

<b>Question#:</b>	1
<b>Topic:</b>	Vetting
<b>Hearing:</b>	Oversight of the US Refugee Admission Program
<b>Primary:</b>	The Honorable Andy Biggs
<b>Committee:</b>	JUDICIARY (HOUSE)

**Question:** Although the Trump Administration is taking efforts to improve and enhance vetting procedures, there is still concern that adequate information may not always be available, particularly in countries facing civil conflicts. In February, Assistant Director of the FBI Counterterrorism Division Michael Steinbach testified to Congress, saying, "the concern is in Syria, the lack of our footprint on the ground in Syria, that the databases won't have the information we need. So, it is not that we have a lack of process, it is there is a lack of information." He went on to say, "you are talking about a country that is a failed state, that is - does not have any infrastructure so to speak, so you - all of the data sets, the police, the intel services that normally you would go and seek that information don't exist."

In cases like these, are there vetting procedures in addition to the traditional procedures used to ensure applicants do not pose a risk to the United States?

**Response:** In addition to a review of databases, DHS has developed a rigorous screening process for all refugee applicants. Eligibility for refugee status, including whether a refugee applicant poses a threat to national security, is determined on a case by case basis through an interview with a specially-trained USCIS officer. A refugee applicant's testimony is always tested against known country conditions and reference is made to other information, such as the documentation in the applicant's file. All evidence submitted by and on behalf of the refugee applicant is considered and evaluated.

This evidence includes testimonial evidence provided by the applicant and information on Form I-590, Registration for Classification as Refugee, which every refugee applicant is required to complete. Refugee cases also have a referral form or statement through which the applicant is granted access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). For refugee cases referred for resettlement consideration by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a U.S. Embassy or certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the referring entity will provide a Resettlement Referral Form (RRF) outlining the applicant's claim. The Resettlement Support Center (RSC) will also interview all applicants and prepare a statement of the refugee claim, which accompanies Form I-590. The RRF and RSC statements are reviewed and considered in light of other information in the record and the applicant's testimony. In addition, statements from other parties, such as other family members, may be submitted for consideration in the adjudication.

Other documents that may be provided by applicants include: original identity documents such as passport, national ID card, birth certificate; education or professional

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certifications; and medical information. These documents are reviewed by experienced staff at UNHCR, RSCs and USCIS. USCIS officers consider this additional documentation in the adjudication of the case; however, such documentation is not required for applicants to apply for refugee status.

Moreover, country of origin information (COI) provides objective evidence against which documentation in the record and the testimony of an applicant can be analyzed and evaluated. When assessing an applicant's testimony regarding the refugee claim, highly-trained USCIS officers assess the credibility of the applicant's testimony using COI. If an applicant's testimony is not consistent with known country conditions or other information (such as prior statements to UNHCR &/or the RSC), lacks detail or is implausible, a case will be denied even if all security checks come back clear. In all applications for immigration benefits, including Form I-590, the applicant bears the burden of proof to establish eligibility for the benefit he or she is seeking.

USCIS regularly denies cases as a matter of discretion for reasons apart from security check results. Cases determined after further vetting to have unresolved national security concerns are also denied as a matter of discretion. These are cases where applicants may self-report information that suggests a possible national security concern that cannot be explained or resolved. The lines of questioning in these cases reflect the interviewing officer's probing questions and detailed knowledge of country conditions. In the previous five fiscal years, USCIS discretionarily denied approximately 5,550 cases.

**Question:** Is there an assumption that applicants do not pose a risk simply because there is no information about them in any of our databases? If not, how are assurances most frequently attained?

**Response:** Even if there may not be information on individual refugee resettlement applicants in USCIS databases, USCIS regularly examines all relevant information provided by intelligence and law enforcement partners, even when it is not specific to an individual applicant, and may choose to deny applicants based on that information, where appropriate.

Furthermore, USCIS does not assume, simply because there is no information about an individual refugee resettlement applicant in any of our databases, that the individual does not pose a risk. As stated previously, USCIS conducts thorough interviews of applicants seeking refugee status in the United States and regularly denies cases for reasons apart from security database check results, including cases in which the applicant's testimony is deemed not credible, as well as cases where applicants self-report information that suggests a possible national security concern that cannot be explained or resolved.

<b>Question#:</b>	2
<b>Topic:</b>	Assimilation
<b>Hearing:</b>	Oversight of the US Refugee Admission Program
<b>Primary:</b>	The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
<b>Committee:</b>	JUDICIARY (HOUSE)

**Question:** The Administration's report to Congress concerning the proposed FY 2018 refugee admissions ceiling states: "PRM and DHS/USCIS will work closely with UNHCR to ensure that, in addition to referrals of refugees with compelling protection needs, referrals may also take into account certain criteria that enhance a refugee's likelihood of successful assimilation and contribution to the United States."

Is it the Administration's position that refugees are not already successfully assimilating into and contributing to the United States?

**Response:** The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is dedicated to helping refugees transition as quickly and successfully as possible into their new lives in the United States so that they may realize their full potential and contribute to U.S. society. Improved assimilation of refugees and asylees will not only boost their ability to be successful in the United States, but will also help to better secure our communities by fostering a cohesive society based upon shared civic ideals, an appreciation of our history, and English language functionality.

The USRAP strives to ensure that refugees who are accepted for admission to the United States are prepared for the profound life changes they will experience by providing cultural orientation programs prior to departure for the United States as well as upon arrival. This support aims to ensure that refugees have a realistic idea of their responsibilities, what their new lives will be like, and what services will be available to them. Additionally, the USRAP is premised on the idea that refugees should become economically self-sufficient as quickly as possible, and dedicates significant resources and programming to help refugees become self-sufficient and integrated into U.S. society.

Successful assimilation of refugees into U.S. society directly benefits refugees and communities, while also serving the national interest of the United States by helping to establish a safe and secure homeland. Assimilation facilitates the ability of refugees to make positive contributions to the United States and the communities where they live. Although much is already being done, with these benefits in mind, DHS is working collaboratively with the Departments of State and Health and Human Services to enhance efforts to promote refugee assimilation and integration. Improved assimilation of refugees will not only boost their ability to be successful in the United States, but will also help to better secure our communities by fostering a cohesive society based upon shared civic ideals, an appreciation of our history, and an understanding of the English language.

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For DHS's part, USCIS is pursuing several integration-related initiatives in FY 2018, including:

- **Grant Funding.** Subject to congressional authority, USCIS is considering prioritizing grant-funded programs that focus on integrating newly arrived refugees and recently approved asylees through a variety of critical assimilation services. Additionally, USCIS is exploring awarding grant funds to local governments that are partners in resettling refugees or hosting asylees to support effective settlement and assimilation programming.
- **Informational Brochure.** USCIS is working to develop an informational brochure for refugees and asylees containing information on critical resettlement resources, including available English language learning opportunities, lawful permanent residence and citizenship, and U.S. civic values. This brochure will be translated into several languages and distributed to refugees at designated ports of entry, to asylees through USCIS asylum offices, and through other appropriate and available channels.

**Question:** Please provide the empirical evidence underlying and methodology guiding the above "assimilation test," including any evidence that you believe demonstrates an existing failure to assimilate.

**Response:** There is no "assimilation test." The Administration's report to Congress concerning the proposed FY 2018 refugee admissions ceiling states that the Department of State/PRM and DHS/USCIS will work closely with UNHCR to ensure that referrals "may also take into account certain criteria that enhance a refugee's likelihood of successful assimilation and contribution to the United States." Satisfaction of any such criteria is thus not a prerequisite to acceptance for admission to the United States as a refugee.

**Question:** What criteria has the Administration identified as predicting a refugee's likelihood of successfully assimilating into and contributing to the United States, or failing to do so?

**Response:** The Administration has not identified criteria that predict a refugee's likelihood of successfully assimilating into and contributing to the United States. As noted in the Annual Report to Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2018, DHS will pursue several initiatives to help refugees assimilate as quickly as possible. Improved assimilation of refugees and asylees will not only boost their ability to be successful in the United States, but will also help to better secure our communities

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by fostering a cohesive society based upon shared civic ideals, an appreciation of our history, and an understanding of the English language. The education and work history of each refugee is included in information shared with resettlement agencies prior to a refugee's arrival which leads to placement supporting the most optimal outcomes for refugees.

**Question:** Under what circumstances, and to what extent, will this test determine the composition of U.S. refugee referrals and admissions?

**Response:** As noted above, there is no “assimilation test.”

**Question:** Please provide copies of any agency documents and communications referring or relating to this assimilation test, including concept notes, position papers, and agency guidance.

**Response:** There is no documentation or communication referring or relating to an “assimilation test.”