

Center for American Progress



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Crisis in Context

The Global Refugee Problem

By John Norris and Annie Malknecht

September 2015



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Introduction and summary

The scenes from the daily news have been compelling and often horrific: a child lying dead in the surf; massive camps in the desert as large as cities; refugees herded behind barbed wire and huddled in train stations. The statistics on refugees have been equally alarming. Every day in 2014, the world averaged 42,500 new refugees and internally displaced people, or IDPs¹—people who were forced from their homes but have not crossed an international border. In June 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, announced that global forced displacement, the combined total of both refugees and IDPs, topped 50 million people for the first time since World War II.² This total is now close to 60 million and still rising.³ Half of these refugees are under 18 years of age.⁴

This report attempts to place the current global refugee problem within a clearer context to allow for better informed policy decisions by all involved. There should be no mistake: The current refugee crisis is international and cannot be viewed as merely a European or Middle Eastern problem. This report places particular emphasis on Syrian refugees and IDPs, since they are the largest force shifting the overall numbers in recent years. That said, it is important to stress that resolving the concerns surrounding refugees and IDPs from any country demands a nuanced view of the situation on the ground and an effective understanding of the complexities surrounding forced displacement.

Close to 60 million people are displaced worldwide currently, with the majority of them internally displaced, rather than refugees. In addition, a relatively few number of countries produce a very high percentage of this global displacement. The large number of people on the move reflects a fundamental failure to achieve a durable peace or to address the eroding security situations forcing people into hazardous flight from their homes.

The international response to the current forced displacement crisis has been deeply uneven, and this report proposes a series of recommendations to help address it.

Key Gulf states—including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia—should loosen work permit restrictions for Syrian refugees, ramp up their humanitarian giving, and move to become signatories to the U.N. refugee convention. The international community should also develop a better concerted and more robust position to end the horrific and widespread use of barrel bomb attacks in Syria, which are a prime factor in driving people from their homes.

In order to make it easier for refugees to seek asylum, the European Union should establish an outpost in Izmir, Turkey, to process refugees before they attempt the hazardous journey to the Greek Islands and beyond. Also, the Dublin Regulation should be altered to better reflect the proportions and urgency of the present crisis by allowing more flexibility for asylum seekers.

U.N. member states should hold an emergency special session to address the displacement crisis. The United Nations, in conjunction with private sector partners, should explore how best to integrate new refugee populations with an emphasis on improved livelihoods for refugees and their surrounding communities.

Finally, the United States must increase its efforts to help with this humanitarian crisis, including sharing a greater burden of accepting refugees. There are many convenient excuses for inaction or doing too little, but this is no time to shirk the responsibility of our common humanity.

The broad trend in numbers

The spike in refugees, particularly those trying to find safe haven in Europe, has garnered enormous press attention, but much of the focus has obscured some important trends. First and foremost, internally displaced people continue to be a more serious problem than refugees. Of the nearly 60 million people forcibly displaced around the globe, almost two thirds of them—38.2 million—are internally displaced people, with 7.6 million of those IDPs in Syria alone.⁵ For all the heart-wrenching scenes of refugees in Hungary and Greece, there is little coverage of the significantly more people in Syria who have fled their homes but are unable to escape their own country. The conditions for these people remain harrowing.

The second major trend in refugee and IDP numbers is their growing concentration in increasingly fewer countries. Roughly 60 percent of the world's IDP population comes from just five nations: Syria (19.9 percent); Colombia (15.83 percent); Iraq (8.58 percent); Sudan (8.12 percent); and the Democratic Republic of Congo (7.22 percent).⁶ This suggests that the refugee and IDP problem can be effectively addressed if the international community can substantially improve the conditions in just a handful of countries—albeit these countries stand out as some of the most serious challenges to peacebuilding of this generation.

And for all of the handwringing in European parliaments—and to a lesser extent, in the U.S. Congress—about the number of refugees seeking asylum, it is useful to remember that developing countries still bear, by far, the largest brunt of both the emerging and longstanding refugee crises. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that developing countries host more than 85 percent of refugees, with the top host countries including Pakistan (1.5 million),⁷ Iran (982,000),⁸ Lebanon (1.1 million), Jordan (more than 600,000 registered; an estimated 1.4 million total),⁹ and Turkey (1.9 million).¹⁰

Lebanon and Jordan bear the largest per capita burden of refugees, with Lebanon hosting at least 232 refugees per 1,000 of its inhabitants and Jordan hosting 87 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants.¹¹ This is a staggering burden, and lacking a more effective international response in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, any one of these

three states could see their fundamental stability undermined. Such instability in any one of these three countries would see the United States risking the loss of a key ally, and likely unleash even larger numbers of refugees and IDPs.

It is also important to note that refugees tend to remain in exile for very significant periods of time. In 2003, UNHCR noted that the average time in exile before returning home for a refugee was 17 years, meaning the challenge of dealing with today's refugees from Syria and Iraq will continue for a generation to come.¹² Some 90 percent of the countries and territories that the Norwegian Refugee Council monitored in 2014 were home to IDPs who have been displaced for 10 or more years.¹³

Refugees are a symptom, not the illness

The refugees now moving across the Middle East and Europe are a direct result of the international failure to resolve conflicts and foster sustainable security in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and elsewhere. The rise of the Islamic State has exacerbated the refugee and IDP problem, with at least 2.2 million people fleeing areas that fell under Islamic State control.¹⁴ Refugees are a symptom of these crises across multiple states, and the worst refugee problem in a generation will not be resolved unless there is a far more concerted effort to achieve peace in conflict-torn societies.

The United Nations Security Council, the United States, European Union, key Gulf States, and others made a strategic decision to largely take a hands-off approach with regard to intervening in the Syrian conflict. After misadventures of varying degrees in both Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with the difficult choices on the ground, that may still be a defensible position. However, as the enormous volume of Syrian refugees and IDPs make clear, there is also a very real cost for inaction. Current negotiations to end the Syrian conflict neither appear serious nor likely to succeed. Russia has started troubling provisions of direct military support to the Assad regime.¹⁵ And we have seen little to suggest that Western powers have a coherent vision to stem the conflict.

If the international community is content to watch as Syria smolders, it must also be prepared to vastly step up its efforts to share the burden of hosting refugee populations, while continuing to help underwrite the large sums of humanitarian assistance needed to assist refugee and IDPs that remain in the region. The human catastrophe driving desperate men, women, and children to seek refuge in Europe is a global problem that requires global action, and it demands an approach that begins to address the root causes that are driving people from their homes.

The U.N. Convention on Refugees

First agreed upon in 1951 and later amended in 1967, 145 countries have signed the U.N. Convention on Refugees.¹⁶ The convention includes the following key elements that have been important lodestars in the international approach to dealing with refugees.

- A refugee is defined as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”
- With specific exceptions, refugees should not be penalized for their illegal entry or stay.
- The convention establishes the principle of non-refoulement, which provides that no one shall expel or return—*refouler*—a refugee against his/her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where he/she fears threats to life or freedom.
- It establishes minimum standards of treatment of refugees, including access to courts, to primary education, to work, and to provision of documentation—including travel documentation in passport form, commonly known as the “Nansen passport.”
- The convention does not apply to the following groups: individuals suspected of war crimes or crimes against humanity, serious non-political crimes, or crimes that counter the principles of the United Nations; refugees who benefit from the protection/assistance of a U.N. agency other than UNHCR; refugees who have a status equivalent to nationals in the country of asylum, meaning internally displaced people.

A deeply uneven response

Nowhere has the unevenness of the international response to refugees been more apparent than in the relative willingness, and unwillingness, of countries to accept refugees. In addition, the European Union, the United States, and a number of key Gulf states appeared to be caught entirely unprepared by a refugee problem that should not have come as a shock.

The response to the idea of hosting refugee populations, even in small numbers, has at times triggered an ugly undercurrent of xenophobia and fears of terrorism that far outweigh the actual risk imposed by taking in refugees.¹⁷ Indeed, there is considerable evidence that hosting refugees ultimately pays off in terms of considerable economic benefits to host countries.¹⁸

Looking at where refugees from Syria have been accepted to date provides important insight into the sharp disparity of approaches by host countries.

The frontline states

Lebanon has 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees, although the government estimates that the total, including unregistered refugees, is closer to 1.5 million.¹⁹ In Jordan, UNHCR currently tallies 629,266 registered refugees; however, the government has said that it is hosting 1.4 million Syrians.²⁰ Turkey currently hosts 1.9 million Syrians, with one-third of them living in government-run camps.²¹ These are enormous numbers with the potential to fundamentally alter the political and strategic trajectory for all three countries. For leaders of these countries to hear from EU member states or the United States that it is too difficult to accept tens of thousands of refugees in a single year is surely galling.

The Gulf states

Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, or UAE, and Saudi Arabia have not officially accepted refugees from Syria, but both Saudi Arabia and the UAE report having admitted 100,000 Syrians each since the beginning of the conflict. In addition, Saudi Arabia reports to have some 500,000 Syrians living within its borders, and the UAE reports 242,000.²² However, there is considerable confusion surrounding these numbers. For example, Saudi officials have also claimed in different reports to have “received” 2.5 million Syrian refugees since the conflict began, a number so large that it likely includes the total number of all transits through the country by Syrians.²³ Some refugees have claimed they would feel much more welcome in Europe than the Gulf states.²⁴ None of the three states—and indeed none of the six Gulf states—are signatories to the U.N. refugee convention, have no treaty obligations to accept refugees, and thus do not grant any of the refugees in their countries refugee status.

According to the annual tallies of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or UNOCHA, Financial Tracking Service, since the conflict began, humanitarian assistance to the Syrian crisis have totaled: \$403 million from the UAE; \$594 million from Saudi Arabia; \$933 million from Kuwait; \$233 million from Qatar; \$23 million from Oman; and \$3 million from Bahrain.²⁵ While it is not clear why, Gulf spending on the humanitarian crisis according to UNOCHA official estimates seems to be lagging badly this year, with the UAE donating close to \$30 million to date in 2015, Saudi Arabia donating \$18.3 million, and Qatar \$9.2 million.²⁶ The combined total from these countries this year is less than the Netherlands or Switzerland has donated to the Syrian refugee crisis on its own. Overall spending by Gulf states has been significant, but it also useful to put these numbers in some broader perspective: Qatar alone is expected to spend \$200 billion to host the 2022 World Cup.²⁷

Israel

Israel has not accepted refugees from Syria fearing that they would pose a threat to the state by altering the country’s demographic balance—although Israel has provided medical treatment to 1,000 people who have been injured in the fighting in Syria.²⁸ When Israeli opposition leader Isaac Herzog argued that Israel, by dint of its own difficult history, had an obligation to give shelter to at least a token number of refugees, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

responded by saying that Israeli was not in a position to accept refugees because of concerns that prominently included terrorism.²⁹ While Israeli security concerns are legitimate, it should explore avenues for helping its neighbors manage the refugee challenge and increase regional stability.

The uneasy bridges

Greece, Italy, and Hungary have been the three most vital transit points for refugees from the Middle East coming into the European Union. As such, they have been the countries that most acutely have felt the brunt of confusion, indecision, and inaction by the European Union as a whole. Greece, already under considerable duress because of the financial crisis, has been used primarily as a land bridge into Europe; 158,000 refugees have passed through Greece in 2015 alone.³⁰ Italy currently hosts 110,000 refugees who arrived in 2015. More than 170,000 refugees have arrived in Hungary this year alone.³¹ Unfortunately, this influx has meant that Hungary, led by a hard-right government, has become the face of anti-immigrant, anti-refugee hostility in Europe. Refugees have been abused by police and other authorities in train stations and in the streets, and the country is rushing to complete a 175-kilometer fence along its border with Serbia in an effort to keep out refugees.³²

Hungary's treatment of refugees has been so consistently poor that it has been criticized by UNHCR and by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.³³ While many concerns have been raised about Italy and Greece's handling of refugees, particularly those refugees trying to make the voyage by sea from North Africa, Hungary's response to the refugee crisis—which has often appeared to contravene the country's commitment under the U.N. Convention on Refugees—has been so mishandled as to largely remove Greece and Italy from the headlines other than in the immediate aftermath of tragic maritime disasters claiming refugee lives.

The stalwarts

To date, Germany and Sweden have been stalwarts in dealing with the influx of refugees. Both countries deserve significant praise for the reaction of their political leadership and general public to accommodate refugees. Germany has received 500,000 total asylum applications since 2011, but 100,000 people arrived in Germany in August 2015 alone seeking refugee protection.³⁴ German Chancellor Angela Merkel has pledged \$6.7 billion to address the crisis. German Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel told *The Guardian*, "I believe we [Germany] could

surely deal with something in the order of half a million [refugees] for several years ... I have no doubt about that, maybe more.”³⁵ Sweden has accepted 80,000 refugees in 2015, one-third of whom are Syrian. France, after initial reluctance, announced on September 8, 2015, that it would accept 24,000 refugees over two years under the EU quota system.³⁶

Money, not people

Both the United Kingdom and the United States have responded to the current refugee crisis with extraordinarily generous humanitarian assistance and extraordinarily restrictive policies on accepting refugees from the Middle East. The United States has delivered more than \$1 billion to assist Syrian refugees and IDPs in 2015, and the United Kingdom delivered close to half a billion dollars, making them the first and second largest donors in the world in that regard.³⁷ The United States has delivered more than \$4 billion in aid since the Syrian crisis began.

However, when it comes to people, the story has been quite different in both countries. British Prime Minister David Cameron initially committed the United Kingdom to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 and suggested that child refugees would be deported when they turned 18. After sharp opposition party criticism that the 4,000 refugee a year figure paled in comparison to a number of other European countries, Cameron appeared to back pedal somewhat, indicating that children would not be deported when they turned 18 and suggesting that the 20,000 number could be achieved before 2020—although still not indicating that this total number of refugees would be raised.³⁸

The United States has been equally reluctant on Syrian refugee admissions—despite the fact that much of the population movement in Syria and Iraq can be traced directly back to the chain of events that began to unfold with the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and the subsequent mishandling of reconstruction. In August 2015, the United States resettled only 251 Syrian refugees, and the total for the fiscal year ending September 30 will likely end up in the range of 1,500 to 1,700 Syrians, approximately 0.03 percent of all Syrian refugees. Between October 1, 2014, and September 30, 2015, the United States had set a target of resettling 70,000 refugees from around the globe, with Syrians making up a very small portion of this total. Separate from the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, foreign nationals who are in the country can stay by applying for asylum. Although there is no numerical cap on the number of people who may be granted asylum in a given year, the number of Syrians who have

applied for asylum in recent years is relatively low: slightly more than 4,000 between October 1, 2010, and March 31, 2015.³⁹ And because the process only is available to people who have already arrived in the United States, it is off limits to the vast majority of Syrian refugees living in dire straits abroad.

With ongoing discussions between the executive and legislative branches regarding the target refugee number for the upcoming fiscal year, the Obama administration announced on September 10 that it would take in “at least” 10,000 Syrian refugees in the coming fiscal year.⁴⁰ While an improvement, this remains very low.

Congress has had a mixed reaction to the idea of accepting more Syrian refugees. In May 2015, 14 Democratic U.S. senators wrote to the president calling for a significant increase in accepting Syrian refugees.⁴¹ They noted that as of May 2015, the U.S. had only accepted approximately 700 refugees and that UNHCR had presented 12,000 cases of Syrian refugees to the United States for resettlement. The signatories called on the president to accept at least 50 percent of the Syrian refugees UNHCR wants to resettle, “consistent with our nation’s traditional practice under both Republican and Democratic Presidents.” In September 2015, Republican Sens. Lindsey Graham (SC) and John McCain (AZ) also called for accepting increased numbers of Syrian refugees.⁴²

Others in Congress have raised concerns that Syrian refugees in the United States would pose a terrorist threat. Commonly cited incidents related to this argument include: the Boston Marathon bombers; the more than 20 Somali Americans who have left the United States to join the Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa; the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center by Ramzi Yousef; and two Iraqis from Bowling Green, Kentucky, who were charged with conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals abroad. As Rep. Peter King (R-NY) argued, “I agree that the vast majority of Syrian refugees do not have ties to terror groups. However, we have been reviewing the current security vetting procedures for a number of months, and I have a number of concerns, not the least of which is the lack of on-the-ground intelligence necessary to identify terror links.”⁴³ Some in the House of Representatives have gone so far as to propose that the resettlement process be suspended in its entirety, a remarkably draconian reaction.⁴⁴

By any measure, the U.S. vetting process for Syrian refugees is laborious and remarkably slow. The average vetting process for a Syrian refugee coming into the United States takes 18 to 24 months—the same amount of time it takes to get an associate degree from a university.⁴⁵ The relative lack of on-the-ground intelligence from Syria contributes to delays in processing Syrian refugees in the United States.

U.S. security agencies remain deeply concerned about the influx of foreign fighters into Syria, the emphasis by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS, on lone wolf attacks, and the fear that a refugee influx could allow a terrorist to slip into the country at a time when there is zero tolerance for risk. But as Seth Jones of the Rand Corporation notes:

Almost none of the major terrorist plots since 9/11 have involved refugees. Even in those cases where refugees were arrested on terrorism-related charges, years and even decades often transpired between their entry into the United States and their involvement in terrorism. In most instances, a would-be terrorist's refugee status had little or nothing to do with their radicalization and shift to terrorism.⁴⁶

Recent developments and recommendations

On September 9, 2015, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker called on the European Union to accept binding a quota to resettle 160,000 refugees. He also asked that asylum seekers be allowed to work as part of “root-and-branch” reforms to EU immigration policy.⁴⁷ Juncker’s remarks seemed to mark an important moment in the debate within Europe. Juncker called on European states not to differentiate refugees by religion given that some have preferred to accept Christians rather than Muslims. He also stressed the need for refugees to work and secure livelihoods, saying “I am strongly in favor of allowing asylum seekers to work and earn their own money whilst their applications are being processed. Labor, work, being in a job is a matter of dignity ... so we should do everything to change our national legislation in order to allow refugees, migrants, to work since day one of their arrival in Europe.”⁴⁸

Juncker also called for major revisions to the Dublin Regulation.⁴⁹ Current provisions of that treaty direct that asylum seekers should be processed only in the first point of entry to the European Union, placing an undue burden on states that are on the frontlines of this crisis, such as Italy and Greece. The treaty also ensures that asylum applicants do not apply to more than one EU member country, with the EU member state of choice either accepting or rejecting the application and the applicant unable to restart the process in another jurisdiction. The treaty is frequently criticized as violating refugees’ rights. The application process under the Dublin treaty can cause significant delays in examination and in some cases, applications are never given a hearing. There are also accusations that the system can lead to excessive use of detention to enforce transfers, leads to the separation of families, prevents refugees from appealing denied applications, and impedes the integration of refugees while often forcing them to remain in states where they have few or no connections. The treaty also considers the standards and treatment of refugees as equal across all EU member states, which has very obviously not been the case in recent history.⁵⁰

Juncker called for the European Union to adopt procedures that will make it easier for refugees to seek asylum, including by expanding access to visas for those from conflict-affected countries. Asylum-seekers would be able to apply from their home regions rather than waiting to apply until they have risked their lives and the lives of their children by trekking across thousands of miles of land and sea, often at the mercy of criminal human smuggling gangs. He also called for the European Union to improve the provision of humanitarian assistance, public safety, and basic social services for refugees. The Dublin treaty would be altered to better reflect the proportions and urgency of the present crisis. He called for an open and transparent process to select the incoming chief of U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to ensure that this individual possesses the requisite competence to deal with the enormity of the current refugee crisis.

Reactions to Juncker's speech were mixed, although many saw it as a positive step forward. A British government spokesperson rejected the idea that the United Kingdom would not be bound by the EU plan to take 160,000 refugees across the member states, saying "In terms of any relocation, we have already been clear that we are not bound by it and we are going to focus our efforts on resettlement."⁵¹ And if the United Kingdom thought the new EU plan was too generous, Turkish officials called the offer "ridiculously" meager, and Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu complained, "The concept of burden-sharing has become a meaningless catchphrase."⁵² German Chancellor Merkel also expressed concern that the quota of 160,000 quota might be insufficient.⁵³

This report recommends a number of additional steps beyond Juncker's proposals that would be useful moving forward:

- The United States must recognize some responsibility for the plight of innocent families pushed out of their homes by ongoing conflict in the region; it must increase its efforts to help with this humanitarian crisis, including sharing a greater burden of accepting refugees. Admitting 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next year remains a very low figure, and it deserves bipartisan support to be revised upward, reflecting our country's long and proud bipartisan tradition of assisting the most desperate in their hour of need. The United States should follow the call from humanitarian groups to accept at least 65,000 Syrian refugees in the next year,⁵⁴ with the understanding that the United States could accept even more if needed.

- At a bare minimum, Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia should loosen their work permit restrictions to allow more Syrians to find employment in all three countries, combine to at least match the combined total of U.S. and U.K. contributions to humanitarian assistance, and become signatories to the U.N. refugee convention.
- The European Union should consider establishing a foreign affairs outpost in Izmir, Turkey, to register refugees, allowing refugees to avoid the dangerous journey to the Greek Islands and then from Greece up through Macedonia into Serbia, which will be even more unwelcoming with the completion of the fence at the Hungary-Serbia border.
- U.N. member states should hold an emergency special session to address these conflicts and the current global refugee emergency when they meet this September in New York.
- The UNHCR, in conjunction with global business and philanthropic leaders, should hold an immediate session to explore how best to integrate new refugee populations into Europe and other nations in the Middle East and to ensure that these individuals and their surrounding communities receive sufficient livelihood support to avoid isolation and ghettoization.
- Member states and concerned individuals should close UNHCR's considerable funding gap. Only 37 percent of the \$4.5 billion that the United Nations needs to provide for refugees in 2015 has been contributed by donors. The G20 and G7 should put these issues prominently on their agenda for upcoming meetings.
- Finally, steps must be taken at the source. The international community must speak with a much clearer and forceful position to end the widespread use of barrel bombs in Syria. Barrel bomb attacks—large metal barrels filled with high explosives, shrapnel oil, and/or chemicals and then dropped from airplanes or helicopters—have become a frequent, and wildly indiscriminate, military tactic used by the Assad regime, and these attacks are driving large numbers of people to flee.⁵⁵ As Ken Roth, the head of Human Rights Watch observed, “Mr. Assad’s indiscriminate use of barrel bombs deep in opposition-held territory means that for many there is no safe place to hide. That ugly reality has played a major part in persuading four million people to flee the country.”⁵⁶ While the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 2139 on February 22, 2014, ordering all parties in Syria to halt the use of barrel bombs in the country, there has been no cost imposed on the Syrian government for its blatant disregard for innocent civilian life.⁵⁷ Stopping these attacks would be the single greatest measure to staunch the flow of new IDPs and refugees.

Conclusion

The refugee and IDP situation, and the global response to it, continues to evolve rapidly. However, several things are ultimately clear. The international response continues to be inadequate on a number of levels. The collective effort to forge effective diplomatic approaches in places such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan remain badly lacking. Too many Gulf states remain eager to avoid shouldering their share of the burden of refugees, either financially or in terms of granting them safe haven. The European Union, while having made important steps forward, remains burdened by ineffective bureaucratic procedures concerning refugees, and a number of its member states, particularly Hungary, continue to be badly wrong-headed in their fundamental approach to the crisis. The United States and the United Kingdom remain generous with money but woefully inadequate in their willingness to accept refugees. The nearly 60 million refugees and IDPs around the globe today stand as a fundamental test of the world's moral and strategic resolve. History will not judge us kindly if we continue to find inaction so much easier than action.

About the authors

John Norris is the Executive Director of the Sustainable Security and Peacebuilding Initiative at American Progress. He has served in a number of senior roles in government, international institutions, and nonprofits. In 2014, John was appointed by President Barack Obama to the President's Global Development Council, a body charged with advising the administration on effective development practices. John previously served as the Executive Director of the Enough Project at American Progress and was the chief of political affairs for the U.N. Mission in Nepal. Previously, John served as the Washington chief of staff for the International Crisis Group and as the director of communications for U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. He also worked as a speechwriter and field disaster expert at the U.S. Agency for International Development. John is the author of several books, including *Mary McGrory: The First Queen of Journalism* and the *Disaster Gypsies*, a memoir of his work in the field of emergency relief. John has published commentary in scores of outlets including, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and elsewhere. He has a graduate degree in public administration.

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