expanded liberty and equality.

When my German ancestors immigrated to Illinois in the 1830s, half of the U.S. considered the ownership of a person as their property perfectly moral, acceptable, and just. Slavery was not only a state-sanctioned practice enshrined within the U.S. Constitution, it was also upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. A series of legal opinions culminated in the 1857 Dred Scott v. Sandford case. The justices found that Dred Scott was neither a citizen nor person, but property to be bought, sold, and treated as his owners saw fit. The justices also proclaimed that persons of African descent cannot be citizens under the U.S. Constitution. Slave owners that sought moral guidance apart from secular law and looked to religious texts found solace, not just in a complete lack of condemnation, but outright support for the institution of slavery.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them

sincerely as you would serve Christ. (Ephesians 6:5 NLT).

Christians who are slaves should give their masters full respect so that the name of God and his teaching will not be shamed. If your master is a Christian, that is no excuse for being disrespectful. You should work all the harder because you are helping another believer by your efforts. (1 Timothy 6:1-2 NLT).

Arguments for slavery and indentured servitude in Illinois were not completely nullified until 1841 when Abraham Lincoln argued a case before the Illinois Supreme Court and established the important precedent that under the Illinois constitution all persons were presumed to be free.

When my ancestors from the Balkans immigrated to Missouri in the early 1900s, half of the U.S. population still lacked many of the basic rights and liberties we now take for granted. It was not until 1920 that women were allowed to vote after the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was finally ratified.<sup>70</sup> The fight for women's rights and equality under the law continued long after the right to vote was won and continues to this day to include legislation that granted equal access to professions, pay, and credit as well as protection against discrimination, abuse, and assault. It was not until the 1965 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut* that the state could no longer forbid the distribution of birth control to married women and the "right to privacy" was firmly articulated. It took another seven years for the same restrictions to be lifted for all women regardless of marital status with the 1972 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*.<sup>71</sup> The removal of these arbitrary restrictions finally granted women the ability to control the most fundamental decisions in their life and as William J. Brennan, Jr. clearly articulated, "If the

right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child."<sup>72</sup>

My grandparents grew up in an America that included a government-imposed system of second-class citizenship on non-white Americans. This system subjugated an entire people to destitution and fear based solely on the color of their skin. It was not until my parent's generation that women were able to seek more equality in the workplace and at home. It was not until their adolescence that the American Psychiatric Association voted to remove homosexuality from the list of diagnosable mental disorders.<sup>73</sup> It was only seven years before my first child was born and only after extreme political pressure that Bob Jones University finally removed its ban on interracial dating.<sup>74</sup> My children and their generation will be the first to experience a U.S. where they can serve in any job in the military and marry whomever they want, regardless of their gender. These slow, but progressive achievements in human dignity, self-determination, and liberty were made possible by the unchaining of archaic cultural norms and religious law from society, in the pursuit of a more liberated and less bigoted system of governance and culture. Other cultures will assimilate into this system.

The U.S. system of governance is secular. The U.S. Constitution forbids the establishment of religion at all levels of governance, to include legislation that is based on or the result of excessive government entanglement in religious dogma or teaching. The legal system of the U.S. is conducive to all religions and cultures. Insofar as the behavior of a person does not interfere with or infringe on another person's constitutionally protected rights. One can argue that in the U.S. you can "do what you will as long as it harms no one," with few exceptions to include the prevention of "self-harm" as in

the case of drug use. The Constitution enshrines the protection of personal rights and liberties to include speech, assembly, religion, due process, life, and liberty from slavery and indentured servitude.<sup>75</sup> As the U.S. and much of the liberal and secular-minded world has moved forward and progressed in time, the expansion of liberty, equality, and peace has followed suit.

**Any concern that Syrians will upturn and change the very fabric of the U.S. culture and legal system is a delusional fantasy...**

However, this is not true for much of the rest of the world and especially the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The MENA has a long and tumultuous history of autocratic regimes, both secular and theocratic. Small blips in time on the radar of the MENA that represent democracy and other liberal tenets are quickly overshadowed by military coups, religious extremism, despotism, dictatorship, or a combination of the above. Peaceful transitions of power, except within families, are hardly existent. It is within this context that the Arab Spring began. Across the MENA, discontent and grievances grew, followed by largely youthful protests against oppressive and liberty-restricting regimes. A combination of a more networked, educated, and disenfranchised generation cried out for more liberty and opportunity.

The failure of liberty to take root and expand within these states is not the fault of the people, but rather of the failed institutions, governments, and leaders. Without a proper framework, such as a secular constitution, legal system, and civic structures, the quest for liberty will not be achieved. Transplanting people from these failed states within a successful state, such as the U.S., will allow their human capital to take root and grow, and including Syrian refugees will be a

drop in the bucket of the overall U.S. population demographic. Any concern that Syrians will upturn and change the very fabric of the U.S. culture and legal system is a delusional fantasy:

Pew Research Center estimates that there were about 3.3 million Muslims of all ages living in the United States in 2015. This means that Muslims made up about 1% of the total U.S. population (about 322 million people in 2015), and we estimate that that share will double by 2050.... By 2050, the American Muslim population is projected to reach 8.1 million people, or 2.1% of the total population.<sup>76</sup>

It is the Syrian culture and religion that will ultimately be diluted and absorbed by the U.S. multicultural behemoth, not the other way around.

### **Syria: A Closer Look**

It is from within this framework that we must now peer deeper into the disaster of Syria. Syria, a predominately Islamic and Arabic-speaking state, is composed of several different ethnicities, religions, and language groups, all with varying degrees of religiosity. Ruled by Bashar al-Assad who took power in 2000, Syria has competing interests within the conflict, including pro and anti-government forces, as well as theocracy-minded and secular-seeking factions. Some groups are separatists while others are revolutionary. The result is a war-torn country where all have lost some and many have lost all.

Conflict forces people to make one of three decisions: stay and fight, stay and avoid fighting, or leave. No one wants to leave his or her home, family, possessions, and stability. Few people chose to put their lives on the line and fight unless they feel utterly compelled to. It is not a choice many make lightly. Few choose to leave. and fewer still have the means to leave. However, in Syria, where the conflict has gone

on for so long and the destruction is so epic, the rationale choice continues to sway more and more toward leaving. In interviews with Syrian refugees in the Jordanian based camp of Za'atari, Beehner found that:

The refugees who came to Za'atari, while certainly all different, share some common attributes. As mentioned before, they are largely middle-class families by Syrian standards—educated, though often heavily in debt. Most of the refugees were better off than those who remained in Syria, given how expensive it is to flee.... They all never thought they would have to move and only did so as a means of last resort. Well over half of those interviewed lost at least one family member or their home to the war, and often it is not just households but whole villages that relocate together.<sup>77</sup>

What does the empirical evidence tell us about refugee flows? Is this purely a humanitarian issue or a broader security concern with regards to Syria's neighbors, a regional problem, or even a global instability issue?

The neighboring countries of Syria have absorbed the majority of its externally displaced refugee population. The countries that have accepted the most Syrian refugees are Turkey (2,760,000); Lebanon (1,017,000), Jordan (655,000), and Iraq (228,000).<sup>78</sup> Not a single Arab Persian Gulf state has accepted a single refugee, which is not surprising and could be used to the U.S.'s advantage. The predominantly Sunni states of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE have an interest in a destabilized Iraq and Levant. Destabilized and anarchic territory allows for a battleground far from home to commence a proxy war against their Shiite adversary, Iran. Syria is not just a battlefield, but also a recruiting ground for converts and foot soldiers. The Gulf States are opposed to absorbing people that are not homogenous to their internal ethnicity, share their fervent

religious persuasion, and are liberty seeking. They cite "security concerns" for not admitting Syrian refugees, but it has more to do with their societal and closed citizenship structures.<sup>79</sup> The Persian Gulf States have thus far avoided and nullified the liberty-minded and freethinking movement of the Arab Spring. They want to maintain their autocracies and placate their internal populations with state oil revenues and targeted subjugation of their Shiite minority and migrant workers. The Arab Gulf states are part of the problem and cannot be relied upon to be part of the solution. Marginalizing their influence is the best course of action.

**Failure to relieve the stress of the humanitarian crisis from the pressure cooker of Syria will only prolong the war.**

## Conclusion

The U.S. and its liberal, democratic, and secular-minded allies must exert their influence in the Syrian conflict to reduce the rise of radical religious extremism, counter autocratic regimes, and stabilize the region. An element of that approach must be the absorption of refugees fleeing the conflict. Failure to relieve the stress of the humanitarian crisis from the pressure cooker of Syria will only prolong the war. The refusal to accept refugees risks expanding the conflict to Syria's neighbors. The conflict has already spilled over into Iraq. Daesh used the vacuum of power, freedom of maneuver, and increase in arms availability in Syria to bolster its forces and capture much of Iraq's territory. The presence of refugees in a country increases the probability of intra and interstate war in that country when the refugees come from a neighboring country. Any additional conflicts would only further destabilize the region, yield more death and destruction, and produce even

more refugees.

The U.S. has a vested interest in combating the theocratic influence of both Iran and Saudi Arabia. The U.S. has secular and liberal values, which run counter to the goals of the Ayatollah and the Wahhabis. Ignoring their influence, allowing them to expand it, and pretending that the U.S. values are in synch with them is dangerous. I, like most Americans, am descended from the poor, unskilled, peasant class of generations past and share more in common with the Syrian refugee than not. The U.S. is a nation of migrants and refugees that left autocracies, religious tyrannies, and persecution for a better life and liberty. All it takes is knowledge to combat ignorance and undue irrational fear coupled with the political will to act. The U.S. has absorbed and resettled refugees in the past successfully and can do again in the future.

Those states that turn their backs on the refugees will only embolden the religious extremists to target refugees to become their new foot soldiers, radicals, and suicidal bombers. The U.S. is a nation of 300,000,000 people that can readily absorb hundreds of thousands of refugees and assimilate them into American culture with ease and little demographic impact.

Refugees should be looked upon as human capital and a rare resource that would be indebted to their newfound motherland. The host country should view refugees as a cultural, military, educational, and intelligence-gathering asset. Combating the spread of religious extremism and theocratic tyranny is a war of ideas within the human domain more so than in the kinetic world of strikes and body counts. The U.S. should use every means at its disposal to spread its values both abroad and domestically.

Globalization and the technology that is driving its quickening pace are drawing the world's populations closer than ever. It affects refugees as well. Refugees are rational actors and are becoming well informed before and during their decision to flee their homeland. They are increasingly avoiding their neighboring countries and seeking asylum in more developed countries. This trend will likely accelerate as "the combined effects of the expansion of modern means of communication and closed political systems in many countries are expected to generate refugees, even in the presence of nominal peace, in the years to come."<sup>80</sup> The world is on the cusp of a new phase of human development as the distance between our neighbors continues to shrink. Liberty-seeking people will forever strive for and face extreme hardship when they are pushed to the breaking point. Such is the story of Eritrean refugees seeking admittance to the U.S., who reported hardships on the way, "including the rape of women, as in Libya; death in the deserts, as in the Sahara and Sinai; the risks of being taken hostages, as in the Sinai; and drowning in dangerous waters, as in the Mediterranean Sea."<sup>81</sup> Failure to acknowledge, accept, understand, and develop a means to adapt to this reality is not an option. Building concrete walls and other arbitrary barriers will do nothing but provide our descendants something to gawk at and study, just as Hadrian's Wall does for us today.

Darkness is the absence of light. One does not spread the light of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness by putting it in a box or building a wall around it. Allowing discontent to fester, the innocent to wallow in misery, and turning away those seeking liberty, empowerment, and equality is how the despots and tyrants of the world were empowered. The New Colossus must once again cry out across the ocean, "**Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!**"<sup>82</sup> A failure to adapt, assimilate new patriots and spread the values of enlightenment and liberty will leave the U.S. weakened and forgotten in the dustbin of history. **IAJ**

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