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Should 100,000 Syrian Refugees Come to America?

BY STOYAN ZAIMOV , CHRISTIAN POST REPORTER

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Robert Ford, Sr. Fellow, Middle East Inst., David Miliband, President & CEO, International Rescue Committee, Jessica Vaughan, Dir. of Policy Studies, Center for Immigration Studies, and David Frum Senior Editor, The Atlantic, at a refugee debate hosted by the Intelligence Squared U.S. organization in New York on January 13, 2015.

A major debate between leading U.S. experts on refugee and migration issues, organized by the Intelligence Squared U.S. organization, produced drastically split results on the motion of whether the U.S. should let in 100,000 Syrian Refugees.

At the end of [the event](#) on Wednesday in New York, moderated by John Donvan of ABC News, viewers were asked to vote on who in their opinion won the debate. A first vote on the refugee question before the debate found that 52 percent of respondents were in favor of letting in 100,000 Syrian refugees, while 12 percent were against, and 36 percent were undecided.

Following the debate, the motion received even more support – 72 percent declared themselves in favor of more refugees, though the percentage against the motion also rose to 21, with only 8 percent undecided.

A separate online voting poll, however, produced drastically different results from the New York audience — 87 percent of responders declared themselves against the motion, while only 13 percent were for it. The poll had close to 4,000 votes by Thursday afternoon.

The question of whether America should let in more refugees fleeing civil war and terrorism has dominated public discourse and opinion polls, with voters, such as those in a December [Quinnipiac University National poll](#), relatively split on the issue.

David Miliband, President & CEO of International Rescue Committee, and former U.K. Foreign Secretary, said in Wednesday's debate that admitting refugees is the right thing to do, because such gestures have been a core part of American history.

"It will also transform obviously 100,000 lives and bring wider benefits to the U.S. Secondly, we will argue that it's a practical thing to do, because the U.S. has a proven secure and effective system for

refugee resettlement, far, far better than the chaotic scenes you see in Europe at the moment," Miliband added.

"We will show tonight that there is no parallel between the boat loads of people arriving in Europe and the pipeline of admissions that exist in the United States. And the third thing is that we will show you it's a smart thing to do to support this motion, because the last thing that ISIS and other hatemongers around the world want is for the U.S. to be a beacon of hope and inclusion and a beacon of tolerance for the world," he added.

Miliband further pointed out that the Syrian war shows no sign of ending, while the refugees desperately need help. He also suggested that setting a policy of inclusion and integration is a firm way to battle extremism.

David Frum, Senior Editor at the Atlantic and Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Policy Exchange, who spoke out against the motion, reminded the audience, however, of the wave of sex assaults and other crimes across Europe, [most recently in Cologne](#), Germany, that have been linked to the growing numbers of arriving refugees.

A Syrian refugee feeds his child in front of a fence at the Greek-Macedonian border, while waiting to cross over, near to the village of Idomeni, Greece, December 5, 2015.

"I will open by arguing that mass resettlement of refugees in the Middle East is not in the American interest. When I say 'mass,' I mean mass. Clearly, there are individuals and families who need to be in the West, who have family connections, who belong to the small but real former urban — Syrian urban elite. Many of them have actually already resettled themselves with friends and family here in the West. That is not who we are talking about tonight," he said.

"We are — tonight we are talking about what is to be done with the very, very large numbers of Syrian refugees who do not have prior connections to the West, who are not — who have no family, who are not connected to people here, and who lack the aptitudes and skills that would normally qualify them for the usual immigration processes."

Frum noted that resettling one refugee family in America costs 13 times as much as to resettle them closer to home. Another troubling factor he referred to was the rising radicalization in the West, particularly among the second generation of Middle Eastern migrants.

He rejected, however, notions that those who disagree with welcoming in more refugees are "cowards, racists, or worse."

Robert Ford, the senior fellow at the Middle East Institute and former U.S. ambassador to Syria, was next up to argue in favor of the motion, suggesting that America has a duty to act in the face of such an enormous humanitarian tragedy as the ongoing civil war in Syria.

"785,000 refugees, 115,000 more than 115,000 Iraqi refugees have come into the United States. Has anybody seen any of them commit a mass shooting? Terrorist incident at a mall? No. There have been

some Iraqis arrested for terrorism, that is true," he said, looking to argue against fears that more refugees means an increased terror threat in America.

"I think the latest number, given events last week, is five out of roughly 115,000. That is actually a small number and in each of these cases federal authorities were able to intervene before they did any damage," he added.

Ford said that Syrian-American communities in the U.S. are made up of doctors, business owners, and other people who contribute greatly to society.

"It is an urban culture. It is not a lawless culture. And it is most certainly not a radical Islamic culture. Definitely not. And so, again, I ask you to think about the security, think about the safety, think about our values," he insisted.

Jessica Vaughan, the Director of Policy Studies for the Center for Immigration Studies, said, however, that the majority of the American public is against letting in 100,000 more refugees, because it constitutes "an enormous and unacceptable security risk to our country."

Vaughan focused on the risks behind the U.S. vetting process, claiming that even if it is effectively managed, it cannot guarantee Americans' safety.

"We've — when you hear these stories of actual terrorists who came in as actual refugees, and then we hear the president and his allies, who are pushing for this 100,000 Syrian refugees to be admitted — and talk about the 18 to 24-month vetting period, which is really, you know, more of a waiting period than — no one spends 18 to 24 months investigating refugees," she said.

"We hear that they have three interviews. We hear that they're fingerprinted. We hear that we check databases. The truth is that even our fabulous screening system, which is supposedly better than anyone else's in the world has made some mistakes before. And that's why — don't believe me — believe the Director of the FBI, who, with his top staff, has testified before Congress to say that it simply can't be done," Vaughan continued.

The debate then turned to a more interactive conversation about the issues and concerns raised by the speakers, which can be watched online on the Intelligence Squared U.S. [website](#).