

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Topic A: The Syrian Refugee Crisis

MUNUC 31

Update Paper

The United States' Retreat from Syria

Impacted by political instability, poverty, war, authoritarianism and violence, “Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time.”¹ Over 5.6 million people have fled Syria since 2011, seeking safety in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and beyond; 13.1 million people are in need in Syria, 6.6 million are internally displaced and 2.98 million are in hard to reach and besieged areas according to the UNHCR Agency.² As women, children and men attempt to escape turmoil to find asylum in European countries, the United Nations joins its forces to provide humanitarian aid, education, food, shelter and health treatments to refugees. Despite this effort, however, political tensions only seem to escalate.

On Wednesday, December 19th 2018, President Donald Trump tweeted: “We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency.”³ With this claim, the American president ordered the withdrawal of the 2,000 US troops serving in the northeast of Syria which in turn caused Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to resign.^{4 5} The Islamic State has indeed, “lost enormous

¹ UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, “Syria emergency”

² UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, “Syria emergency”

³ Eli Lake, “Trump courts catastrophe in Syria,” Bloomberg Opinion

⁴ Eli Lake, “Trump courts catastrophe in Syria,” Bloomberg Opinion

amounts of territory, thanks to a powerful alliance between U.S. and Kurdish fighters.”⁶ However, a retreat from the Syrian territory could create an opening for ISIS to regain territory and power. “A withdrawal without a plan to protect civilians from barrel bombs and Iranian-backed militias will create the same kind of opening Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have seized before.”⁷ Since president Trump’s first announcement, he clarified that troops would slowly be sent back home and that Islamic State remnants were still being fought.⁸ This nuance adds hope that the United States’ army will not depart from Syria too soon, but the uncertainty implies that there is still work to be done by the United Nations and, in particular, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The UN cannot erase political tensions or decide whether the United States remains in Syria, but it can aid refugees to find asylum and create a plan to protect civilians from a possible Islamic State expansion. The UNHCR has appealed for US \$8 billion in funding to help refugees, including the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) which plans to use, “US \$4.4 billion to support over 5 million refugees in neighboring countries and some four million people in the communities hosting them [... and including] the 2017 Syria Humanitarian Response Plan, which seeks nearly US \$3.2 billion to provide humanitarian support and protection to 13.5 million people inside Syria.”⁹ By providing a plan that helps refugees in Syria, the United Nations can hedge against a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from the territory. It can provide economic and social incentives for neighboring countries to receive and host refugees, and it can introduce shelters and programs to educate children refugees.

⁵ Anthony Capaccio, “Mattis resigns as Defense Chief, citing differences with Trump,” Bloomberg

⁶ Eli Lake, “Trump courts catastrophe in Syria,” Bloomberg Opinion

⁷ Eli Lake, “Trump courts catastrophe in Syria,” Bloomberg Opinion

⁸ BBC News, “Syria conflict: Trump slows down troop withdrawal”

⁹ UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, “Syria emergency”

During conference, as we discuss the issue of the Syrian refugee crisis, we will come to better understand the political incentives countries have to fight against the different political regimes in Syria; we will study the possible solutions the UNHCR can adopt to aid refugees and we will get to a comprehensive resolution to help the Syrian refugee crisis.

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The 2019-2020 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan

As of December 2018, the number of Syrian refugees registered across the region reached an approximate 5.6 million, with refugees mainly concentrated in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq.¹⁰ Despite these countries hosting large number of populations, currently, the number of newly-born Syrian refugees has hit 1 million.¹¹ These children are in the danger of facing a life of poverty, lack of education, unemployment, child labor and general uncertainty. In order to meet the needs of the Syrian refugees, United Nations Agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and United Nations Development Programme have partnered up with 270 NGOs and humanitarian and development partners to launch the 2019-2020 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP).¹² It is a 5.5 billion USD plan to assist the host governments in dealing with the repercussions of the Syrian crisis.¹³

¹⁰ "3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2019-2020," accessed January 6, 2019, <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/>.

¹¹ Charlie Dunmore, "Syrian refugee aid plan launched as births in exile hit 1 million," UNHCR, 11 December 2018.

¹² "3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2019-2020," accessed January 6, 2019, <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/>.

¹³ Ibid.

The 3RP aims to help 3.9 million vulnerable host community members through livelihoods, economic opportunities, basic services and supporting the work of local institutions, hoping to lessen some of the socio-economic impact of the crisis.¹⁴ In the coming years, the 3RP plans to target 9 million individuals in the 5 host countries mentioned previously.¹⁵ In this year, the partners hope to address the security and protection issues faced by refugees along with improving the basic health services and available economic opportunities (especially for women). More focus is being put into getting the refugee children some sort of education as 35% of those in exile are still out of school.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the international community is urged to continue to provide support and show solidarity for host countries as well as the 3RP partners.

Since its inception in 2015, the 3RP has been trying its level best to counter the condition of the Syrian crisis on the neighboring countries in support of their efforts. Around 12 billion USD has already been channeled to help the refugee and host communities.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Charlie Dunmore, "Syrian refugee aid plan launched as births in exile hit 1 million," UNHCR, 11 December 2018.

¹⁷ "3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2019-2020," accessed January 6, 2019, <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/>.

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Topic B: Developing a Global Burden-Sharing Framework for Displaced Peoples

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Update Paper

The Global Compact on Refugees

At the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants conducted in 2016, the New York Declaration was put into effect. This Declaration called on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to develop and propose a new global compact on refugees in consultation with States and other stakeholders, based on the comprehensive refugee response frameworks set out at the summit.¹⁸ The Global Compact on Refugees aims to provide a predictable and equitable burden and responsibility-sharing to all cases of human displacement. This deal helps more than 25 million refugees around the world who have been displaced due to war, persecution or violence.¹⁹ With more than 180 UN members voting in favor of the compact, the United States and Hungary alone opposed its adoption.²⁰

The four main aims of this agreement consists of increasing the ability of refugees to reach “third countries” through legal methods, alleviating pressure on refugee-hosting countries,

¹⁸ “Global Compact on Refugees,” Refugees and Migrants, April 5, 2017, <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/refugees-compact>.

¹⁹ Tania Karas, “Briefing: The New Refugee Compact,” IRIN, December 18, 2018.

²⁰ Ibid.

improving the self-reliance of refugees and helping to improve conditions in their countries of origin to allow for a safe repatriation. It is composed of a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework which permits the carrying out of a ground level response of the compact and a Programme of Action that operates at a broader level to set concrete guidelines for the international community. It aims to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to aid refugees including state and international aid organizations, international and local civil society groups, development actors, the private sector and financial institutions. It also guides host countries on how to get financial, material and technical assistance in the face of a new crisis through a new Support Platform, which will help alleviate the tensions surrounding cooperation between donors and host countries that hinder the ability to provide support.

The global compact fills a major gap surrounding international migration that has existed since the 1951 Refugee Convention, which focuses on the rights of refugees and the individual duties of states but does not offer specifics on the sharing of burden and responsibility of the world's refugees. This agreement serves as a necessary source of guidance on international cooperation. An unequal distribution of refugees exists worldwide: today, only ten countries serve as hosts to 60% of the world's refugees with over 85% living in developing countries.²¹ While developing countries receive the majority of the world's refugees, they lack the infrastructure, resources and services to adequately support them due to their own economic and development challenges. The first assessment of the compact will occur next year at the first Global Refugee Forum. After that, countries will meet every four years where compact signatories will discuss their

²¹ The Global Compact on Refugees: UNHCR Quick Guide, UNHCR, September 2018.

progress and make new pledges of different actions such as financial assistance in support of the compact.

One criticism of the compact is that as it is non-binding and therefore depends on the will of governments to support refugees. UNHCR is unable to hold governments who choose to ignore obligations outlined in the compact accountable as it depends on these countries for funding and the ability to carry out field operations. Another criticism is that the agreement supports the unequal division of labor within the provision of support for refugees with richer countries providing aid and resettling only a small percentage of refugees while poorer countries continue to host the majority of refugees. Many argue that it continues to promote the interests of rich countries to protect their borders through making their responsibility based in providing humanitarian rather than taking in refugees. The compact also fails to address the issue of international displaced people which make up over half of the world's forcibly displaced people as well as does not offer special protection for climate refugees and women and girls.²² Thus, although this compact provides major support to already existing literature dealing with refugees, there is still room for improvement.

²² Ibid.

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Topic B: Developing a Global Burden-Sharing Framework for Displaced Peoples

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Update Paper

The New York Declaration, the CRRF, and Opposition to the GCR

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was unanimously adopted in September of 2016 by the nations of the UN General Assembly. It outlines the responsibilities of humankind where refugee and migrant issues are concerned, and contains two key “action” provisions: the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (or the CRRF), which discusses some of the obstacles facing refugees, and possible “durable solutions”, and a request for the UNHCR to develop a global framework for confronting the global migration and refugee crises.²³ While the former was used to guide humanitarian aid work in Central America and Africa, the UN also used it to assess the effectiveness of those methods in order to help develop the Global Compact on Refugees (or the GCR), which would be developed out of the latter half of the declaration.²⁴

The CRRF works with local governments, NGOs and private businesses in order to implement effective solutions to specific refugee problems, such as the lack of access to technology

²³ “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,” UNHCR USA, accessed January 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html>

²⁴ “Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework,” UNHCR USA, accessed January 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html>

or the loss of identification papers by the refugee population.²⁵ Other organizations donate funding and analyze where further donations will have the greatest impact.²⁶ The CRRF works with preexisting groups and authorities, and within the abilities and willingness of local bodies, which allows for small-scale but effective change without challenging a nation's sovereignty or sense of identity. The small scale of some of their work allows for the implementation of untested ideas to determine their viability and allows the CRRF to reach smaller refugee populations that might otherwise be overlooked.²⁷ While they work with small-scale and local groups, CRRF also organizes transnational regional bodies to coordinate humanitarian work, ensuring that effective solutions to relevant obstacles are not disregarded.²⁸

When the Global Compact on Refugees was adopted in December of 2018, only two nations opposed the motion (the United States and Hungary) while three nations abstained (the Dominican Republic, Eritrea, and Libya). United States opposition to the global compact centered around funding and sovereignty concerns, and early statements emphasized the necessary voluntary status of the proposals within the document.^{29 30} Eventually the United States decided to oppose the compact entirely. The Ambassador of Hungary to the UN explained that Hungary believes the

²⁵ "Application of Comprehensive Refugee Responses," UNHCR USA, as of December 2018, <http://www.globalcrrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/CRRF-Global-Poster-December-2018-final-version.pdf>

²⁶ Myhrman, Tove, "Sida contribution to Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)," Sida, August 29 2018, <http://www.globalcrrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/FINAL-SIDA-PAPPER-Sida-contribution-CRRF-20180829.pdf>

²⁷ "Application of Comprehensive Refugee Responses"

²⁸ "Bringing the New York Declaration to Life: Applying the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)", UNHCR, last updated February 2018, <http://www.globalcrrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CRRF-Bringing-the-NYD-to-life-Feb-2018.pdf>

²⁹ "Statement of the United States of America to the first formal consultation, agenda item one" UNHCR USA, February 14, 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/events/conferences/5a8a9ae47/statement-united-states-america-first-formal-consultation-agenda-item.html>

³⁰ "Statement of the United States of America to the first formal consultation, agenda item two" UNHCR USA, February 14, 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/events/conferences/5a8a9b907/statement-united-states-america-first-formal-consultation-agenda-item.html>

Global Compact for Refugees is an unnecessary measure, as adequate policy for handling refugee issues already exists.³¹ While the GCR passed with an overwhelming majority of votes, the perspectives held by the United States and Hungary remain existing roadblocks to united global progress. While the opposition of two nations in no way prevents the GCR from being a landmark document in refugee policy, it is important to keep in mind opposing arguments in order to effectively analyze the position of refugee policy worldwide.

³¹ Lederer, Edith M., "UN approves compact to support world's refugees; US objects," *AP News*, December 17, 2018, <https://apnews.com/4fd4c127e8da4801b6bb3f8d5f184404>

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