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Analyzing the United States' Limited Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

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Carolina Romero is a graduating senior with a major in political science and minor in Latino/Latina studies. She is a member of Pi Sigma Alpha Honor Society. Her interests in humanitarian issues around the world inspired her paper. She plans to attend law school after graduation and hopes she will be able to make a difference for those in need, such as the refugees she discusses in her paper.

The Syrian refugee crisis can be described as one of the biggest, if not largest, humanitarian crisis of the 21st century. The crisis is a result of an ongoing civil war between rebel groups and the government forces of the Assad regime. Since the beginning of the war in 2011, over 400,000 have been killed and a combined 11 million have been displaced either internally or externally from their homes (Human Rights Watch, World Report 2018). The United Nations and the international community have openly expressed discontent with the dealings of the Assad regime, and as a result, have attempted to aid this struggling nation ridden with extreme violence. With more than 11 million displaced Syrians seeking refuge in other nation states across the world, various states have provided more lenient measures and policies to offer legal refugee resettlement within their respective borders (Morico 2017). However, the response has differed greatly on a state by state basis, with the United States resettling an inadequate number of Syrian refugees. According to the State Department, near the end of President Obama's term in 2016, the U.S. had resettled 15,479 Syrian refugees. In 2017, the country let in 3,024. Horrifyingly, the National Public Radio has stated that by April 2018, the United States had only taken in 11 Syrian refugees (Amos 2018). These numbers are close to nothing in the grand scheme of over 11 million refugees displaced worldwide. Meanwhile nation states, such as Germany, Canada, and neighboring states of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, have implemented liberal refugee policies to alleviate the crisis, despite the hardships that resettling thousands, or millions, of

refugees would bring to the state. The American response to the severity of the crisis has accomplished little to alleviate the growing issue. Our response is troubling, thus sparking the question why our response to this injustice has been so limited in scope, while other world powers have accepted thousands or millions within their borders. This has created an unnecessarily hard burden on the neighboring countries around Syria, which have struggled to relocate and provide for millions of displaced refugees within their often fragile borders. These nations, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, do not have the resources and adequate social structures to provide aid for millions, as the United States and other superpowers could do more readily. Furthermore, states and international organizations have responded to the crisis by providing millions in aid and support for relocation, something that the United States has not done to the same extent. Therefore, there is an apparent need to analyze why the response from the U.S. has been drastically different and to ponder potential solutions to alleviate the burden and provide the proper support needed to help Syrians, but to also assist in lifting the burden from other struggling countries by aiding Syrian refugee resettlement. As a world superpower, we cannot turn a blind eye to an increasingly large humanitarian crisis. So, why has the United States' response to the Syrian refugee crisis been drastically different compared to the responses from other nations? This paper will analyze how Islamophobia, xenophobia, the current state of refugee policies in the U.S., and shifts in administrations and ideologies from liberal to conservative, have shaped our response

to the largest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century. Furthermore, by drawing comparisons to the reactions of other nation states, this paper will discuss how conservatism has influenced our foreign policy towards Syria, and has created a political environment that is unreceptive to accepting a large influx of refugees into the country, thus leading to inaction on our part. Although a nation's foreign policy is shaped by numerous factors, by drawing comparisons between liberal and conservative approaches from other nations, it demonstrated that conservative, nationalist views have led to insubstantial refugee resettlement efforts by the United States. Furthermore, under international law and the norm of "Responsibility to Protect", why has the United States and others not intervened to stop the ongoing and expanding crisis? As the research explains, inadequacies in the structure of the Responsibility to Protect guidelines set out by the United Nations, as a result of support from Russia and China for the Assad regime, has blocked potential intervention efforts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been significant research to attempt to answer why the American response has been dismal in the Syrian refugee crisis, especially in comparison to more liberal policies in other states. The existing literature revolves around the issues of xenophobia, Islamophobia, outdated refugee and asylum policies, and shifts in presidential administrations. As the research indicates, it is difficult to pinpoint an exact reason to accurately answer the puzzling question at hand, but overall, the research indicates that conservative and nationalist ideals and rhetoric lead to an increase in public sentiments of Islamophobia and xenophobia, which result in little to no action to take in influxes of refugees into a nation under conservative leadership.

To begin, the sentiments of xenophobia and Islamophobia have been clear and prominent in recent years, particularly after terrorist attacks throughout North America and Europe. Melissa Carlier, Rachel Morico, and Paul James Pope analyze, these sentiments have created a divide in society, and this type of rhetoric and attitudes

towards Muslim immigrants and refugees has created an environment intolerable to refugees in some states, including the United States. Rachel Morico explains in her research that the reaction of the United States toward the Syrian refugee crisis was fueled by a nationalistic approach of putting one's own citizens before refugees from another country. She explains that this response from nations, including the U.S. and Japan, explains the restrictive and dismal responses to resettle refugees within their respective borders (Morico 2017, 210). It is especially important to note why the U.S. has taken a nationalist approach, and as she explains, it is due to conservative actions that have created a negative image of Muslim immigrants to the American eye, and led to a majority of American politicians rejecting an influx of Muslim refugees into the country and their respective states (Morico 2017, 201). As a result, it has not been possible to pass an amendment to allow a large influx of Syrians into the country yet because there is a strong opposition from the public and politicians. Morico analyzes how Islamophobia leads to conservative and nationalist approaches, which has led to a dismal response by the U.S., even more so under the Trump administration.

Furthermore, Melissa Carlier also supports the idea that heightened feelings of xenophobia and Islamophobia in the U.S. can explain our response to the refugee crisis. By drawing a comparison with Canada, a North American democratic country that resembles our own in a multitude of ways, she concludes that the American public, for the most part, has a negative view on immigrants and Muslims and this has resulted in a different response, unlike the one by Canada and other states like it (Carlier 2016, 63). She concludes in her research that Canada has a history of positive multicultural policies, outlook, and legislation that has aided in integrating immigrants into Canadian society, while this is not the case in the United States. As a result, the American public opinion is less in favor to accepting a large influx of Syrian refugees compared to Canada (Carlier 2016, 63). Therefore, the U.S. has not taken actions to accept a significant number of refugees for resettlement, like that of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accepting more than 25,000 Syrian

refugees in 2016 alone (Associated Press in Toronto 2016). Carlier highlights that the rhetoric of Islamophobia and xenophobia clearly results in conservative actions, while a positive outlook on refugee resettlement leads to liberal resettlement programs that contribute substantially in alleviating the global refugee crisis.

Lastly, political science Paul James Pope, offers significant research on the effects of negative, racist rhetoric on policy. Pope explains how the concept of “othering”, a process used to identify and separate those that are thought to be different from oneself, is used to create a power complex that oftentimes isolates ethnic minorities (Pope 2017, 58). Moreover, he demonstrates that American politicians use “othering” as a strategic mean to portray Syrian refugees as enemies and national threats, rather than the war victims that they truly are (Pope 2017, 59). As a result, these state politicians have successfully opposed liberal federal policy proposals to help the Syrian refugee crisis, leading to the inaction we have seen since the war began in 2011. His work supplements the research of others, like Morico and Carlier, that have analyzed the extent of xenophobia and Islamophobia in the U.S. as a means to justify a nationalist approach that has resulted in the resettlement of an insignificant number of Syrian refugees since the outbreak of the civil war. On the contrary, others have taken a different approach to explaining the United States’ response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Some, like Donald Kerwin and Melanie Nezer believe that the reason why the U.S. has resettled so few Syrian refugees can be answered by examining our antiquated asylum and refugee policies. These authors put the blame on outdated refugee policy that has not been changed much since it was enacted in 1980. Furthermore, they analyze how our system has too many requirements for the vetting process that can potentially delay applications for up to a few years (Kerwin 2015, 225). In addition, since the refugee policies have not been changed much since 1980, the requirement of the Refugee Act of 1980 to individually evaluate each application has created an unnecessary burden on the system, and has resulted in significant time delays in processing, vetting, and granting resettlement (Nezer 2014, 129). These policies simply make it infeasible to

allow lawful entry to a significant number of innocent and non-threatening refugees who are in dire need of resettling outside of their own borders, which would be a potential solution to the global refugee crisis. By changing and amending our refugee resettlement laws, in a liberal way similar to Germany’s in 2015 when Chancellor Merkel changed the law to allow resettlement en masse to refugees, we can then begin to uphold our end to alleviate the Syrian refugee crisis, as these authors propose.

Lastly, the final explanation in the existing literature focuses on the shift from a liberal administration under former President Barack Obama to a conservative one under President Donald Trump. Some authors have linked conservatism and nationalism to restrictive resettlement initiatives. For instance, Rachel Morico supplements her responses to the research question by analyzing initiatives under the Obama administration and then actions by the Trump administration. She explains that Obama had attempted to resettle 10,000 refugees by the end of 2016, but this measure was halted almost immediately after President Trump took office in 2016. President Trump attempted to institute a travel ban from seven Muslim majority nations, which blocked Syrian refugees and took other measures to restrict access for others from Muslim states, citing national security precautions (Morico 2017, 191). These acts by President Trump were a nationalist approach to foreign policy, which is evident in his reasoning for the travel ban: to protect the U.S. from potential terrorists that could slip through the system. His actions and rhetoric are rooted in Islamophobia and it is evident that his discourse aims to associate Muslims with terrorism and portray them as enemies of the U.S. This conservative approach has blocked any form of liberal refugee resettlement efforts in the U.S. because it has made it very difficult to pass any form of liberal legislation in the federal government for Muslim refugee resettlement, despite the humanitarian crisis. In addition, by drawing comparisons with other conservative, nationalist countries, like Hungary, the similarities in the two leaders’ discourse and subsequent foreign policy responses are strikingly similar. Annastiina Kallius, Daniel Monterescu, and Prem

Kumar Rajaram have shown the rhetoric and actions by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to be conservative, nationalist, and even far-right populist in nature as well (Kallius, et al. 2016). Orban's anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions resonate with the discourse in the U.S. since the Trump administration. Therefore, there is evidence in the existing literature to connect conservatism and nationalism, which are rooted in xenophobia and Islamophobia, to a result in insignificant efforts for refugee resettlement within those states.

Although some researchers have made the argument that the U.S.'s response has been limited because of our outdated asylum and refugee policies that make the system incapable of processing a high volume quickly and efficiently, this argument does not seem to be the most salient factor to explain our minute acceptance of Syrian refugees. Instead, our response to the crisis is more rooted in a change in presidential administrations from liberal to conservative. Conservative and nationalist discourse and actions by the Trump administration, which are rooted in emotions of xenophobia and Islamophobia towards an influx of refugees, has created an environment almost politically incapable of passing liberal resettlement legislation to resettle a greater number in order to truly make a change in this crisis. It is evident that the United States and other nations, including some states in the European Union, have not continued to uphold their obligations and duties of alleviating the crisis and safeguarding the rights of innocent civilians caught in the grip of violence.

HISTORY OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

The Syrian civil war is an ongoing conflict that has sparked vast and lengthy discussions about intervention, sanctions, and responses by the international community and the United Nations. The conflict began in 2011 as the Arab Spring revolutions were occurring in Libya and Tunisia. As the ideals of the Arab Spring reached Syrian territories, the Syrian armed forces, under orders of President Bashar Al-Assad, reacted with violence against children and protestors (McHugo 2015, 222). These violent orders against innocent civilians protesting the Assad government led to defection by the Syrian soldiers who expressed

discontent with Assad's orders against protestors. These dissenters formed the opposition Free Syrian Army, led by Colonel Riyad al-As'ad in July 2011. He famously called on soldiers to defect from the oppressive orders of the Syrian armed forces, and to "stop pointing their rifles at the people's chests, join the free army, and to form a national army that can protect the revolution and all sections of the Syrian people with all their sects." (McHugo 2015, 227). As protests and dissent grew, the oppressive and violent actions of the Assad regime continued to grow, including the suspected use of chemical warfare against civilians. By July 2012, the Red Cross deemed the fighting a full-fledged civil war (McHugo 2015, 228). As fighting continued, Islamist groups, like ISIS, emerged in the battles and targeted the efforts of the Free Syrian Army, and attempted to overtake the bases they had successfully overtaken from Assad. Despite efforts from the United Nations, Europe, and the United States, the Assad regime, backed with support from Russia and China, has remained in power, despite diplomatic efforts to force Assad to step down.

The research suggests that as long as Syria continues to receive support from Russia, the civil war will continue to rage through and incinerate the country. As a result of the war, millions are finding refuge in the nearest countries, including Lebanon and Jordan. Lebanon has had a history of instability and the country of about 4.5 million had accepted over 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees by January 2017 ("Number of Syrian Refugees", Union of Relief and Development Associations). Similar numbers have been reached in Jordan and Turkey. With inadequate social structures of neighboring countries to handle a massive influx in population, it is evident that the moment of intervention and resettlement is past due by the U.S. and the international community.

ISSUES WITH UNITED STATES REFUGEE AND ASYLUM POLICY

Refugee policy in the United States has been largely untouched and unrevised since The Refugee Act of 1980. This act set guidelines for lawful entrance and historically, the United States has resettled the largest number of refugees in the world since 1980. Between 2009 and 2013, it

accepted more than 70 percent of UNHCR-submitted refugees for resettlement throughout the world (UNHCR 2014, 61). However, there are significant flaws in the refugee policy in the United States that has contributed to the problem of resettling Syrian refugees. As the crisis has expanded exponentially, the international community and United Nations have struggled to resettle over 11 million Syrians who have been displaced either internally or externally. However, states have struggled to adequately address the problem and it is evident that the United States has failed to preserve the rights of these citizens and to alleviate the burden through accepting more refugees.

To begin with, a major flaw of our current refugee policy is the amount of time that it may take to screen and accept a refugee's application, which can take two or more years (Kerwin 2015, 225). The Refugee Act of 1980 states that applications must be screened individually and the applicants must pass the thorough security and health screenings, which can substantially delay the process because the timing of the application process oftentimes do not coincide with the validity window of the screenings and "by the time later checks are concluded, the first checks have [often] expired and must be redone" (Nezer 2014, 129). Meanwhile, while their applications are under review, these refugees and their families must face violence, fear, live in camps with minimal resources, and potentially die in the process (Kerwin 2015, 225). Despite having an outdated system, we see that it is possible to make significant changes when it is evidently needed. For example, in Germany in 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel enacted an "open door policy" that admitted over 1.1 million Syrian refugees in masses, rather than through time-consuming individual reviews, like the refugee application stands at the moment in the U.S. (Morico 2017, 190; Kerwin 2014, 49).

As the crisis continues to expand and the situation grows direr, there is an imminent need to resettle refugees at a much faster pace, yet, the necessary rate is nearly impossible due to the organization of the refugee policy and the slow processing rate. In addition to a significant time delay in processing applications, it is more difficult

for these asylum and refugee seekers to apply for asylum because geographic locations make it difficult to get here first and then make an asylum claim. Since it is more difficult to travel to the U.S., Syrians seeking resettlement in the U.S. must make their claims from elsewhere, where they are constantly subjected to violence and the possibility of death. Without a quicker processing system, these applicants die waiting for their chance at a new life.

In addition to a slow application review process, another significant flaw in our current policy is the limitations on asylum seekers. Since 1996, the law has required that asylum seekers apply for asylum within one year of their arrival in the United States. However, according to the research, this requirement prevents individuals with legitimate claims of persecution from gaining asylum protection if their applications were delayed due to fear, lack of information, or other circumstances they cannot control (Schrag et al. 2010). Moreover, the filing deadline "has significantly lengthened the adjudication of asylum cases, and diverts scarce immigration court time and resources from considering the merits of asylum claims." (Nezer 2014, 126). Another limitation on asylees is the 180-day waiting period to apply for a work authorization, as set by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. (Saucedo and Rodriguez 2010). This limitation has proved to be problematic for refugees and creates an economic burden on the refugees and their families along with creating a strain on the system, therefore lengthening the already prolonged and slow process of granting asylum. The Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice have determined that the "clock" that counts this 180-day period stops if there is any delay in the adjudication process that is requested or caused by the asylum seeker. (Nezer 2014, 130). There have been numerous problems with the implementation of this provision, known as the "asylum clock," including a lack of transparency in the management of the clock; a lack of clarity and comprehensiveness of the government's clock policy; misinterpretation of the regulations governing the clock; improper implementation of the government's clock policy; and problems

associated with the Executive Office for Immigration Review's case completion goals (Saucedo and Rodriguez 2010).

It is evident that the limitations placed on asylum seekers causes a burden on the system and an unnecessary and harsh burden on these families. The time that is wasted on screenings, adjudication, and review demonstrates that the system for processing refugee and asylum applications is antiquated and in need of a reform in order to screen faster to keep up with the rapid rates of migration around the world, but specifically in regards to Syrian refugees. Countries who are incapable of hosting millions of refugees are currently doing so, but are unable to handle the massive influxes. Rather than seeing immigration as a boost to the economy through work opportunities and a more enriching society, we have taken a *laissez faire* approach to dealing with the situation, a clear violation of international norms to protect humanitarian rights and interests as detailed by the United Nations through R2P doctrine. Refugee rights to employment and equal opportunities in the United States must be taken more seriously and thus reflected in the legislation through the passing of various bills and amendments to address these issues.

LIBERALISM TO CONSERVATISM

During a crucial point of the Syrian civil war, the U.S. experienced a change in presidential administration from a Democrat to a conservative Republican. This change also ushered in new restrictions in the U.S. response to the crisis at hand, as President Trump sought to cut back on quotas that had been set by the Obama administration that allowed Syrian refugees lawful entry into the country (Morico 2017, 205). Under the Obama administration, the expected quota for Syrian refugees had been set at 10,000 by the end of 2016, but halfway through the year only 1,300 Syrians had been admitted because of delays in their applications that requires a more in-depth vetting process than other applicants (Morico 2017, 191). In addition to a more rigorous vetting process, these refugees were limited "... primarily due to administrative limitations and now heightened fear as a result of terrorist attacks carried out in other parts of the world." (Morico

2017, 191). It is evident that this sensationalist fear of Muslims is present in Trump's foreign policy towards Syria, through his "America First" approach. His nationalism was a campaign strongpoint and one which garnered widespread support from his electorate. Therefore, we see that President Trump has attempted to keep up his campaign promises by limiting Muslim entry into the country, regardless of humanitarian and moral obligations. Furthermore, President Trump attempted to institute a travel ban barring entry from seven Muslim majority nations, including Syria. This act also demonstrates the views of Islamophobia and xenophobia that have been even more prominent and normalized during the Trump administration. On January 27, 2017, President Trump signed "Executive Order on Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" which:

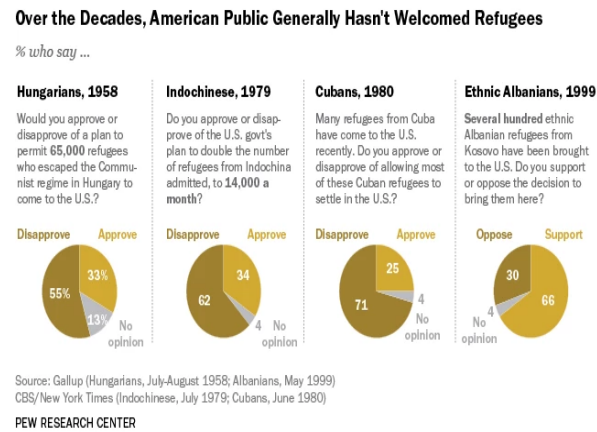
(1) placed a ninety-day travel ban on entry into the United States of citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Libya, and Somalia; (2) suspended the admittance of all refugees to the United States for 120 days; (3) terminated admission of Syrian refugees indefinitely; and (4) capped the total number of refugees entering the United States in 2017 at 50,000 (less than half of the previous year's 117,000). Trump explained that the suspensions were needed to protect the nation from potential terrorists who could sneak into the United States while he and his national security team agreed on the best way to strengthen vetting procedures (Morico 2017, 191).

These actions by the Trump administration demonstrates a clear fear of Muslims, portraying them as terrorists. This rhetoric and ideologies have been especially damaging in the U.S. because it has painted Muslims in a negative light, which has resulted in inaction on the part of the federal government because conservatives have opposed an inrush of Syrian refugees due to fear.

In addition to actions by the Trump administration to halt entry to Muslims, research proves that in general, Americans have not been welcoming to mass influxes of refugees during world crises in the past. The following

visualization, created with research conducted by the Pew Research Center, demonstrates a long-term tendency of Americans being unwelcoming to the idea of allowing entry to refugees.

Figure 1.



Source: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/19/u-s-public-seldom-has-welcomed-refugees-into-country>

As the chart shows, generally, the American public has opposed allowing large numbers of refugees of different backgrounds in to the country during times of war or extreme violence by more than 50% until 1999. In a general sense, we see that the United States has had a deep-rooted history of xenophobic tendencies, as the data details below. These same sentiments have carried over and is clearly evident in the recent rhetoric of conservative media promoting a backlash in allowing migrants and refugees into the country and efforts by the Trump administration to physically block and place administrative difficulties in the refugee resettlement process.

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND XENOPHOBIA

Research has demonstrated that anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant discourse has been prevalent in many states across the world after an incident of terrorism in that state. As a result, these spikes in Islamophobic feelings have resulted in “othering” (Pope 2017, 58). This concept refers to a power complex that uses racist, negative rhetoric to assert a dominance over a different sect of people, often ethnic minorities. These feelings of Islamophobia

and xenophobia has been evident in the U.S. and it has impacted our reaction to the Syrian refugee crisis, because individual state politicians have used this sensationalized fear of Muslim immigrants to block the more liberal initiatives that former President Obama attempted to enact in 2015 and 2016 (Pope 2017, 59). State politicians blocked liberal immigration proposals to resettle Syrian refugees citing security concerns for their individual states and negative views on Muslim resettlement within their respective states (Pope 2017, 60). As a result of this “othering” and the widespread negative public opinion about Muslims and refugees, the U.S. has not taken any liberal steps to provide a large-scale resettlement effort.

Furthermore, our political polarity plays a role with the deep history of xenophobia and islamophobia that exists in the U.S. When Americans and Canadians were both polled in regards to their views on multicultural policies and immigration, it is evident that Americans have a more conservative view than most Canadians, which is an interesting point given our similarities. For instance, according to a Pew Research Center poll conducted in 2015, “about 51% of Americans think that immigrants strengthen the economy through hard work and talents (Pew Research Center, 2015b). This is a 31-point difference from the 82% of Canadians that view immigrants as having a positive effect on the economy.” (Carlier 2016, 62). Furthermore, in regards to their views on immigration:

49% of Americans think that immigration should be decreased and 34% of Americans think that legal immigration should be kept at current levels (Krogstad, 2015). From this data, we can conclude that nearly half of Americans think there is too much immigration to the United States, which is in contrast to the 57% of Canadians who do not think there is too much immigration in Canada (Carlier 2016, 62).

Additionally, she explains that American views of immigrants are largely split along party lines, with Republicans having more negative views of immigrants and Democrats having more positive views of immigrants. (Carlier 2016, 62). It is

evident that differences between Democrats and Republicans can create difficulties in passing or amending legislation. As a result, it is more difficult to pass more liberal refugee policies in the U.S. than it is in other states, like Germany or Canada (Carlier 2016, 68). Our political polarity, which have clear-cut stances along party lines about refugees and Muslims, has created more difficult scenario to pass legislation to aid the Syrian crisis, compared to the political structures of other liberal countries that are more committed to safeguarding human rights around the world, such as Germany and Canada.

RESPONSES FROM OTHER LEADING NATIONS

A. *Canada*

In contrast to other nation states who have quickly changed legislation or made executive decisions in regards to their immigration policy in light of the growing need to resettle refugees, the United States has not reacted in the same way or in any similar manner. Instead, we have made attempts to restrict border entry and have granted a miniscule amount of refugee applications. Our system is in need of reform and our stagnation is frightening. It is interesting to see the Canadian response to the crisis, since Canada and the United States are so close in geographic location, societal benefits, form of government, etc. Canadian foreign policy has not been so concerned with infiltration with violent groups or the spread of terrorism to bordering states, a concern that the United States has an interest in restricting, as demonstrated by President Trump's actions. As prior research shows,

Canada's vital interests—its security and prosperity—are not threatened by the war: unlike Syria's neighbours, Canada is not concerned with spillover in the form of massive refugee flows, border violence, and infiltration by violent groups. Canada's trade interests are virtually unaffected: in 2010, before the onset of the war, Canadian exports to Syria amounted to CDN\$60 million, while imports were CDN\$17 million. Trade has since almost completely ceased. (Juneau 2015, 473)

Canada is one of the largest contributors of humanitarian and development assistance to Syria and neighbouring countries. As of January 2015,

Ottawa had committed CDN\$353.5 million to international humanitarian assistance efforts since the start of the war to the UN, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and various non-governmental organizations. (Juneau 2015, 485). In addition,

Canada has also committed CDN\$210.7 million to Jordan to strengthen government services and infrastructure stressed by the influx of Syrian refugees and to address the kingdom's development challenges. In 2013, Ottawa pledged to resettle 1,300 Syrian refugees by the end of 2014 as well as up to 5,000 refugees from Turkey by 2018. In early 2015, Canada committed to accept a further 10,000 Syrian refugees over three years and another 3000 Iraqi refugees in 2015 (Juneau 2015, 486).

This response is drastically different from the American response to the crisis. The Canadian government has provided support to the burdened neighboring countries that have been ill-equipped in handling the issue of migration alone. Furthermore, Canadian officials have admitted thousands of Syrian refugees from Syria and surrounding states. Although their pledge is still minute in the large scheme of the millions of refugees, it is a greater number than the U.S. has admitted, which is important to note given the similarities between the U.S. and Canada. In 2015, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took a liberal response to Syrian resettlement in Canada, after shifting from a conservative incumbent to his new liberal administration. By the end of 2016, Trudeau had accomplished his goal of admitting over 25,000 Syrian refugees into Canada and was making strides to admit up to 50,000 (Associated Press in Toronto 2016). These initiatives differ greatly from the prior Conservative administration's actions. Trudeau's commitment to liberalism is evident in his discourse and rhetoric that has been positive and welcoming to refugees, especially in response to instances where President Trump has made negative comments on Muslims (Associated Press in Toronto 2016). As we see in the case of Canada, commitments to liberalism and a positive outlook on Muslim refugees results in major resettlement efforts. And on the contrary, negative, anti-Muslim discourse creates a fear that isolates Muslims and results in

minimal resettlement efforts, as is the case in the U.S.

It is important to note the similarities between the U.S. and Canada because the close proximity and similar power on the world stage would lead one to expect the Canadian and American responses to be very similar in nature. However, as the research shows this is not the case. Although the Canadian response was also a very minute number of admitted refugees compared to neighboring states, its pledged support to aid the burden on neighboring countries is far more than the United States has agreed to support these struggling countries. Logically, one would expect that the United States would react in such a way to try to protect their interests and allies in the Middle East. A massive influx of Syrian refugees can create a political and economic instability that puts fragile states, such as Turkey, Jordan, and Libya, in a path for potential proxy wars and its own national instability that can harm American interests in the Middle East. Despite this fact, in which Canadian officials have reacted to accordingly, the United States has not acted in this way. We have not pledged support to take refugees from neighboring countries or contributed the same numbers or more than Canada. This can be explained through the American heightened notions of islamophobia, xenophobia, and political polarity, compared to the Canadian government and society.

B. Germany

In addition to liberal policies like those of Canada, Germany instituted an open-door policy in 2015, which allowed over 400,000 Syrian refugees to enter over the span of a few months (Morico 2017, 192). Germany had also experienced their own instances of terrorism, leading to outbursts and spikes in anti-Muslim sentiments, but in the U.S., this fear is evident in our legislation and policies, as we see with Trump's initiative to block entry to the country. On the contrary, Germany and other nations have still decided to pass liberal asylum legislation, acknowledging the gravity of the circumstances in Syria, despite public and political backlash because of Islamophobic sentiments (Morico 2017, 195). In Germany, two liberal immigration laws, the Asylum Act and the

Residence Act, gives refugees in Germany the right to apply for asylum as a constitutional right under German law, and details rules about entry, stay, and exit of refugees. These acts were amended in 2015 by Chancellor Angela Merkel to accelerate the asylum application process, provide benefits for refugees, and essentially, allow hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees into the country quickly, in light of the epidemic (Morico 2017, 195). A liberal reform of immigration policy, as it occurred in Germany, demonstrates how to provide real aid to the international crisis. Yet, despite both nations having similar Islamophobic sentiments, we see that the U.S. has responded differently because of our conservative, Nationalist agenda as proposed by President Trump, that supplements public opinion that views Muslims as enemies, rather than contributing members of the economy and society, as portrayed in the case of Germany.

C. Turkey

Turkey and the other nations surrounding Syria have seen an enormous population of Syrian refugees entering their countries since the conflict in 2011. This large influx is partially due to mere geography. It is easier for refugees to reach Turkey, Lebanon, or Jordan, than to reach Western Europe and the Americas, which has resulted in these nations resettling the largest chunk of displaced Syrian refugees. These states have seen an exponential increase in populations, but as a result, have struggled to provide adequate social benefits and education to these refugees (Dincer, et al. 2016, 26). Although Turkey and these other nations do not have the appropriate structures to allow the resettlement of millions of refugees, nonetheless, Turkey adopted an open-door policy, similar to that of Germany in 2015. Turkey's policy, like that of Germany, is one of the most liberal approaches and has facilitated mass resettlement by removing previous security requirements. By 2015, Turkey had more than 2 million registered Syrian refugees, making it the nation with the largest resettlement effort for Syrians (Ferris and Kirisci 2015). It is interesting to see how a country with a significantly smaller population than the U.S. has taken in over 2 million refugees and continues to uphold its open-

door policy. Despite over \$6 billion USD in government expenditures as a result of this massive influx, Turkey continues to uphold its moral obligation to aid Syrians. Despite the good-hearted efforts by the Turkish government to resettle refugees in a large-scale manner, the government has not been able to provide the best resettlement options, due to the economic burdens this has placed on Turkey. Most refugees live in government camps that do not provide sufficient measures to allow refugees to integrate into Turkish society (Dincer, et al. 2016, 27). The example of Turkey illustrates the need for an increase in American resettlement efforts to alleviate the domino effects that massive resettlement has had on these countries.

D. Hungary

Although the research differs in responding to this issue, it is more evident that political conservatism results in difficulty in passing liberal legislation and amendments to existing policies. Coupled with feelings of Islamophobia and xenophobia, conservatism can accurately explain the limited aid of the U.S. towards the Syrian refugee crisis as compared to other world powers. Although it is not one clear cut answer to explain the limited number of refugees resettled in the states, it is important to examine the intersectionality and relationships of various factors that come together when analyzing a state's foreign policy towards another state, especially one in dire need of assistance. As a result, the U.S., especially under conservative power, tends to take a "U.S. first" approach. This results in legislation and policies that aim to safeguard American interests and security before aiming to help another state. The existing literature demonstrates that the states who are committed to a conservative viewpoint, including Hungary and the United States, have acted in limited ways to aid the Syrian crisis.

As the research shows, the United States is not the only country that has demonstrated xenophobic tendencies when passing legislation in regards to immigration and refugee policy. As a whole, the European Union had taken in approximately 123,600 Syrian refugees by June 2014 (Orchard and Miller 2014, 13). This number, although much greater than the number of

admitted Syrian refugees in the United States, is still practically insignificant considering that the total number of Syrian refugees was approximately 2,854,211 million in 2014 (Orchard and Miller 2014, 11). In analyzing the refugee policies of the European Union, we see that some countries have implemented liberal policies, including Sweden and Germany, through the adoption of open-door refugee policies (Ostrand 2015). However, not all European states have agreed to follow in the footsteps of these superpowers. For instance, Hungary's right-wing government took on conservative, anti-immigrant, anti-refugee policies in response to the crisis. In September of 2015, the Hungarian government implemented a new asylum law that would make it illegal to pass through Hungary on the way to another Western European country, and they instituted a fence along the Serbian-Hungarian border, along with hundreds of Hungarian soldiers and police present to arrest anyone attempting to cross or damage the fence intended to keep them out (Kallius, et al., 2016, 33). As the research demonstrates, Hungary's political party in power is the Fidesz, a right-wing populist, conservative party whose platform relies heavily on anti-immigrant and foreign intervention (Strickland 2016). The evidence of both Hungary and the United States's conservative responses to the wave of refugees migrating for resettlement in Europe and the U.S., suggests that countries with conservative governments, and those states who employ an anti-immigrant rhetoric in the media, are creating barriers for refugee resettlement, as opposed to states with a liberal and positive approach to refugees. Liberalism is vital for the resettlement and granting of the basic human rights to Syrian refugees. A liberal approach to the crisis by the U.S. and other EU states can have significant impact to the current situation, and alleviate the ongoing burden being placed on weaker neighbor states whom are incapable of providing adequate housing, healthcare access, food and water, education, etc. to thousands living in refugee camps.

By examining the factors that contributed to the Hungarian response to the crisis, we see an overlap of some factors that have influenced the American response to the crisis. For instance, in

Europe, while most of the European Union has recognized the crisis and has pledged support to assist, Hungary has reacted in a manner similar to the U.S. under the Trump administration. Hungary, located in Eastern Europe and closer to the Middle East, has largely seen an influx of refugees passing through in attempts to reach Western Europe for security and refuge. However, as a response Hungary instituted its own means of border control by creating a fence to block incoming refugees (Kallius, et al., 2016, 33). This action is similar to Trump's proposed border wall to keep migrants out of the U.S., a campaign promise that gained him much public support amongst Republicans across the country. In examining the Hungarian response to the civil war and the influx of refugees to its borders, we see overlapping similarities that can help to strengthen research in regards to the American response.

To begin with, the Hungarian political party in power at the height of the epidemic is a far right-wing, populist party, the Fidesz party (Strickland 2016). Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, has solidly ran and succeeded on anti-immigrant policies and campaigns. The anti-immigrant rhetoric by Orban and the Fidesz party in mainstream Hungarian media rivals Donald Trump's rhetoric throughout his campaign and administration as POTUS, e.g. his slogan, "Make America Great Again". Orban used similar language in public interviews with media and prominent newspapers, e.g. referring to refugees as "Muslim invaders" (Schultheis 2018). By analyzing the Hungarian response, there is overlap with the polarized political environment in the U.S. and the current state of anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and "America First" sentiments that are resounding and prominent in our current media and presidential administration under President Trump.

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, we have taken insufficient measures to contain the extent of violence and stop the crisis. Therefore, the question arises, why has the U.S. not done more to stop the violence in Syria? As reports of state-committed human rights violations continually arose, the international community

felt pressured to act in order to limit or stop the state-sponsored violence by the Assad regime. To do so, many states claimed that intervention in Syria would be justified because of the UN norm of Responsibility to Protect. Since R2P was established in 2001, the norm conceives of sovereignty as entailing a responsibility on each state to protect its territorial population from genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes. It also calls for a complementary responsibility held by the international community to avoid those crimes against humanity (Achieme 2015, 691). Ultimately, the language of R2P demonstrates that the international community bears a responsibility to protect refugees seeking protection, regardless if that state has been unwilling to extend this protection.

However, a flaw with the norm of R2P is the fact that it is not a legally binding document. Therefore, states who do not wish to adhere to its duty to help fight R2P crimes, are not legally obliged to do so. Though it is morally wrong to turn a blind eye, some states have been able to do so since it is a non-binding agreement, which has resulted in a burden on neighboring states because of geographic proximity that has resulted in the greatest number of refugees resettling to Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. R2P could be used successfully, if adhered to strictly, to assume refugee cost-sharing to shift some of the burden onto larger states that are better equipped to provide the necessities to these refugees (Achieme 2015, 727). In addition, R2P has not been used thus far as a justification for military intervention in Syria due to support from Russia and China for the Assad regime. Russia and China have publicly pledged support for Assad and rejected attempts from Western nations to pass resolutions allowing justified military intervention in Syria. R2P states that the UN Security Council must allow military intervention in a state, but Russia and China have not allowed that to occur, as they attempt to resist against pressures from Western leaders (Momani 2016). Clearly, R2P could be used as a means to support military intervention in Syria, but resistance from powers like Russia and China, along with wavering commitments to the norm

itself, has resulted in inaction of using R2P ideals to eradicate the Syrian crisis.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the international community has clearly demonstrated that their commitment to protect human rights around the world is wavering. Developed nations with sufficient economic resources, social structures, education, etc. have resettled a miniscule number of Syrian refugees compared to the millions that are displaced both internally and externally. Instead, the neighboring states of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, etc., have assumed the role of allowing millions of migrants into their states, despite unstable situations. Some states have implemented liberal open-door policies, such as Canada, Turkey, and Germany, and have been doing their fair share to alleviate the burden of the global crisis. On the other hand, countries with restrictive and conservative policies, such as the United States and Hungary, illustrate policies influenced by strong tendencies of xenophobia, islamophobia, and conservative political influences in government. As the research shows, the countries that have reacted minimally to the humanitarian crisis in Syria have shared the same defining characteristics including xenophobia, islamophobia, conservative political power, and populist tendencies that prioritize the state over safeguarding human rights. It is evident that the United States is doing little to nothing to resettle Syrian refugees, and is ignoring their obligations under the UN's notion of R2P. In order to begin to provide substantive aid to the increasing burden, we must begin to take on our equitable share of refugees. This can be accomplished by having a thorough revision of the 1980 Refugee Act and current American immigration policy, that has resulted in an antiquated system proven to be incapable of handling an influx of thousands, or millions, of refugees. By permitting significant revisions to refugee policy, such as allowing mass refugee admissions with a faster vetting process and lifting the limitations on temporary protected status, the U.S. would be able to process asylum and refugee applications on a timelier basis, thus granting legal entry to thousands more applications than our immigration system processes at this moment.

However, as the research displays, this step would only be possible if views on Muslim refugees are changed from a negative to a positive perception in the U.S. By doing this, it would be possible to pass liberal legislation for Syrian refugees, but under the conservative Trump administration, this feat seems unlikely.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the existing research on the Syrian refugee crisis highlights the severity of this issue on the global stage. R2P, the notion outlined by the United Nations to protect human rights across the world, has clearly failed to move states into action to alleviate the problem that the ongoing civil war has caused. In regards to other ethnic refugee crises, we have seen much more widespread mobilization by governments and organizations, yet when one of the greatest refugee crises of the 21st century is occurring, we have not seen the same amount of widespread aid, resettlement, and government aid to the Syrian resistance forces and innocent civilians. As a result, millions are without basic human rights to education, shelter, food, healthcare, water, etc. in Syria and in weak host nations. These injustices have been overlooked by many states who have taken on minimal numbers of refugees, despite their capabilities to provide enough housing, job placement, and aid to refugees looking for a better life, like the U.S. In analyzing the American response, we can see that our dismal efforts are due to Islamophobia, xenophobia, and the rise of right-wing ideals in the U.S. A nationalist foreign policy approach, such as the American and Hungarian policies, tends to restrict refugees and immigrants into the country in hopes to protect the economy and livelihoods of its own citizens. Although these sentiments are clearly a focal point of right-wing politics and media, refugees contribute and strengthen their host' economies by contributing ideas and providing a new workforce that they pay into society. However, the misconceptions and fear that anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric puts on society is clearly detrimental to these damaged communities hoping for the opportunity to rebuild their lives, as we see has led to the inactivity by the United States in resettling Syrian refugees because of widespread fear of terrorism that "othering" has established in the U.S.

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