



# You are Not Welcome Here Anymore: Restoring Support for Refugee Resettlement in the Age of Trump

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## Executive Summary

After descending an escalator of his hotel at Central Park West on a June day in 2015, Donald Trump ascended a podium and proceeded to accuse Mexico of “sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us (sic). They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists” (Time 2015). It was a moment that marked the launch of his bid for president of the United States. From that point forward, Trump made immigration restriction one of the centerpieces of his campaign. Paired with an economically populist message, the nativist rhetoric shaped a narrative that helped launch him to the White House. His effectiveness partly lay in his ability to understand and exploit preexisting insecurities, partly in his outsider status, and partly in his willingness to tap into apparently widespread public sentiment that is uneasy with, if not overtly hostile to, migrants.

This paper will try to make sense of the restrictionist logic that informs the Trump administration’s worldview, alongside some of the underlying cultural, philosophical, and political conditions that inspired support for Trump by millions of Americans. This paper contends that the Clash of Civilizations (CoC) paradigm is a useful lens to help understand the positions that President Trump has taken with respect to international affairs broadly, and specifically in his approach to migration policy. This paradigm, originally coined by the historian Bernard Lewis but popularized by the political theorist Samuel Huntington (Hirsh 2016), provides a conceptual framework for understanding international relations following the end of the Cold War. It is a framework that emphasizes the importance of culture, rather than political ideology, as the primary fault line along which future conflicts will occur. Whether Trump ever consciously embraced such a framework in the early days of his candidacy is doubtful. He has been candid about the fact that he has never spent much time reading and generally responds to problems on instinct and “common sense” rather than a conceptually defined worldview developed by academics and intellectuals

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed herein are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the opinions or positions of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

(Fisher 2016). Nevertheless, during the presidential campaign, and continuing after his victory, Trump surrounded himself with high-level advisers, political appointees, and staff who, if they have nothing else in common, embrace something roughly akin to the Clash of Civilizations perspective (Ashford 2016).<sup>2</sup>

The paper will focus primarily on Trump's approach to refugee resettlement. One might think that refugees would elicit an almost knee-jerk sympathy given the tragic circumstances that drove their migration, but perceptions of refugees are often tied up with geopolitical considerations and domestic political realities. Following 9/11, the threat of Islamic-inspired terrorism emerged as a national security priority. With the onset of the Syrian Civil War and the significant refugee crisis that ensued in its wake, paired with some high-profile terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe, the "Islamic threat" became even more pronounced.

The perception that Islamic-inspired terrorism is a real and imminent threat has contributed to a growing antagonism toward the resettlement of refugees, and particularly Muslims. When viewed through the lens of the CoC paradigm, victims of persecution can easily be transformed into potential threats. Insofar as Islam is understood as an external and even existential threat to the American way of life, the admission of these migrants and refugees could be deemed a serious threat to national security.

This paper will begin by examining some of Trump's campaign promises and his efforts to implement them during the early days of his administration. Although the underlying rationale feeding into the contemporary reaction against refugee resettlement is unique in many respects, it is rooted in a much longer history that extends back to the World War II period. It was during this period that a more formal effort to admit refugees began, and it was over the next half century that the program developed. Understanding the historical backdrop, particularly insofar as its development was influenced by the Cold War context, will help to clarify some of the transitions that influenced the reception of refugees in the decades after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Such an exploration also helps to explain how and why a CoC paradigm has become ascendant. The decline of the ideologically driven conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union has, according to Huntington's thesis, been superseded by culturally based conflicts that occur when competing civilizations come into contact. The conceptual framework that the CoC framework embodies meshes well with the cultural and economic dislocation felt by millions of Trump supporters who are concerned about the continued dissolution of a shared cultural and political heritage. It is important to keep in mind that the CoC paradigm, as a conceptual framework for

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that proponents of the CoC worldview are just one bloc within the Trump administration, albeit at the moment an influential one. Other competing blocs (e.g., establishment Republicans) are also in the mix.

understanding Donald Trump and his approach to refugee resettlement and migration more broadly, is at its core pre-political; it helps to define the cultural matrix that people use to make sense of the world. The policy prescriptions that follow from it are more effect than cause.

## Trump's Campaign Promises

Beginning with the June announcement of his candidacy, through the Republican primary and into the general campaign, Trump honed his immigration restrictionist bona fides. Not only did he promise to crack down on illegal immigration and deport the estimated 11 million unauthorized migrants living in the United States (Lobianco 2015), he also committed to build a wall along the US-Mexico border and to make Mexico pay for it. He took aim at the refugee resettlement system along the way. Although perhaps surprising in retrospect, in a September 2015 interview with Fox News, Candidate Trump called for an increase in the admission of Syrian refugees as a humanitarian gesture (BBC News 2015a). However, it was not long before he backpedaled and embraced a hardline approach that more closely mirrored, and in some respects surpassed, the position of his Republican opponents.

Just three weeks after promising to bring in more Syrian refugees, Trump committed to sending every Syrian refugee admitted into the United States back from where they came (BBC 2015b). On November 13, 2015, gunmen and suicide bombers executed an attack on a concert hall, a sports stadium, and a series of bars and restaurants in downtown Paris, killing 130 people. The following week, at a rally in Birmingham, Alabama, Trump called for a database of refugees entering the United States from Syria and supported efforts to surveil several unspecified mosques (Haberma 2015).

In the immediate aftermath of the San Bernardino attack in December 2015, he called for a shutdown on all Muslims entering the United States (Diamond 2015). Several months later, Trump claimed that Hillary Clinton supported a program to “admit hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Middle East with no system to vet them,” and he vowed to use his executive power to stop the admission of Muslims and other people from the region (Schultheis 2016). Refugees and other migrants from this part of the world, he said, could very easily be a “Trojan Horse” for America (ibid.). Islamic terrorism was by this point for Trump an existential threat to the United States; allowing them into the country by choice would thus be a critical threat to national security.

## Efforts to Implement an Agenda

Upon becoming president, Trump moved quickly to fulfill some of his election year promises. In the week following the inauguration he issued three different executive orders (EO) pertaining to migration. The first two orders came on January 25, 2017 and focused on different aspects of the immigration issue. The first looked at border security and issues related to the restriction of entry of immigrants,<sup>3</sup> and the second focused more explicitly

<sup>3</sup> Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements, Exec. Order No. 13767, 82 Fed. Reg. 8793 (Jan. 25, 2017).

on internal enforcement and the need to deal with undocumented migrants who were established in the United States.<sup>4</sup> The beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program seem to fall outside the administration's broad enforcement priorities, at least at this writing.

More important for our purposes here, the president's third executive order on migration, issued on January 27, focused on his concern that the refugee resettlement program was potentially allowing the admission of terrorists into the United States. To minimize this possibility, the president called for a reduction in the number of refugee admission in fiscal year (FY) 2017 to 50,000 — down from the 110,000 target that President Obama had established in his presidential determination for FY 2017. Among other provisions, the order imposed a 120-day halt to the refugee resettlement program (for the purpose of reviewing and revising the vetting process), and a 90-day ban on the issuance of any visas or refugee resettlement from seven Muslim-majority countries. The EO indefinitely suspended the admission of Syrians.<sup>5</sup>

Efforts to implement the EO did not run smoothly. Reports surfaced that green card holders from these banned countries who had traveled overseas were refused entry back into the United States. The day after Trump signed the order, a DHS spokesperson told Reuters that the ban would bar green card holders (Greenwood 2017). This caused serious disruptions at international airports as even lawful permanent residents who sought to return home from overseas travel were forbidden from boarding planes bound to the United States. Potential recipients of special immigrant visas (e.g., individuals who served as interpreters for US troops in Iraq) were initially forbidden admission. Some military officials expressed concern about the alienating effect that this decision could have on allies and supporters in the region (Gibbons-Neff 2017).

The following Monday, Acting Attorney General Sally Yates released a memo to Justice Department attorneys ordering them not to defend the executive order in court. In the memo, she noted that she was responsible for ensuring that “the position of the Department of Justice is not only legally defensible, but is informed by our best view of what the law is after consideration of all the facts,” and to ensure “that the positions we take in court remain consistent with this institution's solemn obligation to always seek justice and stand for what is right” (Yates 2017). She deemed that some of the provisions in the EO could not withstand such scrutiny and thus should not be defended (*ibid.*). Her refusal to enforce the refugee ban led to her dismissal several hours later (Lawter 2017).

More than 50 lawsuits aimed at Trump's executive order were filed by religious groups, state attorney generals, and other organizations in the days following its release (Wilson 2017). On February 2, Judge James Robart, a federal district court judge in Seattle, issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) against several sections of the EO, including the 120-day admissions pause and the 90-day, seven country ban. Less than a week later the 9th

4 Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States, Exec. Order No. 13768, 82 Fed. Reg. 8799 (Jan. 25, 2017).

5 Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, Exec. Order No. 13769, 82 Fed. Reg. 8977 (Jan. 27, 2017).

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Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the TRO,<sup>6</sup> thus leaving the EO in legal limbo. Rather than pursuing the legal case through the courts, the Trump administration decided to rescind and replace the initial order with a new one. The revised order was issued on March 6 and, while it maintained the general thrust of the original EO, it contained some changes that the administration hoped would pass judicial review. These included the elimination of any resettlement preference for religious minorities, the removal of Iraq from the banned countries list, and the specifying of individuals that the EO did not affect (e.g., foreign nationals with valid visas and dual citizens).<sup>7</sup> On March 15, District Court Judge Derrick Watson issued a TRO in response to a lawsuit filed by the state of Hawaii, which prevented the travel ban from taking effect. Later that day a Maryland judge issued a nationwide preliminary injunction on part of the EO (McGraw 2017).

Given the president's expansive executive authority to implement immigration policy, it would be surprising if President Trump does not continue to push a restrictionist agenda throughout the rest of his term, and to seek ways to reduce refugee resettlement further. What is perhaps more surprising is the extent to which efforts to enact substantive legislative changes to migration policy in recent years have failed, given the increasingly tumultuous nature of the issue. With respect to humanitarian-based migration policy, for example, the provisions laid out in the Refugee Act of 1980 have remained generally intact for more than three decades. This is not an altogether positive assessment given that improvements could have been made to the program that would have improved its efficiency and effectiveness (Scribner and Brown 2015). Nevertheless, a substantial amount of damage could also have been done if such legislation had significantly altered the United States' longstanding tradition to resettle refugees.

Why has the program managed to avoid any significant — and long lasting — changes? In general, polarization along ideological lines has made it increasingly difficult to find any common ground to address some of the fundamental problems facing the immigration system (Dimock et al. 2014, 64-65). This polarization has been apparent in response to refugee resettlement as well, and has led to gridlock and the unwillingness among party leadership to raise broader migration-related legislation that could fracture their caucus during an election season (Magner 2016, 186-87). In addition, the tradition of welcome among many Americans remains strong, even in the face of the parallel fear and disdain for “the other,” which also has long and deep roots in American life.

This is not the first time that resettlement has stoked concerns among policymakers and the US public. From the mid-1940s, when a more formal refugee resettlement system began to take shape in the United States, through the Cold War, debates about the resettlement system surfaced. What risks did such a system pose to national security? Who should be resettled and what should be the standards used to determine their worthiness for resettlement? Finally, what legal authorities should be relied upon (e.g., executive parole power or legislation)?

6 *State of Washington v. Trump*, No. 17-35105, (9th Cir. Feb. 9, 2017) (per curiam), <http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2017/02/09/17-35105.pdf>.

7 Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, Exec. Order No. 13780, 82 Fed. Reg. 13209 (March 6, 2017).



During the period from about 1945-1989, Cold War politics played an important role in the growth of the resettlement system. It strongly influenced the way in which policymakers engaged refugees and marked who was worthy and who was not for resettlement. Its end marked an important transition in international politics and required a rethinking of how refugee resettlement fit within America's approach to international relations and humanitarian engagement with the world. Understanding the growth of the resettlement program during the Cold War, its impact on the program, and the conceptual gap that emerged following its end will help to make sense of the contemporary nativist reaction to refugee admissions. In short, the end of the Cold War left an opening for the emergence of a Clash of Civilizations framework.

## **The Refugee Resettlement System in the United States**

The United States refugee resettlement program has its origins in the response to the massive number of displaced persons created by World War II. Early efforts by the United States to resettle displaced persons were stymied by a few factors. First, the National Origins Act of 1924 complicated matters because refugee admissions fell under the purview of the quota system; at the time, there was no legal distinction made between a "refugee" and an "immigrant." Any effort to resettle displaced persons that went beyond the quota for a specific country had to rely on special exemptions by the president or emergency legislation that would specifically provide for increased admissions (Scribner 2013). Eventually, Congress passed a series of laws, beginning with the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, that admitted substantial numbers of refugees into the United States. Regardless, there remained a significant resistance to these types of emergency legislation.

Such resistance depended on at least two primary factors. First, its opponents worried that any form of emergency legislation would undermine the practical effect of the quota system. This is evident in the fact that advocacy groups that were closely involved in advocating for the passage of such legislation were intentional in their effort to avoid the impression that debate over such legislation was in fact a debate over the quota system (National Catholic Resettlement Council 1948).<sup>8</sup> Second, the growing animosity between the United States and the Soviet Union and the onset of the Cold War led to concerns that the admission of displaced persons would inevitably lead to the admission of communists who would seek to undermine America from within.

As early as 1946, Senator Chapman Revercomb (R-WV) contended that refugees from Eastern Europe were ignorant of the American system of government and, as they had come from communist countries, likely shared that mind-set. He stated that "it would be a tragic blunder to bring into our midst those imbued with a communistic line of thought, when one of the most important tasks of this Government today is to combat and eradicate communism from this country" (New York Times 1946, 4). Such a view contrasted with President Truman's. In a 1947 message to Congress, the president emphasized that displaced populations in Western Germany, Austria, and Italy "are not communists and are opposed

<sup>8</sup> On this point, critics of emergency legislation were not entirely in the wrong. The passage of emergency legislation in the early 1950s, paired with the expansive use of executive power to parole large groups of people into the country during the following decade, undermined the viability of the quota system, even if it did not change it in law.

to communism” (Truman 1948). For this reason, he stated, America ought to open her doors to them so that they would not be forced to return to their now communist countries of origin (ibid.). Similar arguments for and against resettlement resurfaced in the following decades, first with the onset of the Hungarian refugee crisis and then again with respect to the influx of Cubans following the rise to power of Fidel Castro (Markowitz 1973, 51-3; Harvard Law Review 2001, 907-09).

Given the resistance in Congress to emergency legislation that would resettle escapees from behind the Iron Curtain, it became almost commonplace for the executive branch to use its expansive parole power to provide haven to individuals escaping communist countries. One of the reasons for exercising such power was to demonstrate a point: People living in communist countries didn’t want to be there and by escaping to America would reveal the undesirable character of communist countries and the superiority of the West. People would vote against the Soviet Union with their feet, if not by ballot. It was also hoped that these efforts would help demonstrate the depravity of the communist bloc countries and would help reinforce in the public’s mind a national anticommunist sentiment that would provide essential support for the continuation of expensive Cold War programs (Harvard Law Review 2001).

Although congressional leadership was long concerned with the ad hoc approach taken by the executive branch to admit refugees, for several decades Congress’s concerns remained little more than that. When Congress successfully legislated on refugee matters, it generally passed legislation that was shaped by the Cold War culture. From the passage of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 to the Refugee Act of 1980, refugees were generally understood in the context of the East/West conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, for example, defined a refugee as a person who “because of persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religion, or political opinion they have fled I) from any communist or communist dominated country, or II) from within any country in the general vicinity of the Middle East.”<sup>9</sup>

It was not until the Refugee Act of 1980 that the United States formally conformed to the definition of a refugee espoused in the 1951 Convention Related to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the 1980 Act codified the legal duty of *nonrefoulement*, which prohibits the return of an individual to a country from which their life or freedom would be threatened based on characteristics that would qualify the person as a refugee. More broadly, the act “standardized the system under which refugees were admitted, clarified the objectives of the program, authorized assistance programs that would be used to achieve these objectives, and delineated the roles and responsibilities of the various federal agencies involved in the process” (Brown, 106). Nevertheless, even after its passage, the Reagan administration applied asylum and refugee policy in a way that relied on Cold War politics, particularly in relation to Central Americans fleeing the region’s civil wars (Bon Tempo 2008, 189). Cold War politics remained a central consideration in refugee resettlement.

9 INA § 203(a)(7), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(a)(7).

10 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Geneva, 28 July 1951) 198 U.N.T.S. 137, *entered into force* 22 April 1954, Art 1(A); Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (New York, 31 Jan. 1967) 606 U.N.T.S. 267, *entered into force* 4 Oct. 1967, Art. 1(2); 8 U.S.C. § 1521 (1980).

An important takeaway from the foregoing discussion is the extent to which the conceptual framework created by the Cold War helped to shape policies and actions related to refugee resettlement. Presidents from Eisenhower to Carter used their extensive power to parole for victims of communist oppression, so as to highlight the moral and political superiority of the United States. Until 1980, Congress relied on a definition of a refugee that was directly informed by the communist threat, a fact that had important implications for people who were seeking humanitarian relief. The logic of resettlement was subservient to the foreign policy objectives that were central to the Cold War — fighting communism and defeating the Soviet Union.

The end of the Cold War created a vacuum, as the conceptual framework that helped to define international relations for a half century fell apart. Several competing frameworks were developed by intellectuals and foreign policy experts to make sense of this new reality. Francis Fukuyama put forward his “end of history” theory, which asserted that the end of the Cold War had led us to “the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama 1989, 4). Charles Krauthammer argued that the United States had entered a “unipolar moment” in which it was the unchallenged superpower. With its newly established preeminence, Krauthammer argued, the United States was in a position to lay down the rules of the world order and should be willing to enforce them (Krauthammer 1990). Samuel Huntington, for his part, proposed that the fall of the Soviet Union had brought to the forefront the clash of civilizations: no longer was ideology the key to understanding the roots of international conflict, but culture.

The purpose here is not to determine which conceptual framework most accurately describes reality, but which most resonates with those in power and the constituents that function as their base of support. There is reason to believe that the Huntington thesis is the most influential paradigm at work among members of the Trump administration; this is a point that we will touch on more extensively below. So, what does the “clash of civilizations” entail?

In 1996, Samuel Huntington authored a book, the central ideas of which were published in an earlier article in *Foreign Affairs*, which promoted the view that the contemporary world is experiencing a series of fundamental conflicts that divide along cultural fault lines (Huntington 1993; Huntington 1996). With the ideological conflict of the Cold War in the past, a conflict that helped to keep in check cultural divisions from boiling over has moved to the forefront. While nation states remain important, they are increasingly eclipsed by power groupings made up of existing states that center around shared core cultural values. In broader terms, these groupings represent discrete civilizations, which include Western, Confucian (China), Islamic, Orthodox, and Latin American civilization (Huntington 1993, 5). Such entities remain ready to defend their interests in the face of challenges from other culturally defined groupings (Wang 1997, 69-71).

In a post-Cold War world, the West finds itself in a weaker position than in earlier decades, as other countries have become more willing to play an adversarial role in response to the perceived, long-standing cultural, political, and economic dominance by the West of other civilizations. With the decline of colonialism, the West has become more isolated and other areas of the world have become increasingly modernized — with respect to their



communications technology, militarily, economically, and in related matters — and thus pose a greater threat or at least an evolving independence. It is what Huntington referred to as the “the West vs. the rest” (Huntington 1996, 187-206). Central to this division is the revival of non-Western religions, which are “the most powerful manifestation of anti-Westernism in non-Western society” (Huntington 1996, 101). Not surprisingly, Huntington posited that one key area where conflict would likely occur was between the Western world and the Islamic world, because of “Western arrogance” and “Islamic intolerance” (Huntington 1997, 185)..

Although there are certainly periods and places where Christians and Muslims coexisted peacefully with one another, conflict between the Western and Islamic worlds is not a new one. Tensions between these competing religions extends back centuries, almost to the origination of Islam and its early encounters with Christendom. An influential historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, has pointed to the fact that the current tensions between the Islamic and Western worlds are not novel:

[T]he struggle between these rival systems has now lasted for some fourteen centuries. It began with the advent of Islam in the seventh century, and has continued virtually to the present day. It has consisted of a long series of attacks and counterattacks, jihads and crusades, conquests and reconquests.

(Lewis 1990, 49)

Huntington holds that, while there has been a makeshift peace that lasted through much of the Cold War, in its aftermath the long-standing conflict between the Western and Islamic World are again coming to the forefront.<sup>11</sup>

## How Did We Get Here?

The Republican Party of the immediate post-Cold War period under Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush has a very different feel than its present-day iteration under the leadership of Donald Trump. In a recent article for *The Atlantic*, Peter Beinart wrestles with this transition and points to a fundamental split that has long been present in the Republican Party, but has only recently broken into the open. Two strains of conservative thought within the Republican Party formed a functioning coalition during the Cold War. The first was comprised of a civilizational form of conservatism, embodied in the likes of Patrick Buchanan and Jerry Falwell, and an ideological conservatism expressed in the thought of someone like Senator John McCain and political neoconservatives. The former espoused a more culturally oriented perspective rooted in an Anglo-Saxon and Christian tradition, which stood up against an atheistic Soviet Union. The latter was more inclined to an Enlightenment-oriented liberalism that espoused liberty in the face of a totalitarian enemy (Beinart 2016).

The end of the Cold War eliminated the shared enemy that had originally joined these different approaches, although the eventual divorce remained a generally cordial separation

<sup>11</sup> A similar conflict was likely emergent between Western civilization and Confucian-based societies, as the latter became increasingly influential in their respective region. More specifically, China would play an increasingly adversarial role to the interests of the United States.

for several years. In the aftermath of 9/11, both parties backed George W. Bush's War on Terror, if for different reasons. With the end of the Bush presidency and the ascendance of Obama, the civilizational conservatives became more outspoken in their reaction to Islam as a wicked religion and not one that aimed at living in peaceful coexistence with the West. Simultaneously, many of these individuals began to warm to Russia and Vladimir Putin, an unthinkable betrayal to the ideological conservatives who viewed Russia as an authoritarian and an adversary (ibid.).

The rationale for the civilizational conservative's current support for Russia is their view of "Putin's Russia as Christianity's front line against the new civilizational enemy: Islam" (ibid.). From this perspective, Putin is "popular because he resists the liberal, cosmopolitan values that Muslims supposedly exploit to undermine the West" (ibid.). Donald Trump successfully tapped into these sentiments in several ways. He stoked the popular animosity toward Islam that had been growing since 9/11, particularly — but not only — in Republican circles, and repeatedly emphasized the threat that Islam posed to American values. He lauded Putin's leadership style and, during the second presidential debate, said that Assad and his Russian backers "were killing ISIS" and that it would be great "if we got along with Russia so that we could fight ISIS together" (S.N. 2016).<sup>12</sup> Many of his appointees and top-level advisors have reinforced one or more aspects of this general perspective.

One of the key advisors to Trump is Stephen Bannon, the former executive chairman at *Breitbart News*. In his daily radio show, Bannon often used rhetoric that reinforced the Clash of Civilizations paradigm, particularly as it pertained to the incompatibility between the Western and Islamic worlds.<sup>13</sup> During one interview, for example, he highlighted and reinforced the growing frustration in some quarters with the federal government's admission of Muslim refugees into the United States. He asserted that the West is in the middle of an expanding war against Islam that will take place on a number of fronts, including — almost certainly — a new and significant war in the Middle East. This threat, he said, is compounded by the fact that there is a "rot" at the center of the Judeo-Christian West which will, presumably, make the battle more difficult to win (Bannon 2015). Several months later, when discussing the European migration crisis, he referred to it as a "Muslim invasion" that is carrying out a process of civilizational jihad, to which the ruling elites are oblivious or even openly courting (Bannon 2016c).

The emphasis on an existing Judeo-Christian culture and its importance for Western life is, for Bannon, a point of emphasis. In a 2014 speech at a conference held at the Vatican, which was sponsored by the Human Dignity Institute, he highlighted what he understood to be an ongoing process of secularization in the West, and the corrosive role that popular

12 Trump's admiration of Putin and his expressed desire for warmer relations with Russia is a digression from the conceptual framework promoted by Huntington in his CoC paradigm. For Huntington, Russia represents an Orthodox culture that has for centuries lived in tension with Western Christianity.

13 Bannon has also emphasized the burgeoning conflict between the United States and China. Although it is not directly pertinent here, such rhetoric reinforces the clash of civilizations paradigm. Huntington stressed that a China-US conflict was a very real threat in the coming decades. At one point, for example, Bannon stated that there is "no doubt" that the United States and China will go to war in the next five to 10 years. Drawing the Islamic and Chinese-threat together, he noted in another show that "you have an expansionist Islam and you have an expansionist China. Right? They are motivated. They're arrogant. They're on the march. And they think the Judeo-Christian west is on the retreat" (Bannon 2016a; Bannon 2016b).

culture has played in this regard.<sup>14</sup> When this trend is paired with the reality that we are in an “outright war against Jihadist Islamic fascism,” and are at the “beginning stages of a global conflict,” the West is seen to be in a disadvantaged position; it has lost one of the central roots that gave rise to its greatness and ability to effectively fight back: its Christian tradition (Feder 2014).

The encroaching Islamic threat is also at the core of the worldview promoted by Sebastian Gorka, a deputy assistant to the president and former national security editor at *Breitbart News*. In his book *Defeating Jihad*, Gorka (2016) argues that global jihadism is a new form of totalitarianism akin to communism or fascism, but perhaps even more dangerous. It is global, and thus not bound to a state or clearly defined geographic region, and absolutist in its approach. In service to Allah, global jihadism has permission to engage in the mass murder of infidels or their enslavement. The ultimate purpose, Gorka argues, is to bring the world under its complete control. Thus, confrontation with global jihadists is inevitable. The book provides Gorka’s preliminary plan to develop a strategy how the United States should proceed. His commentary also presents an appeal to a Christian worldview that will be required to engage effectively the battle ahead.

A third advisor to the president, Michael Anton, was named in early 2017 as a staff member on the National Security Council. In September 2016, Anton published a pseudonymous endorsement of Trump in an article titled “The Flight 93 Election,” a reference to one of the hijacked planes on 9/11 in which passengers fought back in effort to retake the plane (Warren 2017). Anton used Flight 93 to illustrate the stakes that the American people faced in the election — fight back and vote against Hillary Clinton or die. A vote for Trump, he argued, might lead to the same result, but at least there would be a chance that we might prevail. In short, a “Hillary Clinton presidency is Russian Roulette with a semi-auto. With Trump, at least you can spin the cylinder and take your chances” (Publius Decius Mus 2016a).

In an article published six months earlier under the same pseudonym, Anton attempted to take a first step at clarifying and systematizing some of the positions outlined by Trump in his campaign. While the essay is wide ranging, two key points deserve attention — the first on Islam and the second on mass migration. With respect to Islam, *Publius* remarks that “Islam and the modern West are incompatible,” and that “when we welcome them en masse into our country they change us — and not for the better” (Publius Decius Mus 2016b). Furthermore, “only an insane society . . . would have increased Muslim immigration after the September 11th attacks. Yet that is exactly what the United States did” (ibid.).<sup>15</sup>

By this view, the threat in the civilizational conflict scenario is not only an external one, as disparate civilization orders come into contact, and at times conflict, with each other.

14 The Human Dignity Institute is think tank established in 2008 by Benjamin Harnwell for the express purpose of upholding an authentic understanding of human dignity rooted in the Christian tradition and against growing secular intolerance toward Christians. See <http://www.dignitishumananae.com/>.

15 Other examples could be provided of Trump administration officials who espouse a Manichean vision of the conflict between the Islamic world and the Western one. Retired General Michael Flynn, the short-lived national security advisor, for example, expressed at different times his conviction that Islamic militancy is an existential threat to the West and that sharia law is spreading across the United States. (Rosenberg and Haberman 2016) The foregoing commentary provides a very preliminary investigation into the way that the CoC paradigm has influenced the development of migration-related policies in the Trump administration.

Inherent to the CoC paradigm is the concern that the mass migration of people from one civilization to another can bring with it threats to the common order and undermine the cultural underpinnings of a society. The migration of Muslims to the United States, for example, could result in domestic conflicts that emerge along cultural fault lines given the different hierarchies of values that each culture presupposes. Compounding the problem, per this perspective, are the national security concerns that would come along with such an influx.

It is worth noting here as well, however briefly, the application of Huntington's thesis to broader issues of migration. In addition to the threat that Islam poses, substantial migration from Latin America to the United States could bring about a notable clash between the underlying cultural convictions of these disparate civilizations. Language differences that accrue through large migration flows could lead to a bifurcated society that undercuts any sort of coherent national identity. Huntington's concerns do not apply simply to the Western/Islamic divide but are more comprehensive. This fact is most clearly spelled out in one of his latter books, *Who Are We?* (Huntington 2004a).

This book is in important respects an application of some of his ideas expressed in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of a World Order* to an American context. Huntington tries to unpack key characteristics of American life, including the English language, its Anglo-Protestant Christianity, its embrace of an English concept of the rule of law, and its emphasis on the individual (Huntington, 2004a, xv-xvii). In the closing decades of the twentieth century, he argues, many of these foundational elements of American life have come under assault, and multiculturalism has been exalted. The question of whether the United States will remain a country with a single national language, and a core Anglo-Protestant culture is very much in doubt. As Huntington (1997, 204) noted, "The issue is not whether Europe will be Islamicized or the United States Hispanicized. It is whether Europe and America will become cleft societies encompassing two distinct and largely separate communities from two different civilizations," which turns on how effective host countries are at integrating immigrant populations (.).

The perceived failure to integrate the large numbers of migrants who have come to the United States from all over the world in the past half century has endangered the shared heritage that had helped make America great in times past. The willingness to allow admission to thousands of Muslims who espouse a cultural and religious system that is in contradiction to a traditional American culture puts Americans at risk. These preoccupations are also evident in thinking of the millions of voters who supported Trump's presidential campaign and are at least, in part, what contributed to his grassroots support. Such support is not rooted merely in an emotional expression of fear and loathing of migrants and Muslims, but in a series of "pre-political" commitments — however flawed they may be under further examination — that commit people to a certain way of looking at the world, and thus bias them to certain political positions.

## **The Restrictionist Impulse in American Life**

Making up 26 percent of the overall electorate and having turned 82 percent in favor of Donald Trump, the white evangelical vote was a crucial factor in the general election. One

can extrapolate a kind of trinity of factors that fed into evangelical support for Trump, and which he took advantage of during his campaign: the fear of Islam and the assertion that Muslims pose a national security threat, the cultural insecurities that have emerged among many white Christian Republicans in particular, and economic stagnation. Each of these factors are worth examining, particularly considering the way that each of them contributed to the development of an electorate that was broad enough to help Donald Trump win the presidency.

As of 2015, Muslims made up about one percent of the US population (3.3 million), which is on track to double by 2050, at which point in time Islam is expected to surpass Judaism as the second largest religious group in the United States (Lipka 2015). Over half of this growth is attributable to migration (Mohamed 2016). Muslims also comprise an increasing percentage of immigrants granted green cards, from about 5 percent in 1995 to 10 percent in 2012 (Pew Research 2013). Though still a relatively small population living in the United States, the Muslim community has received increased scrutiny by a range of organizations vying to determine the American public's attitude toward them.

A February 2017 report released by Pew Forum provided a thermometer rating for a range of religious groups, which measured the warmth or coolness that Americans felt in general toward specific religions. The higher the number, the warmer the feelings. As a mean rating, Muslims scored a 48, which was the coolest rating among all religions tested, falling shy even of atheism (Pew Research Center 2017). Broken down along demographic lines, those aged 18-29 expressed the greatest warmth toward Muslims, with a mean rating of 58, while those aged 65 and older the coolest (44) (ibid.).

Of perhaps the greatest importance here is the support or opposition given by religious affiliation and partisanship. White evangelicals rated Islam at a chilly 37 degrees, and even members of the white mainline were relatively cool toward Muslims (45) (ibid.). Republicans also expressed a coolness toward Islam, providing a mean rating of 39, up from 33 just three years ago (ibid.). This contrasted with the opinion held by Democrats whose mean score was 56 (ibid.). Given the significant support provided to Donald Trump by white evangelicals there is reason to believe that his harsh rhetoric pertaining to Muslim refugees and immigrants might have benefited him. His support among that population points to the fact that he struck a chord with these populations, on this issue and likely a host of others. Given his efforts to appeal to evangelical Christians, it is perhaps not surprising that he promised to protect Christian minorities affected by the crisis in Syria (Burke 2017).

Similar partisan divides are evident with respect to the perception of Islam: A joint study by Brookings and the Public Religion Research Institute found that while 79 percent of Republicans, and 83 percent of Trump supporters, believe that the basic value system of Islam is at odds with American values, only 42 percent of Democrats thought the same way (Jones et al. 2016, 44-48). Perhaps not surprisingly, the same poll reports that 66 percent of Republicans (78% of Trump supporters) oppose admitting Syrian refugees into the United States (ibid.). Support for a ban of this sort correlates with concerns related to terrorism; 57 percent of Americans who report being very worried about terrorism favor a ban (ibid.). Finally, 64 percent of Republicans reported supporting a temporary ban on Muslim immigration across the board (ibid.). Given the heightened sense among



Republicans that Muslims represent both a national security threat via terrorism and a longer term cultural threat due to the competing cultural values that they uphold, it is not surprising that Trump's nativist rhetoric found substantial support.

As important as national security, the perceived cultural threat that immigrants pose was a second factor in Trump's appeal; it is a threat that extends to other types of migrant populations. Nearly six in 10 Trump supporters, and 51 percent of Republicans overall, reported the opinion that immigrants were changing American society "a lot," and of those who shared this belief, 74 percent say it has been for the worse (ibid., 50). Nearly six in 10 white Americans express discomfort when they are around immigrants who do not speak English (ibid., 13). Many white evangelicals and conservative Republicans have a precarious sense of place in American culture. Alongside the perceived onslaught of secularism and changing morals, the influx of immigrants is yet another blow to their long-standing preeminence in defining American cultural standards.

In short, the percentage of white evangelicals who believe that America is no longer a Christian nation jumped from 48 percent in 2012 to 59 percent in 2016 (ibid.). The perceived loss of Christianity as a defining marker for US identity among white Christians — who had taken it for granted — could be a singularly disruptive force on the American political scene. Perhaps most telling is the percentage of Republican voters (68%) who believe that things have changed for the worse since the 1950s, compared to the percentage of Democrats who are convinced that things have changed for the *better* (66%) (ibid.). Efforts to reclaim America's glorious past, while perhaps expressive of nostalgia, is a powerful, politically exploitable reservoir. When such decline is viewed not merely as the product of an expansive secularism, but also a corrosive foreign influence brought about by an influx of migrants who were formed in a different cultural setting, the likelihood that nativism will emerge increases substantially.<sup>16</sup> Robert Jones has referred to this process of dissolution as signifying the end of white Christian America (Jones 2016).

As a part of this worldview, not only do Muslims pose an external national security threat *vis-à-vis* terrorism, but an internal one insofar as they threaten the cultural and political foundations that have given the United States its distinctive character. This is a story as old as America. Migrants have often been deemed threats to the existing political and social system. In the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, the fear was that a theocracy would be created as Catholics entered in large numbers and fomented revolution. By the mid-twentieth century, restrictionist sentiment hinged partially on anti-Semitism, and the overlapping concern that many Jews admitted from Europe might harbor communist sympathies. In recent decades, the threat of Islamic-inspired terrorism has become an overriding concern for many Americans.

Beyond the cultural and political threat, the economic threat that migrants pose also plays an important role. Tucked in between terrorism and immigration as the first and third priorities for white evangelicals when casting a vote for president in 2016 was the economy. The Great Recession, which began in December 2007, took a significant toll on communities across the nation. The average income for evangelical Christians today remains 1.6 percent

<sup>16</sup> Per the Brookings study, 83 percent of Trump supporters (and 74% of Republican voters) asserted that America needed to be protected against foreign influences that were doing America harm (ibid.).

lower than in 2007, and 2.4 percent lower than the high reached in the 1990s. While white evangelicals still fare better than their non-white evangelical counterparts, many have failed to return to their previous standard of living and feel a sense of having been left behind. Donald Trump's promise to "Make America Great Again" played into these insecurities by promising that he would take responsibility for eliminating them (Reynaud 2017).

Perhaps not surprisingly, a large majority of Trump supporters (80%) thought of immigrants as burdens on the economy because they take Americans' jobs, healthcare, and housing (Jones et al. 2016, 46-47). Taken together, concerns related to national security, cultural dissolution, and economic insecurity contribute to a sensibility that can very easily become enmeshed in a narrative that is nativist and exclusionary. Countering this worldview will require proponents of migration and refugee resettlement to engage these issues on a variety of levels, through direct advocacy with elected officials and engagement with everyday Americans who are concerned about the danger that migrants pose to America.

## Restoring Support for Refugee Resettlement

Critics of the Trump administration — as well as some supporters — who are supportive of humanitarian migration into the United States are understandably concerned with some of the policies he tried to implement during his early weeks in office. To take one example, his proposed reduction in the number of refugees to 50,000 during FY 2017 will likely remain the standard for the foreseeable future. This is a reduction from an approximately 85,000 resettled in FY 2016 and down further from the proposed 110,000 that then President Obama hoped to resettle in FY 2017. Taking FY 2016 as the marker, over the course of the next four years, this reduction would total approximately 140,000 people who might otherwise be resettled but are stuck in refugee camps and urban refugee situations around the world. Compare this to the fact that during calendar year 2016, the rest of the world resettled a total of about 41,000 refugees (UNHCR 2017).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, refugee resettlement complements other permanent solutions for refugees and can be used to secure greater integration opportunities for refugees in host communities abroad. For these reasons, resettlement reductions have consequences that extend well beyond the lives of those eligible for resettlement.

The difference between the number proposed by Obama for FY16 and the number Trump has proposed for FY17 is roughly equivalent to the number of refugees resettled in every other country. And, these announced reductions come despite the record 65 million forcibly displaced people in the world, a number that includes more than 21 million refugees (ibid.). This fact makes any further reduction in the number of refugees resettled all the more significant, and points to the need to expand the number resettled so as to better respond to a need that is difficult to ignore. How do we do that?

17 To be fair, with the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis, many countries, including some notable examples in Europe, have been far more open to the admission of asylum seekers than has been the United States. As much as the United States might like to applaud itself for the number of refugees that it has traditionally admitted compared to other countries, its reticence to provide an equally generous asylum policy is worth noting. Competing approaches to the admission of asylum seekers versus the admission of refugees through the more formalized resettlement system should be examined more closely.

There is no doubt that effective advocacy is an important first step in this process, if for no other reason than to resist the further legislative expansion of restrictionist sentiment. Failure to advocate in favor of one's own community or values leaves the door open for others to advocate on your behalf, and not always in your favor. First and foremost, it is important to advocate for generous refugee admissions program that provides funding adequate to meet the needs involved in the resettlement process. This also includes maintaining suitable foreign aid funding; any significant cuts to organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees by the United States risks seriously disrupting the ability of UNHCR to screen potential refugees and to provide support and care for individuals who are stuck in refugee-like situations. Richard Gowan, an expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations, noted that in 2016, the United States contributed \$1.5 billion of the \$4 billion UNHCR budget. Cutting this contribution would "leave a gaping hole that other big donors would struggle to fill" (Lynch 2017). It will also be important to help mobilize minority communities and urge them to be more politically active so that they can help to shape political decision making on the state and national level (Young 2017). Finally, it is crucial that advocates urge administrators of the refugee program to remain faithful to its original, nondiscriminatory purpose of protecting the persecuted, including victims of religious persecution, at a time when large numbers of Americans mistakenly view Muslims as a threat to their culture and security.

In addition to direct advocacy with lawmakers on Capitol Hill and the administration, it is important that proponents of refugee resettlement engage in grassroots organizing and educational efforts in local communities. This could include efforts to publicize the tangible benefits that refugees and migrants make to their local communities, and highlight the fiscal consequences of their exclusion. Promoting integration on the local level will also prove helpful to counteract criticisms that migrant communities self-segregate and demonstrate an indifference or aversion to becoming active participants in their communities. This will require that religious institutions, immigration advocates, nonprofits and other organizations better understand what contributes to effective integration and how local organizations are succeeding, or failing, in this regard (Kerwin and Barron 2017). Getting a better grasp on these various facets and disseminating them publicly via various media and other outlets will be of assistance in the advocacy efforts and, hopefully, help to alleviate some of the tensions that emerge on the local level between native and refugee populations.

While the role and responsibility of advocates to respond to attacks on the resettlement system is crucial, policymakers have the primary responsibility to approach this issue in a clearheaded and responsible manner. In particular, they ought to refrain from exploiting existing cultural fears of religious or other minority groups who are admitted into the United States via the refugee resettlement system. Given the positions of power that elected officials occupy, it would be particularly unfortunate if they were to mischaracterize the intentions and aspirations of refugee groups for political ends. Instead, they should recognize the generally bipartisan support that the refugee resettlement system has held and, in doing so, work more closely together to ensure that the system is further strengthened and supported, while ensuring that national security concerns are addressed.

It is also important to recall that culture — broadly understood — will play a preeminent role in the promotion and establishment of policy, whether in the field of migration, poverty,

family, or some other arenas. Setting legislative agendas, promoting communication strategies, developing talking points, and coordinating advocacy efforts are important aspects of the policymaking process, but more crucial still is the importance of shaping a culture so that it is conducive to — in this instance — a more generous approach to refugees and migrants.

The centrality of culture in the legislative process might very well require that institutions that are interested in shaping legislation to the benefit of vulnerable migrant populations rethink their strategies. This could include less emphasis on advocacy efforts aimed at Congress and the administration, and more emphasis on engaging people that inhabit rural America, small towns, and big cities across the country. Cultural and personal formation would thus take center stage, while lobbying efforts and grassroots mobilization in favor of a specific legislative agenda would take a secondary — albeit important — place in the process.<sup>18</sup> An effort to rethink the fundamental narratives that guide our decision making and thus our self-understanding as a nation, should become the priority in the public engagement of civic associations, faith communities, and other organizations interested in the public square. There are a variety of academically oriented resources and publications that have focused on these types of issues, but it is important that more work be done to engage the wider community on fundamental questions of national identity.

How do people understand the world, the nation, and their place in them? What kinds of paradigms and conceptual frameworks are various interest groups and individuals using to make sense of their lives and the situation in which they find themselves? Who is promoting these conceptual frameworks and for what end? Are there alternative ways at looking at the world, what are they, and how can they be more effectively promoted in the public square? The cultural underpinnings — the pre-political conditions — will continue to shape the context in which specific legislative proposals and administrative actions will be deemed viable, elections will be won and lost, and policies will be shaped that affect the lives of millions, including refugees.

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<sup>18</sup> It would be a mistake to conclude that lobbying and cultural formation are mutually exclusive, but the latter should be, in my view, prioritized. If effective, efforts that are aimed at achieving migrant-friendly policies will be much easier to achieve.

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