

Refugee Issues in the 21st Century: Challenges to Humanity and World Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

The current flow of human beings escaping their countries' turmoil is not a temporary surge or a passing crisis. Mass migration, accompanied by sudden surges of people, will be a permanent challenge to 21st century states and world order. Recent surges of refugee and asylum claimants are testing the capacity of states and eroding traditions of welcome in receiving countries for refugee and migrants alike. At the same time, the intersection of forced migration, human rights, and conflict presents a unique challenge for world foreign policy in this 21st century. These three factors are already beginning to combine in ways that undermine traditional understandings of national security and offer ample reason to revisit traditional divisions of labour between diplomacy, defence, economic social development policy around the world. Accordingly, this paper has three objectives. Firstly, this paper provides a brief overview of refugee issues in the 21st century with major issue of forced migration, human rights, and conflict and its implications. Secondly, this paper highlights emergent issues and challenge faced by the countries around the world regarding refugees and humanity. Thirdly, this paper discusses the challenge of world diplomacy when it comes to the issue of refugee and humanity. Finally, the paper will highlights the ways in which world foreign policy must adapt to meet the challenges they facing today regarding this issue.

Keywords: Refugee, 21st century, challenges, humanity, diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, governments throughout the world have tried to avoid dealing with the difficult questions raised by refugee and related movements. Since 2010, a number of States have also been concerned with the so called "irregular movements" of refugees, particularly with a view to enhancing the option of sending such refugees or asylum seekers back to another country deemed able to provide protection or considered more responsible than the State of arrival.¹

Seeing no national or international actors able to willing to remedy their satisfactory present conditions, a record number of refugees have taken matters into their own hands in 2015 and 2016, moving from countries of first asylum to Europe or to more prosperous and stable countries in their region of origin. Often, they move along the same routes and by the same means as other migrants who do not qualify for refugee status, as defined by international and national laws, even as some travel to escape corrupt and dysfunctional government authorities, environmental catastrophes, or grinding poverty.²

According to Werz (2016) these clandestine journeys, and the suffering and exploitation associated with them, pose extraordinary challenges for the countries and regions receiving refugees without the opportunity to plan for their arrival, and for the transit countries through which they pass. As Corabatir (2016) notes, "In the summer of 2015, the Syrian refugee crisis became a European humanitarian crisis. However, arrivals also poured into Europe from most of the other top refugee-

producing countries, including Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, and more. These trends not only happen in Europe but other regions around the world that will add to pressure facing local and national governments in the decades to come. In light of these challenge, advanced and developing countries must revise traditional concepts of refugees and asylum seeker and focus on how to support and building the resilience of these vulnerable communities. This paper examines emergent issues and challenges faced by the countries around the world regarding refugees and humanity. The aim of this paper also is to address the challenge of world diplomacy when it comes to the issue of refugee and humanity. Finally, the paper will highlights the ways in which world foreign policy must adapt to meet the challenges they facing today regarding this issue.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD REGARDING REFUGEES AND HUMANITY

The majority of people seeking entry to Europe are fleeing conflict and violence in their home countries.³

This is same with majority of Rohingya Muslim from Myanmar especially from Arakan region to Bangladesh.⁴

At this moment, the European Union, Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia are among the governments that have struggled to manage the increase in refugee, stateless and migrant flows over the last few years, contributing to a perception of chaos and loss of control. For many

refugees, in the Middle East and Southeast Asia there is little or no real prospect of integration or even real security in their countries of first destination.⁵

In the case of Syrian refugees, for example according to Bodewig (2015), host government in the Middle East are overwhelmed by the volume of arrivals and some are becoming increasingly hostile, tightening borders, increasing visa or residency restrictions and in some cases effectively denying legal access to work.

The security situation in some host countries is also deteriorating, as demonstrated by recent bomb attacks in Turkey and prevailing insecurity in Lebanon. The discrepancy between forced migration in the Middle East and Southeast Asia and obstacles to international movements of people in need of protection, in and around the region, raises two nagging questions: Will there still be a haven for people fleeing war and conflict and will the refugee crisis fuel a security crisis? First, unless stability returns to Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Myanmar, population displacement will continue while the re-emigration of refugees temporarily sheltered in Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Bangladesh will gain momentum. Although the Middle East is source and host to 50 per cent of the world's 20 million refugees and Bangladesh host around 1 million Rohingya Muslim from Myanmar, most states in the regions are not parties to the Refugee Convention of 1951. This makes the refugees cannot claim any rights, including rights to reside. These situations make their life in limbo.⁶

Second massive refugee flows have put considerable strain on their hosts. Offering a haven to the millions of refugees, states like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are faced with a heavy burden on their economies. Not only housing, public services and the labour market, but also unforeseeable consequences for political stability and security. As communal lines are not congruent with national borders, many refugees found shelter on the other side of their homeland's border within their own community.⁷

According to Philippe (2016), the influx of Syrian Kurds into Turkey and Iraq has strengthened, at least symbolically, Kurdish irredentism in both countries and reignited armed conflict. In Lebanon, inflows of mostly Sunni Syrians has overturned the *de facto* population makeup, propelling their community to first place in demographic terms ahead of the equally dominant Shias and Maronites in political terms and fuelling violence in the northern city of Tripoli. In Jordan, it is not the sectarian composition of the flow but its very nature that generates tensions in a country where half of the citizens are themselves refugees from Palestine. The population in the receiving areas feels that it once again has been left alone to manage huge waves of displaced people.

Since the rise of the so-called Islamic State in 2014 that amplified forced migration in and from Syria and Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon have given their initial

openness, barred the way to new refugees and restricted the stay and access to livelihood for those already there. Prioritising security, the Lebanese government has adopted a harsh line towards refugees. The objective is to reduce their numbers and to prevent illegal employment that creates unfair competition for Lebanese workers. Many Syrian refugees are now overstaying on an expired residency permit and risk deportation.⁸

In Jordan, where refugees had received a temporary permit of stay at entry, the UNHCR is in charge of finding durable solutions. Because return to Syria and naturalisation in Jordan are excluded, the only solution left is resettlement elsewhere. Moreover, for lack of funding the World Food Program has had to cut food assistance to refugees in urban neighbourhoods. As a result of the above trends, the total populations of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon have significantly decreased over the last two years.⁹

In Turkey, which remains the last half-opened door at the border of Syria, the situation of refugees is deteriorating. On the one hand Turkey, a party to the UN Refugee Convention with a geographical limitation to Europe, offers only temporary asylum to non-Europeans. On the other hand, Turkey has signed an agreement with the EU aimed at keeping refugees away from Europe. This will have several unwanted outcomes. It will send Syrians in Turkey down longer and more perilous routes to be smuggled into Europe. It will mean locking up people fleeing violence within Syria. It may even end in the *refoulement* of refugees.¹⁰

Meanwhile, according to Hassan (2016), the international community's response to the situation in these countries has been wholly inadequate. Responses to UNHCR calls for resettlement places have been slow, and only a third of the estimated 4000,000 places needed have been pledged. Funding for the refugee response in the Middle East is less than half what is required and emergency programmes have been cut as a result. UNHCR estimates that 86 per cent of Syrian refugees in Jordan and 70 per cent in Lebanon are living below the poverty line.

The failure of the international community to address conflicts, violence and human rights violations in countries of origin has been another key factor in the surge in irregular migration especially to Europe.¹¹

There is no international political framework for ending the Syria conflict and no clear international strategy for addressing the related conflict in Iraq and Myanmar. Afghanistan is still far from any real stability despite years of international intervention, and the international community seems to be out of ideas on how to end the decades-long conflict in Somalia. Efforts to address the chronic poverty, inequality, weak governance and climate and environmental changes that constitute "push" factors in many developing countries have also been inadequate.¹²

THE CHALLENGE OF WORLD DIPLOMACY ON THE ISSUE OF REFUGEE AND HUMANITY

Although international law enforcement and military tools play a role in addressing both refugees and conflicts in many regions in the world, the solution to mass migrations especially in Europe and Asia depends extensively on diplomacy.¹³ There is no better example of this than the March 2016 EU Agreement with Turkey on stemming migration flows. While media reports focused on the almost \$7 billion in assistance for Syrian refugees in Turkey, much of the diplomatic effort focused on even more complex negotiations. For example, diplomats had to coordinate position about whether, when and-most importantly-under what conditions to allow visa-free travel for Turkish citizens. They also had to develop potential steps towards EU membership for Turkey. EU member states had to negotiate increased quotas for accepting legal refugees; furthermore, they had to determine measures to assist Greece in housing, processing and returning migrants to Turkey, an effort requiring the deployment of thousands of judges, lawyers, translators and border guards on Greek islands to hear the cases of asylum seekers, before sending them back to Turkey.¹⁴

At the same time, diplomats had to address strong criticisms from Amnesty International, the Vatican and others that the agreement was damaging to human rights and humanitarian law.¹⁵ However, this agreement has come under strain since the July 2016 attempted coup in Turkey and subsequent crackdown by the Turkish government. Disagreement with the EU on the treatment of dissidents post-coup, and the prospect of not attaining visa-free travel to Europe for Turkish citizens have meant that the agreement has not yet come into place. This uncertainty has resulted in refugees to make their way into Greece from Turkey.¹⁶

Effective diplomacy often requires coordination with officials who oversee financial assistance funds, who can change domestic policies, or who can provide law enforcement, military or intelligence support. Throughout 2015 and 2016, countries in Europe, and particularly those bordering Greece, were closing their borders to refugees, transporting them to neighbouring countries, restricting refugee resettlement and in some cases fining citizens trying to help refugees. At the same time, migration affected the internal political dialogue of many countries, strengthening populist, anti-immigrant and isolationist voices.¹⁷

According to D'Alfonso (2014), migration and death at sea continued to surge, human-smuggling networks grew larger and bolder, conditions at overcrowded camps worsened, and concerns about terrorists posing as refugees spiked. In response, diplomat worked to coordinate financial assistance packages for Greece, Turkey, and countries in the Middle East and North Africa. They coordinated and debated updates to domestic

laws and policies governing migrant processing and absorption of refugees. They coordinated multinational law enforcement and military actions, as well as intelligence-sharing.

Same situation happen to Malaysia and Turkey government that negotiate with Bangladesh government regarding financial and medical assistance for Rohingya refugees at Cox's Bazaar.

According to European diplomats, they make efforts that designed to help European governments improve assistance to migrants while regaining some level of control over refugee flows. But in order to get to more long-term solutions, diplomats will need to get to the roots of the mass migration challenges in and near the countries from which migrants are fleeing. Diplomat will need to further leverage foreign aid tools to tend to displaced persons in their home countries or in neighbouring countries like Jordan and Lebanon.¹⁸ They will need to continue the challenging negotiations to establish ceasefires and peace plan for Syria. And they will need to leverage defence and security tools to address instability and terrorism in Syria and Iraq, and across the Middle East and Africa. Same case going to the Rohingya, where ASEAN need to have their collective responsibility and voice toward the Myanmar government.

As for the long-term solution, which lies primarily outside Europe's and Southeast Asia's borders, are also where US diplomat have critical roles to play. European and Southeast Asian security and their political and economic stability are vital US interest, and American diplomats have been engaged around the Mediterranean both to protect the US homeland from abroad as well as in Southeast Asia. As with their European and Asian counterparts, American diplomats have needed to leverage financial, law enforcement, military and other tools to support a coordinated effort in multiple locations from Turkey to Iraq to Syria to North Africa to Malaysia to the high seas.¹⁹

THE REFUGEE CRISIS: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The global refugee crisis is primarily a result of conflicts and widespread human rights violations. The obligation of individual countries to give protection and assistance to refugees, coupled with the responsibility of the international community to act collectively in the case of large refugee crises, is essential to refugee protection. The refugee crisis the world has witnessed in the past few years has been exacerbated by the failures of individual states, and of the international community as a whole, to live up to these obligations.²⁰

According to UNHCR (2015), although 145 countries have ratified the Refugee Convention, there are regions of the world in which very few countries have ratified the treaty, including most of the Middle East, South Asia

and Southeast Asia. In these regions refugees generally enjoy limited rights and in some cases are not legally recognised as refugees. The responsibility for coping with the world's multiple refugee crises lies almost entirely with poorer countries in the world: 86 per cent of the world's refugees are in developing countries. Wealthier countries are not doing nearly enough to share the burden of the global refugee crisis. Humanitarian appeals for refugee crises are consistently- and often- severely-underfunded. Nearly one million refugees need resettlement, yet, globally, annual resettlement commitments are less than a tenth of this number. Only around 30 countries offer any resettlement places at all.

In many countries, political considerations regularly take precedence over the lives of refugees and migrants, leaving thousand to die on dangerous journeys that could have been avoided. Ultimately, refugee crises end when their root causes are addressed. Ending conflicts and widespread human rights abuses are objectives that states should pursue, but they are difficult to achieve. However, individual states and the international community as a whole must recognise that they can lessen the devastating consequences of the refugee on people. For this, a global approach to the problem is needed.²¹

Individual countries should respect their legal obligations towards refugees and asylum seekers, including allowing them to enter their territories, providing assistance to those in distress at sea and tackling xenophobia, but there must also be a fundamental change in international cooperation on refugee crises. The international community must share the responsibility for assisting and hosting refugees, including by resettling refugees who need it and adequate funding humanitarian programmes in other countries.²²

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The international community needs to reinvigorate the system for responsibility-sharing amongst states through below commitments:

1. Develop robust domestic refugee systems: States must have fair domestic procedures to assess refugee claims and must guarantee fundamental rights and access to services, such as education and health care to refugees;
2. An absolute commitment to saving lives first: States must prioritise saving people in distress over implementing immigration policies. In situations where people in danger of death, including, but not limited to, people attempting sea crossings, states should invest in search and rescue operations and immediately come to the rescue of people in distress.
3. Combat trafficking: States must take effective action to investigate and prosecute trafficking gangs. States should offer protection and assistance to victims of trafficking and ensure they have access to refugee status determination procedures and/or resettlement opportunities.
4. Combat xenophobia: Governments must refrain from engaging in xenophobia themselves, for example by implying or directly claiming asylum-seekers and migrants are blame for economic and social problems. Governments must also have effective policies to address xenophobic violence; and
5. Establish a global refugee fund: Such a fund should fulfil all UN humanitarian appeals for refugee crises. This fund should also provide meaningful financial support to countries hosting large numbers of refugees to help them provide services to refugees and their host communities. This should be additional to existing development aid.

NOTES

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