



One Hundred Fourteenth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20515

November 16, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Islamist terrorists struck one of our closest allies during the November 13 Paris attacks, killing at least 129 people, including an American. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has claimed responsibility for this murderous rampage. Some of the operatives who executed this attack had reportedly traveled to the Syrian conflict zone. It appears that at least one of them may have infiltrated France using the cover of the unprecedented Syrian refugee flow into Europe.

In addition to the potential that operatives exploited asylee programs to wage their deadly attack in Paris, there have been longstanding indications that ISIS and other Islamist terrorists are seeking to exploit refugee flows to slip into the West. Moreover, there has been a steady stream of related concerns voiced by our national security and law enforcement officials here in the United States. These factors demand action and an immediate reassessment of our security screening processes.

You have proposed resettling at least 10,000 Syrian refugees – currently residing outside the Syria conflict zone in refugee camps – to the United States this fiscal year, in addition to more than 1,800 already resettled since 2011. We remain concerned that these resettlements are taking place without appropriate regard for the safety of the American people.

Leaders from the FBI, National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have repeatedly indicated to my Committee that we lack the on-the-ground intelligence necessary to thoroughly vet Syrian refugees seeking to resettle here. NCTC Director Nicholas Rasmussen testified before my Committee on October 21 that the intelligence picture in Syria -- which we rely on to vet applicants' information -- "isn't what we'd like it to be." FBI Director James Comey explained during that same hearing: "...if someone has not made a ripple in the pond in Syria in a way that would get their identity or their interests reflected in our databases, we can query our databases until the cows come home but nothing will show up because we have no record of that person... You can only query what you have collected." DHS Secretary Johnson conceded at that hearing: "It is true that we are not going to know a whole lot

about the Syrians that come forth in this process.” These statements call into serious question the integrity of our vetting procedures for Syrian refugees.

I sent a letter to your Administration in January, along with the Chairmen of the Border and Maritime Security and Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittees Rep. Candice Miller and Rep. Peter King, and another in June of this year expressing concerns about the homeland security impact of surging Syrian refugees into the United States without security assurances to protect the American people. In September, we sent you the key findings and recommendations from our bipartisan Task Force on Combatting Foreign Fighter Travel, which discussed the terror threat posed by Syria-based Islamist extremists. We requested at that time that you work with Congress to address numerous security vulnerabilities we identified; aside from comments from DHS, we have not received a formal response from your Administration on what is clearly an urgent national security issue.

In light of the terrorist attack in Paris, I call on you to temporarily suspend the admission of all additional Syrian refugees into the United States pending a full review of the Syrian refugee resettlement program, including of the aforementioned security risks. Our nation has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees into our country, but in this particular case the high-threat environment demands that we move forward with greater caution in order to protect the American people and to prevent terrorists from reaching our shores.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. McCAUL  
Chairman  
Homeland Security Committee

CC:

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