Background

Moving into its 8th tragic year, the conflict in Syria continues to take a heavy toll on the Syrian people. It is impossible to get an accurate count of the casualties of the Syria war, but some estimates put the death toll at over half a million people. An estimated 5.4 million people have fled Syria, and more than six million have been displaced inside the country. While the Assad regime and its allies appear to have decidedly turned the tide in their favor on the battlefield, a negotiated settlement to fully resolve the conflict is nowhere on the horizon.

The Problem

The Syrian people were subject to further betrayal at the hands of “false allies,” who hijacked their uprising and provoked a brutal, sectarian war. The result was a broken and divided opposition plagued by infighting, where extremists wielded more power than the genuine democratic movement aiming to bring freedom to the Syrian people.

Apart from a sustained military campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), conducted with little regard for civilian casualties, the Trump Administration appears to have no coherent policy on Syria, wobbling between a policy of “do nothing” and largely symbolic air strikes on Syrian government targets following both confirmed and suspected chemical attacks. A letter demanding congressional approval before President Trump can engage in any military action in Syria was heavily favored by Democrats and opposed by Republicans, indicating a partisan reversal to a similar letter in 2013 demanding the same of then-President Obama. This suggests Congress is focusing on partisan domestic consumption of its Syria positions, rather than attempting to formulate a coherent U.S. policy towards Syria that benefits the Syrian people.

This year, the Trump Administration has allowed only 11 Syrian refugees to settle in the U.S., down from 3,000 last year, and over 15,000 during President Obama’s last year in office. The move comes amidst a campaign of xenophobia and vilification targeting Syrian refugees by hate groups with close ties to the Trump Administration.

Key Recommendations:

1. At the local level:
   - Fight against bigotry and work to make your city or municipality a “welcoming community,” supporting efforts that make your community more inclusive towards Syrian immigrants and refugees.

2. At the state level:
   - Find out if you live in a state where Syrian refugees are not welcomed, and if so, advocate for a change in policy.

3. At the national level:
   - There is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. Even as the Syrian government and its allies appear to be winning the war on the ground, the future requires compromise, reconciliation, and a political transition that affords true freedom and dignity for the Syrian people. Given the magnitude of the atrocities committed by the Syrian government over the past seven years, it is unclear whether a sustainable peace can be achieved without Bashar Al-Assad stepping down as President. But the details of the political reforms that
will take Syria into its next chapter must be decided by the Syrian people.

- The U.S. should avoid taking military action in Syria, as that risks escalating bloodshed that has already gone on for too long. The U.S. should work with all of its allies to de-escalate the conflict, and bring the parties together for negotiations. If military action becomes inevitable for any reason, the Trump Administration must do more to avoid civilian casualties.

- We cannot turn our back on Syrian refugees. As one of the largest and wealthiest nations in the world, and the only nation explicitly established for all freedom-seeking people across the globe, we have a responsibility to live true to our promise, and welcome more Syrian refugees. We also must maintain Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Syrians for as long as Syria remains unsafe, and we must provide further material support to countries like Lebanon and Jordan that have absorbed millions of refugees despite their small size and limited resources.

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5 The U.S. Has Accepted Only 11 Syrian Refugees This Year, NPR (Apr. 12, 2018), https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/04/12/602022877/the-u-s-has-welcomed-only-11-syrian-refugees-this-year.
