



Trump's refugee crackdown threatens US security

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Suhad Munshid's brother-in-law, who lives in Baghdad, cooked for American troops after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and his family opened its home as a safe house for the soldiers as they patrolled Sadr City.

But while she left Iraq and arrived in the United States earlier this year, she told the *New York Times* the other day, her sister and brother-in-law may find themselves unable to follow — even as they, like many others, face the threat of assassination from militant groups due to their work with the U.S. side.

That's because, as part of President Trump's effort to restrict immigration to the United States, the administration announced last week that it's capping the number of Iraqi refugees who are eligible for admission this fiscal year (which began Oct. 1) at just 4,000, out of an estimated 110,000 who have applied due to their wartime cooperation.

On the heels of his controversial decision to pull out of Syria and abandon the Kurds, our close allies in the fight against the Islamic State, the President's move to cap Iraqi refugees is sure to raise further doubts about why people in foreign lands should risk their lives to work with the United States.

That explains why, in the summer of 2018, Pentagon officials took their concerns about the administration's efforts to restrict the number of refugees — particularly Iraqi refugees who worked with the United States — to the White House. More than a year later, their pleas have gone unanswered.

To put Trump's decision in perspective, the 4,000 limit on Iraqi refugees is part of an overall 18,000 limit on refugees worldwide, the lowest annual number since Washington created its current refugee program in 1980. Trump has gradually lowered the ceiling on refugees — from 45,000 in his first year, to 30,000 last year, to 18,000 this year.

Moreover, as two officials told the *New York Times*, the administration will likely fall far short even of the 4,000 limit for Iraqi refugees. After all, it admitted only 153 such refugees in all of last year. Between 2009 and 2014, by contrast, the United States admitted nearly 100,000 Iraqi refugees.

The President's efforts may be driven by broad security concerns over "high risk" immigration, but they have severely reshaped America's status as a destination point for refugees. For decades, the United States resettled more refugees than the rest of the world combined. But, amid a global refugee crisis, it's no longer the world's top refugee admitter, losing that status to Canada last year.

That America owes its gratitude to thousands of brave Iraqis — and should respond accordingly — is hardly debatable. In the tumultuous years after the United States toppled Saddam Hussein, many thousands of Iraqis worked with America's military, diplomats, contractors, non-governmental organizations, and others as part of a multi-year U.S. effort to stabilize and democratize that country.

"There is an implicit moral obligation to those who share risk," General David Petraeus said at a Washington event in the aftermath of the President's Executive Order of early 2017 that temporarily banned immigrants from some majority-Muslim countries. "It's very important for the future as well."

The story of Iraqis who helped the United States during the war is not a pretty one. As the International Refugee Assistance Project wrote last year, "[h]undreds... were killed, wounded, abducted, or threatened because of their work."

In just one example, "Captain Allen Vaught (Ret.) of the U.S. Army Reserves reported that his unit's work relied on translators who worked '[f]or as little as \$5 a week, and with no weapons or body armor,' and who 'served loyally as though they were U.S. soldiers.' Regrettably, two of Captain Vaught's five translators were assassinated by militias who opposed the U.S. mission in Iraq."

In an era of failed states and terror, Iraq will not be America's last military engagement. At some point, U.S. troops will battle the forces of another nation or terrorist group far from home. The path to victory will prove far easier if America has the help of those on the ground. Whether we can rely on such help is an increasingly open question, however.

In the spring of 2007, an Indiana congressman by the name of Mike Pence told a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee hearing on the plight of America's Iraqi partners, "I think there is nothing more important than the United States of America saying to people in Iraq or anywhere in the world, if you stand by us, we will stand by you."

Now that he's Vice President, perhaps Mr. Pence should walk down the White House corridor and say the same to the Commander-in-Chief.

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