

# U.S. must lead world in resolving Syrian crisis

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Photo: Stefan Rousseau, AFP / Getty Images

British Prime Minister David Cameron (left) meets Syrian refugee families at a tented settlement camp in the Bekaa Valley on the Lebanese-Syrian border.

Cameron arrived in Beirut Monday for a one-day visit to discuss the Syrian refugee crisis gripping the Middle East and Europe, a Lebanese government source said. Cameron was to visit a refugee camp in the Bekaa valley in eastern Lebanon, the source said. The country hosts more than 1.1 million Syrian refugees.

When hundreds of thousands of Syrians flee their country to escape death from shelling, bombings or beheadings and risk drowning, rape, robbery or torture by smugglers in order to reach Europe, the alarm bell cannot be louder. Syria's neighbors — Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and, to a lesser extent, Iraq — are no longer able to absorb the more than 4 million refugees they've received since the crisis began. Even the Mediterranean Sea is saturated, after thousands have perished in its waters.

How and why did it all happen? How could humanity allow this refugee crisis to become the worst since World War II? The Syrian crisis, which began when Syrians began to demand justice from their authoritarian government, has been turned into a disturbing proxy war of competing international interests. There are no easily identifiable warring parties — a situation that is most conducive for radicalization to grow and spread. All regional and international powers have become culprits in the crisis, and hence in the creation of this humanitarian disaster.

But mainly, it's the shortsightedness of some rich, oil-producing Arab countries whose financing backs many of the warring parties that are responsible for the obliteration of Syrian society. Rather than spending incalculable resources on the mujahedeen to fight in Syria (as they did in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion), these nations

should open their borders to their Arab and Muslim brethren from the country they thoughtlessly helped destroy.

The cost of this vast tragedy reveals the ineptness of the international system that should have prevented it from unfolding. While most fleeing refugees can be said to be genuinely searching for a better, safer life, can anyone guarantee that ISIS members will not try to join the river of refugees into Europe to achieve some of its goals? Can anyone be sure that ISIS, and like-minded groups, will not manipulate the agony endured by many on their way to Europe, as was the case in Hungary, to mobilize new recruits into radicalization?

By all accounts, the displacement of many Syrians, Iraqis and Palestinians during the past few years has widened the base of radicalization in the region. Indeed, unless alternatives that replace despair with hope are introduced, radicalization becomes inevitable during war.

The refugee crisis cannot be solved until the political quagmire in Syria is settled. That requires both international vision and vigor. The United States has a greater role to play by assuming the moral high ground and leading the solution to this debacle. It must not only open its doors to more refugees, it must also offer aid to European countries taking them in. In this defining moment in human history, the U.S. is in a unique position to prevail upon its wealthy friends in the Arab world to get their act together. They must stop financing or exacerbating conflicts in Syria and, in collaboration with the United Nations, develop and implement a comprehensive Marshall-like plan to resurrect Syria's

fractured society.

The exodus of refugees we've seen in the past few weeks may be just the tip of the iceberg. The Arab Spring, celebrated four years ago, could turn into an Arab flood, with millions of refugees seeking safety and more dignified lives. Will they be welcomed? The dangers inherent in this saga are real and are ignored only at humanity's peril.

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