



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on November 16, 2015

U.S. to Open Facilities in Middle East to Speed Up Processing of Syrian Refugees

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Danna Van Brand said in a November 6 statement that the United States plans to open a refugee settlement processing center in Erbil, Iraq, before the end of 2015, and will also resume refugee processing in Lebanon in early 2016. The announcement was made just one week before the terrorist attacks in Paris that killed 129 people and wounded more than 350 others.



During a joint press appearance in Berlin on September 20 with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Secretary of State John Kerry previewed the Obama administration's plan to drastically increase the flow of refugees into the United States, mentioning specifically refugees from Syria. "I'm pleased to announce today that the United States will significantly increase our numbers for refugee resettlement in the course of this next year and the year after," Kerry said. "Last year I think we were at 70,000," he noted, referring to number of refugees the United States accepted from around the world.

"We are now going to go up to 85,000 with at least, and I underscore the 'at least' — it is not a ceiling, it's a floor — of 10,000 over the next year from Syria specifically even as we also receive more refugees from other areas. And in the next fiscal year, we'll target 100,000, and if it's possible to do more, we'll do [more]."

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A CNN report in September noted that the number of requests for asylum made by Syrian refugees to France has been relatively low, but they predicted: "They will surely increase now that French President François Hollande has said France is ready to take on more responsibility and host 24,000 refugees over the next two years."

Hollande said the 24,000 number would be France's share under a proposal by the European Commission for EU nations to take in 120,000 refugees over the next two years. "We will do so because it is the principle to which France is committed," CNN quoted Hollande as saying.

Hollande did not revise his offer following the November 13 terrorist attacks but did address a joint session of parliament in the Palace of Versailles that began with the words, "France is at war." During his speech, Hollande announced an increase in police recruitment, a halt to layoffs in the army, and a constitutional amendment to strengthen the fight against terrorism.

Reuters reported that Hollande announced he would meet President Obama in Washington and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in the coming days "so we can unite our forces to achieve a result that has taken too long."

Hollande ruled out Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as part of the solution to the refugee crisis, which seems odd considering that most of the refugees are fleeing terrorists engaged in a civil war against



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Assad. “Our enemy is Daesh [the Islamic State, or ISIS]” Hollande said, and maintained that France was fighting terrorism and not another civilization.

“We will eradicate terrorism,” said Hollande at the end of his 50-minute speech. Lawmakers from all of France’s political parties gave him a standing ovation and sang the “Marseillaise” national anthem.

Reuters reported a significant statement made by Hollande: He wants more effective controls of the European Union’s external borders to avoid a return to national border controls and the dismantling of the European Union. This point came up during Sweden’s November 11 announcement that it would reintroduce border controls to stem the uncontrolled flow of migrants entering the nation. Sweden’s ability to control its own borders is governed by the EU’s Schengen Agreement rules, under which they may continue to impose border controls for up to two months, after which they must open the borders again. Hollande’s statement indicated that he favors keeping the EU’s domination of its members states in place and does not value French sovereignty enough to seek a reversal of those policies. He is a member of France’s Socialist Party.

The U.S. State Department may have made plans to expedite the resettlement of refugees from the turmoil in Syria and the Middle East by opening new screening outposts in Iraq and Lebanon, but several American governors have announced that they don’t want these refugees to come into their states. Republican governors Rick Snyder of Michigan and Robert Bentley of Alabama issued individual statements on November 15 declaring that their states would not admit refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria.

The *Washington Post* quoted Snyder’s statement, in which he noted Michigan’s “rich history of immigration,” but stated, “our first priority is protecting the safety of our residents. “It’s also important to remember that these attacks are the efforts of extremists and do not reflect the peaceful ways of people of Middle Eastern descent here and around the world,” Snyder added.

In Alabama, Bentley said in his statement: “As your Governor, I will not stand complicit to a policy that places the citizens of Alabama in harm’s way. The acts of terror committed over the weekend are a tragic reminder to the world that evil exists and takes the form of terrorists who seek to destroy the basic freedoms we will always fight to preserve.”

On November 16, five more governors (all Republicans) joined Snyder and Bentley in issuing similar policy statements. These included Greg Abbott of Texas, Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas, Mike Pence of Indiana, Bobby Jindal of Louisiana, and Phil Bryant of Mississippi. Abbott, the governor of the nation’s second largest state in both area and population, sent an open letter to President Obama that stated, in part:

As governor of Texas, I write to inform you that the State of Texas will not accept any refugees from Syria in the wake of the deadly terrorist attack in Paris.

Further, I — and millions of Americans — implore you to halt your plans to accept more Syrian refugees in the United States. A Syrian “refugee” appears to have been part of the Paris terror attack. American humanitarian compassion could be exploited to expose Americans to similar deadly danger. The reasons for such concerns are plentiful.

The FBI director testified to Congress that the federal government does not have the background information that is necessary to effectively conduct proper security checks on Syrian nationals, Director Comey explained: “We can query our database until the cows come home, but there will be nothing show up because we have no record of them.”



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Abbott stated that, effective November 16, he is directing the Texas Health & Human Services Commission's Refugee Resettlement Program to not participate in the resettlement of any Syrian refugees in the State of Texas.

While these governors were acting to stop the settlement of Syrian refugees in their states, presidential candidate Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) announced on his Facebook page and elsewhere on November 16 that he was introducing legislation that would suspend visa issuance for countries with a high risk of terrorism. His bill would also impose a waiting period for background checks on visa issuance from other countries "until the American people can be assured terrorists cannot enter the country through our immigration and visa system." The wording of the legislation is based on language first proposed by Paul in 2013.

"The time has come to stop terrorists from walking in our front door," said Paul. "The Boston Marathon bombers were refugees, and numerous refugees from Iraq, including some living in my hometown, have attempted to commit terrorist attacks. The terrorist attacks in Paris underscore this concern that I have been working to address for the past several years. My bill will press pause on new refugee entrants from high-risk countries until stringent new screening procedures are in place."

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