

# Reevaluation of humanitarian principles around the world, initiated by the syrian...

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## **Complications of the Syrian Civil War: A Humanitarian Crisis**

Right now, in November of 2015, the media talks a lot about Syria. And not just the media, but politicians also take part in the discussion. They talk about what the U. S. is doing with their military and what Russia is doing with theirs—everyone is trying to figure what the best strategy is for happily ending the Syrian civil war. This discussion takes place in many countries, as all of NATO is trying to coordinate its strategy in cooperation with Russia, and now the whole thing is teetering on the brink of conflict. This is where issues with the discussion on Syria come in. Political decision-makers are often making decisions that could end up conflicting with Russia; one could find evidence of the potential complication with Russia from a quick skim of recent news articles. Not only are we contemplating the wrong decisions, we are undervaluing the importance of the topic of refugees, in favor of arguing about how the United States is sending special operation troops. The conversation on Syria tends to focus heavily on how the United States should get more involved in a military sense, but often neglects to think about the consequences military action could have regarding Russia. And all the while, the topic of refugees is too often undervalued in favor of discussing war.

It only seems that recently the discussion on the Syrian civil war is making a push in a different direction, as predicted by John R. Bradley in his substantial article titled: “ Why Putin backs Assad: The West’s strategy on Syria is a complete shambles.” The general idea that the author is putting forward is that the U. S.’s actions toward the Syrian civil war were

completely incorrect. That NATO hasn't made a good choice up until now, and it has allowed Russia to take control of the situation in Syria ever since Russia "called Washington's bluff by establishing military bases in the regime stronghold of Latakia" (Bradley). The United States' biggest misstep so far, according to Bradley, was "its harebrained idea of training an entirely new rebel army from scratch—to simultaneously topple the Assad regime and defeat the Islamic State—[which] cost more than \$40 million, and produced just four or five soldiers" (Bradley). Yet, like was stated before, the media still continues to announce Presidential and congressional plans to send "special operation troops" (NYT) to Syria. And now that Russia's military influence in Syria is stronger than ever, the U. S. needs to rethink its future plans; the United States needs to make sure that it doesn't start a proxy war with Russia.

But what else does the entire discussion need to rethink? I'm not here to slander President Obama, but according to journalist Michael Brenden Dougherty, "increased intervention in Syria — is the most stupid and potentially ruinous foreign policy decision of Obama's presidency"—Dougherty puts bluntly in his recent *The Week* article titled "Obama's catastrophic Syria folly." The gist of Dougherty's article is that "approach to the Middle East is hardly one of shirking cowardice;" not only should NATO withhold military action in Syria, they probably should not even get involved at all (except for, you know, the refugee issue). And as John R. Bradley would agree, "Obama is backing himself into a proxy war with Putin, when Putin's Syrian ally is the most likely victor" (Dougherty). Luckily a good chunk of the

discussion is leading away from bringing down Assad by arming rebels. The U. S. government too “ after years of repeating like a mantra that The Evil Dictator Assad Must Go Now, suddenly found themselves mumbling that, come to think of it, Assad does not need to go just yet after all” (Bradley). However, a large percentage of media articles today are still giving conflicting opinions on how the United States fighting against Assad would be a good idea. But in reality, the Global North’s discussion on the Syrian civil war needs to start focusing less on war.

What we should be concerned about is what is being left out of the conversation: how the United States can help the refugees. If one was to search through Google New on topics relating to Syria, one would be pressed to find an article discussing the United States’ effort to aid refugees. It seems the entire conversation is happening in Europe. I even had difficulty finding an article about how U. S. politicians discussing the plans to help Syrian refugees—except for the occasional politician making a brief and frustrating statement, e. g. Donald Trump saying he is going to “ send ‘ em back.” The issue with Syrian refugees is extremely complicated, and the U. S. has begun bracing themselves, but the only way we seem to be helping is by “ resettling.” Well what is resettling? One would see that word a lot if they looked at the headlines. A recent Huffington Post article—written by Mathew La Corte—does its best to explain resettlement and the emigration of Syrian refugees. Resettlement simply means moving Syrian refugees into the United States. This is concerning to a lot of people since it is somewhat unclear what happens to them once they arrive in the states, but “

resettlement in the U. S. is one of the only ways to save refugees from a nightmare situation back home”(La Corte). Hopefully, and as predicted by La Corte, the refugees “ will pull their weight,” and “ spend money on goods and services, which will drive further economic activity” (La Corte). So maybe society should hold off on the baseball bats.

Refugees have already had it bad enough. They have had to leave their homes to flee to countries where they have to try to find work, or to live in a refugee camp. 10, 000 refugees have immigrated into New York this past month, according to Alana Semuels from The Atlantic. Syracuse, New York must now “ figure out how to find housing for refugees who can’t afford much and how to ensure, in a region where jobs are hard to come by, [so] that refugees don’t fall into perpetual poverty” (Semuels). Many of these people have had a long journey by boat; many of these people do not speak good English. Now these people must try to find jobs. “ In 2012, only 33 percent of refugees in Arizona were able to find work, and only 25 percent of those in California were employed, while 55 percent of refugees in Minnesota had entered employment in 2012” (Semuels). And this isn’t only happening in America, it’s happening in Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon and Turkey.

And if the U. S. really wants to continue to help save the Middle East, refugees might matter more than we think.

Refugees concern not only a humanitarian imperative but also a strategic one. Without an increase in humanitarian aid, development assistance, and

refugee resettlement, the crisis may trigger greater instability in frontline states—including key U. S. allies like Jordan—and in the Middle East more broadly. (Acer, Eleanor)

Backing ourselves into a proxy war with Russia will not solve the issue. But luckily, congress is looking to pass a bill that “ would provide an extra \$1 billion in emergency funding for humanitarian aid and resettlement of Syrian refugees.” (Acer) Bills like these will not solve the issue entirely; however, it’s a step in the right direction. Organizations such as Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), Homeland Security (DHS), and Health and Human Services (HHS) will continue to help solve “ the largest displacement of people since World War II”(Acer).

One must consider the drastic way the conversation has changed since the ISIS attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015. Due to some number of ISIS terrorists gaining access to Europe through Syrian refugee resettlements, a great deal of paranoia has been created. As of November 19, “ 31 U. S. governors say they oppose accepting Syrian refugees in their states,” and only “ seven states explicitly say they will allow refugees.” Many U. S. mayors have also claimed to be formally against accepting refugees. However horrific the recent attacks of terrorism have been, there is no need to make innocent peoples’ lives more difficult. Refugees already have to go through an extensive screening process to be resettled in the United States, so it’s not as if terrorists will be flooding into the country.

The discussion on Syria must move towards a more positive outlook on refugees for the best outcome for everyone. Focusing too much on the military is almost unnecessary for a lot of NATO, especially the United States, due to the substantial power of Russia's military influence already in Syria—incorrectly as authors John Bradley and Michael Dougherty pointed out. Russia is already going through great effort to fight ISIS and end the Syrian war, so why do we need to get involved anyways? Russia had destroyed 448 ISIS facilities in Syria just in three days! So would NATO putting soldiers on the ground to stomp ISIS really be necessary. But this is not the point. The point is “ over 3 million have fled to Syria's immediate neighbors of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. 6. 5 million are internally displaced within Syria” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). In the month of November, it seems clearer than ever how much the United States needs to think about how it will deal with ISIS, but this topic requires a much different conversation. NATO and the United States should continue doing their best to accommodate refugees, and focus less on ISIS and the Syrian civil war itself—that's what is most important.