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**REFUGEE RADICALIZATION IN THE
UNITED STATES: SCOPE OF THREAT AND
STEPS TOWARD MITIGATION**

by

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December 2020

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SCOPE OF THREAT AND STEPS TOWARD MITIGATION**

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ABSTRACT

The rhetoric of the Trump administration has fomented a belief among the U.S. public that refugees are a source of terrorism and a growing threat to the security of American citizens. This rhetoric has been reinforced by executive orders, regulations, and policies that have severely restricted the number of refugees admitted to the United States since 2017 and subjected those who enter to enhanced screening and vetting in an attempt to mitigate this perceived threat. This thesis assesses the actual scope of threat posed to the security of the United States by resettled refugees. Looking at quantitative data for attempted and perpetrated attacks by refugees in the United States, this thesis concludes that the threat posed to the U.S. homeland by resettled refugees is so minimal as to be statistically insignificant. Analyzing well-known examples of resettled refugees who have been radicalized to terrorism abroad, this thesis also concludes that the true risk of radicalization lies in the failed integration of these refugees into American society. Preventing the ostracism of refugees through policy changes to the refugee admissions program may serve to mitigate this risk and cure the misperceived fear of refugees among the public.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CLASS	Consular Lookout and Support System
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DoD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDNS	Fraud Detection and Nationality Security
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
IJU	Islamic Jihad Union
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act
IOM	International Office of Migration
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
NGO	non-governmental organization
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
RSC	Resettlement Support Center
SAO	security advisory opinion
START	Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
USRAP	United States Refugee Admissions Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the mid-2000s, a group of radicalized Somali-born American citizens sprang out of the refugee community in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area of Minnesota and returned to Somalia, where they received training from al-Shabab. There, they committed acts of violence and terrorism. This group’s radicalization led to one of the largest domestic counterterrorism investigations since 9/11. The investigation resulted in charges being brought against 14 persons in Minnesota in 2009 for participating in the recruitment of these Somali-Americans and funding their travels and training. Several were charged with attending terrorist training camps and fighting on behalf of al-Shabab.¹ Since then, little has been done on a national level to assess the risk of radicalization within the resettled refugee population in the United States though new executive actions on immigration have attempted to address the perceived threat. While it is possible that the “Twin Cities travelers” were an anomaly, it is also possible that they illustrate what might happen when the risk of radicalization within an isolated community of refugees goes unmitigated.

As a result of political rhetoric and the waves of attacks that have plagued Europe in recent years, the American public seems to perceive refugees as an ever-growing and substantial threat to the security of U.S. citizens.² Executive orders, regulations, and policies under the Trump administration have reinforced these fears. The administration has sought to limit the annual number of refugee admissions—stemming the flow from certain “high-risk” countries, including Somalia—and enhance the vetting mechanisms used during the refugee admissions process.³

¹ U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Minnesota, “Terror Charges Unsealed in Minnesota against Eight Defendants, Justice Department Announces,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, Minneapolis Division, November 23, 2009, <http://www.fbi.gov/minneapolis/press-releases/2009/mp112309.htm>.

² Caroline R. Nagel, “Southern Hospitality? Islamophobia and the Politicization of Refugees in South Carolina during the 2016 Election Season,” *Southeastern Geographer* 56, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 283–90, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sgo.2016.0033>; Thomas Nail, “A Tale of Two Crises: Migration and Terrorism after the Paris Attacks,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 16, no. 1 (April 2016): 158–67, <https://refugeereseach.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Nail-2016-The-figure-of-the-migrant.pdf>.

³ Donald J. Trump, Executive Order 13780, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” *Code of Federal Regulations*, title 3 (2018 comp.): 301.

The Trump administration has sought to overhaul the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) based on the perceived threat of terrorism within this population. The refugee admissions cap for fiscal year 2018 had been set at 45,000, the lowest in the history of the program at that time.⁴ Fiscal year 2019 saw an even further reduction in the refugee admissions cap, at a limit of 30,000.⁵ The following fiscal year, 2020, saw the greatest reduction by far, with an upper limit of 18,000 refugee admissions.⁶ In addition to curtailing the number of admitted refugees, the administration also called for “extreme vetting” of those applicants. The Departments of Homeland Security and State have been instructed to implement enhanced screening and vetting for all immigration benefit applicants, including refugees.⁷ That same presidential memorandum also requested an assessment of the overall cost of USRAP and recommendations to limit those costs.⁸

This thesis asks the following questions: Is radicalization of resettled refugees a significant threat to the security of the United States? Which factors contribute to the violent radicalization of resettled refugees within the United States or in other countries? What can be done to mitigate the risk of radicalization from within the resettled refugee community? To answer these questions, this thesis defines the actual scope of the threat to the United States posed by resettled refugees. “Resettled” refugees are those admitted to

⁴ Donald J. Trump, “Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2018” (presidential memorandum to the secretary of state, Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-secretary-state-4/>; Oliver Laughland, “Donald Trump Caps Refugee Admissions in 2018 Historic Low,” *Guardian*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/27/donald-trump-caps-refugee-admissions-2018-historic-low>.

⁵ Presidential Determination No. 2019–01, 83 Fed. Reg. 55,091 (November 1, 2018), <https://thefederalregister.org/83-FR/Issue-212/FR-2018-11-01.pdf>.

⁶ Presidential Determination No. 2020–04, 84 Fed. Reg. 65,903 (November 29, 2019), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-11-29/pdf/2019-26082.pdf>.

⁷ Donald J. Trump, “Implementing Immediate Heightened Screening and Vetting of Applications for Visas and Other Immigration Benefits, Ensuring Enforcement of All Laws for Entry into the United States, and Increasing Transparency among Departments and Agencies of the Federal Government and for the American People” (presidential memorandum for the secretary of state, attorney general, and secretary of homeland security, Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/06/memorandum-secretary-state-attorney-general-secretary-homeland-security>.

⁸ Trump.

the United States under USRAP and do not include asylees or other classes of immigrants or non-immigrants who may reside in the United States. It looks at historical data to find incidents of terrorism perpetrated by resettled refugees in the United States and, using this data, assesses the risk of harm to U.S. persons from this population. It draws from known cases of radicalization among resettled refugees in the United States, Canada, and Australia that did not result in domestic terrorist attacks in those respective countries. These cases illustrate the factors that led these populations to radicalize and identify common trends.

Over 40 years of data reveal only a handful of successful terrorist attacks perpetrated by refugees within the United States, of which only two were fatal. However, members of resettled refugee communities are being radicalized to participate in terrorist activity outside the United States—which is itself a threat to national security. This research seeks to determine what can be done to mitigate the risk of radicalization within the resettled refugee community and concludes that the root causes of radicalization are due to psychosocial and cultural issues experienced after resettlement that are not cured by limiting refugee admissions. To mitigate this risk, policymakers must reassess what steps are being taken to ensure integration of refugees into society instead of allowing for conditions that contribute to isolation and division between refugees and citizens of the United States.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the mid-2000s, a group of radicalized Somali-born American citizens sprang out of the refugee community in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area of Minnesota and returned to Somalia, where they received training from al-Shabab. There, they committed acts of violence and terrorism. This group’s radicalization led to one of the largest domestic counterterrorism investigations since 9/11. The investigation resulted in charges being brought against 14 persons in Minnesota in 2009 for participating in the recruitment of these Somali-Americans and funding their travels and training. Several were charged with attending terrorist training camps and fighting on behalf of al-Shabab.¹ Since then, little has been done on a national level to assess the risk of radicalization within the resettled refugee population in the United States though new executive actions on immigration have attempted to address the perceived threat. While it is possible that the “Twin Cities travelers” were an anomaly, it is also possible that they illustrate what might happen when the risk of radicalization within an isolated community of refugees goes unmitigated.

As a result of political rhetoric and the waves of attacks that have plagued Europe in recent years, the American public seems to perceive refugees as an ever-growing and substantial threat to the security of U.S. citizens.² Executive orders, regulations, and policies under the Trump administration have reinforced these fears. The administration has sought to limit the annual number of refugee admissions—stemming the flow from certain “high-risk” countries, including Somalia—and enhance the vetting mechanisms used during the refugee admissions process.³

¹ U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Minnesota, “Terror Charges Unsealed in Minnesota against Eight Defendants, Justice Department Announces,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, Minneapolis Division, November 23, 2009, <http://www.fbi.gov/minneapolis/press-releases/2009/mp112309.htm>.

² Caroline R. Nagel, “Southern Hospitality? Islamophobia and the Politicization of Refugees in South Carolina during the 2016 Election Season,” *Southeastern Geographer* 56, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 283–90, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sgo.2016.0033>; Thomas Nail, “A Tale of Two Crises: Migration and Terrorism after the Paris Attacks,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 16, no. 1 (April 2016): 158–67, <https://refugeereseach.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Nail-2016-The-figure-of-the-migrant.pdf>.

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A. MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The limitations on refugee admissions and the rhetoric emphasizing the threat of refugees to the United States has prompted the following questions: Is radicalization of resettled refugees a significant threat to the security of the United States? Which factors contribute to the violent radicalization of resettled refugees within the United States or in other countries? What can be done to mitigate the risk of radicalization from within the

⁴ Donald J. Trump, “Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2018” (presidential memorandum to the secretary of state, Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-secretary-state-4/>; Oliver Laughland, “Donald Trump Caps Refugee Admissions in 2018 Historic Low,” *Guardian*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/27/donald-trump-caps-refugee-admissions-2018-historic-low>.

⁵ Presidential Determination No. 2019–01, 83 Fed. Reg. 55,091 (November 1, 2018), <https://thefederalregister.org/83-FR/Issue-212/FR-2018-11-01.pdf>.

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⁷ Donald J. Trump, “Implementing Immediate Heightened Screening and Vetting of Applications for Visas and Other Immigration Benefits, Ensuring Enforcement of All Laws for Entry into the United States, and Increasing Transparency among Departments and Agencies of the Federal Government and for the American People” (presidential memorandum for the secretary of state, attorney general, and secretary of homeland security, Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/06/memorandum-secretary-state-attorney-general-secretary-homeland-security>.

⁸ Trump.

resettled refugee community? To answer these questions, this thesis defines the actual scope of the threat to the United States posed by resettled refugees. “Resettled” refugees are those admitted to the United States under USRAP and do not include asylees or other classes of immigrants or non-immigrants who may reside in the United States.⁹ It examines historical data to find incidents of terrorism perpetrated by resettled refugees in the United States. Using this data, it assesses the risk of harm to U.S. persons from this population. It also draws from known cases of radicalization among resettled refugees in the United States, Canada, and Australia that did not result in domestic terrorist attacks in those respective countries. The analysis of these known cases reveals the factors that led these populations to radicalize and identifies common trends.

In assessing whether refugee radicalization is a significant threat to the United States, the research may serve to justify further executive action regarding restrictions on refugee admissions and increased vetting of admitted refugees. However, if the threat of radicalization or terrorism from within the refugee population is not supported by data, the need for such actions will be obviated and more appropriate recommendations for policy changes to the USRAP can address any risk posed to national security by resettled refugees.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Current research on refugee radicalization and the threat of terrorism from refugees in the United States consists of a mix of both quantitative and qualitative research. The Cato Institute has provided a recent and succinct overview of the last five decades’ major quantitative studies on terrorists in the United States.¹⁰ Several databases track terrorist

⁹ Refugees are processed through USRAP, vetted, and approved for travel to and resettlement in the United States while still overseas. Asylees apply for and are granted protection and status with the U.S. government after entering the United States through a land, air, or sea border. Asylum seekers often arrive in the United States as non-immigrants or enter without being inspected by immigration authorities. While both refugees and asylees must meet the statutory definition of a refugee under the Immigration and Nationality Act in order to be granted status, the timing and processes for adjudicating these immigrant statuses are distinct.

¹⁰ Alex Nowrasteh, *Terrorism and Immigration: A Risk Analysis*, Policy Analysis No. 798 (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2016), <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/terrorism-immigration-risk-analysis#related-content>; Alex Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality: A Risk Analysis, 1975-2017*, Policy Analysis No. 866 (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2019), https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa_866_edit.pdf.

attacks across the globe, including RAND’s Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents and the Global Terrorism Database maintained by the University of Maryland’s National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Terrorism studies experts have used these datasets to assess the number and severity of acts of terrorism plotted or perpetrated in the United States since September 11, 2001.¹¹ Such comprehensive reviews of the data, especially relating to the immigration status of terrorism perpetrators or suspects, are few.

Leiken and Brooke of the bipartisan Center for National Interest (formerly the Nixon Center) note the paucity of quantitative data on terrorism incidents in their 2006 analysis on terrorism and immigration. While historically comprehensive and useful in tracking the overlap between immigration and terrorism, their analysis is now outdated, and their dataset is no longer publicly available. Other researchers have built on, and found similar results to, Leiken and Brooke’s early studies. Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute, whose risk analyses of terrorism and immigration are both recent and data-driven, expands upon prior research. He matches known terrorists with their visa categories and tracks the methods used by these terrorists to enter the United States. Nowrasteh found that the overall risk from foreign-born terrorists in the United States was much lower than that of their American-born counterparts. The risk from refugees, specifically, was almost infinitesimal. Americans have a “1-in-3.86-billion” chance of dying in a terrorist attack perpetrated by a refugee in the United States.¹²

Another recent and comprehensive overview of cases of post-9/11 Islamic extremist terrorism comes from Nowrasteh’s colleague at the Cato Institute, John Mueller.¹³ Mueller acted as an editor for this compilation, working with the University of Columbus to produce this voluminous dataset. The prevalence of the Cato Institute in

¹¹ Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality*; Robert Leiken and Steve Brooke, “The Quantitative Analysis of Terrorism and Immigration: An Initial Exploration,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 4 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550600880294>; Jerome P. Bjelopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat*, CRS Report No. R41416 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R41416/19>.

¹² Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality*, 1.

¹³ John Mueller, ed., *Terrorism since 9/11: The American Cases* (Columbus: Mershon Center, Ohio State University, 2020), <https://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/SINCE.pdf>.

recent terrorism research does give a slightly myopic perspective, as it emphasizes Islamic terrorism. Despite this shortcoming, the products remain objective, as their focus is numeric and data-driven, and provide no subjective analysis.

While Nowrasteh examined the immigration status of convicted or known terrorists from a quantitative perspective, Mueller and his team aimed to provide a comprehensive case study analysis of a specific subset of terrorist incidents. Mueller’s research looks at all cases of Islamic extremist terrorism affecting the United States or its interests since 9/11 and resulting in investigations, arrests, or convictions.¹⁴ In compiling the dataset and instructing the analysis, Mueller notes the gaps in prior research on Islamic terrorism regarding the “nature of the terrorist ‘adversary.’”¹⁵ Mueller found that the motivation for most terrorists stemmed from their opposition to American foreign policy, specifically regarding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While many of these terrorists appeared to be “misfits,” Mueller’s research does not conclude that isolation, discrimination, or identity crises played a significant role in their radicalization.¹⁶ These findings seem to contradict Sageman’s analysis of terrorism motivations within the diaspora. For his research, Sageman points to humiliation and moral outrage as two of the primary drivers toward radicalization.¹⁷

As noted by Nowrasteh, no existing dataset on global terrorist incidents includes all the demographic information necessary to discern what plots or attacks specifically implicate refugees resettled in the United States. Additionally, several datasets exclude plots or attacks outside the United States, thereby removing from the data those in the United States who have taken action in support of foreign terrorist organizations or traveled overseas to participate in terrorism.¹⁸ While case studies are useful for analyzing terrorist

¹⁴ Mueller.

¹⁵ Mueller, 23.

¹⁶ Mueller.

¹⁷ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 71–88.

¹⁸ Nowrasteh, *Terrorism and Immigration: A Risk Analysis*, 2.

motivations, the pieces absent from these datasets pose a challenge to fully comprehending the scope of the terrorist problem within the refugee community.

The research analyzing the larger population of homegrown violent jihadists, and the refugees found within that set, provides more insight than the raw numbers of refugees who have become domestic terrorists.¹⁹ The Congressional Research Service (CRS) has produced a lengthy report on homegrown jihadist terrorism. This report is more comprehensive than those from the Cato Institute in that it includes data about U.S. citizens, residents, or visitors who became radicalized in the United States but participated in terrorism abroad. The CRS estimates that there have been 63 plots or attacks in the United States since 9/11 that can be attributed to homegrown radicalization.²⁰ Similar to the aforementioned reports, the CRS also limited its data to a single terrorist ideology. It further limited its scope to attacks planned or committed within the United States.²¹ While the RAND and START databases include all incidents of terrorism, regardless of ideology, research that provides more details regarding those incidents and their perpetrators is mostly limited to Islamic terrorists. Such research narrows the world of available data from which cases can be drawn for qualitative analysis.

Outside of quantitative data analysis, research exists on specific subsets within refugee communities in different countries who have become radicalized or participated in terrorist plots or activity. One much studied group is Somali refugee youth. In the United States, Canada, and Australia, members of this diaspora have been known to travel abroad to participate in terrorist activity or have attempted to commit terrorist acts domestically.²²

¹⁹ Bjelopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism*, 65, 108, 118.

²⁰ Bjelopera, 1.

²¹ Bjelopera, 5.

²² Scott E. Mulligan, "Radicalization within the Somali-American Diaspora: Countering the Homegrown Terrorist Threat" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009) 22, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/4479>; Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Shiraz Maher, and James Shaheen, *Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2012), <https://preventviolentextremism.info/sites/default/files/Lights,%20Camera,%20Jihad-%20Al-Shabaab%E2%80%99s%20Western%20Media%20Strategy%20.pdf>; Michael G. Zekulin, "Islamic-Inspired Home-Grown Terrorism (IIHGT): What We Know and What It Means Moving Forward," *Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies*, Occasional Paper No. 8 (Calgary: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2013), <http://cdm.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cpmss/article/view/36353/29308>.

General research on radicalization and violent extremism does not point to any single factor or group of factors that are indicators of radicalization risk. Marc Sageman’s early analysis of jihadists found that personal characteristics, such as socioeconomic background, education, and national origin, were poor indicators of who might become a terrorist.²³ Subsequent research generally supports this theory—that no specific indicators suggest an individual’s likelihood to radicalize.²⁴ However, the most recent wave of jihadi terrorists does appear to struggle with identity issues and social struggles.²⁵

Although resettled refugees do not match the typical immigration status of third-wave jihadists, these issues have also been identified as commonalities across radicalized members of the Somali diaspora. Weine and his colleagues have dedicated several pieces to assessing the various push and pull factors driving members of the Somali diaspora to extremism, including identity crises.²⁶ Studies of Somali refugee youth have revealed that this identity crisis is particularly acute within that group, exacerbated by their isolation from their resettled host communities.²⁷ Studies of the Somali diaspora have the benefit of both breadth and depth. Much of this research has spanned the greater part of a decade, and several studies have identified individuals, their specific histories, and circumstances leading to radicalization. The volume and variety of research make this

²³ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 99–135, ProQuest.

²⁴ Jytte Klausen et al., “Radicalization Trajectories: An Evidence-Based Computational Approach to Dynamic Risk Assessment of ‘Homegrown’ Jihadists,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 7 (2020): 588–615, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1492819>.

²⁵ Simon Cottee, “Jihadism as a Subcultural Response to Social Strain: Extending Marc Sageman’s ‘Bunch of Guys’ Thesis,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 5 (2011): 730–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2011.611840>.

²⁶ Stevan Weine et al., “Community and Family Approaches to Combating the Radicalization and Recruitment of Somali-American Youth and Young Adults: A Psychosocial Perspective,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 2, no. 3 (November 2009): 181–200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467581003586897>; Stevan Weine, Edna Erez, and Chloe Polutnik, *Transnational Crimes among Somali-Americans: Convergences of Radicalization and Trafficking* (Washington, DC: Office of Justice Programs, 2019), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252135.pdf>.

²⁷ Jessica Stern, “Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence: What Have We Learned and What Can We Do About It?,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 668, (November 2016): 102–17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26361939>; Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Shaheen, *Lights, Camera, Jihad*.

community particularly valuable when assessing the risk of radicalization from within a population of resettled refugees.

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research provides a comprehensive history of refugee laws in the United States and an overview of the current refugee admissions program. Using existing research and analyses, as well as raw data from global terrorism databases, it assesses the number and severity of terrorist plots and attacks perpetrated by resettled refugees within the United States. Drawing on qualitative analyses of known terrorist activity within resettled refugee communities, including the Twin Cities travelers from the Somali refugee community in Minnesota, it compares these cases to analyses of similarly situated cases in Canada and Australia from within the Somali and Lebanese diasporas. It focuses on larger groups or networks of persons who have become radicalized to commit terrorist acts domestically or overseas, rather than lone-wolf terrorists. This research uses existing assessments to analyze the shared factors that contributed to the radicalization of those refugees and proposes a recommendation for policy actions that could mitigate those risks.

D. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter II provides a historical overview of immigration legislation in the United States. It details statutes and executive actions taken by the U.S. government with respect to refugees. While focusing on domestic law, this chapter also details how international law relating to immigrants and refugees helped to shape current legislation in the United States and provides a background for how public perception can shape immigration law and policy. This chapter also outlines the current process for refugee admissions in the United States. Details about the interview, vetting, and travel process are provided to give context for analyzing factors that might lead a resettled refugee to become radicalized after permanent resettlement.

Chapter III outlines the known terrorist attacks that have been committed by resettled refugees within the United States. The chapter focuses on incidents perpetrated by individuals admitted to and resettled in the United States under USRAP; it does not include events involving asylees or other classes of immigrants or non-immigrants. Giving

details for each of these incidents and perpetrators, this chapter demonstrates the paucity of successful attacks that have been committed by resettled refugees on U.S. soil and notes that none of these attacks have taken place since the implementation of the current refugee admissions process. Providing details about recent unsuccessful terrorist incidents attempted by resettled refugees, this chapter demonstrates that various refugee communities are implicated in such incidents, though these refugees are more likely to be from predominantly Muslim countries. The section also compares known cases of radicalized refugees from within the Somali refugee communities in Canada and the United States and draws parallel examples from the Somali and Lebanese refugee communities in Australia. The Somali refugee communities in North America have been targeted for recruitment by al-Shabab, and several factors, including isolationism, contribute to their vulnerability to radicalization. Parallels from within the Lebanese refugee community in Australia are detailed to demonstrate common themes of risk across different refugee populations.

Chapter IV draws on the risk factors outlined in the previous chapter to provide a suggested policy solution for mitigating the risk of refugee radicalization within the United States. Drawing on the successes of the Canadian refugee admissions program in integrating previous groups of refugees, it suggests a practical step the United States could take in expanding its current refugee admissions program to include public and private sponsors for individual refugees.

Chapter V provides a conclusion based on the assessment of the overall risk from the U.S. refugee population, as assessed in Chapter II, while acknowledging the known examples of, and reasons for, radicalization from within this community. Considering the policy recommendation detailed in Chapter IV, this thesis concludes that the risk can be appropriately mitigated.

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II. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS TO THE UNITED STATES: LEGAL AND OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

In assessing the scope of any threat posed by refugees, it is important to understand the evolution of national legislation pertaining to these immigrants and contextualize known terrorist incidents perpetrated by refugees in the proper historical context. U.S. refugee law has evolved from reactionary and politically driven bursts of admission or exclusion of individuals based on specific criteria to its current state. Since 1980, and until very recently, humanitarian need has driven U.S. refugee admissions. While the Trump administration significantly curtailed the number of refugee admissions and created policies to exclude certain nationalities from admission, the definition of a refugee has remained unchanged. USRAP continues to operate in a limited capacity, working closely with international partners to interview refugee applicants, conduct robust screening and vetting, and accept individuals fleeing persecution from across the globe.

A. LEGAL HISTORY OF U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “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-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

—Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus”²⁸

²⁸ Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” Poetry Foundation, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus>.

A Jewish immigrant penned the famous words inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty in 1883.²⁹ These words encompass both the history of the United States as a country of immigrants and the continuing promise of refuge in a new land.

1. Regulating Immigration in a New Nation

The history of immigration regulation in the United States is almost as old as the country itself. The first pieces of legislation pertaining to the entry of persons to the United States were the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. These acts allowed the president to remove any foreigner who was deemed dangerous.³⁰ These laws expired after two years, and the Alien Act was never enforced.³¹ The Enemy Alien Act, passed concurrently with the Alien and Sedition Acts, authorized the president to remove any citizen, of 14 years of age or older, of a country with which the United States was at war.³² Unlike its counterparts, the Enemy Alien Act remains good law.

These pieces of legislation dealt primarily with the expulsion of immigrants from the United States, rather than their admission. Tracking of immigrants' entry into the United States did not begin until 1819 under the Steerage Act.³³ Prior to this law, an estimated 250,000 immigrants had entered the country between 1776 and 1819.³⁴ Even this tracking was incomplete, as it required the reporting of passenger manifests only from ships coming to Eastern ports. Western ports were not included until 1850, and there was no organized tracking of land-border entries until 1910.³⁵ At the time, entry of immigrants

²⁹ "From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America," Library of Congress, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/haven-century.html>.

³⁰ Walter A. Ewing, "Opportunity and Exclusion: A Brief History of US Immigration Policy" (Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, 2012), 1–7, https://exchange.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/opportunity_exclusion_011312.pdf.

³¹ David Cole, "Enemy Aliens," *Stanford Law Review* 54, no. 5 (May 2002): 989, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229690>.

³² Cole.

³³ Ewing, "Opportunity and Exclusion," 2.

³⁴ Joyce C. Vialet, *A Brief History of US Immigration Policy*, CRS Report No. 80-223 EPW (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1980), 9, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=15210>.

³⁵ Vialet.

was not regulated.³⁶ Manifests were intended to keep Congress and the secretary of state continuously updated on the number of immigrants entering the country.³⁷

In the 1800s, immigration was mostly regulated at the state level. In 1875, the Supreme Court in *Chy Lung v. Freeman* heard a challenge to a California law requiring a bond for passengers from “certain enumerated classes” coming to the United States.³⁸ The court held that Congress, not individual states, possessed the power to pass laws concerning the admission of foreign nationals.³⁹ Stemming partially from this decision and partially from waves of European immigrants flowing into the United States, a series of federal laws was enacted over the next several decades to regulate immigration.⁴⁰

The Page Act of 1875, alternately referred to as the Asian Exclusion Act, barred entry of convicts, prostitutes, and forced Chinese laborers.⁴¹ In 1882, the Immigration Act became the first general immigration statute.⁴² It based eligibility for entry to the United States on national origin.⁴³ Earlier that same year, the Chinese Exclusion Act suspended immigration of Chinese labor immigration for 10 years from the date of the act.⁴⁴ It was the first law of its kind to restrict immigrants from a specific ethnic group, and it remained in effect until 1943.⁴⁵ In 1891, the Immigration Act was amended to exclude other classes of persons from admission, including the insane, poor, or diseased; polygamists; and a variety of criminals.⁴⁶ Literacy requirements for immigrants were first included in

³⁶ Viallet, 12.

³⁷ Viallet.

³⁸ *Chy Lung v. Freeman*, 92 U.S. 275 (1876).

³⁹ *Chy Lung*.

⁴⁰ Viallet, *A Brief History*, 12.

⁴¹ George Peffer, “Forbidden Families: Emigration Experiences of Chinese Women under the Page Law, 1875–1882,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 6, no. 1 (1986): 28–46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27500484>.

⁴² Viallet, *A Brief History*, 12.

⁴³ Viallet.

⁴⁴ Chinese Exclusion Act, Public Law 47–126, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 22 (1882): 58–59.

⁴⁵ Viallet, *A Brief History*, 12.

⁴⁶ Immigration Act of 1891, Public Law 51–551, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 26 (1891): 1084.

legislation in 1897 but were not implemented until congressional overriding of a presidential veto in 1917 established a literacy test. That same year, the Immigration Act further restricted immigration for peoples from Asia, creating an “Asiatic Barred Zone.”⁴⁷

Despite these measures prior to the First World War, immigration to the United States continued to grow on an exponential scale. Bills restricting immigration began to appear in Congress in 1918 and 1919. The Immigration Act of June 5, 1920, was passed, broadly prohibiting the admission of radicals and anarchists.⁴⁸ Further restrictions on immigration were legislated through the use of quotas. The Quota Act of 1921 applied numerical limitations to immigration, regardless of eligibility. This law marked the onset of a bifurcated immigrant admission system based on selection and restriction.⁴⁹ The quota system was modified through the Quota Act of 1924. In 1928, a national origins quota was implemented to reduce the overall amount of immigration and “maintain the cultural and racial homogeneity of the United States.”⁵⁰ These quotas were based on the population of the United States as recorded in the 1890 census.

From 1890 until the Second World War, little immigration legislation was passed in the United States. With the advent of the war in 1939, the United States became more fearful of enemy aliens. This anxiety was reflected in the Alien Registration Act of 1940. That act created five additional categories of removable aliens, and aliens who were over the age of 14 and present in the United States for 30 days or more were required to be registered and fingerprinted.⁵¹ The quota system and other isolationist policies caused the 1930s to see the slowest immigration flow in a century.⁵² The next years, and the widespread persecution carried out during the Second World War, led to a shift in

⁴⁷ Edward P. Hutchinson, “Immigration Policy since World War I,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 262, no. 1 (March 1949): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271624926200103>.

⁴⁸ Hutchinson, 15–21.

⁴⁹ Hutchinson, 16.

⁵⁰ Hutchinson, 17.

⁵¹ Hutchinson, 19.

⁵² Violet, *A Brief History*, 21–22.

ideologies in the U.S. approach to immigration. The legislation passed in the war's aftermath would form the foundation of refugee admissions to the United States.⁵³

2. From Exclusion to Admission: The Development of Refugee Legislation

Under the enduring quota system, there was no provision to address the admission of refugees to the United States. They were virtually barred from entry. Prior to 1942, the United States had taken in only 250,000 refugees from Nazi persecution.⁵⁴ An estimated 11 million persons were displaced within Europe after the war, yet the United States only accepted roughly 400,000.⁵⁵ The refugee problem at the time was seen as singular. The government did not think it would need a legislative solution.⁵⁶ Due to the failure of Congress to take precedential or permanent action on refugees, the executive branch was forced to act outside of statutory immigration limits.⁵⁷

To alleviate quotas on refugee admissions, President Truman passed a directive permitting up to 90 percent of regular quotas for Central and Eastern Europe to be used for displaced persons.⁵⁸ Roughly 42,000 were admitted under this directive in 1945.⁵⁹ A legislative solution proposed to overcome the quota system had failed.⁶⁰ Though it did not result in a large number of admissions, Truman's directive was transformative in allowing for humanitarian agencies to sponsor refugees in lieu of "financially competent

⁵³ Violet, 19.

⁵⁴ Philip A. Holman, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States," in *Refugees in America in the 1990s: A Reference Handbook*, ed. David W. Haines (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 5.

⁵⁵ Holman, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States"; Anastasia Brown and Todd Scribner, "Unfulfilled Promises, Future Possibilities: The Refugee Resettlement System in the United States," *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 2, no. 2 (2014): 101–20, <https://doi.org/10.14240/jmhs.v2i2.2>.

⁵⁶ Linda W. Gordon, "The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees in the United States," in *Refugees in America in the 1990s: A Reference Handbook*, ed. David W. Haines (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 331–54.

⁵⁷ Deborah Anker and Michael Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis: A Legislative History of the Refugee Act of 1980," *San Diego Law Review* 19, no. 1 (1981): 13, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/sanlr19&i=17>.

⁵⁸ Holman, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States," 5.

⁵⁹ Holman.

⁶⁰ Gordon, "The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees," 335.

individuals.”⁶¹ The directive allowed for the agencies themselves to pay for resettlement costs for displaced persons instead of using tax dollars.⁶²

Since the directive and the existing legislation did not distinguish between refugees and other immigrants, Congress enacted the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. This emergency legislation, passed due to pressure from the executive branch, allowed for a narrowly defined group of 202,000 displaced persons to be admitted to the United States over a two-year period.⁶³ Overall, more than 400,000 displaced persons were admitted between 1948 and 1951.⁶⁴ It was also under this act that a national network for refugee resettlement began to develop. Humanitarian agencies ceded responsibility for travel costs to the federal government and took over responsibility for the resettlement process.⁶⁵

The approach to refugees continued to be driven by ad hoc executive and legislative responses for the next two decades, despite the Displaced Persons Act.⁶⁶ The more comprehensive Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1952 also failed to provide a solution to the refugee problem. It focused on national origins quotas and family reunification.⁶⁷ The Refugee Relief Act of 1953, and its subsequent amendments, was narrowly tailored to allow for the admission of only European refugees and those escaping communist countries.⁶⁸ To respond to the 1956 Hungarian refugee crisis, the attorney general employed the INA’s parole provision to admit 15,000 Hungarian refugees who were ineligible for visas under the expired Refugee Relief Act, which permitted that only 6,500 visas be issued.⁶⁹ The statutory intent of parole was to use the attorney general’s

⁶¹ Brown and Scribner, “Unfulfilled Promises,” 104.

⁶² Brown and Scribner.

⁶³ Brown and Scribner, “Unfulfilled Promises”; Anker and Posner, “The Forty Year Crisis,” 13.

⁶⁴ Vialet, *A Brief History*, 19.

⁶⁵ Brown and Scribner, “Unfulfilled Promises,” 104.

⁶⁶ Anker and Posner, “The Forty Year Crisis,” 13.

⁶⁷ Vialet, *A Brief History*, 21.

⁶⁸ Vialet, 22.

⁶⁹ Anker and Posner, “The Forty Year Crisis,” 15; Refugee Relief Act of 1953, Public Law 83–203, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 67 (1953): 400, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-67/pdf/STATUTE-67-Pg400.pdf>.

discretionary authority to allow aliens to enter the United States temporarily due to an emergency or for the public interest; such entry is not considered a lawful admission, and aliens are supposed to return to their countries of origin after the period authorized for parole has expired.⁷⁰ Without the use of parole here, it would have taken three years' worth of quotas to admit this number of Hungarian refugees.

The Refugee-Escapee Act of 1957 expanded the class of refugees previously articulated in the Refugee Relief Act to include those fleeing from the Middle East.⁷¹ This law was still insufficient to capture all refugees in need of assistance. In 1958, the Azores and Netherlands Refugee Act was passed to assist Portuguese nationals displaced by earthquakes and Dutch nationals displaced by floods in Indonesia.⁷² This law was the first instance of offering refuge to foreign nationals fleeing from natural disasters. Provisions for similarly situated populations would be included in future refugee legislation. In 1959, the Refugee Relatives Act provided for family members of individuals who had been admitted under the prior Refugee Relief Act to obtain admission as non-quota immigrants.⁷³

The United Nations declared 1960 the Year of the Refugee, and the issue of refugees came to the international foreground.⁷⁴ In the hopes of aiding the closure of European refugee camps, the Fair Share Law of 1960 allowed for the attorney general to use parole authority to admit a "fair share" of refugees in those camps. Twenty-five percent of remaining European refugees were admitted to the United States under this law.⁷⁵ This act, like ones before it, was narrowly tailored to include only certain populations of

⁷⁰ Anker and Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis," 15.

⁷¹ Vialet, *A Brief History*, 23.

⁷² Gordon, "The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees," 337.

⁷³ Gordon.

⁷⁴ Gordon, 338.

⁷⁵ Anker and Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis," 16; Vialet, *A Brief History*, 23–24.

refugees.⁷⁶ From 1960 through 1962, the widespread use of parole authority by the executive branch filled gaps in congressional legislation aimed at refugees.⁷⁷

Beginning in 1960, the United States was host for the first time to a population of refugees from the Western Hemisphere. The fall of Cuba's Batista government sent waves of refugees from the island.⁷⁸ In 1960 alone, over 100,000 Cuban refugees reached the United States. This influx of immigrants prompted President Eisenhower to establish the Cuban Refugee Center in Miami, Florida, with a \$1 million allocation of funds from the President's Contingency Fund.⁷⁹ An additional \$4 million was allocated in 1961 to continue supporting the ongoing flow of Cuban refugees.⁸⁰ This program was the first and only to provide assistance to refugees arriving in the United States as the country of first refuge.⁸¹

President Eisenhower issued a directive in May 1962 to address the "Hong Kong Chinese."⁸² Like previous directives, this was a temporary fix to a singular crisis. Chinese persons fleeing the mainland to Hong Kong who were relatives of U.S. citizens or residents, were special skills aliens, or had previously denied refugee applications due to visa limits were allowed admission.⁸³

With ongoing refugee crises, the United States was driven to pass more comprehensive legislation. The Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 provided the first broad definition of refugee. It included persons from the Western Hemisphere who fled, or could not return to their countries of origin, because of persecution based on race,

⁷⁶ Anker and Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis," 16.

⁷⁷ Anker and Posner.

⁷⁸ John F. Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," *International Migration Review* 1, no. 2 (1967): 46–57, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3002808>.

⁷⁹ Holman, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States," 7; Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," 47.

⁸⁰ Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," 48.

⁸¹ Holman, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States," 7–8; Gordon, "The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees," 341.

⁸² Gordon, "The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees," 339.

⁸³ Gordon.

religion, or political opinion.⁸⁴ The act created a better system of cooperation between the federal government and international refugee assistance groups as well as better funding for refugee programs, including the existing Cuban Refugee Program.⁸⁵

For more than two decades, the United States failed to establish comprehensive or lasting refugee legislation. This deficit in legislation resulted in special treatment for certain ethnic populations and created a constant need for executive or congressional action to respond to the crises as they arose. In 1965, Congress passed amendments to the INA that established a permanent legal basis for refugee admission to the United States.⁸⁶ These amendments repealed all previous refugee laws, including the national origin quotas, and set the yearly limit at just over 10,000 admissions.⁸⁷ While codifying refugee admissions, these amendments represented a regression in refugee policy. The definition limited refugees to those fleeing persecution from a communist country or the Middle East. The amendments did, however, contain a provision for admitting refugees fleeing natural disasters.⁸⁸

Even these legislative amendments did not adequately address the issue of refugee admissions. The attorney general continued to employ parole authority to admit scores of refugees to evade the numerical limitations in the INA.⁸⁹ Cubans, in particular, continued to benefit from the executive's supplemental refugee admissions. More than 265,000 Cuban refugees were air-lifted into the United States, at the rate of 3,000–4,000 per month

⁸⁴ Anker and Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis," 17; Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, Public Law No. 87–510, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 76 (1962): 121 <http://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/87/510.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Anker and Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis," 17; Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," 48.

⁸⁶ Anker and Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis," 17.

⁸⁷ Gordon, "The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees," 340; Holman, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States," 4.

⁸⁸ Gordon, "The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees," 337; Anker and Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis," 17.

⁸⁹ Anker and Posner, "The Forty Year Crisis," 19.

between 1965 and 1973, based on a memorandum of understanding between President Johnson and Cuba.⁹⁰

The 1965 INA amendments did not prevent further legislation directed at specific refugee populations. Although in 1968 the U.S. Senate ratified the 1967 United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of a Refugee, it did not formally adopt the apolitical refugee definition from that protocol at the time.⁹¹ The United States continued to cater to different refugee groups “deserving of special consideration.”⁹² In 1971, the attorney general used his authority to allow for Jewish persons from the USSR to enter the United States as refugees.⁹³ The same authority was exercised in 1972 for expelled Ugandan Asians.⁹⁴ Similar programs targeting Romanians, Eastern Europeans, Lebanese, and South American political prisoners were used throughout the 1970s.⁹⁵

President Ford’s 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act provided Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees with the same access to domestic assistance as did the similarly named act of 1962 for Cubans.⁹⁶ Approximately 130,000 Vietnamese refugees resettled in the United States within seven months of its signing.⁹⁷ Over 250,000 additional Southeast Asian refugees were resettled under this act in the three subsequent fiscal years.⁹⁸ During this time, Congress continued to amend the INA to create consistency in refugee policy.⁹⁹ The 1976 amendments extended the per-country refugee

⁹⁰ Holman, “Refugee Resettlement in the United States,” 10.

⁹¹ Rebecca Hamlin and Philip E. Wolgin, “Symbolic Politics and Policy Feedback: The United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and American Refugee Policy in the Cold War,” *International Migration Review* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 586–88, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2012.00898.x>.

⁹² Gordon, “The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees,” 342.

⁹³ Gordon, 342.

⁹⁴ Gordon.

⁹⁵ Gordon.

⁹⁶ Holman, “Refugee Resettlement in the United States,” 10.

⁹⁷ Holman.

⁹⁸ Holman, 11–18.

⁹⁹ Violet, *A Brief History*, 25–29.

limit to 20,000 but maintained a preference for refugees from the Western Hemisphere.¹⁰⁰ The 1979 amendments developed a single preference system with a worldwide ceiling of 290,000.¹⁰¹

Despite the consistent updating of the INA after its passage in 1965, legislation pertaining to refugees did not create a cohesive policy until the Refugee Act of 1980. This act established refugees as their own class of immigrant, eliminating them as a category in the preference system and acknowledging that refugee resettlement was not a singular phenomenon.¹⁰² It formally adopted the definition of a refugee from the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in U.S. law and provided for regular admission of refugees in consultation with Congress.¹⁰³

Before the passage of the Refugee Act, refugees were defined in U.S. law as “persons fleeing persecution in Communist countries or countries in the Middle East.”¹⁰⁴ Beginning in 1980, the U.S. defined a refugee as any person, outside of one’s country of nationality or last place of residence, “who is unable or unwilling to return to . . . that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”¹⁰⁵ This shift aligned the U.S. refugee policy with the posture of the international community and shied away from preferential treatment for certain types of political refugees. There has been no cohesive legislative update pertaining to refugees since the passage of this act. The legal posture under which the United States processes and admits refugees has remained unchanged for the past 40 years.

¹⁰⁰ Vialet, 25.

¹⁰¹ Vialet.

¹⁰² Gordon, “The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees,” 343.

¹⁰³ Gordon, “The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees”; Vialet, *A Brief History*, 25.

¹⁰⁴ Vialet, *A Brief History*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ Refugee Act of 1980, Public Law 96–212, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 94 (1980): 102, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-94/pdf/STATUTE-94-Pg102.pdf>.

B. THE UNITED STATES REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW

To offer resettlement opportunities to persons overseas who are of special humanitarian concern, while protecting national security and combating fraud.

—Mission of the United States Refugee Admissions Program¹⁰⁶

Refugee admissions fall under the purview of the executive branch of the U.S. government. Each year, the Department of State (DOS) submits a report to Congress on behalf of the president proposing a number of refugee admissions for that year.¹⁰⁷ This report, compiled with the assistance of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), analyzes the global refugee situation and the United States' ability to participate in resettling refugees; it also assesses whether the admission of refugees comports with the national interests of the country or is otherwise justified by humanitarian concerns.¹⁰⁸ This report forms the basis for consultations with Congress that yield a presidential declaration setting a ceiling for refugee admissions each fiscal year.¹⁰⁹

USRAP is operated by DOS in conjunction with DHS and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).¹¹⁰ Refugees are referred for application and processing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or a trained non-governmental organization (NGO).¹¹¹ Refugees must generally be outside of the United States and fall into one of three priorities for application

¹⁰⁶ "The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, March 2011, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/presentations/Refugee_Admissions_Program.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program"; "An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy," American Immigration Council, January 8, 2020, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/overview-us-refugee-law-and-policy>.

¹⁰⁹ "The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Consultation and Worldwide Processing Priorities," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, last updated March 5, 2019, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees/the-united-states-refugee-admissions-program-usrap-consultation-and-worldwide-processing-priorities>; American Immigration Council, "An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy."

¹¹⁰ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "The United States Refugee Admissions Program."

¹¹¹ "Refugee Admissions: Application and Case Processing," Department of State, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/application-and-case-processing/>.

to USRAP. Priority one refugees must be referred to the United States by UNHCR or a specially trained NGO as individuals with “compelling persecution needs or those for whom no other durable solution exists.”¹¹² Refugees falling under priority two include those of “special concern” selected by DOS with input from UNHCR, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and certain NGOs.¹¹³ Priority three refugees are the parents, spouses, and unmarried children of refugees who have already resettled in the United States and for whom an affidavit of relationship has been filed with DHS.¹¹⁴

After referral, the first step in the refugee admissions process is handled by one of seven Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs) around the globe. These RSCs are managed and funded by DOS but operated by NGOs, international organizations, or contract employees of a U.S. embassy.¹¹⁵ At the RSC, applicants are prepared for screening through the collection of biometric and biographic data and the initiation of security checks.¹¹⁶ Applicants are also prepared for interview and adjudication before USCIS. The RSC creates a case file, which includes biographic and claim information collected by UNHCR, and prepares the I-590 *Registration for Classification as a Refugee* and case summary.¹¹⁷ Applicants are also educated about the refugee application and admission process.¹¹⁸

Once the RSC prepares an applicant’s case, it is referred to USCIS for an in-person interview with a refugee officer.¹¹⁹ Refugee officers are specially trained to conduct non-adversarial interviews about an applicant’s refugee claim and eligibility for admission

¹¹² American Immigration Council, “An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy.”

¹¹³ American Immigration Council.

¹¹⁴ American Immigration Council.

¹¹⁵ Department of State, “Refugee Admissions: Application and Case Processing.”

¹¹⁶ Department of State, “Refugee Admissions: Application and Case Processing”; “United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP): Flow Chart,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, last updated August 31, 2018, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/charts/USRAP_Flow_Chart.pdf.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Flow Chart.”

¹¹⁸ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹¹⁹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

to the United States.¹²⁰ Refugee interviews are designed to elicit credible testimony regarding an applicant’s qualifications for refugee status, including whether the applicant has been appropriately referred under a processing priority, whether the applicant meets the statutory definition of a refugee, whether the applicant has been firmly resettled (offered or granted citizenship) in a third country, and whether the applicant is otherwise inadmissible to the United States.¹²¹

USCIS is also responsible for completing and analyzing the results of security checks to assess any potential derogatory information that may prevent the approval of a refugee application.¹²² This part of the process involves checking multiple security systems owned by various U.S. agencies for each applicant.¹²³ The DOS Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) vets primary names and aliases of applicants before the USCIS interview, and USCIS reviews and resolves any potential mismatches.¹²⁴ Any additional biographic data collected at the interview is also run through CLASS before the final decision on the case.¹²⁵ The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and intelligence community partners conduct biographic checks called security advisory opinions (SAOs).¹²⁶ The RSC initiates these checks, which are reviewed and cleared by USCIS before the interview. As with the CLASS check, any new biographic data acquired at the time of the interview generates a new SAO, which must be reviewed and cleared prior to a final decision.

¹²⁰ “Refugee Eligibility Determination,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, last updated April 8, 2013, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees/refugee-eligibility-determination>.

¹²¹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹²² U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹²³ “Refugee Processing and Security Screening,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, last updated June 3, 2020, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees/refugee-processing-and-security-screening>.<https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees/refugee-processing-and-security-screening>.

¹²⁴ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹²⁵ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹²⁶ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The FBI also conducts recurring checks for criminal history and other immigration data based on a refugee applicant's fingerprints, as it does for many other immigration form types. Intelligence community partners, including the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), are responsible for providing results of an interagency check, which vets an applicant's biographic data on a recurring basis. These checks are initiated by USCIS, typically at the time of interview.¹²⁷ For applicants from certain regions, biometrics are run against the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Forensics and Biometrics Automated Biometric Identification System. This system is only available if the DoD has had sufficient military presence in an area to collect biometric data.¹²⁸ In addition to these standard security checks, USCIS's Fraud Detection and Nationality Security (FDNS) officers route certain cases with nationality security concerns through the enhanced Controlled Application Review and Resolution Process and conduct enhanced FDNS reviews for certain populations of cases. Approved refugees are vetted by Customs and Border Protection before departure and are then inspected for admission at a port of entry upon arrival in the United States.¹²⁹

After interview and adjudication by USCIS, applicants whose I-590s have been conditionally approved go through post-adjudication with the RSC.¹³⁰ All refugees undergo either a health screening by a panel physician or a physical exam with the International Office of Migration (IOM)'s Health Division.¹³¹ The purpose of this health screening is to assess an individual's physical and mental fitness to travel and ensure any necessary treatments or vaccines are delivered.¹³² Refugees who are cleared to travel usually receive a cultural orientation from the RSC, which lasts one to five days.¹³³ This

¹²⁷ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹²⁸ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹²⁹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹³⁰ Department of State, "Refugee Admissions: Application and Case Processing."

¹³¹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Flow Chart."

¹³² "Migration Health Assessments & Travel Health Assistance," International Office of Migration, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.iom.int/migration-health-assessments-travel-health-assistance>.

¹³³ Department of State, "Refugee Admissions: Application and Case Processing."

orientation covers topics such as housing, transportation, employment, English language skills, education, health and hygiene, budgeting and finance, and immigration law.¹³⁴

DOS funds refugee travel with a no-interest loan, which refugees pay back to DOS beginning six months after their arrival to the United States.¹³⁵ IOM is responsible for the administration of these loans, which must be repaid within 46 months of resettlement, either to IOM or to an authorized loan-collecting resettlement agency.¹³⁶

Each refugee is paired with a sponsoring resettlement agency in the United States that coordinates the resettlement site and provides support services.¹³⁷ Sponsoring agencies receive grants from DOS aimed to help refugees pay their expenses for the first 90 days in the United States. Any supplemental funds or resources are provided by the agency itself.¹³⁸ The goal of resettlement agencies is to assist refugees with their adjustment to living in the United States by providing services to address integration, education, employment, immigration case management, and language support.¹³⁹

USCIS, in an attempt to assist with the full assimilation of refugees up to and through the naturalization process, supplements ORR's programs, promoting self-sufficiency through the funding of the Refugee and Asylee Assimilation Program.¹⁴⁰ The program funds eligible local organizations to assist with developing assimilation plans

¹³⁴ Dani M. Abrams, *Making Your Way: A Reception and Placement Orientation Curriculum*, ed. Donald A. Ranard (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2013), <http://coresourceexchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Complete-Making-Your-Way-RP-Orientation-Curriculum.pdf>.

¹³⁵ "Refugee Admissions: Reception and Placement," Department of State, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/reception-and-placement/>.

¹³⁶ "United States of America," International Office of Migration, last updated February 2016, <https://www.iom.int/countries/united-states-america>.

¹³⁷ International Office of Migration, "United States of America"; "Refugee Support Services," Office of Refugee Resettlement, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/refugee-support-services>.

¹³⁸ Department of State, "Refugee Admissions: Reception and Placement."

¹³⁹ See, for example, "Resettlement Services," Commonwealth Catholic Charities, accessed December 12, 2020, <https://www.cccofva.org/resettlement-services>.

¹⁴⁰ "The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) FY2020 Citizenship and Assimilation Grant Program Refugee and Asylee Assimilation Program," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed December 12, 2020, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/notices/RAAP_FY_2020_NOFO_FINAL.pdf.

geared toward cultivating responsible citizens who feel a sense of belonging and attachment to the United States. To be eligible, the organizations must be familiar with asylee and refugee populations in their areas.¹⁴¹ Funding in this fiscal year is available for only six organizations nationwide, limiting the scope of access to such services by the greater refugee community.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹⁴² U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

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III. RADICALIZED REFUGEES: PERPETRATORS AND TRAVELERS

Resettled refugees have attempted or carried out over 20 terrorist attacks in the United States. However, only a very small number of these attacks have been successful or resulted in death or injury to U.S. persons. Notably, no fatal attacks have occurred since the implementation of the current refugee admissions process as established under the 1980 Refugee Act. Recent terrorist incidents have been attempted or perpetrated by resettled refugees from a range of refugee communities. The Somali refugee population in North America has been most susceptible to radicalization; there have been known cases of relatively large numbers of radicalized Somali refugees in both Canada and the United States. Several psychosocial factors, most notably isolationism, have contributed to these communities' vulnerability to radicalization.

A. REFUGEE RADICALIZATION—A PERCEIVED OR ACTUAL THREAT?

Refugees are not terrorists. Refugees are many times the first victims of terror.

—Antonio Guterres, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees¹⁴³

There are a number of known terrorist attacks that have been committed by resettled refugees within the United States over the course of the last 50 years. While recent rhetoric surrounding refugees and terrorism would imply a significant risk to the life and safety of U.S. citizens, the data available indicates that there is no pattern of domestic terrorist activity within the refugee community. In analyzing the details of each of these incidents and their perpetrators, it is evident there have been few fatal attacks in recent history, and there is no single root cause of these attacks. No fatal attacks have occurred since the implementation of the current refugee admissions law and process under the Refugee Act of 1980, making the actual risk posed by resettled refugees a minimal one.

¹⁴³ William Spindler, “Don’t Confuse Refugees with Terrorists,’ Says Guterres,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, July 22, 2005, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2005/7/42e0df204/dont-confuse-refugees-terrorists-says-guterres.html>.

1. Refugee Attacks in the United States: The Numbers

Between 1975 and 2017, a total of 25 individuals resettled in the United States as refugees were responsible for terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.¹⁴⁴ This number equates with about 13 percent of total foreign-born terrorists identified in the United States during that timeframe.¹⁴⁵ In total, 192 foreign-born terrorists were responsible for the killings of 3,037 people, the majority of whom perished in the attacks on September 11, 2001.¹⁴⁶ No one involved in the attacks of 9/11 had entered the United States as a refugee.¹⁴⁷ Based on the raw data, this puts the risk of being killed by a refugee in a terrorist attack in the United States at 0.000000026 percent—functionally, zero.¹⁴⁸ An individual’s status as a refugee is not an indicator of potential for terrorist activity.¹⁴⁹ Parallel studies have found that immigration, particularly refugee protection programs, generally reduce the number of attacks by acting to diffuse terrorism on a global scale.¹⁵⁰

There has not been another metadata analysis conducted for terrorist attacks after 2017 in the United States. However, the Global Terrorism Database serves as a repository for all terrorist incidents worldwide from 1970 through 2018. Queries of this database reveal that there was one additional incident of domestic terrorism perpetrated by a refugee in the United States between 2017 and 2018.¹⁵¹ That attack did not result in any deaths.

¹⁴⁴ Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality*, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Nowrasteh.

¹⁴⁶ Nowrasteh, 2, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Nowrasteh, *Terrorism and Immigration*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality*, 8.

¹⁴⁹ Seth G. Jones, “The Terrorism Threat to the United States and Implications for Refugees” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT433.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Vincenzo Bove and Tobias Bohmelt, “Does Immigration Induce Terrorism,” *Journal of Politics* 78, no. 2 (April 2016): 584, <https://doi.org/10.1086/684679>; Donald Kerwin, “How Robust Refugee Protection Policies Can Strengthen Human and National Security,” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 4, no. 3 (2016): 83–140.

¹⁵¹ Global Terrorism Database (United States, between 2015 and 2018; accessed October 20, 2020), <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

Through 2017, the 25 refugees responsible for a handful of terrorist attacks were successful in only three, killing three people.¹⁵² Those attacks were all committed by Cuban refugees in the 1970s. All of these individuals were admitted to the United States before the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980. They were not subject to the progressively enhanced screening and vetting implemented by DHS and its partner agencies.¹⁵³ While the last decade has seen another three successful attacks by three additional refugees-turned-terrorists, none of those resulted in casualties.¹⁵⁴ The most common perpetrators of terrorism within the United States are native-born or naturalized citizens.¹⁵⁵

2. Lethal Refugee Attacks in the United States

There were two lethal attacks by refugees in the United States between 1975 and 2015. Valentin Hernandez, a Cuban refugee, participated in a terrorist campaign in Florida in the mid-1970s. He was responsible for gunning down fellow Cuban refugee and activist Luciano Nieves on February 21, 1975.¹⁵⁶ Hernandez had a history of violence against Nieves due to the latter's desire to re-establish ties between Cuba and the United States. At the time of the investigation and trial, Miami police determined that Cuban politics was the cause of the terrorism.¹⁵⁷ Alvin Ross Diaz, a Cuban national and director of the Cuban Nationalist Movement, provided assistance to Cuban national and U.S. lawful permanent resident Guillermo Novo Sampol in the September 21, 1976, assassinations of Chilean

¹⁵² Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality*, 8.

¹⁵³ Nowrasteh, *Terrorism and Immigration*, 4.

¹⁵⁴ Global Terrorism Database.

¹⁵⁵ Bryce E. Yost, "Admitting Syrian Refugees: Is the Threat of Islamic State Infiltration Justified?" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017) 10, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1046593.pdf>.

¹⁵⁶ Louis Salome and Hilda Inclan, "2 Indicted in Death of Exile Here," *Miami News*, October 6, 1976, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/belligerence/MN-10-6-1976-1.pdf>.

¹⁵⁷ Salome and Inclan.

Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier and his American assistant, Ronni Moffit. The two were killed in Washington, DC, at the direction of Pinochet's junta.¹⁵⁸

These three deaths comprise the only fatal terrorist attacks by resettled refugees in the United States in the last four decades. All three involved Christian, North American refugees admitted before adoption of modern refugee law, and before the cohesive and extensive vetting of refugee applicants by various U.S. government entities.

3. Recent Terrorist Activity Related to Refugees

Between 1986 and 2003, there were no terrorist attacks on U.S. soil by refugees.¹⁵⁹ Between 2004 and 2017, 14 refugees were implicated in terrorist plots, or engaged in terrorist activity, in the United States.¹⁶⁰ One other refugee was connected to a terrorist attack between 2017 and 2018.¹⁶¹ The ideology of terrorists in the United States between 1986 and the early 2000s shifted from predominantly political to religious. The majority of recently identified terrorist plots in the United States have been linked to known Islamic terrorist groups or to extremist Islamic ideology.¹⁶²

In 2004, an Iraqi Kurdistan refugee named Yassin Aref conspired to aid a Pakistani terrorist group by providing support for a weapon of mass destruction and money laundering.¹⁶³ Aref was an imam in Albany, New York, and was suspected of being connected to the Ansar al-Islam terrorist group based on evidence discovered in a successful raid in Iraq.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ “United States: District Court for the District of Columbia Opinion in *Letelier v. Chile* (U.S. Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act; Money Damages for Death or Injury),” *International Legal Materials* 19, no. 6 (November 1980): 1418–35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20692228>; “Chile’s Supreme Court Reopens Letelier Inquiry,” *New York Times*, January 16, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/01/16/world/around-the-world-chile-s-supreme-court-reopens-letelier-inquiry.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality*, 29–32.

¹⁶⁰ Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality*, 32–34; Bjelopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism*, 123.

¹⁶¹ Global Terrorism Database.

¹⁶² Bjelopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism*.

¹⁶³ Bjelopera, 132.

¹⁶⁴ Bjelopera, 133.

Agron Abdullahu was the sole refugee implicated with five other men in a terrorist plot to attack Fort Dix, New Jersey, in 2007.¹⁶⁵ Abdullahu, a refugee from Kosovo-Albania, was charged with allowing others in the plot, including several illegal immigrants, to possess and use guns he owned legally. The plot was meant to kill military personnel at the Army base and had no affiliation with a known terrorist organization.¹⁶⁶

New York City, a recurring target of terrorist plots in the aftermath of 9/11, was home to resettled Afghan refugee Najibullah Zazi, who admitted to plotting a coordinated attack on the subways there in 2009.¹⁶⁷ Not only was Zazi's plot operated on behalf of al-Qaida; he also fought with the Taliban against the United States in Pakistan in 2008 and received training as a bomb maker.¹⁶⁸ Zazi's co-conspirators, Zarein Ahmedzay and Adis Medunjanin, were also refugees.¹⁶⁹

On July 27, 2009, Hysen Sherifi, a Kosovar refugee, was arrested with six others in North Carolina on charges of plotting jihad abroad.¹⁷⁰ Sherifi, who traveled back to Kosovo, translated recruitment videos and collected money in the United States for carrying out jihad in Kosovo.¹⁷¹ With his co-conspirators, Sherifi plotted to attack military personnel at the Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia.¹⁷² They were convicted of conspiracy and possession of weapons.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁵ Bjelopera, 123.

¹⁶⁶ Bjelopera.

¹⁶⁷ Erik J. Dahl, "The Plots That Failed: Intelligence Lessons Learned from Unsuccessful Terrorist Attacks against the United States," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34, no. 8 (2011): 621–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2011.582628>.

¹⁶⁸ Dahl, 633.

¹⁶⁹ Nowrasteh, *Terrorism and Immigration*, 21.

¹⁷⁰ Peter Bergen, Bruce Hoffman, and Katherine Tiedemann, "Assessing the Jihadist Terrorist Threat to America and American Interests," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 2 (2011): 65–101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2011.538830>.

¹⁷¹ "Kosovar National Charged with Terrorism Violations," Department of Justice, June 17, 2010, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/kosovar-national-charged-terrorism-violations>.

¹⁷² Department of Justice.

¹⁷³ Department of Justice.

Mohamed Osman Mohamud was arrested in Portland, Oregon, on November 26, 2010, for attempting to bomb a Christmas tree-lighting event.¹⁷⁴ Mohamud, a native of Somalia, had resettled in the United States at the age of five.¹⁷⁵ During his teenage years, Mohamud became radicalized online and inspired by other jihadists, including the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks in 2008.¹⁷⁶ Mohamud's father reported his son to the FBI, indicating that he feared he had been brainwashed by associates in Yemen. This tip thwarted Mohamud's two attempts to travel abroad to fight with al-Qaida, so the young man began planning an attack in Portland.¹⁷⁷ Due to the FBI's involvement, the bombing plot was unsuccessful.¹⁷⁸

January 2012 saw a trio of foiled terrorist attacks by refugees. Uzbek refugee Jamshid Muhtorov was arrested in Aurora, Colorado, for plans to travel abroad to fight with the Pakistani-based Islamic Jihad Union (IJU). He had also collected funds from at least one other individual to provide to the IJU.¹⁷⁹ Kosovar refugee Sami Osmakac was implicated in January 2012 in a plot to bomb several public targets near Tampa, Florida. Osmakac expressed extremist views and support of al-Qaida and had been expelled from a local mosque.¹⁸⁰ Iraqi refugee Abdullatif Ali Aldosary was indicted in 2012 in the bombing of a Social Security office in Casa Grande, Arizona.¹⁸¹

Uzbek refugee Fazliddin Kurbanov was arrested in May 2013 in Boise, Idaho, for conspiring to provide material support to a terrorist organization, the Islamic Movement of

¹⁷⁴ Charles A. Eby, "The Nation That Cried Lone Wolf: A Data-Driven Analysis of Individual Terrorists in the United States since 9/11" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2012), 83–84, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA560635.pdf>.

¹⁷⁵ Brad Knickerbocker, "Mohamed Osman Mohamud: The Somali Teen Who Wanted to Bomb Portland," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 28, 2010, ProQuest.

¹⁷⁶ Jytte Klausen et al., "Toward a Behavioral Model of 'Homegrown' Radicalization Trajectories," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 1 (2015): 67–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1099995>.

¹⁷⁷ Klausen et al., 76–77.

¹⁷⁸ Klausen et al.

¹⁷⁹ Bjelopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism*, 65–66.

¹⁸⁰ Bjelopera, 66.

¹⁸¹ "Congressman Gosar Addresses Bombing in His District," Official Website of Congressman Paul Gosar, December 3, 2012, <https://gosar.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=1450>.

Uzbekistan (IMU).¹⁸² Kurbanov communicated with members of the IMU for nearly a year and discussed building a bomb to perpetrate an attack in the United States. When the FBI searched his home in 2012 and 2013, they discovered components for bomb-making. Kurbanov had also provided instructions and demonstrations on bomb-making in January 2013, for which he was indicted in Utah.¹⁸³

Two Cuban-born Floridians, Harlem Suarez and Miguel Moran Diaz, were arrested in 2015 for separate attempted attacks inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).¹⁸⁴ Diaz came to the attention of the FBI because of his pro-ISIS Facebook activity and was arrested on April 2, 2015.¹⁸⁵ In several meetings with an undercover informant, Diaz expressed a desire to acquire ammunition, in addition to what he already possessed, to perpetrate a sniper attack in Miami.¹⁸⁶ Diaz described himself as a “‘lone wolf’ for ISIS.”¹⁸⁷ Suarez was arrested on July 27, 2015, in Key West, Florida.¹⁸⁸ He was charged with “attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction” and had also come to the attention of the FBI because of his pro-ISIS Facebook activity, including a request for bomb-making instructions.¹⁸⁹

Somali refugee Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud was arrested in April 2015 in Columbus, Ohio, for providing and attempting to provide material support to al-Nusra

¹⁸² “Federal Jury Convicts Kurbanov on Terrorism Charges,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, Salt Lake City Field Office, August 12, 2015, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/saltlakecity/news/press-releases/federal-jury-convicts-kurbanov-on-terrorism-charges>.

¹⁸³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Salt Lake City Field Office.

¹⁸⁴ Alfonso Chardy, “Pro-ISIS Suspect OK’d to be Tried,” *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, January 31, 2016, <https://www.pressreader.com/search?query=%22ISIS%22&newspapers=6093&start=2016-1-31&stop=2016-1-31&hideSimilar=1&type=3&state=4>.

¹⁸⁵ “Miami Resident and ISIL Sympathizer Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison for Illegally Possessing a Firearm,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, Miami Field Office, July 28, 2015, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/miami/news/press-releases/miami-resident-and-isil-sympathizer-sentenced-to-10-years-in-prison-for-illegally-possessing-a-firearm>.

¹⁸⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Miami Field Office.

¹⁸⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Miami Field Office.

¹⁸⁸ Brendan Koerner, “Jihad,” *Wired* 24, no. 4 (April 2016): 76, ProQuest.

¹⁸⁹ “Florida Man Charged with Planning Terror Bombing,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/us/florida-man-charged-with-planning-terror-bombing.html>.

Front in Syria.¹⁹⁰ Mohamud's brother had also traveled to Syria and was killed while fighting with al-Nusra; after his brother's death, Mohamud returned to the United States where he plotted to attack military personnel, uniformed officers, and government employees.¹⁹¹ Mohamud intended to attack a federal medical center in Texas and pleaded guilty to all counts brought against him.¹⁹²

The next terrorist incident in the United States perpetrated by a refugee was not until September 2016 when Somali refugee Dahir Adan perpetrated a mass stabbing in a mall in St. Cloud, Minnesota.¹⁹³ In total, 10 people were injured in the attack.¹⁹⁴ Although Adan had no affiliation with any terrorist organization, the Islamic State later claimed responsibility for his actions.¹⁹⁵

Most recently, Mohamed Abdi Mohamed attempted to run down two men outside a synagogue in California in November 2018.¹⁹⁶ Mohamed, a Somali refugee, had no known terrorist affiliations and a history of mental illness.¹⁹⁷

4. The Real Risk

The history of terrorist attacks in the United States perpetrated by refugees is lengthy, spanning the course of five decades. However, over that entire span of time, there

¹⁹⁰ "Ohio Man Pleads Guilty to Providing Material Support to Terrorists," Department of Justice, June 29, 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/ohio-man-pleads-guilty-providing-material-support-terrorists>.

¹⁹¹ Department of Justice.

¹⁹² Andrew Welsh-Huggins, "Man Apologizes, Sentenced to 22 Years for US Terrorism Plot," *Seattle Times*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/ohio-man-accused-of-plotting-us-attacks-to-be-sentenced/>.

¹⁹³ Nowrasteh, *Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality*, 21; Abigail Hauslohner and Drew Harwell, "An Unassuming Life before a Suspect's Rampage in a Minnesota Mall," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/an-unassuming-life-before-a-suspects-rampage-in-a-minnesota-mall/2016/09/19/f2a608f0-7e7a-11e6-9070-5c4905bf40dc_story.html.

¹⁹⁴ Hauslohner and Harwell, "An Unassuming Life."

¹⁹⁵ Mitch Smith, "Unanswered Questions Fuel Doubts among Friends of Minnesota Mall Attacker," *New York Times*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/us/unanswered-questions-fuel-doubts-among-friends-of-minnesota-mall-attacker.html>.

¹⁹⁶ James Queally, "Seattle Man Will Face Attempted Murder Charges in L.A. Synagogue Attack," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-mohamed-abdi-synagogue-attack-20190131-story.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Queally.

have been relatively few documented terrorist incidents, and only three lives have been claimed by these attacks. The posture of the Trump administration has fed the public perception that refugees pose a significant threat to the life and safety of citizens of the United States. The data available, however, indicates that the risk of harm by refugees is so low that it is considered statistically insignificant.

B. RADICALIZED REFUGEES ACROSS CONTINENTS: SOMALI JIHADISTS FROM THE UNITED STATES, CANADA, AND AUSTRALIA

Barasho horteed ha I nicin. (Get to know me, before you reject me.)

—Somali proverb¹⁹⁸

While radicalized refugees rarely pose a significant threat to the U.S. homeland, pockets of refugees have fallen victim to radicalization efforts over the last several decades. This pattern has been observed both in the United States and in other countries. While these efforts have not resulted in any attacks or deaths within the United States, that does not discount the existence of the risk of refugees' becoming radicalized after resettlement—or the need to understand and mitigate that risk. Members of the Somali diaspora in the United States and Canada share many of the same experiences and struggles, and both suffer from identity issues and isolationism. These psychosocial challenges have made many Somali youth susceptible to radicalization. The Lebanese diaspora in Australia had a similar experience to that of North American Somali refugees and were radicalized to terrorist activity in significant numbers. All three communities share the experience of living in insulated communities within their host countries and being relatively disadvantaged compared to other refugees.

1. United States: The Somali Travelers

Beginning in the 1970s, Somalia was plagued by internal and external conflicts including tribalism, wars with neighboring states, state collapse, and a fight to establish it

¹⁹⁸ Dr. Y., “Somali Proverb on Stereotypes,” *African Heritage* (blog), September 25, 2020, <https://afrolegends.com/2020/09/25/somali-proverb-on-stereotypes/>.

as an Islamic state.¹⁹⁹ The constant turmoil in Somalia for the last five decades has led to the killing of hundreds of thousands of Somalis and the flight of hundreds of thousands more.²⁰⁰ Nearly two million Somalis have been internally displaced or made refugees since the 1990s, with thousands fleeing through the last decade.²⁰¹ The United States has become home to a large subset of this refugee population. According to DHS's *Yearbooks of Immigration Statistics*, the United States has admitted over 142,000 Somali refugees since 1993.²⁰² Until 2018, Somalis comprised 10–13 percent of all refugees admitted to the United States each fiscal year, even spiking as high as 25 percent in 2004.²⁰³

As of 2009, there were a reported 60,000 Somali refugees living in Minnesota, the majority of whom settled in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area. A subset of this area came to be known as “Little Mogadishu.”²⁰⁴ The Little Mogadishu community mirrors Somali culture in many ways, as its geographical isolation does not allow for integration of its population into the local culture or access to local services.²⁰⁵ Such isolation has left the community open to internal and external forces that seek to radicalize and reconnect its

¹⁹⁹ Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy, eds, *Whose Peace Is It Anyway?: Connecting Somali and International Peacemaking*, Accord, an International Review of Peace Initiatives, no. 21 (London: Conciliation Resources, 2010), https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/21_Somalia_2010_ENG_F.pdf.

²⁰⁰ Mulligan, “Radicalization within the Somali-American Diaspora,” 22; Weine et al., *Community and Family Approaches*, 181–200.

²⁰¹ Phillip Connor and Jens Manuel Krogstad, “Facts about the World’s Refugees,” Fact Tank, October 5, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/05/key-facts-about-the-worlds-refugees/>.

²⁰² Office of Immigration Statistics, *2018 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2019), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/yearbook_immigration_statistics_2018.pdf; Office of Immigration Statistics, *2009 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2010), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Yearbook_Immigration_Statistics_2009.pdf; Immigration and Naturalization Service, *1999 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice, 2002), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Yearbook_Immigration_Statistics_1999.pdf.

²⁰³ Immigration and Naturalization Service, *1999 Statistical Yearbook*; Office of Immigration Statistics, *2009 Yearbook*; Office of Immigration Statistics, *2018 Yearbook*.

²⁰⁴ Weine et al., “Community and Family Approaches,” 189; Janet Yarwood, “A New Threat: Radicalized Somali-American Youth,” *IDA Research Notes* (Summer 2012), <https://www.ida.org/~media/Corporate/Files/Publications/ResearchNotes/RN2012/2012%20A%20New%20Threat%20Radicalized%20SomaliAmerica%20Youth.pdf>.

²⁰⁵ Weine et al., “Community and Family Approaches,” 189.

youth with Somalia and with the Somali-based terrorist organization al-Shabab.²⁰⁶ This community of resettled refugees was home to the first known American terrorists who were recruited to return to Somalia, receive training, and fight alongside members of al-Shabab.²⁰⁷

Al-Shabab sees itself as an “all-Somali” movement and draws on Somalis’ nationalism to gain support.²⁰⁸ Despite its nationalistic roots, al-Shabab has not remained insulated within Somalia. It infiltrates neighboring countries and claims responsibility for terrorist attacks in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. It also aligns itself against American interests and with al-Qaida.²⁰⁹ The reach of al-Shabab has extended outside the African continent with attacks, or attempted attacks, in Australia, Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and the United States.²¹⁰ Particularly within refugee communities in Europe and the United States, al-Shabab has developed a recruitment foothold by drawing on the feelings of nationalistic pride and religious devotion to lure disenfranchised refugees back to their homelands.²¹¹ A network of recruiters and fundraisers operating on behalf of top leaders within al-Shabab has fed on the isolation of Somali refugee communities in the United States and Canada.²¹²

²⁰⁶ Weine et al., “Community and Family Approaches”; Yarwood, “A New Threat.”

²⁰⁷ Andrea Elliott, “A Call to Jihad, Answered in America,” *New York Times*, July 11, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/12/us/12somalis.html>.

²⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, “Somalia: Al-Shabaab—It Will Be a Long War,” Africa Briefing No. 99 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2014), <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/somalia-al-shabaab-it-will-be-a-long-war.pdf>.

²⁰⁹ Rob Wise, “Al Shabaab,” Case Study No. 2 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2011), http://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/110715_Wise_AlShabaab_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study_WEB.pdf.

²¹⁰ David Batty, “Somali Charged with Murder Attempt on Muhammad Cartoonist,” *Guardian*, January 2, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/02/kurt-westergaard-muhammad-cartoon-somali>; Marco Giannangeli and Ted Jeory, “MI5 Fears over 60 Somali Jihad Plotters in UK,” *Express*, September 29, 2013, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/433010/MI5-fears-over-60-Somali-jihad-plotters-in-UK>; Mulligan, “Radicalization within the Somali-American Diaspora,” 47–48.

²¹¹ Weine et al., “Community and Family Approaches,” 181–200.

²¹² House of Representatives, Committee on Homeland Security, *Al Shabaab: Recruitment and Radicalization within the Muslim American Community and the Threat to the Homeland* (Washington, DC: House of Representatives, 2011), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=683040>.

Between 2007 and 2008, 18 Somali-American youths left the United States to return to Somalia and join al-Shabab.²¹³ In October 2008, one of these young men, Shirwa Ahmed, would become the first known American jihadist suicide bomber.²¹⁴ Subsequent FBI investigations would reveal that Ahmed and his cohorts had been recruited by al-Shabab while still in Minnesota.²¹⁵ Fourteen people were implicated in the case, which became “the most significant domestic terrorism investigation since Sept. 11.”²¹⁶ Between 2009 and 2012, an additional five young Somali-American males joined their numbers in fighting for al-Shabab, bringing the total number of known travelers to 23.²¹⁷ At least 40 Americans are known to have joined al-Shabab, making the United States the primary exporter of Western fighters in Somalia and accounting for the most significant trend in homegrown terrorism since 9/11.²¹⁸ The majority of these young men had come to the United States as refugee children, victims of the diaspora.

2. The Culture Gap: Fodder for Radicalization

Similar to the study of homegrown terrorists, researchers analyzing diasporic communities must focus on the process of radicalization, as it happens after resettlement; these individuals align more closely with homegrown rather than foreign terrorists.²¹⁹ Those researchers who have studied the Somali refugee population in the United States, specifically the aforementioned travelers, have found several factors that make these young males vulnerable to radicalization: financial hardship, a generational gap and lack of

²¹³ Mulligan, “Radicalization within the Somali-American Diaspora,” 47; Weine, Erez, and Polutnik, *Transnational Crimes among Somali-Americans*, 19.

²¹⁴ Elliott, “A Call to Jihad, Answered in America.”

²¹⁵ Mulligan, “Radicalization within the Somali-American Diaspora,” 49–58.

²¹⁶ Elliott, “A Call to Jihad, Answered in America.”

²¹⁷ Weine, Erez, and Polutnik, *Transnational Crimes among Somali-Americans*, 19–20.

²¹⁸ Committee on Homeland Security, *Al Shabaab*; Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Terror Charges Unsealed.”

²¹⁹ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 71.

familial support, coming-of-age issues, identity crises, mental health issues, insulation, a lack of opportunities, and gang involvement.²²⁰

Financial hardship and a lack of opportunity are two factors that make this population especially susceptible to radicalization.²²¹ Among East African emigrants to the United States, Somali-Americans suffer the highest unemployment rate, have higher poverty rates, and see the lowest rates of college graduation.²²² Many of those recruited by al-Shabab have lived in impoverished communities in Minneapolis.²²³

The Somali youth who were radicalized by al-Shabab have been categorized as “Generation 1.5.” Although native to Somalia, they have no real recollection of it due to spending most of their childhood in refugee camps in other parts of Africa or resettling in the United States while still very young.²²⁴ Despite immigrating with their parents, these youth have felt a disconnect from their families, whom they perceive as not available for support. Predominantly single-parent households or the parents’ lack of time to dedicate to—or provide oversight of—their children while providing for the family augments this perception.²²⁵

Identity crises and the transition to adulthood have also played a critical role in the radicalization process.²²⁶ The absence of role models for these refugee youth, specifically male role models, combined with the strain of trying to fit in or navigate multiple identities—Somali, American, Muslim, and Africa-American—has made them more

²²⁰ Weine, Erez, and Polutnik, *Transnational Crimes among Somali-Americans*, 33–39; B. Heidi Ellis et al., “Relation of Psychosocial Factors to Diverse Behaviors and Attitudes among Somali Refugees,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 86, no. 4 (2016): 403–5, <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000121>.

²²¹ Ellis et al., “Relation of Psychosocial Factors to Diverse Behaviors.”

²²² *Violent Islamist Extremism—2009: Hearings before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs*, Senate, 111th Cong., 1st sess., March 11, 2009, 37–38; Mulligan, “Radicalization within the Somali-American Diaspora,” 39–40; Yarwood, “A New Threat.”

²²³ Weine et al., “Community and Family Approaches,” 189.

²²⁴ Weine et al.

²²⁵ Weine, Erez, and Polutnik, *Transnational Crimes among Somali-Americans*, 33–34.

²²⁶ Weine, Erez, and Polutnik, *Transnational Crimes among Somali-Americans*; Stern, “Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence,” 105, 108–10.

susceptible to negative forces, including al-Shabab recruiters.²²⁷ Issues with cultural identity within this community have been more prevalent than within other similarly situated refugee populations. Ultimately, these factors have made them more vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization by al-Shabab.²²⁸

Perhaps most central to the vulnerability of Somali-American refugees is being part of an insulated community. Somali culture is rooted in clannism and a deep-seated identity tied to lineage, culture, and religion.²²⁹ One of the biggest challenges to acculturation found within the Somali refugee community is the language barrier. While Somali immigrants are told that learning English is critically important to successful resettlement, they do not receive English language training until after their arrival in the United States.²³⁰ This absence of language training stands in stark contrast to the language and cultural education received by other refugee communities before being resettled in the United States. As noted by the NCTC, the limited time spent with Somali refugees before migration to the United States contributes to the immediate widening of the cultural gap upon their resettlement.²³¹

In preying on this sense of isolation, recruiters have relied on creating a sense of belonging for these disenfranchised youth by emphasizing their cultural identity as Somalis and an idealized picture of their homeland.²³² The feeling of being “othered,” or perceived as being an outsider in their own communities, has led some to seek re-culturation outside their country of resettlement and, ultimately, extremist activity.²³³

²²⁷ Weine, Erez, and Polutnik, *Transnational Crimes among Somali-Americans*, 34–35.

²²⁸ Mulligan, “Radicalization within the Somali-American Diaspora,” 41–45.

²²⁹ Mulligan, 29–31.

²³⁰ Senate, *Violent Islamist Extremism*.

²³¹ Senate.

²³² Weine et al., “Community and Family Approaches,” 191; Mulligan, “Radicalization within the Somali-American Diaspora,” 58–62.

²³³ Weine et al., “Community and Family Approaches,” 191; Dennis Jensen, “Enhancing Homeland Security Efforts by Building Strong Relationships between the Muslim Community and Local Law Enforcement” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006), 71–74, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA445337.pdf>.

3. Comparable Problems in Canada and Australia

During this same timeframe, it is estimated that approximately 20–25 Canadian Somali youth also traveled overseas to fight with al-Shabab.²³⁴ The details about these individual recruits remain unknown as the issue is mostly unstudied. At least one set of researchers sought to ascertain what might make Somali refugees in Canada vulnerable to radicalization efforts.

An estimated 200,000 Somalis live in Canada.²³⁵ As in Minneapolis, the Somali refugee community in the area of Toronto, Ontario, is the largest of its kind in the country.²³⁶ Like their U.S. counterparts, members of this Canadian refugee community live in low-income areas, but unlike other immigrant communities, they do not seem to advance out of poverty over time. In Canada, as in the United States, Somali refugees are “hypermarginalized” and suffer from widespread stigmatization.²³⁷

The issue of Somali radicalization in Australia has happened concurrently with the traveler phenomena in both Canada and the United States. In 2007, the Australian government began an investigation into accounts of Somali-Australians traveling overseas to fight with al-Shabab.²³⁸ Ultimately, there was insufficient evidence to bring charges against any specific individuals.²³⁹ It is estimated that nearly 40 Somali-Australians were among this group, two of whom were confirmed to have been killed in conflict there.²⁴⁰

In addition to these travelers, at least one Somali refugee was convicted of attempted terrorism within Australia. In 2009, Saney Edow Aweys was arrested with

²³⁴ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Shaheen, *Lights, Camera, Jihad*.

²³⁵ Sara K. Thompson and Sandra M. Bucerius, “Transnational Radicalization, Diaspora Groups, and Within-Group Sentiment Pools: Young Tamil and Somali Canadians on the LTTE and Al Shabaab,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 3 (2019), 585, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2016.1264938>.

²³⁶ Thompson and Bucerius.

²³⁷ Thompson and Bucerius.

²³⁸ Andrew Zammit, “The Holsworthy Barracks Plot: A Case Study of an Al-Shabab Support Network in Australia,” *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 6 (2012): 13–16.

²³⁹ Zammit.

²⁴⁰ Zekulin, “Islamic-Inspired Home-Grown Terrorism,” 17.

four co-conspirators for planning to attack the Holsworthy military base in Sydney.²⁴¹ Officials learned that they had attempted to seek permission and support from al-Shabab in carrying out this attack. They participated in multiple telephone discussions with al-Shabab-affiliated clerics in Somalia and had sent at least one individual to receive military training from the terrorist organization.²⁴²

While the issue of radicalization from within the Somali diaspora in Australia is mostly unstudied, much research has been done on the Lebanese-Australian population, of whom one member was convicted alongside Aweys as part of Operation Neath.²⁴³ In Australia, Somalia does not even rank in the top 10 origin nations of resettled Muslim refugees.²⁴⁴ Lebanese-born Australians, however, comprise the largest proportion of the nation's foreign-born Muslims, at approximately 30 percent of that population. They have been heavily studied due to their disproportionately high rates of participation in terrorist plots within the country.²⁴⁵

The study of Australian extremists of Lebanese origin demonstrates several parallels to the findings regarding radicalized Somali refugees from Canada and the United States. Like their Somali-American counterparts, Lebanese-Australian extremists are typically poorly educated, especially in comparison to other Australian Muslims.²⁴⁶ Another similarity between the groups lies in their low economic status and lack of employment opportunities. Most notably, many Lebanese Muslims live in insulated communities on the margins of Australian society, with limited socialization among the greater Australian community, thus exacerbating cultural differences and impeding integration.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ Zekulin.

²⁴² Zammit, "The Holsworthy Barracks Plot," 14.

²⁴³ Zekulin, "Islamic-Inspired Home-Grown Terrorism," 16.

²⁴⁴ Blair Morris, *Islamic Radicalization in Australia: Index of Radicalization* (Herzliya, Israel: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2013).

²⁴⁵ Morris.

²⁴⁶ Hamed El-Said, "Radicalization in a Western Context: The Case of Australia," in *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137449979_3.

²⁴⁷ El-Said.

4. Common Threads across Continents

Many studies on homegrown terrorism have found no specific demographic markers for those who radicalize.²⁴⁸ Others have tied religious ideology to radicalization of Muslim youth.²⁴⁹ However, a closer examination of the Somali diasporic communities in both the United States and Canada and the Lebanese immigrant community in Australia reveals there may be some exceptions to this rule. Across all three populations, several key factors played a role in making individuals from within these communities susceptible to radicalization. A lack of education or other opportunity, particularly employment, was a shared factor for radicalization among all three groups. The most striking similarity across these three immigrant populations was their isolation and inability to effectively integrate into the society of their host countries; these findings echo a sentiment raised in existing research as to whether diasporic communities can ever fully integrate into their host societies.²⁵⁰ Marginalization of these communities, along with stigmatization from their host societies, appears to be the primary risk factor leading to radicalization of their members.

²⁴⁸ Klausen et al., “Radicalization Trajectories,” 594.

²⁴⁹ Jasper L. de Bie, Christianne J. de Poot, and Joanne P. van der Leun, “Jihadi Networks and the Involvement of Vulnerable Immigrants: Reconsidering the Ideological and Pragmatic Value,” *Global Crime* 15, nos. 3–4 (2014): 275–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2014.930349>.

²⁵⁰ Pnina Werbner, “The Predicament of Diaspora and Millennial Islam: Reflections on September 11, 2001,” *Ethnicities* 4, no. 4 (2004): 468, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796804047469>.

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IV. POLICY SUGGESTIONS TO MITIGATE THE RISK OF REFUGEE RADICALIZATION

The choice is not between the current crisis and blissful isolation. The choice is between the current crisis and an orderly, managed system of mass migration. You can have one or the other. There is no easy middle ground.

—Patrick Kingsley²⁵¹

Despite data indicating that the risk of a domestic terrorist attack from within the refugee community in the United States is extremely low, the perceived risks associated with accepting refugees and other immigrants are higher than in decades past. The U.S. government responded to these perceived risks in the last three years through a drastic reduction in refugee resettlement numbers and a temporary cessation of travel from certain high-risk countries.²⁵² Instead of curtailing refugee admissions, U.S. policymakers should consider a shift in the approach to the current refugee admissions program. Canada's refugee program allows for involvement of its citizens in the admissions process; no parallel process currently exists in U.S. refugee policy. These Canadian programs have achieved great success in increasing the ability of refugees to integrate in their host country and create involved citizens. They also have the benefit of increasing the involvement of existing Canadian citizens in the refugee process—narrowing the cultural gap that can exist between resettled refugees and other members of society and promoting human interest and connection across these populations.

A. CURRENT REFUGEE POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES

The current tone on refugee admissions and policy was set in the first few months of the Trump administration with the passage of two executive orders limiting the scope of USRAP.²⁵³ The initial order temporarily suspended travel from a list of majority-Muslim

²⁵¹ Patrick Kingsley, *The New Odyssey: The Story of Europe's Refugee Crisis* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017), 296.

²⁵² Kristin N. Derenge, "A Critical Analysis of Federal and State Attacks on the United States Refugee Admissions Program," *South Dakota Law Review* 65, no. 1 (2020): 159, HeinOnline.

²⁵³ Trump, Executive Order 13780.

countries, suspended USRAP for 120 days, banned the entry of Syrians as refugees, and proclaimed that resettlement of more than 50,000 refugees in fiscal year 2017 was not in the national interest of the United States.²⁵⁴

That order was enjoined from enforcement, and its successor order was substantially identical, with the exception of one nation of origin being removed from barred entry.²⁵⁵ This order was also enjoined though the Supreme Court later lifted that injunction in part, affirming it with respect to the suspension of refugee admissions.²⁵⁶ After months of consultations with DHS and DOS, the White House issued its final iteration of this policy via presidential proclamation.²⁵⁷ This proclamation indicated that several nations across the globe were deficient in their ability to identify and share information about potential terrorists, and as such, their nationals would be, with limited exception, barred from entry to the United States.²⁵⁸

Ultimately, the proclamation did not impose further restrictions on USRAP, as the initial pause and assessment had already concluded by the time of its issuance. The negative posture toward refugees continues under other actions of the Trump administration. It is reflected in persisting limitations on refugee resettlement, with admissions set at historically low numbers despite ongoing crises around the globe that have led to record numbers of refugees.²⁵⁹ The shuttering of resettlement programs across the nation due to the reduction in refugee admissions and states' opposition to providing services is further evidence of this negativity.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Donald J. Trump, Executive Order 13769, "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," *Code of Federal Regulations*, title 3 (2018 comp.): 272.

²⁵⁵ Mark Tushnet, "*Trump v. Hawaii*: 'This President' and the National Security Constitution," *Supreme Court Review* (2018): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1086/703316>.

²⁵⁶ Derenge, "Attacks on the United States Refugee Admissions Program," 158–59.

²⁵⁷ Derenge.

²⁵⁸ Donald J. Trump, Proclamation No. 9645, "Enhancing Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry into the United States by Terrorists or Other Public-Safety Threats," 82 Fed. Reg. 45,161 (September 24, 2017), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/09/27/2017-20899/enhancing-vetting-capabilities-and-processes-for-detecting-attempted-entry-into-the-united-states-by>.

²⁵⁹ Trump.

²⁶⁰ Trump.

B. MITIGATION VIA MULTICULTURALISM

As the research regarding resettled refugee communities in the United States, Canada, and Australia demonstrates, this contracting of refugee admissions and further isolation of these populations will not serve to mitigate the risk of terrorism that the executive orders purported to address. Instead, policymakers should look to the examples of multiculturalism and refugee integration to develop effective mitigation strategies.

From the 1970s through the late 1990s, Australia followed an immigration policy of multiculturalism.²⁶¹ Its goal was to facilitate integration of immigrants and create a more diverse society. Multiculturalism emphasized the need for all Australians to possess a shared allegiance to the nation, respect for its laws, and adherence to principles such as freedom of speech, democracy, and tolerance. It also stressed the right of all Australians to their own beliefs and cultures, and a duty to respect those of other cultures and belief systems.²⁶² This policy of multiculturalism served Australia extremely well during its tenure, though this was prior to 9/11 and its global aftermath.

Mirroring some key principles from the public policy of multiculturalism, the government of Canada has been using various refugee sponsorship programs for many years. These programs have allowed for increased integration of refugees into Canadian society. Canada's approach to refugee admissions is a model that the United States could emulate to mitigate the risk of creating or maintaining isolated refugee communities, the existence of which is known to be a primary factor in radicalization.

Canada has a long and rich history of accepting refugees. From the British loyalists who fled there during the American Revolution, through the passing of the 1976 Immigration Act, to today, immigrants have sought and received protection from the Canadian government.²⁶³ In particular, Canada's response to the Indochinese refugee

²⁶¹ El-Said, "Radicalization in a Western Context," 53–75.

²⁶² El-Said.

²⁶³ "Canada: A History of Refuge," Government of Canada, last modified January 16, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/canada-role/timeline.html>.

crisis of the late 1970s has been touted as a model for future resettlement programs.²⁶⁴ The private sponsorship resettlement program in Canada was developed 40 years ago. Based on the desire of Canadian citizens to help refugees, the program was created to work in concert with the existing government resettlement program and alleviate some of the burden of refugee resettlement from the government.²⁶⁵ At its onset during the Indochinese crisis, private sponsorship was used to direct the actions of engaged Canadian citizens. Although private sponsorship existed before the crisis, it had not been used frequently. Refugee resettlement via private sponsorships spiked from fewer than 100 in the spring of 1979 to more than 34,000 between 1979 and 1980.²⁶⁶ This blending of community and governmental responsibility for the resettlement of refugees sometimes becomes a political tug of war but has mostly met with success.

The private sponsorship programs of Canada's refugee admissions work in one of five ways. The first allows for certain designated organizations to assist in supporting refugees overseas or during the resettlement process in Canada.²⁶⁷ Over 1,000 such organizations exist with signed sponsorship agreements with the Canadian government. The second option is through the groups-of-five program, which allows five or more Canadian permanent residents or citizens to sponsor a refugee to immigrate to Canada; these refugees must already have status granted by UNHCR.²⁶⁸ A third form of private sponsorship is community-based, in which a community organization can sponsor UNHCR-approved refugees to come to Canada. These organizations then agree to provide

²⁶⁴ Michael J. Molloy and James C. Simeon, "The Indochinese Refugee Movement and the Launch of Canada's Private Sponsorship Program," *Refuge* 32, no. 2 (2016): 3–8, <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40412>.

²⁶⁵ Shauna Labman, "Private Sponsorship: Complementary or Conflicting Interests," *Refuge* 23, no. 2 (2016): 67–80, <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40266>.

²⁶⁶ Labman, "Private Sponsorship," 69.

²⁶⁷ "Sponsorship Agreement Holders—Sponsor a Refugee," Government of Canada, last modified November 24, 2020, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/sah.asp>.

²⁶⁸ "Groups of Five: About the Process," Government of Canada, last modified November 24, 2020, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/groups.asp>.

emotional and financial support for the refugees in their first year in the country.²⁶⁹ The fourth of these programs is the Joint Assistance Program, which allows Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship, Canada, to partner with organizations to resettle refugees with special needs.²⁷⁰ Finally, in 2013, the Canadian government developed the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program, which matches private sponsors with refugees but splits the cost of their resettlement and support.²⁷¹

In addition to the humanitarian success of the program, subsequent studies of Indochinese refugee populations demonstrated that those who had been resettled through private sponsorship had a more successful integration into Canadian society.²⁷² The 10-year investigation into the psychological, economic, and social adaptation of the Indochinese diaspora revealed that private sponsors went above and beyond what was required of them in supporting their beneficiaries. Sponsors act as a refugee's first guide to new society, and data suggests that this sponsor contact has helped with long-term adaptation.²⁷³

During the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016, the government of Canada called on private sponsors to help the country meet UNHCR's request to admit 100,000 Syrian refugees.²⁷⁴ While the nation committed to this admission, it was Canadian citizens who ultimately helped respond by resettling more Syrian refugees than the Canadian government.²⁷⁵

²⁶⁹ "Community Sponsors: About the Process," Government of Canada, last modified November 24, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/private-sponsorship-program/community-sponsors.html>.

²⁷⁰ "Joint Assistance Program: About the Process," Government of Canada, last modified November 24, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/private-sponsorship-program/joint-assistance-program.html>.

²⁷¹ "Blended Visa Office-Referred Program: About the Process," Government of Canada, last modified November 24, 2020, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/vor.asp>.

²⁷² Morton Beiser, "Sponsorship and Resettlement Success," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 4, no. 2, (December 2003): 203–15, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-003-1033-z>.

²⁷³ Beiser, 213.

²⁷⁴ Labman, "Private Sponsorship," 73.

²⁷⁵ Labman, 74.

C. PRACTICAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The United States budgeted nearly \$2.19 billion for refugee assistance services for fiscal year 2019 and \$1.91 billion for fiscal year 2020.²⁷⁶ Nearly one quarter or more of those funds are allocated for transitional and refugee support services.²⁷⁷ In part, the role of the Canadian sponsorship programs is to alleviate funding burdens on the Canadian government and divert the costs associated with resettling and supporting refugees to private citizens and organizations. While private sponsorship will not alleviate the administrative burdens on USRAP for processing of refugees, it can reduce some of the ancillary costs associated with resettlement and societal integration. Those financial demands can be diverted away from the average taxpayer to private sponsors.

Implementing such a program would require drafting parameters and application forms for sponsorship. Existing USCIS personnel would have to be trained, or new positions within DHS would need to be created, to process those applications. Guidelines for secure vetting of private sponsors and organizations would need to be developed, and DHS personnel would need to be trained on those procedures. Existing USCIS personnel would need to be trained, or new positions created, to act as liaisons between USRAP and private sponsors. These liaison positions would be critical in ensuring continued compliance and security through the refugee's first year of admission and before his or her adjustment of status to that of a lawful permanent resident.

Integration with DOS and HHS would also be critical in ensuring correct allocation of funds for resettlement and access to community resources. While community organizations currently receive funding from the U.S. government to provide significant assistance with refugee resettlement, introducing a private sponsorship component to USRAP could enhance the effectiveness of these existing programs and create more concrete ties between refugees and their communities of resettlement. Private sponsors would alleviate some of the burden currently on ORR, as they should fill the role of

²⁷⁶ "Operating Plan for FY 2020," Administration for Children and Families, accessed October 20, 2020, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/olab/fy_2020_acf_operating_plan_web_version.pdf.

²⁷⁷ Administration for Children and Families.

community liaison for the refugees they sponsor and provide for some of the more basic needs that ORR now addresses for the general refugee population.

Developing a program similar to Canada's private sponsorship resettlement would allow the government of the United States to continue to meet the growing demands of ongoing humanitarian crises across the globe while simultaneously promoting community integration of refugees. This program would serve to stem the risk of radicalization from within this population of immigrants. Shifting some responsibility for humanitarian aid onto U.S. citizens who actively seek to assist refugees would allow the U.S. government to encourage community partnerships with refugee populations. Such a move would ensure that areas where refugees resettle are receptive to having them, can work to transition them into their new lives, and integrate them into their new homes.

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V. CONCLUSION

This thesis addressed the following questions: Is radicalization of resettled refugees a significant threat to the security of the United States? Which factors contribute to the violent radicalization of resettled refugees within the United States or in other countries? What can be done to mitigate the risk of radicalization from within the resettled refugee community?

To assess the scope of the potential threat to the United States from resettled refugees, qualitative and quantitative data about terrorist incidents and attempts perpetrated by refugees was assessed. Over 40 years of data revealed only a handful of successful terrorist attacks perpetrated by refugees within the United States, of which only two were deadly. Although fatal attacks from refugees within the United States were not found to be a significant threat, research demonstrates that members of resettled refugee communities are being radicalized to participate in terrorist activity outside of the United States. This radicalization is, itself, a threat to national security and should be addressed.

To determine what can be done to mitigate the risk of radicalization within a community, one must understand what common factors, if any, are contributing to that risk and take appropriate steps to mitigate them. Recent political rhetoric would have the American public believe that refugees have a high likelihood of being terrorists before they even enter the United States. The research, however, shows that the root causes of this radicalization are psychosocial and cultural issues experienced after resettlement. To mitigate this risk, policymakers must reassess what steps are being taken to ensure integration of refugees into the host society instead of allowing for conditions that contribute to isolation and division between refugees and citizens of the United States.

The historical context for refugee admissions to the United States—detailing various pieces of legislation passed with respect to refugees between the 1800s and today—demonstrates the evolution of U.S. refugee law, from reactionary and politically driven bursts of admission or exclusion of individuals based on specific criteria to its current state, driven primarily by humanitarian need.

The current refugee admissions process in the United States is lengthy, from designation as a refugee by UNHCR to eventual entry to the United States. During that process, the United States works closely with international partners to interview refugee applicants and conduct robust screening and vetting of all individuals seeking admission through USRAP. Once they arrive in the United States, there are limited financial and social resources available to refugees. The number of service providers has contracted in recent years, leaving a gap to be filled in the space of refugee integration and certain areas of the country with no resources for these new residents.

The scope of the threat to the United States posed by resettled refugees is a minimal one. Existing databases and research analyses of terrorist attacks in the United States demonstrate no pattern of domestic terrorist activity within the refugee community in the last 50 years. Although early refugee terrorists were politically driven, terrorist activity attempted or committed by recent refugees has generally been religiously motivated or not tied to any specific ideology.

Several common factors might lead a refugee to radicalization to extremist activity, even if that activity is not perpetrated in the refugee's host country. Members of the Somali diaspora in the United States and Canada share many of the same experiences and struggles, both suffering from identity issues and isolation. These challenges have made many Somali refugee youth in both countries susceptible to radicalization. Lebanese refugees, whose experience in Australia mirrored the Somalis' isolation and identity crisis, radicalized in significant numbers to terrorist activity abroad. Based on these examples, policies to deter radicalization from within refugee communities should focus on integration of refugees into their host societies and provide opportunities for those refugees to identify as true members of their new homes.

The Canadian government's positive experience with Indochinese refugees supports the suggestion that U.S. policymakers implement a new approach to refugee admissions. The Canadian refugee program allows for a level of individual or group involvement of citizens in the admissions process that has no equivalent in current U.S. operations. The success of these Canadian programs in integrating refugees into Canadian

society demonstrates that a comparable arm of USRAP may serve to provide similarly increased integration of refugees into the United States.

This thesis maintains that limiting the number of refugee admissions to the United States does not serve the national interest but hampers the ability of refugees to fully integrate into American society. Shrinking the number of refugees in this country will only serve to further isolate them, when what is needed to mitigate any potential for radicalization from within their ranks is inclusion and full membership in their new communities. Adding a piece to USRAP that mirrors Canada's current blended refugee admissions and allows U.S. citizens to participate actively in the resettlement and integration process is the best tool policymakers can employ to address any threat from accepting refugees for resettlement in the United States.

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