

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

From: Anisha Talreja, National Security Advisor

Date: August 12, 2021

Topic: Response to Afghan Refugee Crisis

ISSUE:

The issue is how to most effectively intervene in combating the displacement of Afghan refugees seeking asylum from terrorist organizations, namely the Taliban.

BACKGROUND:

While the United States had pledged to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by the end of this month, this is a decision that must be reevaluated as the Taliban increases their stronghold over the region once more, worsening political strife and causing millions of refugees to flee the country and seek asylum in various states, particularly in Turkey, where roughly 2,000 people flood its eastern border each day. Other states including Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have long harbored Afghan refugees at capacity limits, and our assessment of current circumstances concludes that aid with both refugees that previously arrived as well as those at the border currently is necessary. These issues are both of humanitarian importance and of strategic interest to the United States; it is important to solve the refugee crisis so as to not weaken vital allies in the Middle East that house U.S. military bases and troops and to maintain bilateral relations with them.

DISCUSSION:

When considering possible actions, it is important to remember the history of the crisis in Afghanistan. The Taliban have long been a cause of instability in the region, affecting not only Afghanistan, but also its neighbors. This continued cycle of poor governance paving the path for groups such as the Taliban to dominate the region poses the question of whether we should continue to send troops into the region. While it may take time to solidify our military approach to the crisis, our previous approach to the Syrian refugee crisis focused solely on military victory over terrorist organization ISIS, which inadvertently allowed the situation to continue and escalate to devastating levels. In facing the current crisis, we have reached the conclusion that

our approach must be multifaceted, with close communication between our Departments of State and Defense as we proceed.

A possible course of action would establish communications with Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, as they are the locations most overwhelmed with refugees. There are several factors that are important to bear in mind throughout these discussions. Firstly, it is important to consider the implications of reopening discussion of how to treat existing refugee issues in the areas. Many states around the world are still grappling with the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19, and as such, it will be difficult to obtain aid for the newest refugees. We must be careful throughout our discourse to preserve our diplomatic relations with these countries. In fact, this situation may prove to present us with an opportunity to repair and strengthen our relations with Turkey. The state runs an airport in Kabul and has asked the U.S. to cover operating costs. This could be both a point of leverage in discussions to convince Turkey to continue accepting refugees and another band-aid in strengthening relations with the country. Russia has recently capitalized on weakening U.S. Turkey relations by supplying the country with its S-400 air defense system. This move signifies the beginning of an approach to establish military relations with Turkey, and if the current relations between U.S. and Turkey do not change, it could jeopardize our chief military bases and operations in the Middle East.

As this is a global humanitarian crisis, it would be appropriate to request a special session of the UN General Assembly to delegate the responsibilities of both funding and hosting aid efforts. While this would surely draw global attention to the issue at hand, we must anticipate reluctance from countries still shouldering the burden of COVID-19 to encourage discussions of spending. To that extent, many countries may also be averse to encouraging mass migration by spreading host responsibilities. Instead, they may prefer monetarily facilitating containment of refugees at a site in the vicinity of Afghanistan. Taking into account these perspectives in combination with the length of the process of convening the General Assembly, a different course of action is encouraged. While the U.S. could approach the crisis unilaterally, if actions are taken too soon, outcomes could prove to be disastrous given the fact that we are removing all military presence from the region at the end of the month and will thus have limited monitoring capabilities. Still, it is important that we take individual measures eventually to maintain a credible deterrent against hostile organizations in the region that have threatened civilian life. Instead, a separate but similar conference would ensure parallel cooperation. In addition, if proposed at a large assembly such as the one in mind here, the idea of funding aid efforts in another country could become popular and could make enough of a difference to make the idea feasible.

OPTIONS:

1. Request a special session of the UN General Assembly to delegate efforts to fund and host aid.
2. Take unilateral actions including modifying our immigration policy and maintaining our military presence.
3. Engage in direct discussions with Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and host a conference with UN member nations to discuss how to best contain the refugee crisis within a specified radius of the conflict.

RECOMMENDATION:

The best course of action is option 3, as it will most efficiently spark conversation about the issue that takes into account numerous factors including economic hardship, COVID-19 health concerns, and stability of the Middle East. In addition, such a conference could provide the United States with the opportunity to facilitate, repair, and strengthen relations with other states in strategic geopolitical locations. In the near future, we can pursue option 2 after planning and discussion about our military presence in the region.