

Libby Elliott

From: Bodisch, Robert <Robert.Bodisch@dps.texas.gov>
Sent: Thursday, November 19, 2015 12:37 PM
To: Bodisch, Robert
Subject: Terrorists Have Already Used Refugee Program to Settle in U.S.

Terrorists Have Already Used Refugee Program to Settle in U.S.

Posted on November 19, 2015 by crceping

But that doesn't deter the psychopathic despot in the White House, via: [ABC News – Terrorists Once Used Refugee Program to Settle in US](#) –

Of the 31 states that have declared their opposition to taking in [Syrian refugees](#), one state, Kentucky, has a specific reason to be wary of the background check process: previously two [Iraqi refugees](#) who settled in Bowling Green [turned out to be al Qaeda-linked terrorists](#) with the blood of American soldiers on their hands, an ABC News investigation found. Both pleaded guilty to terror-connected charges after trying to acquire heavy weapons while in America's heartland.

The 2013 ABC News investigation also revealed that several dozen other suspected terrorist bombmakers, including some who were believed to have targeted U.S. troops, may have mistakenly been allowed to move to the U.S. as Iraq and Afghanistan War refugees, among the tens of thousands of innocent immigrants.

The Obama administration insists now that Syrian refugees are subjected to intense vetting before they're allowed to settle in the U.S. and that a vast majority of the millions of refugees the U.S. has resettled since the 1970s are normal, peaceful people, but the program has had serious security problems before. In 2009, a flaw in background screening of Iraqi refugees allowed the two al Qaeda-linked terrorists to settle in Bowling Green and led to a temporary suspension of the refugee program, officials told ABC News in a [2013 investigation](#).

The two men, Waad Ramadan Alwan and Mohanad Shareef Hammadi, were caught on surveillance video in 2010 in a storage locker in Kentucky handling heavy weapons, including a Russian-made machine gun and a Stinger missile launcher, which the FBI said the men thought would be smuggled to insurgents in Iraq.

An FBI agent assigned to the sting operation that eventually nabbed Alwan and Hammadi told ABC News for its original report that Alwan had bragged to an informant about killing American soldiers in Iraq.

"He said he had them 'for lunch and dinner,'" FBI Louisville Supervisory Special Agent Tim Beam told ABC News in 2013.

In the wake of the Kentucky case, the U.S. halted the refugee program for Iraqis for six months, a fact the Obama administration did not disclose to Congress at the time, officials told ABC News in the 2013 investigation.

The U.S. takes in as many as 70,000 refugees from around the world every year – a vast majority of whom are never deemed national security threats — and the White House recently announced it plans to increase that to 100,000 per year by 2017.

Tuesday senior Obama administration's official defended the U.S. refugee program, saying those coming into the states are subjected to "the most rigorous screening and security vetting of any category of people entering the United States."

Tweeting today, President Obama said, “We will provide refuge to at least 10,000 refugees fleeing violence in Syria over the next year after they pass the highest security checks. Here, our focus is giving safe haven to the most vulnerable Syrians – women, children, and survivors of torture. Slamming the door in the face of refugees would betray our deepest values. That’s not who we are. And it’s not what we’re going to do.”

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Libby Elliott

From: Bodisch, Robert <Robert.Bodisch@dps.texas.gov>
Sent: Thursday, November 19, 2015 12:38 PM
To: Bodisch, Robert
Subject: Kentucky: 2 Muslim "refugees" from Iraq charged with terrorism

Kentucky: 2 Muslim "refugees" from Iraq charged with terrorism

Posted on May 31, 2011 by creeping

Who is vetting Iraqi Muslims coming to the U.S.?



From the DOJ press release, Two Iraqi Nationals Indicted on Federal Terrorism Charges in Kentucky:

WASHINGTON—An Iraqi citizen who allegedly carried out numerous improvised explosive device (IED) attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq and another Iraqi national alleged to have participated in the insurgency in Iraq have been arrested and indicted on federal terrorism charges in the Western District of Kentucky.

The arrests in Bowling Green, Kentucky and the criminal complaints and indictment unsealed today were announced by Todd Hinnen, Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security; David J. Hale, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Kentucky; Elizabeth A. Fries, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Louisville Division; and the members of the Louisville Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF).

Waad Ramadan Alwan, 30, and Mohanad Shareef Hammadi, 23, both former residents of Iraq who currently reside in Bowling Green, were charged in a 23-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Bowling Green on May 26, 2011. Alwan is charged with conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals abroad; conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction (explosives) against U.S. nationals abroad; distributing information on the manufacture and use of IEDs; attempting to provide material support to terrorists and to al Qaeda in Iraq; as well as conspiracy to transfer, possess, and export Stinger missiles. Hammadi is charged with attempting to provide material support to terrorists and to al Qaeda in Iraq, as well as conspiracy to transfer, possess, and export Stinger missiles.

Alwan and Hammadi were arrested on May 25, 2011, on criminal complaints and made their initial appearances today in federal court in Louisville, Ky. Each faces a potential sentence of life in prison if convicted of all the charges in the

indictment. Both defendants were closely monitored by federal law enforcement authorities in the months leading up to their arrests. Neither is charged with plotting attacks within the United States.

“Over the course of roughly eight years, Waad Ramadan Alwan allegedly supported efforts to kill U.S. troops in Iraq, first by participating in the construction and placement of improvised explosive devices in Iraq and, more recently, by attempting to ship money and weapons from the United States to insurgents in Iraq. His co-defendant, Mohanad Shareef Hammadi, is accused of many of the same activities. With these arrests, which are the culmination of extraordinary investigative work by law enforcement and intelligence officials, the support provided by these individuals comes to an end and they will face justice,” said Todd Hinnen, Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security.

According to the charging documents, Alwan entered the United States in April 2009 and has lived in Bowling Green since his arrival. Hammadi entered the United States in July 2009 and, after first residing in Las Vegas, moved to Bowling Green.

Prior Activities in Iraq

In September 2009, the FBI launched an investigation into Alwan. Later, the FBI began using a confidential human source (CHS) who met with and engaged in recorded conversations with Alwan beginning in August 2010, and with Hammadi beginning in January 2011. In a number of meetings with the CHS, Alwan allegedly discussed his prior activities as an insurgent in Iraq from 2003 until his capture by Iraqi authorities in May 2006, including his use of IEDs and sniper rifles to target U.S. forces and details about various attacks in which he participated.

For example, in recorded conversations with the CHS, Alwan allegedly stated that he used to procure explosives and missiles while an insurgent in Iraq; that his insurgent group conducted strikes daily; and that he used IEDs in Iraq hundreds of times. At one point, Alwan allegedly drew diagrams of four types of IEDs for the CHS and provided verbal instructions on how to build these devices. He also discussed occasions in which he had used these types of IEDs against U.S. troops. Asked whether he had achieved results from these devices in Iraq, Alwan allegedly replied, “Oh yes,” mentioning that his attacks had “f-ked up” Hummers and also targeted Bradley fighting vehicles.

According to the charging documents, the FBI has been able to identify two latent fingerprints belonging to Alwan on a component of an unexploded IED that was recovered by U.S. forces near Bayji, Iraq. Alwan had allegedly advised the CHS that he lived in that area of Iraq and worked at the power plant in Bayji. Alwan had also allegedly told the CHS how he had used a particular brand of cordless telephone base station in IEDs. Alwan’s fingerprints were allegedly found on this particular brand of cordless base station in the IED that was recovered in Iraq.

In additional conversations with the CHS, Alwan also described IED attacks on U.S. troops that he participated in with others, including an associate whom Alwan said had lost an eye when an IED exploded prematurely. According to the charging documents, U.S. forces recovered an unexploded IED near Bayji from which a latent fingerprint belonging to this associate was later recovered. The charging documents allege that this associate was detained by U.S. troops in June 2006 and had a false eye.

The charging documents also allege that Hammadi has discussed his prior experience as an insurgent in Iraq and has told the CHS about prior IED attacks in Iraq in which he participated. In one conversation with the CHS, Hammadi allegedly described how he had been arrested in Iraq, explaining that authorities captured him after the car he was driving in got a flat tire shortly after he and others had placed IEDs in the ground.

Activities in the United States

According to the charging documents, beginning in September 2010, Alwan expressed interest in helping the CHS provide support to terrorists in Iraq. The CHS explained that he shipped money and weapons to the mujahidin in Iraq by secreting them in vehicles sent from the United States. Thereafter, Alwan allegedly participated in operations with the CHS to provide money, weapons—including machine guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, Stinger missiles,

and C4 plastic explosives—as well as IED diagrams and advice on the construction of IEDs to what he believed were the mujahidin attacking U.S. troops in Iraq.

For instance, in November 2010, Alwan allegedly picked up machine guns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers from a storage facility in Kentucky and delivered them to a designated location believing they would be shipped to al Qaeda in Iraq. In January 2011, the charging documents allege, Alwan recruited Hammadi to assist in the material support activities. Alwan allegedly described Hammadi to the CHS as a relative of his whose work as an insurgent in Iraq was well known.

Later that month, Alwan and Hammadi allegedly delivered money to a tractor-trailer, believing the money would ultimately be shipped to al Qaeda in Iraq. In February 2011, the pair allegedly assisted in the delivery of additional weapons, including sniper rifles and inert C4 plastic explosives, to a tractor-trailer, believing that these items would be shipped to al Qaeda in Iraq. Finally, in March 2011, Alwan and Hammadi allegedly picked up two inert Stinger missiles from the storage facility and delivered them to a tractor-trailer believing these items would be shipped to al Qaeda in Iraq.

Neither the Stinger missiles nor any of the other weapons or money delivered by Alwan or Hammadi in connection with the CHS in the United States were provided to al Qaeda in Iraq, but instead were carefully controlled by law enforcement as part of the undercover operation.

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In closing, Mr. Hale noted, “Let me be clear that this is not an indictment against a particular religious community or religion. Instead, this indictment charges two individuals with federal terrorism offenses.”

It's no coincidence they were Muslim. But years of whining by terror-linked CAIR and other Muslims, rather than actually trying to expose jihad-espousing Muslims, has led to the level of dhimmitude now displayed on every DOJ press release.

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Libby Elliott

From: McCraw, Steven <Steven.McCraw@dps.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, December 11, 2015 7:47 AM
To: Daniel Hodge; Robert Allen; Bodisch, Robert; Libby Elliott; Julia Rathgeber; Drew DeBerry
Subject: Fwd: Invitation: The Ultra-Marathoners of Human Smuggling
Attachments: Invitation Bensman Ultra Marathoners Dec 14 2015.pdf; ATT00001.htm

I previously shared the executive summary of Todd's thesis and he is responsible for the Syrian report that was requested and has been finalized.

Sent from my iPad

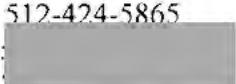
Begin forwarded message:

From: "Jones, John" <John.Jones@dps.texas.gov>
Date: December 10, 2015 at 6:43:59 PM CST
To: "McCraw, Steven" <Steven.McCraw@dps.texas.gov>, "Baker, David" <David.Baker@dps.texas.gov>, "Bodisch, Robert" <Robert.Bodisch@dps.texas.gov>
Subject: FW: Invitation: The Ultra-Marathoners of Human Smuggling

Fyi!

Todd is getting a lot mileage on his Thesis!

(JJ) John Jones
Assistant Director/ Chief
Texas Department of Public Safety
Intelligence & Counterterrorism Division
Tx Joint Crime Information Center (TxJCIC)

6100 Guadalupe Street
Bldg E. (MSC: 0450)
Austin, TX 78752
Office: 512-424-5865
Mobile:  

From: Bensman, Todd
Sent: Thursday, December 10, 2015 7:29 AM
To: Jones, John
Subject: Fwd: Invitation: The Ultra-Marathoners of Human Smuggling

FYI

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "SHIRLEY, KIMBERLY R" <KIMBERLY.R.SHIRLEY@cbp.dhs.gov>
Date: December 9, 2015 at 1:35:12 PM CST
To: "Bensman, Todd" <Todd.Bensman@dps.texas.gov>
Subject: Invitation: The Ultra-Marathoners of Human Smuggling

The Ultra-Marathoners of Human Smuggling
How to Combat Illegal Immigration from the Islamic World

What: A presentation and discussion with Todd Bensman, a Texas DPS colleague who is a Manager of homeland security in the Texas Department of Public Safety's Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division's Joint Crime Information Center (JCIC) in Austin, Texas.

When: December 14th, 2015, 9-11 a.m.

Where: Auditorium of the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC)

Details: Bensman will discuss his recent Naval Postgraduate School thesis research: 'The Ultra-Marathoners of Human Smuggling: How to Combat Illegal Immigration from the Islamic World'. Naval Postgraduate School faculty awarded his research the "Outstanding Thesis" distinction. The presentation is open to U.S. law enforcement personnel; please forward to others who may be interested in attending.

Bensman will be giving the same presentation to U.S. Representative Beto O'Rourke later that day.

Bensman's research has been drawing much attention for its relevancce following the Paris attacks, for which some of the attackers breached the European border with illegal immigrant asylum seekers. He has briefed the offices of numerous U.S. Senators and Congressmen and wishes to meet with a law enforcement audience while he is in El Paso. Click for more information on Bensman, whose background prior to Homeland Security includes two National Press Club awards and a 20-plus-year career in investigative and international journalism in television and print.

Bensman's thesis addresses how to attack the smuggling of "special interest aliens" (SIA) from 35 countries in the Middle East, South Asia and North Africa where terrorist groups operate and pose a potentially exportable product able to make it to the U.S.-Mexico border. The thesis identifies seven fail points in the SIA smuggling network where law enforcement pressure might work well. It also recommends 15 specific strategies to leverage those fail points.

Attendees will be required to present identification including Full Name, Full Social, DOB and POB (City and State).

Please RSVP to sharon.jones@dps.texas.gov.



The Ultra-Marathoners of Human Smuggling

How to Combat Illegal Immigration from the Islamic World

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Todd Bensman Bensman will be giving the same presentation to U.S. Representative Beto O'Rourke later that day.

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Attendees will be required to present identification including Full Name, Full Social, DOB and POB (City and State).

Please *RSVP* to sharon.jones@dps.texas.gov.

Libby Elliott

From: Constance Allison
Sent: Thursday, December 10, 2015 1:13 PM
To: Libby Elliott
Subject: RE: Legislative Contacts

Great. Thanks.

From: Libby Elliott
Sent: Thursday, December 10, 2015 12:21 PM
To: Constance Allison <Constance.Allison@gov.texas.gov>
Cc: Jay Dyer <Jay.Dyer@gov.texas.gov>; Ashley Morgan <Ashley.Morgan@gov.texas.gov>
Subject: FW: Legislative Contacts

In response to your email re: Dec 15 hearing – below is what I know.

From: Drew DeBerry
Sent: Wednesday, December 02, 2015 8:19 PM
To: Libby Elliott <Libby.Elliott@gov.texas.gov>
Subject: Re: Legislative Contacts

Daniel says Raymond told him he is supportive of us and Daniel suggested he have Steve testify on the security concerns.

Drew DeBerry
Policy Director
Texas Governor Greg Abbott

On Dec 1, 2015, at 12:38 PM, Libby Elliott <Libby.Elliott@gov.texas.gov> wrote:

Thank you, sir, for this update. Will loop in others within OOG with a need to know about the contacts and upcoming hearing. Will circle up with Candace on any follow up questions.

Best,

Libby

Sent from Outlook

From: McCraw, Steven <steven.mccraw@dps.texas.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 1, 2015 10:49 AM
Subject: Legislative Contacts
To: Libby Elliott <libby.elliott@gov.texas.gov>
Cc: Candace Nolte <candace.nolte@dps.texas.gov>, Bodisch, Robert <robert.bodisch@dps.texas.gov>, Drew DeBerry <drew.deberry@gov.texas.gov>

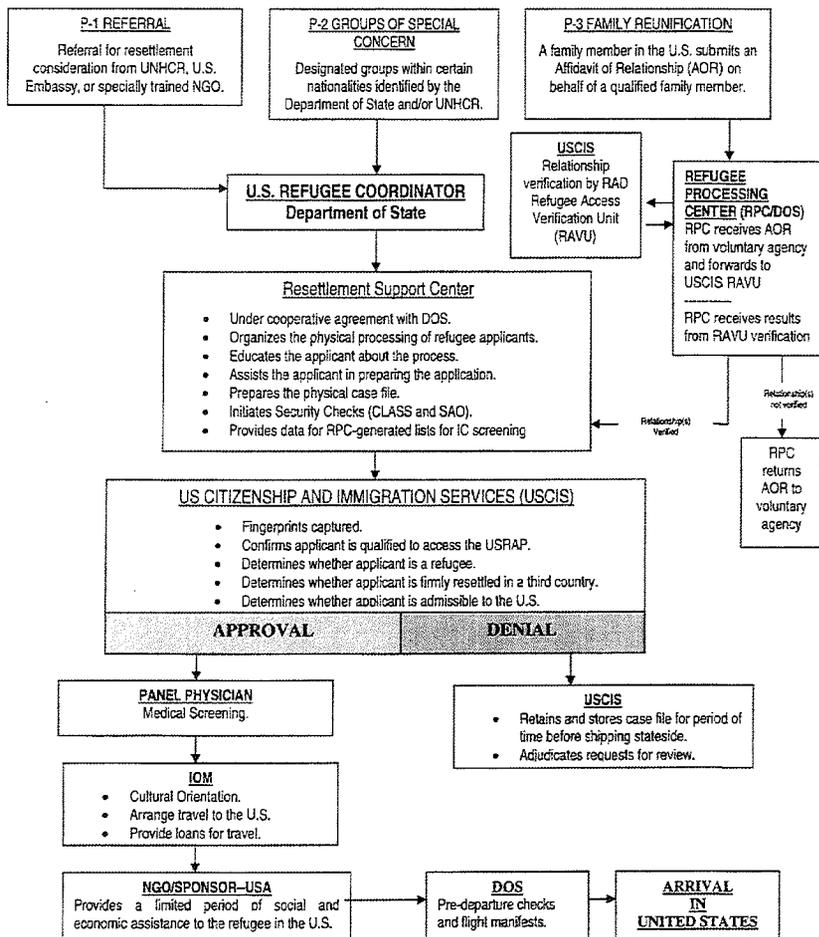
Libby, I just got off the phone with Congressman Sam Johnson whose district covers the Plano area. He wanted to discuss the threat from Syrians including the refugees, the ones who seek asylum at the Ports of Entry and the ones who enter between the Ports of Entry undetected. He is highly supportive of Governor Abbott's actions and wanted me to convey to the Governor that he and the Texas delegation is prepared to support him in

anyway. He was not aware that Syrians who were apprehended at the border for illegal entry are not returned to Syria and are eventually freed from detention.

Also, met with Representative Richard Raymond at his request and he discussed an upcoming hearing on December 15th regarding the Syrian refugee issue and referred an individual who may be able to assist us in border related operations and another in data related services. Representative Raymond has consistently been supportive of the Department on border related issues. He advised that he had discussed the hearing with Daniel Hodge.

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UNITED STATES REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (USRAP)



For Official Use Only (FOUO)

Security Screening and Background Checks – Refugees

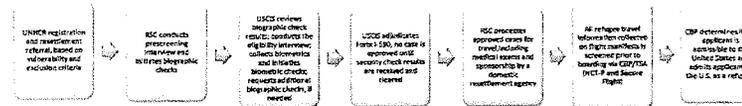
Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the security screening and background checks required for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Applicants for refugee resettlement are subject to the highest degree of security screening and background checks for any category of traveler to the United States.

All refugee applicants receive a standard suite of biographic and biometric security checks. Through close coordination with the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, these checks are continually reviewed to identify potential enhancements and to develop approaches for specific populations that may pose particular threats. All case members must clear security checks in order for a case to be approved.

USCIS's adjudication of *Form I-590 Registration for Classification as a Refugee* by USCIS is only one part of the USRAP. Department of State (State) has overall coordination and management responsibility of the USRAP and has the lead in proposing admissions ceilings and processing priorities. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identifies and refers certain cases to the USRAP for resettlement and provides important information with regard to the worldwide refugee situation. Additionally, Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs), under cooperative agreements with State, carry out administrative and processing functions, such as file preparation and storage, data collection, and out-processing activities.

General Refugee Process



USRAP Screening

The screening of refugee applicants involves numerous biographic checks that are initiated by the RSCs and reviewed/resolved by USCIS. These include:

- **Department of State Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS)¹**

CLASS name checks are initiated by DOS for all refugee applicants at the time of pre-screening by the DOS contractor — the Resettlement Support Center (RSC). Responses are received prior to interview and possible matches to applicants are reviewed and adjudicated by USCIS Headquarters. Evidence of the response is forwarded for inclusion in the case file. If there is a new name or alias developed or identified at the interview, USCIS requests another CLASS name check on the new name, and the case is placed on HOLD until that response is received.

Security Advisory Opinion (SAO)²

The SAO is a State-initiated biographic check conducted by the FBI National Name Check Program (NNCP). SAO name checks are initiated at the time of pre-screening by the RSC for the groups and nationalities designated by the interagency as requiring this higher level check. SAO are processed by FBI NNCP, and a response must be received prior to finalizing the decision. If there is a new name or alias developed at the interview, USCIS requests that another SAO be conducted on the new name, and the case is placed on HOLD until that response is received.

- **Interagency Checks (IAC)**

The IAC consists of screening biographic data, including names, dates of birth, and other data points of all refugee applicants within designated age ranges. This information is captured at time of pre-screening and is provided to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and other intelligence community partners. This screening procedure was initiated in 2008 with NCTC and has expanded over time to include a broader range of holdings and applicants of all nationalities. Prior to recent changes, IAC screening was conducted at the time of initial application and again before an approved applicant's departure to the United States. Since summer 2015, the process includes recurrent IAC screening of all refugee applicants in lieu of the previously conducted pre-departure checks.

At the time of USCIS interview, USCIS staff collects fingerprints and initiates biometric checks. The biometric checks initiated by USCIS for refugee applicants include:

¹ CLASS is a State name-check database that posts use to access critical information for visa adjudication. The system contains records provided by numerous agencies and includes information on persons with visa refusals, immigration violations, criminal histories, and terrorism concerns, as well as intelligence information and child support enforcement data. In addition to containing information from DOS sources, sources for information in CLASS includes NCTC/TSC (terrorist watch lists), TECS, Interpol, DEA, HHS and FBI (extracts of the NCIC Wanted Person, Immigration Violator, Foreign Fugitive Files, VGTOF, and the Interstate Identification Index).

² The Security Advisory Opinion process was implemented after September 11, 2001, to provide a mechanism for additional scrutiny to certain high-risk categories of individuals seeking visas to enter the U.S.

- **FBI Fingerprint Check through Next Generation Identification (NGI)**

A biometric record check pertaining to criminal history and previous immigration data.

- **DHS Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT - f/n/a US-VISIT)**

A biometric record check related to travel and immigration history for non-U.S. citizens as well as immigration violations, law enforcement, and national security concerns. Enrollment in IDENT also allows CBP to confirm identity at the port of entry.

- **DoD Defense Forensics and Biometrics Agency (DFBA)'s Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS)³**

A biometric record check of DoD holdings collected in areas of conflict (predominantly Iraq and Afghanistan). DoD screening began in 2007 for Iraqi applicants and was incrementally expanded to all nationalities by 2013. CBP's National Targeting Center-Passenger (NTC-P) conducts biographic vetting of all ABIS biometric matches (both derogatory and benign) against various classified and unclassified U.S. Government databases.

The USCIS in-person interview itself, though not a traditional system check, is also a vital part of the refugee screening process. USCIS Officers conduct extensive interviews with each refugee applicant to develop all relevant issues related to eligibility for refugee resettlement and admissibility to enter the United States. Officers develop lines of questioning to elicit information regarding any involvement in terrorist activity, criminal activity, or the persecution/torture of others, and conduct a credibility assessment on each applicant.

CBP Screening

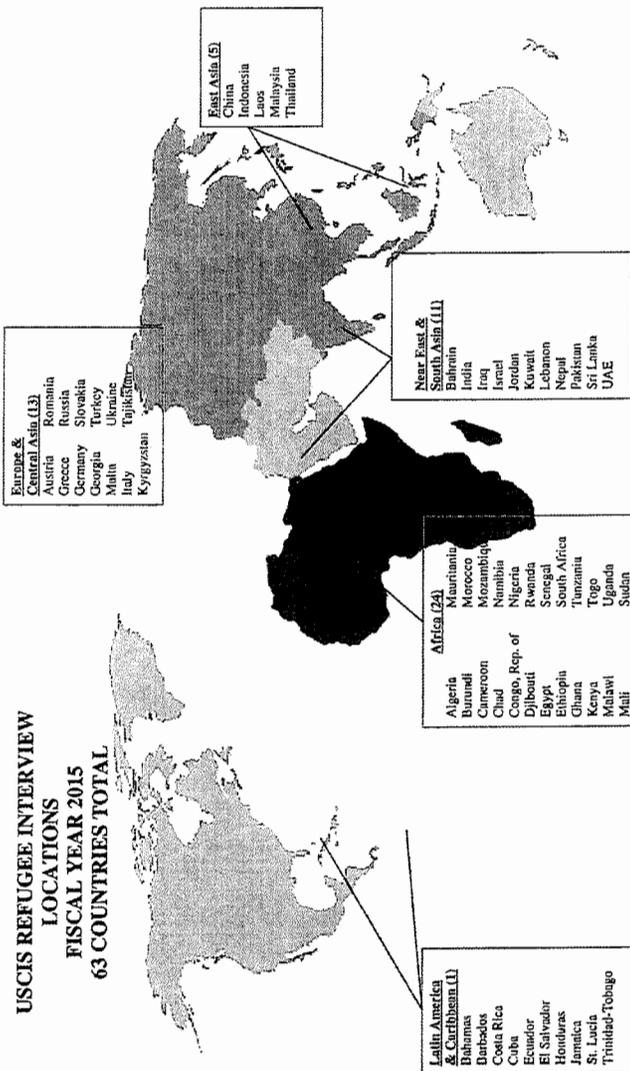
An applicant with a USCIS approved *Form I-590 Registration for Classification as a Refugee* must be found admissible to the United States by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) before receiving refugee status. CBP receives a manifest of all subjects who have approved *Forms I-590* and have made reservations to travel to the United States by air. CBP receives this manifest eight (8) days before the scheduled travel. The agency performs initial vetting of the subjects before they arrive at a port of entry and the conducts both background additional checks and interviews of these subjects upon arrival at a U.S. Port of Entry.

Controlled Application Review and Resolution Process (CARRP)

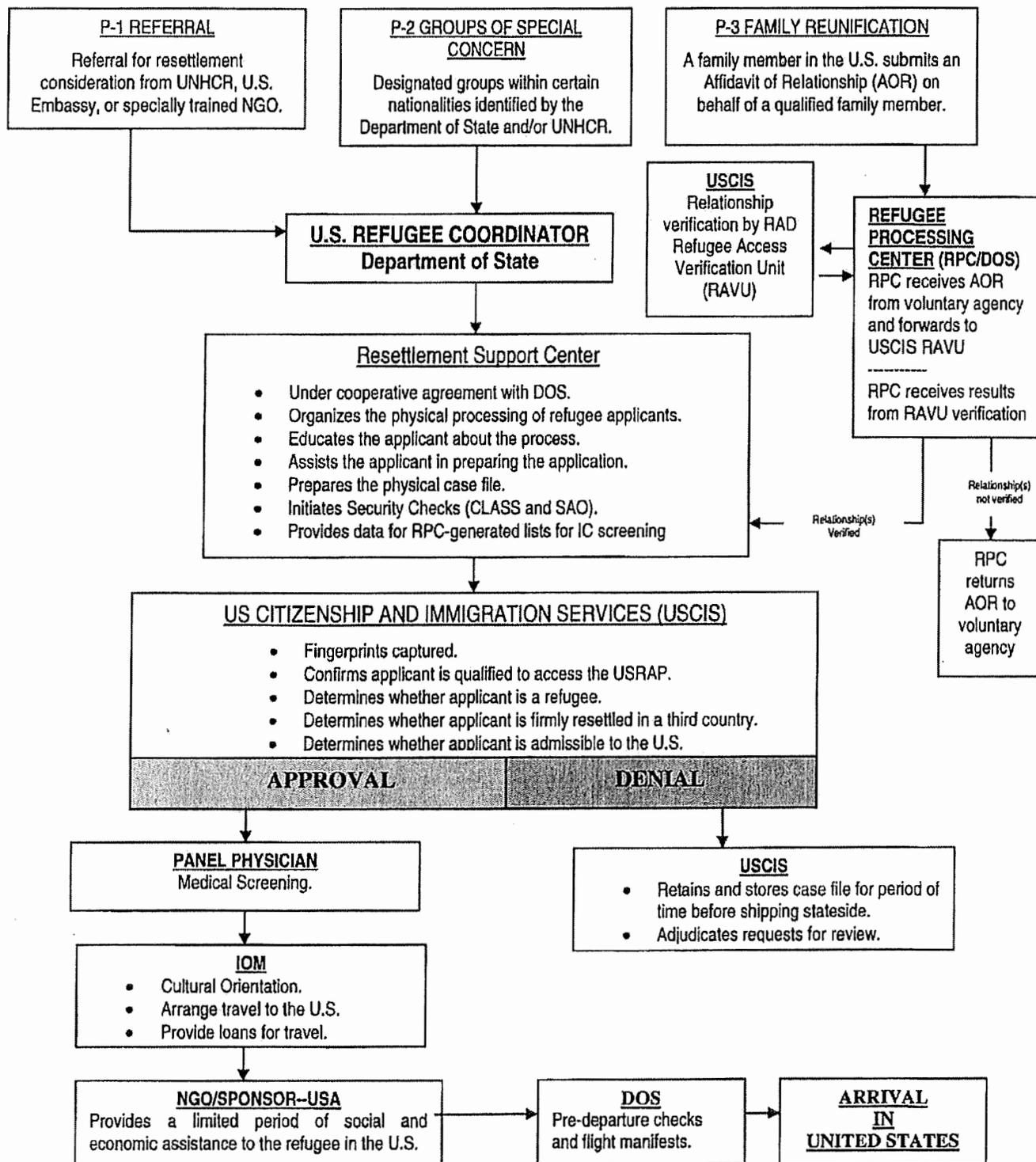
If any of the above security and backgrounds checks, or any background check performed at any time during the adjudication of any benefit to include testimony gleaned during the interview, reveal associated national security (NS) concerns (either known or suspected terrorist (KST) or non-KST NS concerns), then the case undergoes a focused national security CARRP review.

Syria Enhanced Review

USCIS's Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate and Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate have collaborated to develop a Concept of Operations for the enhanced review of certain Syrian cases. This review involves FDNS providing intelligence-driven support to refugee adjudicators in terms of threat identification and lines of inquiry, as well as watchlisting and dissemination of intelligence information reports on those applicants determined to present a national security threat.



UNITED STATES REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (USRAP)



Security Screening and Background Checks – Refugees

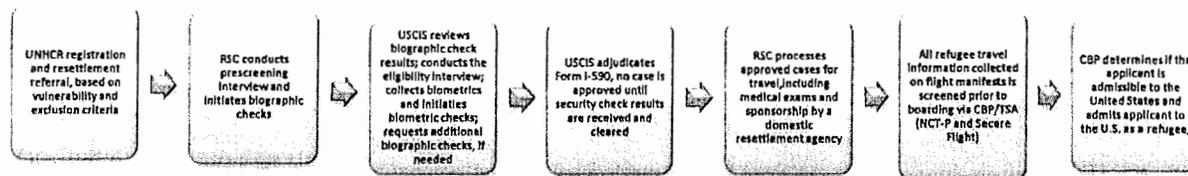
Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the security screening and background checks required for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Applicants for refugee resettlement are subject to the highest degree of security screening and background checks for any category of traveler to the United States.

All refugee applicants receive a standard suite of biographic and biometric security checks. Through close coordination with the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, these checks are continually reviewed to identify potential enhancements and to develop approaches for specific populations that may pose particular threats. All case members must clear security checks in order for a case to be approved.

USCIS's adjudication of *Form I-590 Registration for Classification as a Refugee* by USCIS is only one part of the USRAP. Department of State (State) has overall coordination and management responsibility of the USRAP and has the lead in proposing admissions ceilings and processing priorities. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identifies and refers certain cases to the USRAP for resettlement and provides important information with regard to the worldwide refugee situation. Additionally, Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs), under cooperative agreements with State, carry out administrative and processing functions, such as file preparation and storage, data collection, and out-processing activities.

General Refugee Process



USRAP Screening

The screening of refugee applicants involves numerous biographic checks that are initiated by the RSCs and reviewed/resolved by USCIS. These include:

- ***Department of State Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS)¹***

CLASS name checks are initiated by DOS for all refugee applicants at the time of pre-screening by the DOS contractor — the Resettlement Support Center (RSC). Responses are received prior to interview and possible matches to applicants are reviewed and adjudicated by USCIS Headquarters. Evidence of the response is forwarded for inclusion in the case file. If there is a new name or alias developed or identified at the interview, USCIS requests another CLASS name check on the new name, and the case is placed on HOLD until that response is received.

- ***Security Advisory Opinion (SAO)²***

The SAO is a State-initiated biographic check conducted by the FBI National Name Check Program (NNCP). SAO name checks are initiated at the time of pre-screening by the RSC for the groups and nationalities designated by the interagency as requiring this higher level check. SAO are processed by FBI NNCP, and a response must be received prior to finalizing the decision. If there is a new name or alias developed at the interview, USCIS requests that another SAO be conducted on the new name, and the case is placed on HOLD until that response is received.

- ***Interagency Checks (IAC)***

The IAC consists of screening biographic data, including names, dates of birth, and other data points of all refugee applicants within designated age ranges. This information is captured at time of pre-screening and is provided to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and other intelligence community partners. This screening procedure was initiated in 2008 with NCTC and has expanded over time to include a broader range of holdings and applicants of all nationalities. Prior to recent changes, IAC screening was conducted at the time of initial application and again before an approved applicant's departure to the United States. Since summer 2015, the process includes recurrent IAC screening of all refugee applicants in lieu of the previously conducted pre-departure checks.

At the time of USCIS interview, USCIS staff collects fingerprints and initiates biometric checks. The biometric checks initiated by USCIS for refugee applicants include:

¹ CLASS is a State name-check database that posts use to access critical information for visa adjudication. The system contains records provided by numerous agencies and includes information on persons with visa refusals, immigration violations, criminal histories, and terrorism concerns, as well as intelligence information and child support enforcement data. In addition to containing information from DOS sources, sources for information in CLASS includes NCTC/TSC (terrorist watch lists), TECS, Interpol, DEA, HHS and FBI (extracts of the NCIC Wanted Person, Immigration Violator, Foreign Fugitive Files, VGTOF, and the Interstate Identification Index).

² The Security Advisory Opinion process was implemented after September 11, 2001, to provide a mechanism for additional scrutiny to certain high-risk categories of individuals seeking visas to enter the U.S.

- ***FBI Fingerprint Check through Next Generation Identification (NGI)***
A biometric record check pertaining to criminal history and previous immigration data.
- ***DHS Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT - f/n/a US-VISIT)***
A biometric record check related to travel and immigration history for non-U.S. citizens as well as immigration violations, law enforcement, and national security concerns. Enrollment in IDENT also allows CBP to confirm identity at the port of entry.
- ***DoD Defense Forensics and Biometrics Agency (DFBA)'s Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS)³***
A biometric record check of DoD holdings collected in areas of conflict (predominantly Iraq and Afghanistan). DoD screening began in 2007 for Iraqi applicants and was incrementally expanded to all nationalities by 2013. CBP's National Targeting Center-Passenger (NTC-P) conducts biographic vetting of all ABIS biometric matches (both derogatory and benign) against various classified and unclassified U.S. Government databases.

The USCIS in-person interview itself, though not a traditional system check, is also a vital part of the refugee screening process. USCIS Officers conduct extensive interviews with each refugee applicant to develop all relevant issues related to eligibility for refugee resettlement and admissibility to enter the United States. Officers develop lines of questioning to elicit information regarding any involvement in terrorist activity, criminal activity, or the persecution/torture of others, and conduct a credibility assessment on each applicant.

CBP Screening

An applicant with a USCIS approved *Form I-590 Registration for Classification as a Refugee* must be found admissible to the United States by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) before receiving refugee status. CBP receives a manifest of all subjects who have approved *Forms I-590* and have made reservations to travel to the United States by air. CBP receives this manifest eight (8) days before the scheduled travel. The agency performs initial vetting of the subjects before they arrive at a port of entry and the conducts both background additional checks and interviews of these subjects upon arrival at a U.S. Port of Entry.

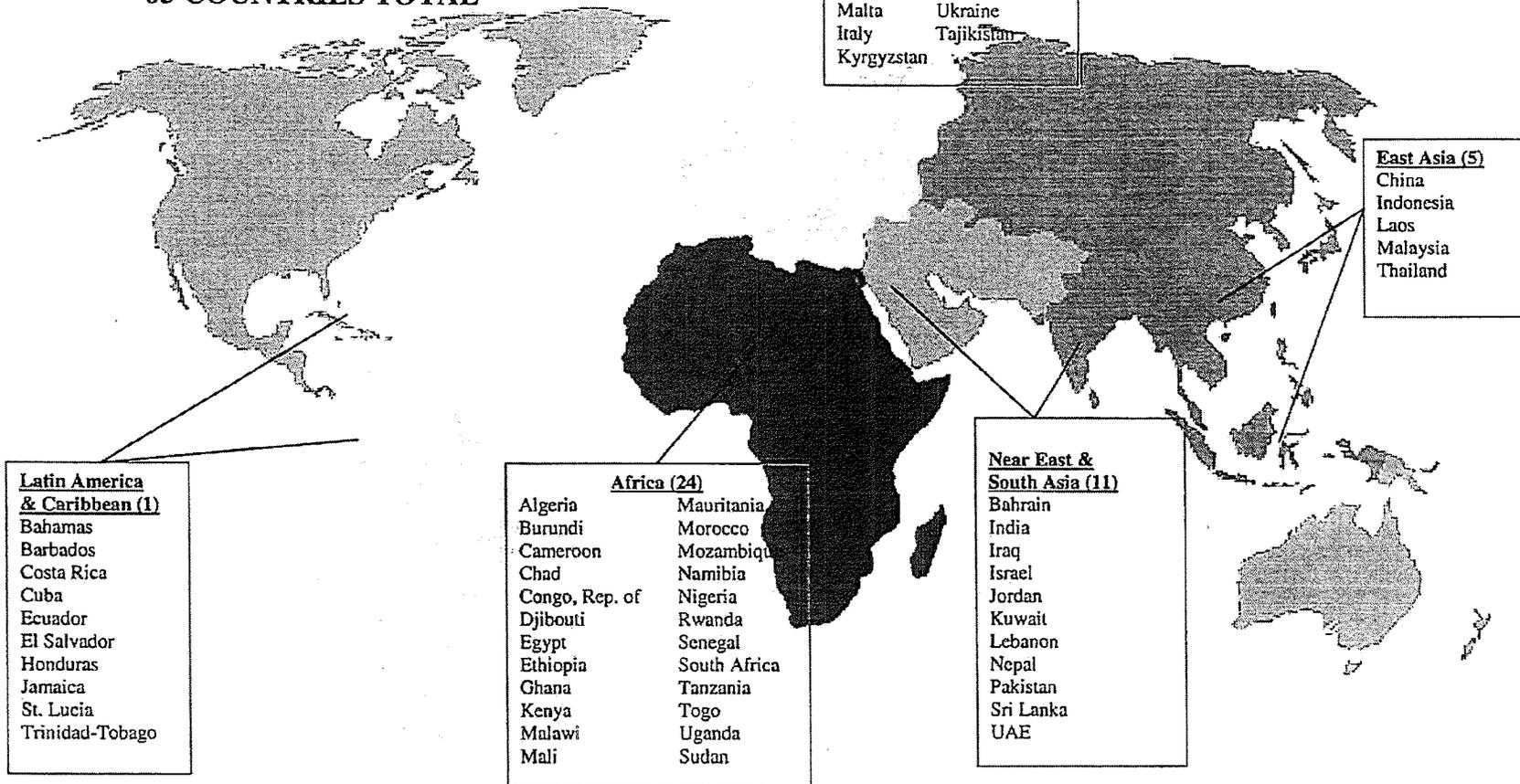
Controlled Application Review and Resolution Process (CARRP)

If any of the above security and backgrounds checks, or any background check performed at any time during the adjudication of any benefit to include testimony gleaned during the interview, reveal associated national security (NS) concerns (either known or suspected terrorist (KST) or non-KST NS concerns), then the case undergoes a focused national security CARRP review.

Syria Enhanced Review

USCIS's Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate and Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate have collaborated to develop a Concept of Operations for the enhanced review of certain Syrian cases. This review involves FDNS providing intelligence-driven support to refugee adjudicators in terms of threat identification and lines of inquiry, as well as watchlisting and dissemination of intelligence information reports on those applicants determined to present a national security threat.

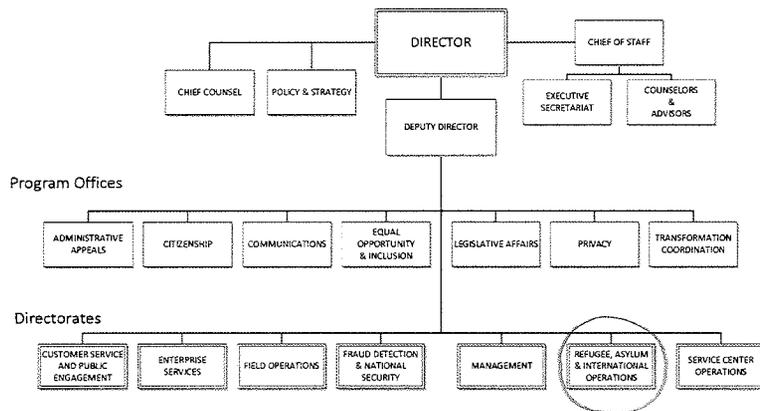
**USCIS REFUGEE INTERVIEW
LOCATIONS
FISCAL YEAR 2015
63 COUNTRIES TOTAL**





U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

U.S. CITIZENSHIP & IMMIGRATION SERVICES



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BACKGROUND BRIEFING ON REFUGEE SCREENING AND ADMISSIONS

Special Briefing
Office of the Spokesperson
Via Teleconference
November 17, 2015

MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for joining us. Just given that the issue of refugee resettlement has been a matter of debate and discussion over the past several days, certainly after the recent attacks in Paris as well as Beirut and Turkey, we felt it was important to bring together some of our subject matter experts to go over and outline our refugee admission process to give you all a better understanding of how it works.

So we have – just first of all, the ground rules. This is an on-background briefing, so folks will be referred to as senior Administration officials. One other essential ground rule is that, while I'm sure you all want to ask about the news of the day, we're not really going to be talking about specific threats or answering questions about specific – or specific to the ongoing investigation into the recent attacks in France. Again, this is to give you all an overview about how our refugee resettlement process works writ large.

So just to go over our speakers this morning, I'll give you their names now for you information. First we have [Senior Administration Official One]. Second, we have [Senior Administration Official Two]. And then thirdly, we have [Senior Administration Three]. Henceforth, they'll be known as Senior Administration Officials One, Two, and Three.

So with all that, we'll hand it over to Senior Administration Official One, and then we'll get to your questions in a bit.

State **SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE:** Hi, everybody. This is Senior Administration Official One speaking. Thank you for your attention today to our program that admits refugees to the United States. It's been a successful program that has been running since the mid-1970s, the post-Vietnam War era. Over that time, 3 million refugees have come and successfully resettled in the United States.

In recent days, there have been a lot of questions about the program. We're happy to answer your questions today. Some of the questions now are focusing in specifically on the security aspects and features of the program. As the President said, his first priority is the safety of the American people. That's why, even as the United States accepts more refugees, including Syrians, we do so only after subjecting them to the most rigorous screening and security vetting of any category of traveler to the United States.

We also have to remember that many of these refugees are fleeing precisely the same type of senseless violence that occurred in Paris. Slamming the door in their face would be a betrayal of our values. Our nation can welcome refugees desperately seeking safety and ensure our own security. We can and must do both.

So I want to reassure you all that all refugees of all nationalities considered for admission to the United States undergo intensive security screening, and this involves multiple federal intelligence, security, and law enforcement agencies. And we do this to ensure that those admitted are not known to pose a threat to our country. The safeguards that are used include biometrics, or fingerprint and biographic checks, and a lengthy in-person overseas interview that is carried out by specially trained DHS – Department of Homeland Security – officers, who scrutinize the applicant's explanation of individual circumstances to ensure the applicant is a bona fide refugee and is not known to present security concerns to the United States.

Mindful of the particular conditions of the Syria crisis, Syrian refugees go through additional forms of security screening. And we continue to examine options for further enhancement for screening refugees, the details of which are classified. But the classified details are regularly shared with relevant congressional committees.

So I am happy to have colleagues on the line who know more about the specifics of the security screening, but I want to tell you that I personally think of this program as a proud American tradition that not only rescues lives and gives people a new start in life, but it also enriches our country and our nation. And one of the things that makes my job easier is that I know all of my bosses agree with that concept. So even as we take a lot of questions now and from the Hill and from the public, we are talking about a program that is in the best American traditions and that reflects our values.

MODERATOR: Great. Perhaps Senior Administration Official Number Two can now say a few words.

CIS **SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO:** Sure. Thank you. Hi, this is Senior Official Number Two with [title withheld]. I'm going to talk a little bit more in detail about the security checks that have already been mentioned and talk in – about certain checks that refugee applicants of all nationalities go through, and then some particular enhancements with regard to Syrian refugee applicants.

Again, this is a part of our program that is extremely interdisciplinary. It's a lot of different federal agencies. So on the operational front, while the State Department and USCIS take the lead overseas, when it comes to doing the security vetting we have law enforcement and intelligence community colleagues who are really integral parts of the program.

I should also mention that these security checks have been enhanced over the years and we expect that they'll continue to be enhanced as we're able to identify new opportunities. But to a large extent, I would say that with the Syrian program, we've benefited from our years of experience in vetting Iraqi refugee applicants. And so the partnerships we have today and the security checks we have today really are more robust because of the experience that we've had since the beginning of large-scale Iraqi processing in 2007.

So refugee applicants of all nationalities go through both biographic – that's name and date of birth and other biographic elements – and also biometric security checks. So we check fingerprints for all refugee applicants. Collecting that information and coordinating those checks is a shared responsibility between the Department of State and DHS. And then, as I mentioned, the – it's other agencies within the federal government, including the FBI, the Department of Defense, and others, who actually vet the information of the refugee applicants against those other holdings.

So the biographic checks, typically they go through something called the CLASS system, which is the Consular Lookout System. It's coordinated by the FBI. Some checks go through a higher – some applicants go through a higher-level name check that we call the Security Advisory Opinion. They also go through something we call the interagency check, which checks against two different partners to see if there's any information there. And I think our colleague number three will talk about that check in a little bit more detail.

With respect to the biometric checks, there really are sort of three partners behind the biometric checks. So we check against FBI holdings – so if anyone had been in the United States, if a criminal record, for example, had been committed in – been recorded in the United States, we would have that information. The DHS also coordinates another set of biometric holdings, which are not necessarily criminal, but have various types of civil information. So if a refugee applicant had applied, for example, for a visa overseas, gone to a U.S. embassy or consulate, their biometric could be captured at that time. That's not necessarily derogatory, but it gives us information about whether the person's been consistent in terms of their identity, the location, their nationality, so that's information that we're very interested in. And then the third piece is the Department of Defense. We check against some Department of Defense biometric holdings as well.

What I've been describing up till now are checks that are for refugee applicants of all nationalities, but with the Syria program we also instituted an additional set of screening that we call the Syria Enhanced Review. So for Syrian refugee applicants, all of those cases are reviewed at headquarters by refugee specialists ahead of time. And there's a file that's already been created by virtue of their registration with the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, and through their first administrative contact with the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. So there's information there about where the refugee has come from, what caused him or her to flee, what their experience was. And depending on what we see in that file, we review certain cases with national security indicators to a special part of our agency – our Fraud Detection and National Security unit. And they can do individualized research using classified and unclassified records and give – prepare information back for the individual refugee adjudicator that's individualized to that case.

So just to give a sort of example, if somebody says, "I was at a demonstration in Aleppo and the soldiers came, or the police came, and something happened," we can actually look back and see was that consistent with known country conditions at that time in that place, and we can follow up lines of questioning that would be appropriate under those circumstances.

The other thing I wanted to emphasize is that every refugee applicant is interviewed in person by specially trained staff. The basic training we have for refugee officers is eight weeks, which is teaching them protection law but it's also teaching them how to elicit testimony, how to test credibility. And for applicants who are working particularly with Iraqi and Syrian refugee applicants, they receive specialized training before they interview that type of case. And we have colleagues from the law enforcement and intelligence community join us for that training. So they participate in that training of our adjudicators.

In addition, if there's anything that we identify in the interview that we think needs some individualized follow-up, we have those relationships with the law enforcement and intelligence communities that we can circle back and talk to them if there are issues that arise in an individual interview.

So we conduct non-adversarial interviews with refugee applicants. We're working with Syrians mainly in Amman, Jordan and in Istanbul, Turkey, to a smaller extent in Cairo; we'll soon resume processing in Lebanon, and a smattering in other locations.

And so why don't I conclude my opening remarks with that and then pass it on to my colleague, Official Number Three.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: This is Official Number Three from [title withheld]. A couple of points to make here on behalf of the larger intelligence community as relates to this process. The refugee vetting and screening process has really benefitted, in a lot of ways, from the lessons that we learned with respect to information sharing for CT purposes since 9/11. Over those years, we've managed to refine and enhance the degree to which we can compare information in the communities' holdings, representing all the different agencies against refugee and other types of traveler data. So the refugees as a population get the same type of attention that we apply to many other classes of traveler, only it's more intensive on the refugee side for the very process reasons that you've heard outlined by the two preceding officials. So we've integrated a lot of the data that relates to CT and can use it to adjudicate the biographic and the biometric information that we have coming in from the adjudicating agencies.

So we are closely linked within the community, within the IC, as well as with DHS and State. We have their representatives here on site that work with us to help resolve potential hits. And it's dynamic, to the extent that even as we provide feedback on names, if subsequently information is learned that wasn't available at the time that we initially checked our holdings, there are means to flag that information and to get it back into the hands of DHS or State or FBI or wherever it should go. So we're constantly refining the process. It benefits from the lessons that we learned over the years from vetting visitor visas and other kinds of travel. And we're constantly looking to improve the efficacy of what we are doing screening-wise with this data.

So with that, I'll turn it back over to the moderator.

MODERATOR: Great. Thanks so much. Appreciate it. Without further ado, we can go ahead and get to your questions. Rochelle.

OPERATOR: Certainly. And ladies and gentlemen, if you wish to ask a question, press * then 1 on your touchtone phone. You will hear a tone indicating you've been placed in queue. You may remove yourself from queue at any time by pressing the # key. Once again, if you have a question, * 1.

First question comes from the line of Andrea Mitchell of NBC. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. Can you respond directly to claims by Republican candidates, by the speaker of the House today, who said that everything was going to put on hold and wants a task force to look into allegations that people are not screened, that there is no vetting, that intelligence information is not properly assessed, and that people could get through the filter threatening the homeland? I know you've given the data, but could you drill down a little bit more on the intelligence aspects of this and how you would know when people are coming from areas without papers who they really are, aside from their own self-assessments? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Okay. This is Speaker Number One. We have a very good relationship with members of Congress who work year in and year out on our program. We – our bureau and the overall program of providing assistance to refugees overseas and resettling refugees in the United States has had a tradition of bipartisan support and good funding levels from Congress. And so I think a lot of the questions we're getting right now – and we'll be up on the Hill today and tomorrow and Thursday responding to a lot of question – I think a lot of questions we're getting are from members who are just learning about the program for the first time.

And I also think there's a lot of misinformation out there on the blogosphere, because I find that I'm correcting a lot of false information that has been passed to them from people who are unfamiliar with the program – things like the idea that the United Nations selects who comes to the United States. It's not true. You've just heard about the whole process that we run that is quite intensive, involves several U.S. Government agencies, and it also involves nongovernmental organizations and faith-based groups.

So we are very interested in correcting these misimpressions describing our program. The way we are talking about it with you all today, we're going to be doing that on the Hill. And we have always done this, but I would say our conversations about this and the number of hearings that have been planned or held have picked up since the beginning of September, as the public has gotten a lot more seized with the issue after the drowning of – the tragic drowning of Aylan Kurdi.

So we see this renewed interest as an opportunity to educate a lot of people about how we've actually been managing the program and that we manage it in a way that is well done and is up to the toughest standards in terms of a humane program, a lifesaving program, but also one that has very strong security features built in.

Can I pass off to Speaker Two on the intelligence piece of this?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Sure. I guess what I would say in terms of – as Speaker Three has explained, there is intelligence on refugee populations, including Syrian refugees. And so we try to make sure we have the best relationships with the intelligence community, and again, on an ongoing basis so that the work that we do is being informed by the work that they do in terms of looking at risk profiles with things that are going on in a particular geographical area, et cetera. I mean, there's been also, I know, quite a bit of talk about whether refugees have or don't have documents. We really – our experience worldwide covers the gamut. There are refugee populations who have very minimal documents. Maybe people have been living in refugee camps for generations, or people who fled in a way that they – they – their documents were destroyed or they were stolen or taken from them as they travel.

I would say in contrast to that, Iraqis and Syrians tend to be a very, very heavily documented population. And members of families tend to have passports and family registries and military books, and they have a lot of information in most instances. And people who are interviewing them from their first time they register with UNHCR, going through the administrative form-filling process and then coming for their refugee interview, are pretty familiar with the kinds of documents that various populations have, and are pretty sophisticated about what they should see, and if something's missing, why is it missing. That would be a line of questioning.

So if someone told us while the family was off at work, a barrel – I'm sorry, a barrel bomb fell on the house and their documents were destroyed, that could be a credible reason for not having one's documents. But we would follow up on that and talk about where they lived and when this incident happened. And again, we can check that with known country conditions information to see if that is a consistent explanation for having – for being missing certain documents that an applicant would otherwise ordinarily be expected to have.

MODERATOR: Great. I think we can move on to the next question now.

OPERATOR: Okay, thank you. Next question is from the line of Brad Klapper of Associated Press. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. I had a couple questions. One, what is your refusal rate? How many have you denied resettlement – percentage or total? And then going back the biometrics, when you have biometric information and you – from a European, for example, you can share that either with law enforcement or intelligence agencies in those countries. You don't have that with the Syrians and you don't have a real intelligence presence on the ground either. So how do you even test criminal history among Syrians? Thanks.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Sure. Let me talk about the first part of your question first, in terms of what our acceptance and approval rates are. Right now, our approval rate is a little over 50 percent, but the other half of that – the other 50 percent includes both denials and cases that are still pending. And so a number of those cases that are still pending may ripen into approvals, and in fact, we expect that that approval rate will edge up a bit above the 50 percent. But that's where we are right now. As you know, we haven't – for us, in terms of interviewing these applicants, it's relatively new for us to be seeing large numbers. And there are some cases that post – after the interview, come back to headquarters for another round of review, and so some of those cases don't have a final decision yet at this point.

In terms of criminal history, we do the best we can with the resources that we have. Some of the international – there are some collections that have that kind of information. We talk to people about what their previous criminal histories are and we hear about that. But it's – so I'd say that's pretty much where we are, unless – I think Official Number Three might want to flesh that out a bit.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: Yeah, I think that's accurate. I want to be clear here that each element of the process is not the totality of the process. So the – whether it's the IC checks, whether it's criminal history, whether it's the interview – all these things have to be synthesized and taken in the aggregate to make a decision. So I think that collectively, the process, through the lengthy period that these adjudications take, help reveal some of these issues as these applicants move through the process. So I think in the fullness of time for these cases, these things can be discerned and can be surfaced. And for refugees, given that period of time, there is oftentimes the opportunity to flesh out these things in a fairly good way given the constraints that we have.

MODERATOR: Great. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Okay, thank you. Next question from Todd Spangler, *Detroit Free Press*. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks for having the call. I'm just curious – yesterday a lot of the news was governors saying they would not accept Syrian refugees. I just hope you could talk a little bit about what roles governors or their administrations play or don't play – maybe more importantly – in this process. Thanks.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Sure. This is Speaker One again. So this is a federal program carried out under the authority of federal law, and refugees arriving in the U.S. are protected by the Constitution and federal law. And they are required to apply to adjust their status to become a legal permanent resident within one year of arriving in the United States. So he or she is also free to move anywhere in the country, although we set up that some of the state benefits they get may be available to the refugee only in the state that they're originally resettled to.

So while state and local governments have an important consultative role to play in the resettlement of refugees, the resettlement program is, as you're hearing, administered by the federal government.

The other piece of this, though, is that this is a program that is very much dependent on the support of local communities. So across the United States we are resettling refugees in 180 locations and it's from coast to coast, it's nearly every state, and it's using nine networks of not-for-profit organizations, six of which are faith-based. So a lot of people are involved through their community associations, through their churches, in providing assistance – from picking refugees up at the airport when they first arrive, taking them to their homes, finding those homes. Volunteers contribute furniture to furnish their first apartment, providing school equipment, things that kids need to start in school, and helping the able-bodied adults find a job. And so this has incredible quiet support from coast to coast because so many Americans are involved in ways big and small to make this program successful.

So we don't want to send refugees anywhere where they would not be welcomed, and we find that refugees are welcomed almost everywhere in the United States. And an important part of this program for these nine groups that carry it out is that they consult routinely with local authorities, with school superintendents, with the mayor, with the police chief, with the local newspaper, so that people who are in positions of authority know that refugees are being resettled, know sort of what the expectations for the program are, that the local health centers know that Congolese refugees may be coming in and that some of them will have been victims of rape. Right now we would want to be alerting people that some of the children coming from Syria might have been traumatized by things they've seen. And the amazing part of it is, even though this is carried out by so many people across the United States, this is a very successful program. Year in and year out, refugees prove to be among the most resilient, hardworking people in the United States.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll take another question, please.

OPERATOR: Certainly. And the next question from the line of Brian Naylor of NPR. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks. A question about the UNHCR's role. So does a refugee say, "I want to come to the U.S.," they go to the UN and the UNHCR places them? How does that work?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Well, the United States is the top funder of UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, in its work all around the world, and they are a partner of ours in carrying out the U.S. refugee admissions program. What they do is they're very well placed to look at the small fraction of the world's refugees for whom resettlement in a new country may make the most sense. So these are people who have been traumatized or victims of torture or witnessed terrible things happening to their families in front of their eyes, widows with small children, people with medical cases that might survive better in a place with more modern medicine available.

And they know a lot about U.S. rules and regs, and so they will refer refugees to us, refugee individuals or families. Each of these makes a case. And they will refer them to the U.S. program, and then the U.S. system takes over. So we fund resettlement support centers in certain regions around the world, and there we have organizations that help us then talk to the refugees, prepare their case histories, put the file together, and get them ready for that interview by – the all-important interview from the Department of Homeland Security, and make sure then if they're accepted for the program they get some cultural orientation and that they understand what's going on along the way, and they understand things like that they shouldn't pay anyone for participation in this program and that their lives in America will be different, and that sort of expectations of what happens once they come here.

So UNHCR is very important at the start of the program, but the State Department and DHS take over after the referrals are made.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: (Inaudible.)

MODERATOR: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: I was just – this is Speaker Number Two to just reiterate [Senior Administration Official One]’s point that --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: That’s Speaker Number One to you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Speaker Number One, sorry. The – it really – it is DHS who decides whether a case is approved or not. So as [Senior Administration Official One] described, UNHCR is that initial filter. Out of all the refugees they register, they’re making that decision of who are the very, very few who are going to be considered for resettlement by any resettlement country. And like they know what our rules are in the U.S., they understand the rules of the other resettlement countries. So they might look for something – if someone already has a relative in a particular country, that would be a reason to think about resettling to Australia or Canada in lieu of the United States. But they’re just making that first sort of filter. It’s the U.S. Government that is making the decision and adjudicating the cases.

MODERATOR: Great, thank you. Time for a few more questions. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next question from Jonathan Tamari of *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. One of the criticisms we’ve heard from congressmen in our area is that it’s not necessarily the screening process but being able to do it on such a large scale with the numbers that have been discussed. What capacity do you have to handle that kind of increase, or how would you respond to his criticism that basically you can’t handle the huge numbers that are being talked about in the future here?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: I can – this is Official Number Three. I can start on that. We screen vastly larger numbers than what we are talking about with respect to refugees already, so we can certainly scale on this population. It will require us adapting and flexing, but I think it’s well within our capacity given the large numbers of travelers and other kinds of screening and vetting that we do that’s significantly larger than what we’re talking about here.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: This is Speaker One. First, I want to point out that the U.S. can be a home for many more refugees than we are currently bringing in, and we’ve seen how we easily absorbed a couple hundred thousand Vietnamese who came during the height of that resettlement program. What we are going to do in the year going forward is to increase our current operations from bringing 70,000 refugees from around the world to 85,000 refugees from around the world. We can do that, and it’s a bit of a stretch, but we can do it. I’m confident of it. We were already planning to expand the program just at the working level – to propose an expansion of the program before the Secretary announced in September that we would be bringing 85,000 this year.

Bringing more refugees, though, is absolutely dependent on having the resources to run the program. And as it expands further, it’ll – this will be dependent on continued support from Congress, from the appropriations committees especially, to fund the program. And in both the State Department and at DHS – and also at Health and Human Services that provides assistance to states for the refugees who need it beyond the first 90 days – all of our programs are set up to do more than run the resettlement program, because DHS, USCIS also has to review asylum applications in the United States. And then we also run programs, as you know, to support humanitarian operations overseas in the places where there are refugees and displaced people and other victims of conflict.

So the program is absolutely dependent on funding from Congress, and as we grow it we will require more assistance from Congress. But for this year, the year where we want to bring 85,000 refugees, I believe we can do that.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. And next question from the line of William LaJeunesse of Fox News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, my question is this: Can you tell me when or where the next state or city is on your list to accept the next group of Syrians?

And then secondly, can you give me a rough demographic breakdown of, say, the 2,500 Syrians we’ve taken in recently – women, children, those under 18, that kind of thing?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well, the way the program works is we have these nine networks that are nationwide, and they meet once a week. And they work with our office to determine where to send refugees on a weekly basis. And sometimes it’s based on family unification. If a refugee has a relative already in the United States, the priority would be to try to settle them somewhere near those relatives. And then secondly, it might be based on whether there are special programs that meet the special needs of some of these most vulnerable refugees. As I mentioned before, like if you have a child who’s a burn victim, you would seek a city where there was a hospital that could handle that. And then otherwise it’s based on where the resettlement agencies think the refugees can thrive. States where there’s low unemployment would be a priority over places where it’ll be difficult for refugees to find jobs, especially those jobs at the bottom of the economic ladder, which many refugees are prepared to accept.

And so it’s not a plan where we sit down and say let’s go to this city this month and to another city the next month. It’s a nationwide program that is very vibrant and adjusts based on what local communities can handle.

Half of the Syrian refugees brought to the U.S. so far have been children; a quarter^[1] are adults over 60. And I think you will have heard that only 2 percent are single males of combat age. So we – there’s slightly more – it’s roughly 50/50 men and women, slightly more men I would say, but not – not a lot more men. So this is normal that as you’re – as we set a priority of bringing the most vulnerable people, we’re going to have female-headed households with a lot of children, and we’re going to have extended

families that are maybe missing the person who used to be the top breadwinner but have several generations – grandparents, a widowed mother, and children.

MODERATOR: Great. We just have time for two more questions. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: And the next question. It comes from the line of Julia Preston of *New York Times*.

QUESTION: Yes. Could you tell me please how long the process is taking now for the Syrian and also the Iraqi refugees end to end, number one? And number two, if the governors persist in demanding a halt to the program, what are you going to do with the Syrian refugees? Will you send them to the states where the governors are still willing to accept them?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well, just as we're talking to you all in the press today, we'll be talking to the governors today. I believe there's a call being organized for them and for some mayors. And we've also taken calls from individual governors who've called in to learn more about the program and double-check that we're doing a good job on the security front.

The – how long the process takes: our average remains 18 to 24 months, and we are – and that's the same for all categories. I don't have an average for Syrians and Iraqis to share with you. As you know, we are trying to look at the process and see if we can make it more efficient without cutting corners on security.

MODERATOR: Great. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Okay. And the next question comes from the line of Laura Koran of CNN. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you so much for doing this call. I just wanted to follow up on an earlier question a little bit. Given that the increase that the Administration is considering in the number of refugees – Syrian refugees specifically – over the next year is more than five-fold what's been accepted in the entire course of the Syrian conflict so far, can you just give a little bit more detail about the specific steps that are being taken to ensure that the screening process remains rigorous as the number of casefiles are growing, both in terms of the resources that are going to be applied to this in the future, support for resettlement agencies, and then especially if these state and local resources are threatened by the kinds of actions that some of these governors and legislators are threatening? If you don't get the additional support from Congress, then how can you still, I guess, meet this quota? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well, I think the entire program is contingent on support of the American people. It is contingent – as all programs in the United States Government are, we're contingent on our funding from Congress. And this program has benefited over the years from strong bipartisan support.

The thing I don't want to lose – and let me be very honest about this – I really don't – I mean, I'm honest anyway most of the time – (laughter) – but the thing I most fear about this current discussion going on in the United States is that we will lose the bipartisan support for this program that it has enjoyed for decades, through Democratic administrations, through Republican administrations, through difference majorities in the House and Senate. And so this is a very precious thing, I think, and it's – in the current day and age, it's been a rare thing. So I hope that that continues.

Speaker Two, do you want to talk a little bit more about the overall process for the Syrians?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Well, for us, a big part of how we are scaling up in the near term is borrowing from other parts of the agency. So we're not just relying on our existing fulltime refugee officers, but we have officer, adjudicators who are experienced in other programs. For example, our domestic asylum program has officers who are experienced in protection law. And so we are seeking volunteers from that program who will be able to augment the staff who are sent overseas to do refugee interviews. And we're also pulling from some other parts of the agency as well who – people who are well-trained and who will receive an increment of additional training in order to participate in the refugee program.

So in terms of being able to scale our program in the near term, that's what we're working on while we're working on longer-term, or middle-term and longer-term hiring of staff that we need to be able to support a larger refugee program in Fiscal Year 2017 and the future.

MODERATOR: Great. Thank you so much to our three speakers today and to all of you in the media who joined us on relatively short notice. Very much appreciate it. I think that's all we have time for today. I hope we answered many, if not all, of your questions, and appreciate, again, your participation. And that's all. Everybody have a great day.

[1] Correction: 2.5 percent of Syrian refugees are over the age of 60.

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