

Terrorist Exploitation of Refugee Programs

**Testimony of Lawrence F. Bartlett
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**Before the
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Chairman Meehan, Ranking Member Higgins and other distinguished Members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee and to update you on the steps we have taken to increase the security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Every year the U.S. admits tens of thousands of refugees as part of a humanitarian effort that reflects the highest values and aspirations of the American people, in a program that is authorized by Congress and historically has enjoyed broad bipartisan Congressional support.

Since 1975, the United States Refugee Admissions Program has welcomed over three million refugees to the United States. That is over three million people with a new chance at life, dignity, self-sufficiency, at raising a family and being part of our community. With the admission of each new refugee, we celebrate the rebirth of America's promise.

For decades, American communities have opened their hearts, homes, and neighborhoods to refugees from around the world. Our responsibility is to ensure that they do so with continued confidence in the security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, a responsibility the State Department shares with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Specifically, the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, through our Resettlement Support Centers, conducts preliminary overseas pre-screening of refugee applicants for U.S. admissions, collecting pertinent biographic information necessary for numerous consular, law enforcement and intelligence reviews.

The State Department is responsible for checking all refugee applicants against the Consular Lookout and Support System known as "CLASS", which comprises security information from the FBI Terrorist Screening Center and DHS as well as certain intelligence agencies.

Certain refugee applications (based upon classified parameters) are also submitted by the State Department for a Security Advisory Opinion. This check requests that certain law enforcement

and intelligence agencies share with the State Department any information they have on refugee applicants with possible terrorism linkages.

Our partners at DHS' U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services as well as DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis, will discuss in their testimony the additional security and other counterterrorism checks that they undertake in partnership with the National Counterterrorism Center, DOD and others in the Intelligence Community and law enforcement, before DHS grants refugee status and admission to a refugee applicant and his or her qualifying family members. The State Department strongly supports these efforts by DHS/USCIS.

This subcommittee's request for testimony included questions pertaining to the Congressionally-mandated Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Program, which facilitates the admission of U.S. Government-affiliated foreigner nationals, including Iraqis and Afghans, to the United States. The SIV Program, which is distinct from the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, is managed by the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs. While I am not in a position to address SIV processing issues, I can tell you that SIV applicants also undergo multiple, extensive layers of security and counterterrorism review.

Whether through the administration of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program or the Special Immigrant Visa Program, the State Department makes its first priority the safety of the American people, who have a right to expect that their Government will undertake all available efforts to safeguard their security.

We at the Department of State are proud of the measures we have taken in recent years to strengthen the security of these programs, including through expanded Intelligence Community participation -- measures which have made the country safer. In partnership with DHS, we will continue to look for additional ways to enhance the safety and security of these important humanitarian programs. This is our obligation to the American people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.