December 1, 2015

Dear Senator/Representative,

We write to express our opposition to proposals that would effectively halt the resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in the United States following the terrorist attacks in Paris. We believe that America can and should continue to provide refuge to those fleeing violence and persecution without compromising the security and safety of our nation. To do otherwise would be contrary to our nation's traditions of openness and inclusivity, and would undermine our core objective of combating terrorism.

The process that refugees undergo in order to be deemed eligible for resettlement in the United States is robust and thorough. They are vetted more intensively than any other category of traveler, and this vetting is conducted while they are still overseas. Those seeking resettlement are screened by national and international intelligence agencies; their fingerprints and other biometric data are checked against terrorist and criminal databases; and they are interviewed several times over the course of the vetting process, which takes 18-24 months and often longer.

Given the stringent measures in place, we are especially concerned by proposals that would derail or further delay the resettlement of Iraqis who risked their lives to work with the U.S. military and other U.S. organizations. These refugees were given priority access to U.S. resettlement under the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act. The United States has a moral obligation to protect them.

We must remain vigilant to keep our nation safe from terrorists, whether foreign or homegrown, and from violence in all its forms. At the same time, we must remain true to our values. These are not mutually exclusive goals. In fact, resettlement initiatives help advance U.S. national security interests by supporting the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees.

Refugees are victims, not perpetrators, of terrorism. Categorically refusing to take them only feeds the narrative of ISIS that there is a war between Islam and the West, that Muslims are not welcome in the United States and Europe, and that the ISIS caliphate is their true home. We must make clear that the United States rejects this worldview by continuing to offer refuge to the world's most vulnerable people, regardless of their religion or nationality.

Sincerely,

(Names in alphabetical order)

Madeleine K. Albright
Former Secretary of State

Samuel R. Berger
Former National Security Advisor

Zbigniew K. Brzezinski
Former National Security Advisor

General George W. Casey, Jr., U.S. Army (Ret.)
Former Chief of Staff, U.S. Army

Henry A. Kissinger
Former Secretary of State
Former National Security Advisor

General Richard B. Myers, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)
Former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Janet A. Napolitano
Former Secretary of Homeland Security

Leon E. Panetta
Former Secretary of Defense
Former Director, Central Intelligence Agency

Michael Chertoff
Former Secretary of Homeland Security

William S. Cohen
Former Secretary of Defense

Stephen J. Hadley
Former National Security Advisor

Chuck Hagel
Former Secretary of Defense

General Michael V. Hayden, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)
Former Director, Central Intelligence Agency

General James L. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)
Former National Security Advisor
Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander
Former Commandant of the Marine Corps

General David H. Petraeus, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Former Director, Central Intelligence Agency
Former Commander, U.S. Central Command

William J. Perry
Former Secretary of Defense

Brent Scowcroft
Former National Security Advisor

George P. Shultz
Former Secretary of State

Admiral James G. Stavridis, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander
Former Commander, U.S. Southern Command

General John W. Vessey, Jr., U.S. Army (Ret.)
Former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff