**May 29, 2018**

**A PROPOSAL TO EXPAND**

***THE THREE GREAT FEARS COMPENDIUM***

**TO COUNTER BIAS AND MISCONCEPTION**

**IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD**

**(1) Introduction**

The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees (“MFA”) has prepared *The* *Three Great Fears*, a succinct compilation of relevant data that responds to what it has identified as the primary driversthat negatively influence public perceptions and inhibit rational and humane public policies toward Syrian refugees. These include:

* Fear of negative economic impact,
* Fear of terrorism, and
* Islamophobia.

The intent of *The Three Great Fears* project (the “Project”) is to collaborate with Being the Blessing Foundation and the International Initiatives in Migrant and Refugee Education (“IIMRE”) by engaging the research and intellectual resources of their members to expand the scope – and the impact – of MFA’s initial work.

The Project would occur in two phases:

1. conducting research to produce a comprehensive report with respect to the United States, by expanding upon the research and analyses that MFA has previously cited and conducting a comprehensive review of additional relevant sources.
2. utilizing the United States version of the report as a template, engage foreign universities to conduct research regarding the comparable fears and misperceptions in their respective counties and formulate the research-based responses that help to support more informed and rational refugee-related policies.

**(2) Replacing Fear and Misconception with Fact-Based Research**

The Syrian civil war has created a humanitarian crisis of inconceivable scale. Despite the enormity of this crisis, the response from the international community has been inadequate, and public support on the issue has wavered. The aim of *The Three Great Fears* project is to replace bias and misconception with substantiated facts and to move public opinion towards greater understanding and acceptance of Syrian refugees.

Fears about Syrian refugees have been consistently observed across the many countries that are hosts to Syrian refugees or to which Syrian refugees seek entry. In an international study on public perceptions of refugees by the Tent Foundation,[[1]](#footnote-1) 64% of respondents indicated that they were concerned about the cost of resettling refugees, while 65% expressed concerns about security and an increased risk of terrorism. Additionally, there are unique concerns about Islam, which nearly half of respondents associated with extremism and intolerance.

The critical purpose of *The Three Great Fears* is to replace this bias, fear, and misconception with proven, substantiated research -- and to promote rational, fact-based discourse. Using data drawn from sources such as the World Bank, the Brookings Institute, and the International Rescue Committee, *The Three Great Fears* reviews the economic benefits resulting from refugee resettlement, the financial successes of Syrians from prior waves of immigration, the extremely thorough vetting of refugees in the U.S., and the history of successful integration and assimilation by Muslim Americans, among an array of other factors.

MFA has utilized *The Three Great Fears* in presentations and speaking events to provide a framework within which to address these concerns in a systematic way that permits information to supersede emotion. MFA has found that compiling and structuring the data in this readily accessible format promotes rational discourse in contexts ranging from casual discussions, to awareness-raising events in community and religious contexts -- and even in advocacy efforts with elected officials and governmental bodies.

**(3) The Project**

The bulk of the research compiled thus far by MFA has focused on these misconceptions in the United States. MFA proposes a two-phase approach to expanding the impact of *The Three Great Fears Compendium*:

1. **Phase One: The United States**

While *The Three Great Fears* has been an effective tool for MFA in the U.S., we believe that its impact can be further enhanced by both additional research and the incorporation of Syrian refugee stories. It is essential to promote greater understanding of the facts about Syrian refugee resettlement to American audiences, as a May 2018 Pew Research Center study shows a decline in the public’s belief that that the U.S. has a responsibility to welcome refugees.[[2]](#footnote-2)

A broader and deeper review of available resources will enable the study to provide greater analysis of the economic, social and cultural impact of refugee resettlement, and Syrian refugee resettlement in particular. Likewise, to be current, there should be additional examination, for example, of the most recent arguments regarding the need for expanded refugee vetting and a review of recent studies, such as a study of international terrorism recently promulgated by the Department of Justice.

In addition, the impact of the assembled data could be significantly enhanced by the inclusion of pertinent stories from Syrian refugees: their motivations, their struggles, their successes, and their regard for the countries that have welcomed them. The Tent Foundation’s international survey found that the main driver of increased sympathy for the plight of refugees was exposure to information about refugee hardships. Stories will give the facts a human context – and, specifically, one that is not at all different from the stories of many American families. The Syrian refugee stories could be presented in both written narratives and video testimonials. They could also be supported by others (e.g., neighbors, community and religious leaders) in their respective locales who can attest to the benefits of refugee resettlement.

To accomplish this Phase One, MFA proposes to work in partnership with one or more U.S. universities identified by CFIU and the IFCU that would: (i) conduct the necessary factual research and data analysis; and (ii) collect, record and edit refugee (and other) stories that would be used to give context to the analytical data.

**(b) Phase Two: International Expansion**

MFA’s work with respect to *The Three Great Fears* has largely been limited to the U.S. However, we believe that similar (although not identical) concerns inhibit rational refugee resettlement policies in other countries. Thus, the need exists to adapt *The Three Great Fears* to the economic, social, cultural, and legal circumstances of a range of other countries. Also, as noted with respect to the U.S., personal stories will likewise help to give context and even greater significance to the research and analytics.

To accomplish Phase Two, MFA proposes to work with Being the Blessing and IIMRE to identify appropriate partner universities in each represented country. The identified universities, using *The Three Great Fears* as a template, would conduct the necessary research and analysis to produce comparable documents to identify and address the prejudices, concerns and fears – and provide responses that are appropriate to the economic, social, cultural, and legal circumstances in each of their respective countries.

**(4) Audience**

Studies from various countries have shown that a significant but less vocal portion of the population has humanitarian impulses, but also harbors concerns about immigrants and refugees. In a report by British Future,[[3]](#footnote-3) they estimate that approximately 50% of the British public fall into the category of the “Anxious Middle,” a group that understands the benefits of immigration but worries about the pressures caused by large-scale immigration. Similarly in Germany, according to a study by Purpose,[[4]](#footnote-4) 61% of the population can be considered the “Conflicted Middle” when it comes to perceptions of refugees, a group ranging from “economic pragmatists” to “moderate opponents” of refugee intake. Those holding these more centrist views can be moved to support Syrian refugees with the right information and messaging.

**(5) Management and Dissemination**

We envision that MFA will work collaboratively with the university participants in both Phases I and II, to coordinate the effort and help ensure academic integrity and consistency. For these purposes, it may be necessary for MFA to add a part-time or full-time person to its current staff to assist with administration.

With regard to dissemination, as the research is being undertaken, MFA, in conjunction with Being the Blessing and IIMRE, would determine how best to disseminate the findings in each of the represented countries. Among the likely vehicles to be pursued would be:

1. Op-eds in national publications
2. Speaking tours and workshops in various cities, potentially hosted by participating universities
3. Distribution to constituent organizations of MFA, Being the Blessing and IIMRE
4. Dissemination to select refugee advocacy and resettlement groups, educational institutions, and secular and faith-based community and civic groups, as well as to appropriate governmental bodies

1. <https://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Tent_GlobalReport_V6.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/24/republicans-turn-more-negative-toward-refugees-as-number-admitted-to-u-s-plummets/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/How-To-Talk-About-Immigration-FINAL.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.moreincommon.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/More-in-Common-Germany-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)