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FACT SHEET: April 2016

Refugee Resettlement - Security Screening Information

The United States screens and vets refugees more stringently than any other group allowed to enter the country.

STAGE ONE: The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees first registers refugees, interviews them, takes biometric data and background information as part of a "Refugee Status Determination" or RSD: a process for determining whether a person seeking international protection is a refugee under international, regional, or national law. These refugees have been living in frontline refugee-hosting countries for years, struggling to survive, and UNHCR has data from years of regular interactions with these refugees. Only those who pass the U.N. assessment are referred to the United States for consideration. Refugees do not choose to be resettled or decide which country accepts them.

STAGE TWO: The U.S. government then conducts its own extremely rigorous screening process.

More specifically, the U.S. refugee vetting process for refugees includes the following elements as outlined by Department of Homeland Security officials:

- **Department of Homeland Security Interviews:** DHS-USCIS officers interview refugees to determine whether or not they can be approved for resettlement to the United States. These interviews occur while refugees are still abroad. To prepare, refugee officers receive specialized training and intelligence briefings that include comprehensive instruction on fraud detection, interviewing techniques, credulity analysis, and current country conditions.
- **Enhanced Review for Syrian Cases:** DHS-USCIS has instituted additional layers of review for Syrian refugee applications. Before being scheduled for an interview with a DHS-USCIS officer (while the refugee is still abroad), Syrian cases are reviewed at DHS-USCIS headquarters. All cases that meet certain criteria are referred to the DHS-USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) for additional review and research. FDNS conducts open-source and classified research on referred cases and synthesizes an assessment for use by the interviewing officer to inform lines of inquiry. This information provides case-specific context relating to country conditions and regional activity. DHS-USCIS reports that FDNS engages with law enforcement and intelligence community members for assistance with identity verification and acquisition of additional information.
- **Consular Lookout and Watch List Check:** Biographic checks are conducted against the State Department's Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS)—including watch list information.
- **Security Advisory Opinions from Intelligence and Other Agencies:** DHS seeks Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs) from a number of law enforcement and intelligence agencies for cases that meet certain criteria.
- **National Counterterrorism Center Checks with Intelligence Agency Support:** Interagency checks, known as "IAC's," are conducted with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) for all refugee applicants within a designated age range, regardless of nationality. In addition, expanded intelligence community support was added to the IAC process in July 2010, and recurrent vetting was added in 2015 so that any intervening derogatory information identified after the initial check has cleared but before the applicant travels to the United States will be provided to DHS.

- **DHS and FBI Biometric Checks:** Fingerprints are screened against the vast biometric holdings of the FBI's Next Generation Identification system, and are screened and enrolled in DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT). Through IDENT, the applicant's fingerprints are screened not only against watch list information, but also for previous immigration encounters in the United States and overseas—including cases in which the applicant previously applied for a visa at a U.S. embassy.
- **Department of Defense Biometric Screening:** Biometric screening is also conducted through the Department of Defense (DOD) Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS). ABIS contains a variety of records, including fingerprint records captured in Iraq. ABIS screening now covers all refugee applicants who fall within prescribed age ranges.
- **Additional Screening Checks on Entry:** When they travel to the United States, refugees are subject to screening conducted by DHS-U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) National Targeting Center-Passenger and the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight program prior to their admission to the United States, as is the case with all individuals traveling to the United States regardless of immigration program. In addition, CBP manages the TECS database, which is an information sharing platform allowing CBP officers to check against a range of connected databases upon an individual's arrival, including information from Interpol and the Terrorist Screening Center's Terrorist Screening Database.
- **Interpol:** The vetting process—including the CLASS and IDENT systems—checks against international intelligence community holdings from Interpol. Interpol's Foreign Terrorist Fighter database includes detailed identity particulars of individuals provided by 52 countries. As of September 2015, Interpol's suspected terrorist database had more than 10,000 names. Further, Interpol's Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database includes details of nearly 54 million stolen, lost, blank, and other documents, including from Syria and Iraq.
- In addition to Interpol, the U.S. government maintains separate security and intelligence sharing relationships with countries in the region, facilitating checks on information gathered on refugees after leaving Syria.

Resettlement of Syrian refugees advances the United States' national security interests and supports key U.S. allies.

"[R]esettlement initiatives help advance U.S. national security interests by supporting the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees."

- letter to Congress from a bipartisan group of the nation's top national security experts.

"The process that is currently in place is thorough and robust and, so long as it is fully implemented and not diluted, it will allow us to safely admit the most vulnerable refugees while protecting the American people. Fortunately, these goals are not mutually exclusive."

- Janet Napolitano and Michael Chertoff, former DHS secretaries

"A U.S. initiative to resettle Syrian refugees in the United States affirmatively advances U.S. national security interests. Increased resettlement and aid helps protect the stability of a region that is home to U.S. allies."

- Ryan Crocker, former Ambassador to Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kuwait: