# NSI Reachback Report

# Responsibility for Displaced Civilians and Effective Voices for Preventing Radicalization

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# What is NSI Reachback?

The Joint Staff, Deputy Director for Global Operations (DDGO), jointly with other elements in the Joint Staff, Services, and United States Government (USG) Agencies, has established a Reachback capability based on the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team's global network of scholars and area experts. It provides Combatant Commands with population-based and regional expertise in support of ongoing operations. The Reachback team combines written and interview elicitations with additional research and analyses to provide concise responses to time-sensitive questions.

This report responds to one of a series of questions posed by USCENTCOM about the strategic implications of destabilizing population dynamics within the Central Region.[1]

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[1] Please contact Sarah Canna (scanna@nsiteam.com or sarah.a.canna.ctr@mail.mil) for more details related to SMA's "Assessment of Strategic Implications of Population Dynamics in the Central Region" study.

# Question of Focus

**[B3]** Where does ownership of this problem (weaponization of IDPs and refugees) reside—internationally, interagency? What is the military's role? What would be the most effective voice to promote de-radicalization?

# Responsibility for Displaced Civilians and Effective Voices for Preventing Radicalization[2]

Host countries, along with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have the primary responsibility for the management and ongoing care of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, ongoing budget shortfalls and the recent surge in the number of displaced civilians create ongoing challenges in many countries, leading to the need to prioritize resources. Once basic needs are met by the host country and UNHCR, priority should be given to the host country providing economic opportunities, psychological counseling, and a secure environment, as well as countering any potential extremist narratives. Counter-narrative work should go beyond simple religious re-education and should take into account local grievances that could be exploited by militant organizations. The most effective voices for ideology-based counter-narratives are respected clerics and experts that share a similar background to the displaced population. Ownership within a country and the specific "voice" for each of these priority areas may differ, depending on resources, but are best delivered by in-country institutions and resources to maintain trust and a perception of neutrality. The most appropriate US military involvement is protection of displaced civilians from combat operations and assisting with security concerns surrounding relocation. While the US military can assist with other needs, such as water supply, camp infrastructure, and security, doing so requires the proper authorization and funding, and should be viewed only as a temporary solution.

## Background

USCENTCOM is seeking the answer to the following questions: In order to prevent weaponization of displaced civilians by violent extremist organizations, 1) where does ownership of this problem reside—internationally as well as within the United States Government (USG), 2) what is the military's role, and 3) what would be the most effective voice to promote de-radicalization? While these questions are in some respects distinct, they are each part of the same overall question of how to most effectively manage displaced civilians in order to prevent radicalization by opportunistic groups seeking to take advantage of the situation or fill a vacuum if needs are unmet.

As a first step in answering that question, it is helpful to understand the size of the problem, and the source of different IDPs and refugees within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR). According to the World Bank, by the end of 2018, there were over 13 million refugees within the USCENTCOM AOR. Total refugee populations are particularly high in Turkey (3.87 million), Jordan (2.95 million), Lebanon (1.42 million), and Pakistan (1.40 million), with additional refugees scattered throughout the AOR in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen. Sizable refugee populations also exist in Egypt and Iran (UNHCR, 2019).[3]

[2] The following subject matter experts kindly contributed to this analysis: **Dr. Adam Lichtenheld** (Yale University) and **Dr. Sarah Lischer** (Wake Forest University).
[3] Includes Palestinian refugees living in Jordan and Lebanon.

Additionally, significant numbers of IDPs continue to make the situation burdensome for host countries. During 2018, there were 2.4 million conflict-related displaced civilians in Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, with the majority (approximately 1.6 million) coming from Syria alone (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019). As illustrated below in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*, displaced populations originate from other locations than just Syria, and each contribute to the burden on host nations. Each of these populations is, at least to some degree, vulnerable to potential radicalization by violent extremist organizations (VEOs) operating in the USCENTCOM AOR and should be considered in plans to prevent weaponization of displaced civilians.

***Figure 1: Refugee origins and destinations***

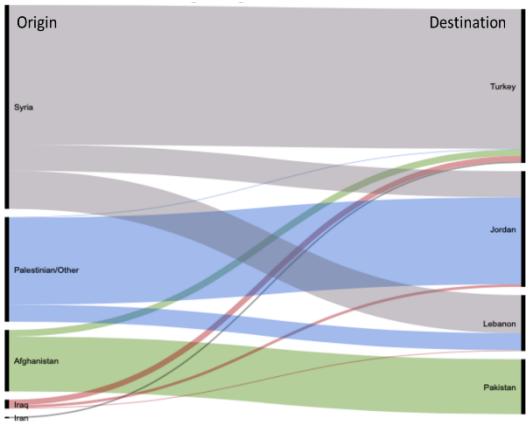
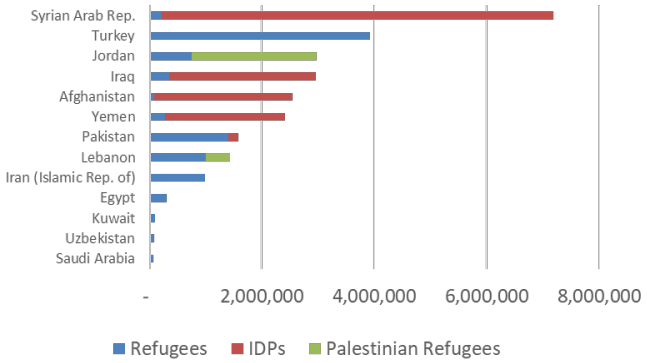



***Figure 2: 2018 Refugee and IDP counts***




***Sources: 2019 Report on Internal Displacement, World Bank: UNHCR Statistics***

While these displaced civilians are often themselves victims of the activities of militant or violent extremist organizations (Kerwin, 2016), "the risk of radicalization is especially heightened where IDPs and refugees find themselves in protracted situations: marginalized, disenfranchised, and excluded" (Koser, 2015).

# Ownership of the Problem

Some aspects of refugee care are managed by the UNHCR. Many other responsibilities, including some of the most critical factors described below, are locally managed. Ultimately, responsibility for refugees and other displaced civilians lies with the host country (UNHCR, 1954; Lichenheld, 2019). Each of the countries within the USCENTCOM AOR has a dedicated government entity responsible for the care and management of refugees and displaced civilians (see *Figure 3* below). However, given the massive influx of refugees and IDPs over the past few years, "many host states express concern about the destabilizing effects of sizeable refugee populations. Large-scale forced displacement places an immense strain on the resources of the host states, the refugees, and international donors" (Lischer, 2017).

***Figure 3: Local government entities responsible for care and management of refugees and IDPs***

| | Country | Nominal Local Agency in Charge |
|---|---|---|
| Origin | Syria | Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates |
| | AFGH | Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation |
| | Yemen | Bureau for Refugee Affairs |
| | Iraq | Ministry of Displacement and Migration |
| Destination | Pakistan | Ministry of States and Frontier Regions, the Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (Federal) |
| | Lebanon | Ministry of Social Affairs |
| | Turkey | Directorate General for Migration Management |
| | Jordan | Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate |

In addition to host nation support, UNHCR plays a significant role in the care and provision of services for refugees worldwide. The UNHCR Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan outlines support priorities across several dimensions including protection, food security, education, healthcare, basic needs, shelter, water/sewage/hygiene (WASH), and livelihood/social cohesion (UNHCR, 2019h). Funding for UNHCR efforts, however, is generally well below assessed requirements. In some cases, such as in Lebanon and Jordan, shortfalls can be extreme, reaching as high as 90% of the target amount (UNHCR Country Reports, 2015-

2019). In the face of these shortfalls, the question becomes one of prioritization. Specifically, once basic needs are met, the next step is to determine how to most efficiently allocate resources to minimize potential radicalization activity among populations that are most at-risk.

Examination of nine case studies across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia (Sude et al., 2019) and interviews with subject matter experts (Lischer, 2019; Lichtenheld, 2019; Mardsen, 2019) identify several areas that are important for a host country to control in avoiding radicalization. Therefore, responsibilities and authorities within the responsible host country institutions should include:

- setting fair and equitable administrative and legal policies that determine the rights of refugees and displaced civilians, particularly relating to freedom of movement and the ability to work;
- avoiding incursion: the degree to which the host country enables or prevents political and militant recruitment and other activities within camps;
- providing security and policing of camps and surrounding areas;
- providing shelter provided for displaced civilians;
- managing and optimizing local economic conditions, opportunities, and resilience (for the local population as well as displaced civilians); and
- managing conditions, plans, and opportunities for youth.

Security extends beyond just screening those admitted to camps and providing policing activities. It also extends to providing appropriate training and punishing violations of officials and soldiers who exploit refugees or treat them poorly (Lichtenheld, 2019).

In addition to the host country and UNHCR efforts, NGOs often play a significant role, particularly in the delivery of health services in non-native countries where refugees cannot easily access the public system. For example, in Jordan, 68% of Syrian refugees requiring treatment of chronic health conditions rely on NGOs for treatment (Tiltnes et al., 2019).

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Freedom of movement, security, providing opportunities for youth, and job opportunities each represent potential vulnerabilities that could be exploited by groups seeking to radicalize a displaced population, but in the end, are the responsibility of the host nation to manage.

## What Should Be the Role of the US Military?

Potential roles for the US military fall into two categories. The first category includes actions that USCENTCOM might take on its own, which focus on protecting civilians from combat operations and assisting with relocation. The second category, which includes humanitarian and limited assistance with infrastructure, would generally require the proper authorizations and funding. In cases where the host country is not able to provide adequate security for displaced civilians, the US military may, in the short-term, and if requested, help to stabilize the situation, within legal and operational constraints, often in an advisory capacity (Lichtenheld, 2019).

In terms of specific actions, the US *Commander's Guide to Supporting Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons* provides specific guidance (Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2012). Key stated duties from the guide are as follows (as a reference, the most relevant sections leading to these conclusions are summarized in Appendix A):

- Minimize civilian interference with military operations.
- Protect civilians from combat operations or other threats and relieve associated suffering.
- When the host nation cannot or is unwilling to control displaced civilians, the military must "collect, evacuate, and resettle them."

However, without authorization from the US State Department, the host country, and/or other agencies (as appropriate), the authorities of the US military are limited. Funding may be available through the Overseas, Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid Appropriation (OHDACA), which is administered by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency and the Combatant Commands. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Commander's Emergency Response Fund (CERP) are also potential sources of funding.

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Given the appropriate permissions and provision of resources, other ways that the US military could help if called upon include providing short-term assistance with provision of water, construction of hygiene facilities, and camp security. However, it is not advisable for the US military to play a protracted role, as it does not have legal responsibility for refugees or IDPs within a foreign host nation. At the same time, highly visible efforts may put humanitarian agencies in a position where it is difficult to maintain a positioning of neutrality (Lichtenheld, 2019).

Furthermore, the military may be able to assist in preventing violent extremist organizations (VEOs) from gaining access to at-risk populations and, in doing so, limit radicalization within displaced populations. As noted in the Commander's Guide, "military operations should be 'designed to deny support and assistance to insurgents by controlling the movement of people and goods and restricting access to key facilities' as appropriate given authorizations, funding, and current levels of cooperation and coordination with host nation agencies."

In addition to ensuring basic needs are met, avoiding radicalization will also require countering extremist narratives that may serve to influence vulnerable populations such as refugees and IDPs.

# The Most Effective Voice in Countering Extremist Narratives

While an in-depth review of all of the active extremist organizations is outside the scope of this report, various VEOs are currently active in Central Region where IDPs and refugees are concentrated (CIA Factbook, 2019; Refworld Country Reports on Terrorism, 2018; Stanford University, 2019). While many of these organizations focus their narratives primarily on religious themes, they differ on stated goals, methods, desired sequence of events, relation to Islamic doctrine, sectarian affiliation, and geographical focus (Liebl, 2019). Therefore, there is not one "voice" or counter-narrative that will help to prevent radicalism among displaced civilians writ large. In some cases, aspects of a VEO's narrative may pit one VEO against another, as is the case between Shia and Sunni organizations, as well as between different Sunni-based VEOs (as was the case with conflict/tension

between al-Qaeda and Islamic State). It follows, then, that the voice used to counter extremist narratives for a particular refugee or IDP population should take into consideration the background and sectarian profile of the population of interest and the specific grievances that a VEO could exploit.

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Generally, as was found in deradicalization efforts in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, the most compelling voices used in countering the religious nature of violent extremist narratives are from respected clerics. Ideally, those individuals would share the ethnicity and national identity of the affected population, along with an understanding of extremist narratives and where those narratives are flawed (Johnston, 2009). However, focusing solely on the religious narrative of a VEO may not be sufficient to circumvent radicalization. More than one "voice" may be required to actively counter all of the themes that a VEO may seek to exploit. Families also play a role. Engaging and providing resources to help educate and support parents should not be overlooked (Lichtenheld, 2019). Each of these efforts entail different message than just ideological reeducation and, therefore, there will need to be a separate (or coordinated) "voice" and communication strategy to prevent potentially radicalizing grievance-based narratives from taking hold within at-risk populations. Ultimately, providing a pathway that enables hope for the future is extremely important, particularly with younger displaced civilians (Lischer, 2019).

It is also important to keep local contextual factors in mind to minimize potential resentment within local communities that adjoin the camps if investments in jobs, facilities, health services, schools, and infrastructure within a camp creates a disparity with what is provided in nearby communities (Sude et al, 2019). In terms of countering specific narratives, respected individuals or leaders within displaced populations can provide an extremely credible voice. For example, if it is feasible to dispel false rumors by showing a representative party within a campground truth or actual evidence, they can provide an effective voice in countering rumors (Lischer, 2019). This strategy is not without risk, however, since they may also be exposed to evidence that supports adversarial narratives (such as collateral damage, etc.).

The ongoing challenge ultimately comes down to four factors: resources, opportunities for displaced civilians, controlling the narrative, and integration with local societies. While the ultimate responsibility continues to lie with the host nation, given the budget shortfalls and growing tensions, it is unlikely that a host country will be able to resolve these challenges without continued support from NGOs, the United Nations, and other agencies.

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# Appendix A: Detailed Summary of Relevant Sections of the Commander's Guide to Supporting Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

First and foremost, "military forces are often the first to encounter refugees and IDPs on the battlefield and/or the Area of Operations (AO). The military has a duty to 'minimize civilian interference with military operations, relieve suffering, and protect civilians from combat operations or other threats.' When the host nation cannot or is unwilling to control' them, the military must 'collect, evacuate, and resettle them.'"

Absent a specific statutory authorization or appropriation, however, US military personnel "will not be able to take the next critical step," including "the provision of humanitarian assistance, whether medical, food, or basic sanitation and facilities improvement." If USCENTCOM is to "provide foreign assistance, to include humanitarian assistance to refugees and IDPs, commanders must have funds expressly authorized and appropriated for that purpose."

Congress has given the Department of Defense some "limited, permanent authorities and an appropriation to provide humanitarian assistance. Foremost among these is the Overseas, Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) appropriation. OHDACA funds generally may be used to provide limited humanitarian assistance, to include medical care, transportation costs, food, and rudimentary construction. These funds are administered by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) through the combatant commands." Some types of support mentioned in the Commander's Guide include activities such as (if authorized by the appropriate agencies and authorities) assisting with water provision (until more permanent solutions can be implemented), excavating hygiene facilities, and assisting with camp security. However, in the long term, these are functions that ultimately are the responsibility of the host nation, and require authorization from the State Department or other authorities in order for the US military to provide assistance.

In situations where "… permanent authorities and appropriations are inadequate to the humanitarian task of providing for IDPs and refugees, the commander has two remaining options. First, and ideally a prerequisite part of the planning process, the commander can coordinate with the State Department and USAID to determine their funds available to meet humanitarian needs for the displaced population. As the lead US agencies for foreign assistance, the Department of State and USAID possess a wide variety of appropriations and authorizations to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees and IDPs."

"A second option is to request a mission-specific appropriation or authority through the combatant command" or other official channels. "Under the right circumstances, such as the Commander's Emergency Response Fund (CERP), Congress may specifically authorize the US military (DOD) to utilize operations and maintenance funds or appropriate separate funds to provide humanitarian assistance. In either event, advanced planning and some degree of lead time are required."

"As stated in Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 3000.5, Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations (28 November 2005), stability operations are a 'core military mission on par with combat operations.'"