

MEMORANDUM

TO: Ambassador Clarke

FROM: Zoe

DATE: 5/22/17

RE: Afghan Refugee Crisis

Summary

Since the Soviet War Afghanistan has seen cycles of violence, corruption, and poverty, continuing to the present day. As a result, according to a project called “Costs of War” by Brown University’s Institute for International and Public Affairs, a quarter of the world’s refugees come from Afghanistan (Afghan Refugees). Afghanistan has long been an ally to the United States. The state of relations between the U.S. and Afghanistan is subject to change following our recent change in administration, so it is important to foster good relations by helping our ally to address one of its largest problems. Afghanistan’s refugee and IDP (internally displaced person) crisis is causing widespread instability and threatening the safety of the populace. Instability could lead to violent regime change, similar to the Taliban’s takeover in the mid 1990s. The United States should therefore take several measures including stressing United Nations refugee protocol, facilitating better relationships between involved countries, allocating resources to improve conditions for IDPs, and increasing the quota of Afghan refugees accepted into the U.S. yearly.

Background

The sheer volume of Afghan refugees makes the crisis significant. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees the height of the crisis saw 6 million Afghan refugees displaced (Afghanistan: One People, One Future). Many of this number are migrating home: compared to the estimated 2.5 million refugees each in Pakistan and Iran, in the beginning of 2016, “By the end of the year, returnees from Pakistan numbered 616,620, of whom 246,518 were undocumented and 370,102 documented,” (The Afghan Refugee Crisis in 2016).

There is a multitude of evidence that repatriation is causing an IDP crisis in Afghanistan. The New York Times estimates that refugee camp closures have sent 300,000 refugees home (A Refugee Crisis in Afghanistan). According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees: “Since 2002 UNHCR has been conducting the largest ever voluntary refugee repatriation program. It has already helped some 5.8 million Afghans return home. However, insufficient rural development, a lack of infrastructure, and a shortage of opportunities, are forcing people to move to cities.” (Afghanistan: One People, One Future). Furthermore, a Peace Brief from the United States Institute of Peace states, “Returnees are entering a country wracked by violence, economic instability, and lack of basic services in most parts of the country. Insecurity remains a serious concern,” The brief cites over eleven thousand civilian casualties in 2015, 3,545 deaths and 7,457 injured (The Afghan Refugee Crisis in 2016). Our ally, Afghanistan, is facing massive casualties which threaten its safety and stability. This warrants intervention in order to avoid resulting violence or regime change from citizens dissatisfied with their government.

There is a multitude of evidence of the poor conditions returnees face in Afghanistan. The aforementioned Brown University research project found, “Afghan IDPs and repatriated

refugees unable to return to their places of origin often live in informal settlements, where many people have died due to environmental conditions and illness [...]. In areas [in Afghanistan] where fighting continues, militants lack respect for the neutrality of health care facilities, making visiting these facilities dangerous[...]. Key public health indicators in Afghanistan are poor, with access to basic health care very low and rates of child malnourishment high,” (Afghan Refugees). This evidence points to a serious humanitarian crisis for Afghan IDPs. There is firsthand evidence of this: an Afghan doctor named Mohamed Nazar describes the state of public health clearly: “There are no facilities for the children. There is no hygiene, no electricity. There are scorpions and snakes. We only have medicine for headaches. For anything else, they go to the hospital,” (VOAvideo). It is exceedingly clear that the standards of life Afghan returnees face are unacceptable, and can not be maintained for the safety of Afghan citizens.

The youth of Afghanistan are undoubtedly its future, and they will be responsible for rebuilding their country. Considering the state of Afghan refugees and IDPs, it is concerning that 1 in 2 Afghan citizens are younger than eighteen (Afghanistan: One People, One Future). If granted asylum, these children can return to better their country. Sudaba, an Afghan refugee currently living in India, has a message of hope as well: “My wish is that this message will reach to all the refugees, that don’t think that you are a refugee and you do not have any power, or you can not do anything, or you do not have value in society. Still you have power and you have value and you are important for society. I am a refugee and I am empowered [sic],” (The Story of a Refugee Girl from Afghanistan). It is in the US’ best interest to invest in Afghan youth, if not for the obvious moral and ethical reasons, then to secure good relations with Afghanistan’s next generation.

A major issue facing refugees is refusal of entry to certain countries. While Pakistan and Iran accept the majority of Afghan refugees, other nations that are less generous about accepting undocumented refugees. A New York Times article describes the experiences of Ahmad, an Afghan soldier: “[In Germany,] A lawyer told him that his request for asylum would take years to process, and that he would not be able to work in the meantime. He struggled with learning German. Facing the prospect of living confined in a camp, Ahmad returned to Afghanistan,” (Jeong, May). The article’s author, May Jeong, reasons, “It’s a rational choice for Afghans to want to leave all that behind. [...] That Afghans are more desperate than ever to leave home is too stark a reminder of the many ways in which the West has failed Afghanistan,” (Jeong, May). In order to effectively address the Afghan refugee and IDP crisis this cycle must end.

Proposed steps

Stress the importance of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and strongly encourage Pakistan and European countries to sign its 1967 Protocol. That Pakistan, Iran, and the EU comply with Article 33 of the Protocol is especially important as it states, "No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion,".

Facilitate a summit with the leaders of Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, India, and relevant EU nations, to improve relations, coordinate actions, and discuss solutions to the crisis.

Allocate resources to IDPs in Afghanistan, to provide health care, nutrition, water, and other basic services. Coordinate existing donor programs with the Afghan government for increased efficiency.

Encourage our government to accept greater numbers of Afghan refugees and reinforce applicable refugee and immigration programs.

Recommendation

Afghanistan being a long-time ally to the United States, it is paramount that the US helps address their long standing refugee and IDP crisis. In light of the war on Isis, maintaining allies in the Middle East is essential to our security and the stability of the region. Addressing and solving this refugee crisis will promote stability and prosperity in Afghanistan, avoiding possible conflict and radical or violent regime change.

Works Cited

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"Afghan Refugees." Afghan Refugees | Costs of War. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 May 2017. <<http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/refugees/afghan>>.

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A Refugee Crisis in Afghanistan - Nytimes.com/video. Dir. The New York Times. YouTube. YouTube, 03 Dec. 2008. Web. 16 May 2017. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4t73e4BenyA>>.

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Peace Brief from the United States Institute of Peace, an overview on the Afghan refugee situation at the end of 2016 with a focus on returnees from Pakistan, the humanitarian situation, and security implications. Key findings include data on unregistered and registered refugees living in Pakistan and Iran, data on returning refugees and IDP populations, links between political tension between countries and returning refugees, basic needs not being met for returning Afghan refugees, and warnings from International agencies of a humanitarian crisis. These findings produced based on extensive research and data.

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Article from the European Resettlement Network on resettlement of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, using empirical evidence to outline the two countries' approaches to their growing refugee populations and their policies regarding the crisis.

Meital Waibsnaider, How National Self-Interest and Foreign Policy Continue To Influence the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, 75 Fordham L. Rev. 391 (2006). Available at:

<http://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol75/iss1/10>

Journal article from the Fordham Law Review approaching the Afghan refugee crisis through the lens of American politics, describing the American approach to Afghan refugees, particularly post-9/11. A history of US refugee and immigration policy with the argument that the United States acts in its own self interest in its refugee policy, to the detriment of affected refugees.

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A video interview from the UNHCR with an Afghan refugee who fled to India at a young age. A firsthand source describing the story of her childhood as they fled Afghanistan and subsequent struggles in India.

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