A FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY GAP:
THE RESETTLEMENT OF OUR ALLIES

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DEDICATION

To my Love, words will never suffice my feelings for you. You continue to remind me that I am the luckiest guy in the world. This journey has been one hell of a ride! To my children, I hope this research and accomplishment demonstrates that dreams can come true. And to my mom, you are my hero.
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ABSTRACT

When U.S. foreign policy involves overt intervention abroad, the employment of local nationals is common and necessary. Foreign nationals who work for the U.S., in some instances, are threatened due to that relationship. In specific cases, policymakers have authorized and funded the immigration of foreign nationals who had worked for and with the U.S. and were targeted due to that relationship. However, the U.S. has no consistent policy on the domestic resettlement of foreign nationals as a consequence of their support of U.S. military interventions.

This multi-case study analyzed the domestic resettlement of Vietnamese, Iraqi Kurds, Iraq and Afghans Special Immigrant Visa-holders. I evaluated policies, appropriations, and legislation. I also interviewed SIV holders, federal and state agencies, as well as resettlement organizations. The purpose of the research was to understand the resettlement policy, past and current practices, organizational structure and relationships, and develop best practices for future resettlement of foreign nationals.

The study revealed that the policy of “self-sustainability,” as embedded in the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, is largely unachievable in today’s economic and social environment. Further, labor market conditions, as well as the lack of mobility of benefits and access to adequate transportation, further limit immigrants’ ability to achieve self-sustainability. Immigration policy and practices are largely out of date and do not support integration in the 21st century American economy. Simply resettling immigrants who sacrificed blood and treasure for the United States with outdated policies is unconscionable. I recommend reforming the existing system to allow the transfer of medical and social benefits across state lines. Further, investing in a holistic evaluation of the immigrant’s family situation, job skills, and ambitions prior to arrival will result in an efficient and effective resettlement.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... 3

ABSTRACT.................................................................................................................................. 4

Chapter 1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 11
  Review of Literature .................................................................................................................. 14
  Assisting U.S. Allies (Pre 9/11) .............................................................................................. 14
  Resettlement Agencies and Organization ............................................................................... 16
  Current Policy .......................................................................................................................... 16
  Afghanistan ............................................................................................................................... 17
  Iraq ........................................................................................................................................... 18
  Challenges in the Current SIV Process .................................................................................... 22
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 24

Chapter 2 Methodology ................................................................................................................. 26
  Programs and Services .............................................................................................................. 26
  Interviews ................................................................................................................................. 27
  Limitations ............................................................................................................................... 29
  Ethics ....................................................................................................................................... 29

Chapter 3 Vietnam ......................................................................................................................... 31
  Political ..................................................................................................................................... 34
  The Operation .......................................................................................................................... 36
  Immigrant Arrival .................................................................................................................... 39
  First Wave ................................................................................................................................. 39
  Second Wave ............................................................................................................................ 40
Third Wave ................................................................................................................. 42
Domestic Support Structure ......................................................................................... 42
Resettlement .................................................................................................................. 44
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 48

Chapter 4 Iraqi Kurds ................................................................................................. 48
Political ......................................................................................................................... 51
The Operation .............................................................................................................. 52
Immigrant Arrival ....................................................................................................... 53
Domestic Support Structure ......................................................................................... 54
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 55

Chapter 5 Afghanistan .............................................................................................. 56
SIV Issuance .................................................................................................................. 59
Domestic Support Structure ......................................................................................... 63
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 65

Chapter 6 Iraq ........................................................................................................... 67
De-Ba'athification ....................................................................................................... 69
Immigration Arrivals ................................................................................................... 70
Domestic Support Structure ......................................................................................... 73
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 75

Chapter 7 Agencies .................................................................................................. 77
Immigration and Naturalization Act ............................................................................ 77
Federal Agencies .......................................................................................................... 78
U.S. Department of State ............................................................................................. 79
SIV Issuance ........................................................................................................................................79
Reception and Placement Program .......................................................................................................80
Department of Homeland Security .........................................................................................................81
Health and Human Services ....................................................................................................................81
Cash Assistance .......................................................................................................................................83
Medical ..................................................................................................................................................84
Social Services .........................................................................................................................................84
Volunteer Agency .....................................................................................................................................85
State Refugee Coordinator .......................................................................................................................85
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................86

Chapter 8 Discussion and Results ..........................................................................................................88
State Agencies ...........................................................................................................................................88
Sustain ......................................................................................................................................................88
Improve ...................................................................................................................................................89
SIV Holders ..............................................................................................................................................92
Sustain ......................................................................................................................................................92
Improve ...................................................................................................................................................93
Resettlement Agencies .............................................................................................................................96
Sustain ......................................................................................................................................................96
Improve ...................................................................................................................................................97
Advocacy Groups .....................................................................................................................................98
Sustain ......................................................................................................................................................98
Improve ...................................................................................................................................................99
Chapter 9 Recommendations........................................................................................................ 100

Vietnam........................................................................................................................................ 101

Iraqi Kurds ...................................................................................................................................... 103

Iraq and Afghanistan ..................................................................................................................... 104

Recommendations.......................................................................................................................... 106

Closing ............................................................................................................................................ 112

References ....................................................................................................................................... 114

APPENDIX A .................................................................................................................................... 119

APPENDIX B .................................................................................................................................... 121

APPENDIX C .................................................................................................................................... 123

APPENDIX D .................................................................................................................................... 125
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Processing dates and locations for Vietnamese refugees ........................................ 43
Table 5.1: SIV issued to Afghan Translators, Interpreters and Workers for the U.S. ............... 63
Table 6.1: SIV for Iraqi and Translators, Interpreters and employees of the U.S. .................... 72
Table 6.2: Iraqi Refugee Processing 2007-2013 ..................................................................... 73
Table 7.1: Obligated Funds for Resettlement Agencies ......................................................... 83
Table 7.2: Funding and Funding Needs-Office of Refugee Resettlement .............................. 83
Table 7.3: Nine Approved Resettlement Agencies ................................................................. 87
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Map of Northern Iraq .......................................................... 52
Figure 5.1: Afghan SIV Issued and Unissued ........................................ 64
Figure 6.1: Obligated Funds for Resettlement Agencies ............................ 74
Chapter 1

Introduction

Like so many hopeful Iraqis, Luqman Mohammed Kurdi Hussein was both excited and optimistic as the NATO bombing campaign ended and the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein was toppled. Immediately, Luqman worked hard to be a part of the new Iraq, gained employment with the U.S.-based company Titan Corp as a linguist, and began working with and for the United States Government (USG) as a translator (AP, 2005).

Among the many lessons learned from the Iraq and Afghan war is that nation building is extremely challenging. De-Ba'athification was the order handed down by Paul Bremer III to the Coalition Provision Authority (CPA), which operated as the interim Iraq government. This order systematically purged any Ba’athist from serving in the new Iraq government. As a result of this decision and other factors, the USG was unable to function in Iraq during and post Operation Iraqi Freedom without foreign nationals, such as Mr. Hussein, providing invaluable skills, labor, relationships and area knowledge.

In 2005, because of his relationship with the USG, Mr. Hussein was targeted by insurgents and captured. The 41-year-old was beheaded. The video was subsequently uploaded and circulated on the internet (AP, 2005). The employment of foreign nationals is decentralized by agency and military organization. Further, multiple contractors were awarded contracts to hire local nationals. For these reasons, finding data on the number of Iraqi and Afghans hired is difficult to find. Translators represent a small, but crucial, percentage of the overall foreign nationals who work for and with the USG. As of 2013, one estimate placed the number of translators killed in Iraq and Afghanistan at 1,000 (Bandow, 2013).
The Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) was established to assist foreign nationals like Mr. Hussein who work for the U.S. government and are threatened due to that relationship. However, implementation of the policy was delayed by the federal government. The operation to resettle and integrate SIV holders has been extremely inadequate (GAO, 2010). The resettlement of foreign nationals is a little known, but very important, foreign policy tool for the United States Government (USG). The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 (INA) authorizes and established guidelines to assist Congress and the President to aid foreign nationals who work for and with the USG and are then displaced, under threat, or targeted due to that relationship. Upon successful checks and processing for eligibility by the federal government, foreign nationals and their family members are eligible to immigrate to the U.S. and receive civil status as Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) and benefits similar to all other immigrant and refugee visa holders.

With the INA, the U.S. policy for resettled foreign nationals is economic self-sufficiency within months upon arrival. Provision within the INA has been used to rescue Kurds from Saddam Hussein and Vietnamese from the North Vietcong, and is currently being used in Iraq and Afghanistan to evacuate all those eligible.

Currently, the USG has no consistent resettlement policy. Congress and the President decide funding, admission levels, resettlement, and organizational processes on a conflict-by-conflict basis. In 2006, with a growing humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Afghanistan, and U.S. credibility under question, the USG formulated another ad hoc program known as the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV). This program was established to aid and assist the thousands of foreign nationals who worked for and with American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and were consequently targeted.
As the USG continues to compete for influence abroad, policymakers are, and will be, faced with the decision to either assist and aid foreign nationals who work for and with the USG and come under threat due to that relationship—or not. Policymakers continue to evaluate, through legislative action, whether an SIV in Iraq and Afghanistan is the best choice to reflect the values and goals of the USG. To look at the SIV question through the lens of the rational model theory is to ask policymakers: Is a decentralized and ad hoc resettlement policy in the best interests and in fulfillment of the United States policy?

The goal of my research is to evaluate current and past resettlement processes and how those cases reflect the U.S. policy via the INA. In the end, I will develop recommendations to the current ad hoc and decentralized resettlement system based on best practices. An improper and poorly managed resettlement policy for U.S. allies degrades the USG’s foreign policy reputation and credibility abroad, creates a self-inflicted humanitarian crisis at home, and eventually leads to poor and underfunded legislation.

I will be conducting a comparative case study into past and present uses of immigration policies in military conflicts from Vietnam, Iraq (1996), and Iraq and Afghanistan (2006-present) to determine how different administrations have used their authority and how federal government agencies perform resettlement and acculturation of foreign nationals. I will develop a framework and standard operating procedures that will enhance the SIV process.

This study is premised on my view that the current SIV process is underfunded, disorganized, and underperforming. As a consequence, SIV applicants struggle to resettle and acculturate in America. The USG has the capacity, but lacks a legislative framework, to build a
systematic and consistent SIV policy. The post 9/11 security environment has made adjudicating and issuing SIVs more difficult, thus necessitating a comprehensive and consistent policy.

A consistent and comprehensive immigration policy for U.S. allies will result in a stronger U.S. foreign policy and enhanced credibility abroad; at home, SIV holders who are properly resettled and acculturated will better contribute to and improve American society.

Review of the Literature

As the United States seeks to maintain global supremacy, American forces will again be involved in wars, covert actions, or stabilization operations abroad. In the past, the United States has both succeeded and failed in foreign policy interventions abroad. In cases of failed foreign policy intervention, the USG has a spotty record of assisting and aiding those who have worked for and with the USG. As our foreign policy action in Iraq and Afghanistan appeared less and less hopeful, the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) was enacted and made available to Iraqi and Afghan citizens who have worked for and with the USG and are now displaced or under threat due to that relationship.

Pre-9/11 History of Assisting U.S. allies

The world remembers America’s long and costly war with Vietnam and its denouement: the hasty withdrawal of the USG from the Saigon Embassy. The collapse of Saigon and the large scale waves of immigrants required far more economic and social assistance than had ever been prepared for previous migrations.

In 1975, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) overran the American-backed South Vietnamese. At that point, the USG’s policy to assist the South Vietnamese nationals who
worked for and with the USG was exposed as non-existent. After the fall of Saigon and the United States capitulation in Vietnam, Congress debated, along with the American public, what to do with an estimated 130,000 Vietnamese who had worked for and with the USG. Neither the public nor policymakers wanted to be reminded of Vietnam, pay additional costs to resettle refugees, or be responsible for Vietnamese refugees (Schaefer, 1975). The indecision and debate about these refugees after the fall of Saigon and as South Vietnamese were on the run further damaged the USG’s reputation abroad and created a humanitarian crisis. In the end, the USG established resettlement locations in four military bases across the U.S. and processing sites in Thailand and Guam. The USG admitted approximately 130,000 Vietnamese within six months and one million over the next 15 years (Kissinger, 2006).

The story of the Kurds, who fled Iraq in 1996 after the failed USG attempt to remove Saddam Hussein from power, is a powerful and positive example of America’s ability to help foreign nationals who work for and with U.S. Government. Following the Gulf War in 1996, the USG backed two groups in the south (Shiite) and north (Kurds) of Iraq. The USG influenced and leveraged these two groups in an attempt to topple Saddam Hussein. However, Saddam Hussein proved resilient; he prevailed and began a systemic purging of all those who sought to overthrow him (Johnson, 2013). The northern Kurdish population who worked for and with the United States Government fled Iraq and was displaced in Jordan, Syria, and Turkey. With a growing humanitarian crisis and foreign policy failure, the United States Government flew thousands of Kurds who worked for and with the USG out of the Middle East (Johnson, 2013).

Approximately 200,000 Kurds eventually settled in Nashville, Tennessee. They have established a culture and have had a positive impact on the community (Kurdish Herald, 2010).
The foreign and domestic policy decision to quickly resettle foreign nationals who worked for and with the USG had and will continue to have a lasting impact on America, the Kurdish population, and the global opinion of USG policymakers.

**Resettlement Agencies and Organizations**

The processing and resettlement of refugees and special immigrants spans multiple U.S. government agencies at the federal and state level as well as non-governmental organizations. These agencies are responsible for identifying immigrants, conducting background checks, medical evaluations, processing, matching the visa holder to a U.S. city or coordinating with existing family members in the U.S., transportation to the U.S., housing, educational courses and tutorials on programs available.

Although the duties and mission of these agencies listed have not changed dramatically since 1975, this research will focus on the roles and responsibilities described and used in the current SIV process for Iraq and Afghanistan. (See Chapter 7 for duties and responsibilities for resettlement agencies)

**Current Policy**

The Global War on Terror (GWOT) in Iraq and Afghanistan once again offered policymakers an opportunity to deal with foreign nationals who work for and with the U.S. Government. As the two wars created further instability in the region, targeted attacks on foreign nationals who worked for and with the USG increased. Congress responded in 2006 by authorizing 50 Special Immigrant Visas for translators in section 1059 of Public Law 109-163, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006. Policymakers eventually expanded
the number of visas (to 5,000) and scope of duties to all who worked for the USG in Section 1244 of Public Law 110-181, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (Twu, 2010; DoS, 2014).

The SIV has been used to assist foreign nationals who worked for and with the U.S. government, including employees of the former Canal Zone in Panama who had been employees for 15 years and U.S. armed service employees who enlist abroad and serve for 12 years. In these cases, the SIV was used to assist foreign nationals who had placed themselves and their families in harm’s way in service to the U.S. government (Bruno, 2015).

The initial authorization and eventual implementation of the SIV were extremely cumbersome. From 2006-2009, a total of 11,050 SIVs were authorized; however, only 4,634 were issued to Iraqi’s (GAO, 2010). The Report does not state why such a low number of SIVs were issued. The implementation of an SIV became far more complicated after the events of September 11, 2001, requiring the collaboration of several federal agencies that were not accustomed to working together on this particular issue. The addition of the Department of Homeland Security, which did not exist prior to September 11, 2001, added another layer to the visa process. As with Vietnam, the American public and policymakers were not particularly enthusiastic about welcoming and funding Iraqi and Afghan refugees (Johnson, 2013).

**Afghanistan**

Section 1059 of the FY2006 National Defense Authorization Act made Afghans who served as interpreters or worked on behalf of the U.S. government eligible for the SIV. For interpreters, Afghans must have worked for the U.S. at least one year, demonstrate a serious threat due to their employment, have worked under the Chief of Mission or U.S. Armed Forces Authority, and
obtain a written letter of recommendation from the Chief of Mission. The numerical cap for this program was initially 50 per year in 2006 but was temporarily increased to 500 for 2007 and 2008. Spouse and children are not counted against the cap and SIV holders are eligible for resettlement benefits from the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement and Department of States, Population, Refugee and Migration. Any visas not issued in a given year could be carried forward. (Bruno, 2015)

In FY2009, Title VI of the Omnibus Appropriation Act expanded the eligibility and authorized Afghans who have worked for or with the U.S. government to be eligible to apply for an SIV. Applicants must have worked for the U.S. government for at least one year between 10/07/2001 and 09/30/2015, demonstrate a serious threat due to their employment, have worked under the Chief of Mission or U.S. Armed Forces Authority, and obtain a written letter of recommendation from the Chief of Mission. The Afghan SIV was capped at 1,500 annually from FY2009 through FY2013 but was increased to 3,000 in FY2014. From FY2009, the State Department was authorized to carry forward any unused balance through the end of FY2015. An additional 1,000 SIV’s were allocated in P.L. 113-160 to be issued by December 31st, 2014 and the National Defense Authorization Act of FY2015 added 4,000 SIV’s with an application deadline of December 31st, 2015 and DoS authority to issue the visa ending on March 31st, 2017 (Bruno, 2015).

**Iraq**

The initial legislation to aid and assist Iraqi foreign nationals began in FY2006 National Defense Authorization Act. This legislation permitted translators, and their spouses and children
who were in good standing and worked for the U.S. government, to apply for a SIV. The 2006 legislation also limited the number of Iraqi SIVs to 50 annually (Bruno, 2015).

With so few visas offered and so many employed, Section 1059 left many Iraqis who worked tirelessly for the U.S. government unable to obtain a visa. Official government statistics for total employed Iraqi and Afghans, are not collected. Congress amended Section 1059 in 2007 to increase the number of applicants from 50 to 500 annually. The eligibility limits were further expanded to include Iraqis who worked, in any capacity for a period of 1 year, directly with the U.S. Armed Forces or under Chief of Mission authority as a translator or interpreter.

With so many Iraqis employed by the U.S. government performing various duties other than translator or interpreter, Congress expanded eligibility again in the FY2008 National Defense Authorization Act. Section 1244 of the National Defense Authorization Act authorized the SIV program for five years (with an expiration at the end of 2013) thus representing a long-term investment in the Iraqi SIV program. With Section 1244, the number of visas authorized was capped at 5,000 principal applicants annually, and application eligibility was expanded to include employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government for at least one year (Bruno, 2015).

Future legislation in P.L. 113-42 permitted the approval of cases that were pending at the end of FY2013 and up to 2,000 new cases that were filed by December 31, 2013. An extension of 2,500 visas was authorized in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 (Bruno, 2015).

The application process has multiple layers and encompasses several federal agencies. Applicants are responsible for the entire application process, including the correspondence with agencies and provision of supporting documentation. In some cases, the applicant is in Iraq
completing the process and working for the U.S. government. In other cases, the applicant is in a third country due to threats. Upon successful completion of the SIV application and admission to the U.S., applicants are given the status of Legal Permanent Residents (LPR).

To begin the process, the applicant must submit documentation to the U.S. Department of State, Chief of Mission (CoM), containing proof of employment by the U.S., a letter from a U.S. citizen supervisor, and a statement of the threat to the applicant’s life. Upon receipt of the material and validation by the DoS of employment, validity of threat and background check, the CoM will grant the applicant a letter of recommendation (Bruno, 2015).

With the letter of recommendation from the CoM, the applicant must file a petition with the DHS, Customs and Immigration Service (USCIS). USCIS then reviews the applicant’s file, background check and documents, and forwards the petition to the National Visa Center (NVC). At this point, the NVC works directly with the applicant to collect additional materials, which may include copies of passports, birth certificates, police records for themselves and family members, and then schedule the final appointment with the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. During this phase, the applicant will also decide whether or not he will request resettlement and assistance from federal public benefits. If awarded the SIV, applicants can decline the assistance and settle with family or friends in the city/state of their choice. In that case, the U.S. government is not responsible for a portion of the resettlement cost and responsibility. The airfare and a portion of the resettlement benefits are forfeited (Bruno, 2015).

The final step in the process occurs at the embassy. The applicant’s fingerprints are taken, the packet is reviewed for completeness, and applicants have a medical examination completed at their own expense. A consular officer will review the applicant’s file and conduct an interview to
determine final eligibility. If the applicant’s file is incomplete, the consular officer will afford the applicant time to retrieve documents or provide time for additional administrative processing (Bruno, 2015).

When the applicant has family and friends in the U.S. and indicates a preference to resettle near them, a portion of the resettlement benefits afforded by Department of State (DoS) and Health and Human Services (HHS) are declined. In that case the applicant is responsible for booking his own flight, finding his own apartment and, upon arrival in the U.S., arranging transportation to his home or apartment. However, the applicant is still eligible for some entitlements and benefits upon arrival (State.gov, 2015).

When the applicant does elect assistance and benefits, the DoS Reception and Placement Program (R&P) covers applicants with 30-90 days of benefits upon arrival in the U.S. Applicants are also eligible for 8 months of resettlement assistance and entitlements under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). At the state level, HHS’s Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides resettlement agencies with grant benefits (State.gov, 2015).

The DoS R&P are sponsored by one of nine non-governmental agencies that have over 200 affiliated field and satellite offices across the U.S. Before departing from overseas, applicants will be assigned a resettlement agency and given information about their final destination and the affiliate office that will handle their case. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) will arrange the flight and an interest-free loan to the visa holders in the R&P program. The loan must be paid by the SIV holder, in full, after 42 months and is paid to the resettlement agency. During the first 30-90 days, resettlement agencies are responsible for locating and securing housing and groceries, buying and transporting necessary furniture and clothing, and assistance
with medical, social, and employment services. Resettlement agencies also assist SIV holders in applying for ORR benefits. These benefits end after 3 months (State.gov, 2015).

ORR offers SIV holders 8 months of cash and medical benefits. The ORR funds and benefits are independent of the DoS resettlement agency and vary depending on the state. At the federal level, ORR provides grants and funds to states to provide language training, employment and social services. Depending on the state, the programs and services vary. However, the Cash and Medical Assistance Program (CMA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) are entitlements provided to each SIV upon enrollment (State.gov, 2015). The CMA benefits vary in their availability. Cash and Medical Assistance to low-income individuals is available on a limited basis through the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) fund. Social Security Insurance for low-income individuals who are aged, blinded, or disabled is available for 7 years. Medicaid is available for up to 7 years. Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) is available for Iraqi SIVs who do not qualify for Medicaid (GAO, 2010).

**Challenges with the Current SIV process**

The events of 9/11 have increased the number of federal agencies responsible for protecting America. Other stakeholders involved in the SIV decision-making process include the Department of Defense (which contracts a very large number of the foreign nationals), the Department of State (congressionally mandated to administer and issue the SIV), the Department of Homeland Security (which is responsible for authorizing foreign nationals to enter the U.S.), and other sub agencies who have vested interests, including the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security, in
particular, has added an administrative process and bureaucratic barrier to the SIV application and adjudication process.

Second, from a domestic perspective, the SIV issuance is the first step. To properly resettle and integrate an SIV holder, the USG must fund and support the process and the SIV holder. Once in the United States, an SIV holder should receive the proper and efficient organizational support, funding, and social and medical services to properly acculturate. According to a GAO report, the current system for Iraqi SIV holders is inadequate (GAO, 2010).

Finally, the election of President Obama in 2008 and the 2010 Republican Tea Party victory in Congress have resulted in political stagnation. The potential for lawmakers to work together, formulate legislation, and increase funding has become extremely strained. Depending on the legislature to formulate appropriate policy when a crisis unfolds abroad is risky. From a policy standpoint, the Legislature establishes the environment for the Executive to develop policy. In a resource strained environment, their results in an inability to establish a policy.

These three challenges underscore the need for a consistent resettlement policy that supplants the current ad hoc policy. If there is a consistent SIV policy, legislative stagnation will not impact the resettlement of foreign nationals. A consistent or permanent resettlement framework embedded in our foreign policy would allow government agencies to remain proficient and improve the existing processes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Research demonstrates that the post-9/11 federal government has slowed the application process and provided inadequate funding at home. The GAO concluded that simply finding homes for refugees is not the final step in the process. A comprehensive resettlement and integration system is required (GAO, 2010). Policymakers must develop a comprehensive policy
to address the needs of those foreigners who will work for the United States Government and become displaced, as a result of either a withdrawal or failed intervention abroad. Further, a comprehensive SIV policy must entail a reformed government (local/state/federal) organizational structure, adequate funding, and proper reintegration into the U.S.

**Conclusion**

Acceptance and integration of refugees is a part of America’s heritage. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugee (UNHCR), the United States resettled 50,097 of the global total of 74,835 refugees resettled in 2012 (UNHCR, 2012). However, I would argue that all refugees are not the same. From a foreign policy perspective, America has a responsibility to protect foreign nationals who work for the USG and are then displaced due to that relationship. I believe that foreign nationals who give blood and treasure alongside the United States ought to be given status and benefits beyond other refugees. A consistent resettlement policy will lift the global standing and credibility of the U.S. and cement commitments from foreigners when military operations take place in their country. In line with the INA, immigrants will become economically self-sufficient, integrated, and more productive in society.

To prepare for future conflicts, policymakers must develop a comprehensive resettlement policy. The policy must aid and assist foreigners who will work for the United States Government and become displaced as a result of that relationship. Further, a comprehensive resettlement policy must entail a reformed government (local/state/federal) organizational structure, funding, and proper reintegration into the U.S. To properly resettle our allies, the U.S. must enhanced immigration status and benefits beyond refugee, add transferability of benefits
and transportation, Vietnamese and Kurdish, utilize the National Guard to enhance network and community integration, identify a location for in processing, integration and adjustment holistically evaluate and advise the individual before resettlement, resettle in states with the best social, medical and support structure for immigrants, properly integrate immigrants into the medical system.
Chapter 2
Methodology

In order to develop a framework for a comprehensive resettlement policy, I conducted a comparative case study of four U.S. military conflicts abroad, involving primarily document review and interviews. The four military conflicts I analyzed were Vietnam (1975), Iraq (1996), Afghanistan (2006), and Iraq (2006). These military conflicts were chosen because they span a range of time periods (from 1975 through 2014), involve multiple governments and administrations, and encompass multiple countries. Comparing and contrasting these military conflicts, and subsequent U.S. government use of the INA (refugee, aslyee, and Special Immigrant Visa) to resettle foreign nationals, established a foundation for the development of a best practice and policy recommendations moving forward.

This study was conducted in two parts. First, I evaluated the programs and services established by the government and operated by either the government or nonprofit organizations for SIV holders. Second, I conducted interviews with foreign nationals, nonprofit agencies, and state and federal workers who support the resettlement process.

Programs and Services

The SIV program, in each military conflict, has had varying levels of involvement from federal, state, and nonprofit organizations. The domestic involvement is of particular interest to my research. Because the depth of support and breadth of the programs have varied in each military conflict, I reviewed which agencies participated in the resettlement, their level of involvement, and the amount of resources appropriated to their organization.
Traditional programs for refugees and immigrants are education assistance, housing subsidies, language training, healthcare, caseworkers, and résumé writing/interview classes. Funding for these programs and services can come from federal, state or nonprofit organizations. Agencies involved with these services and programs include Health and Human Services (HHS), U.S. Department of State (DoS), and nonprofit volunteer organizations known as (VolAgs).

As Congress or the President approve immigration status for allies following a conflict, the level of funding and thus programs and services available for immigrants will become scrutinized. The programs and funding have an appropriation, per immigrant, which is billed out by the state to the federal government. Therefore, I compared the programs and services available during each of the four stated military conflicts. The measures around programs and services were aimed at gauging the level of support provided to the immigrant upon arriving in America. I researched the appropriated level of support from interviews with immigrants, open source material, reports from the Government and Account Office, think tanks, and academic journals, as well as published government documents.

**Interviews**

In the second phase of my research, I interviewed a variety of personnel attached to the SIV. In total, I interviewed five immigrants. I also interviewed support staff from various levels of government, and nonprofit organizations who have participated in the processing and resettlement of immigrants. In total, I interviewed twenty personnel from support and government agencies. The objective of the interviews was to understand the government processes, the immigrant experience, and structural networks within the resettlement system.
I interviewed each participant once. I anticipated interviewing nine SIV holders (three from each conflict) but removed Vietnam from the interview list due to subject availability constraints. For the Kurdish conflict, I interviewed two Kurdish Iraqis. And for Iraq and Afghanistan, I interviewed a total of three immigrants (two from Iraq and one Afghan). For the interviews of immigrants, I recruited from my personal and professional network and used a snowball sampling technique thereafter. I requested assistance from peers in the military who were in contact with Iraq and Afghan SIV holders. For Kurdish immigrants, I contacted university professors and business leaders who advertised their Kurdish heritage.

At the national and state level, I interviewed three volunteer agencies. I spoke with the state resettlement and health coordinator from three states for a combined total of six interviews. From the federal government, I was able to speak with the State Department, Health and Human Services and Department of Defense. And finally, I interviewed two nonprofit advocate agencies that focus on the resettlement and legal status of SIVs.

For federal government agencies, I contacted the Washington offices for each agency and was provided a point of contact. At the state level, I contacted the Office of Refugee and Migration in states with a reputation for receiving immigrants. For interviews with nonprofit agencies, I contacted participating volunteer agencies with offices in Boston. The questions for each agency varied (see Appendix A). I conducted all interviews over the phone for the agencies and immigrants. The interview time ranged from 30 to 80 minutes. My criteria for all government and non-governmental organization employees were that they have been involved in the SIV process and are sufficiently knowledgeable about it.
Limitations

I did not include all conflicts that had SIV legislation. Instead, I focused on military conflicts in which the U.S. directly employed foreign nationals. I also did not interview South Vietnamese immigrants. Finding Vietnamese who arrived during the narrow timeframe of my research was difficult. Instead, I relied on the similar studies which cited direct quotes from South Vietnamese immigrants who arrived during this study’s timeframe. I interviewed only a select number of resettlement agencies because the resettlement agency model is decentralized across the fifty states. Time constraints required that I select a sample of settlement agencies to target. The states chosen are representative of the two model of funding used. The number of Iraq and Afghan immigrants interviewed was small, and a larger sample size may have established experiences that were outside the sample group and offered additional recommendations. However, the experiences by the sample size were confirmed by participants from the nonprofit advocacy groups established to represent Iraqi and Afghans SIV holders. Participating agencies were able to add tremendous value and insight to compliment the immigrants interviewed.

Ethics

The project was reviewed and approved by NEU’s IRB (see appendix for IRB materials). I used an unsigned consent because all of my interviews to took place over the phone. During the first telephone contact, I explained the purpose and parameters of the research. Once the subject agreed to participate, I read the consent form over the phone. I recorded the consent during the initial phone conversation and e-mailed the unsigned consent form to the interviewee. I did not interview SIV holders who were unable to speak English at a conversational level.
In my interviews with SIV holders, if I sensed stress or anxiety over the phone, I moved onto another question or ask the interviewee if he/she would like to end the session. In either case, I provided the interviewee a contact number for the National Crisis Help Line; however, no interviewees required assistance from the National Crisis Help Line.

The safety and security of the information obtained from interviews with federal/state/nonprofits will be maintained in accordance with the outlined confidentiality agreement and storage procedures as approved by the IRB. Interview notes and audio files were kept in a password-protected file on the student researcher’s computer, which itself required a password for access. The computer is located in the home of the student researcher, which is locked when not occupied and is equipped with a home security system.
Chapter 3
Vietnam

On April 29, 1975, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) overran the American-backed South Vietnamese Army and ended what was 25 years of a failed U.S. foreign policy in the region. For the first time since WWII, the U.S. military’s use of force was rebuffed and policymakers were left to consider what to do with foreign nationals who worked for and with the U.S. government and were now targeted due to that relationship (Kissinger, 2003).

The U.S. involvement with Vietnam and Indochina began in 1950 with President Harry Truman and his administration’s support of the colonial power France. The French military were stretched thin following WWII and suffered huge losses in guerilla fighting. Their inevitable withdrawal left a vacuum that the Eisenhower administration filled with financial support and military advisors. The Kennedy administration ramped up the advisor role and for the first time American interest in the country became vested in not only winning the tactical military war but also changing the political culture and nation building. The Johnson administration, under political pressure from Republican realists and motivated to push the “Great Society” legislation through Congress, further increased the U.S. military and diplomatic involvement in the region. The Nixon administration began the eventual withdrawal of troops and the Ford administration was responsible for evacuating the final American out of the embassy and developing a policy to deal with foreign nationals who worked for and with the U.S. and were now targeted due to that relationship (Kissinger, 2003).

The decisions made by all administrations were based on the National Security Council (NSC) conclusion that Indochina, and more specifically Vietnam, were vital to our national
interests. The NSC is assigned to the executive branch and functions to advise and assist the President on national security and foreign policy matters. The NSC is composed of cabinet officials and the President’s approved advisors (NSC, 2014). Foreign policy decision-making at that time was based on the “domino theory,” which stated that if one nation in Southeast Asia fell to communism then the entire region could crumble. This belief led five administrations to mobilize millions of troops and spend billions of dollars (Kissinger, 2003).

Throughout the U.S involvement in Vietnam, there was no policy to assist the South Vietnamese nationals. After the fall of Saigon and the U.S. capitulation in Vietnam, Congress debated, along with the American public, what to do with an estimated one million Vietnamese and their family members who had worked for and with the USG (Kissinger, 2003).

Neither the public nor policy makers wanted to be reminded of Vietnam, pay additional costs to resettle refugees, or be responsible for Vietnamese refugees (Schaefer, 1975). The indecision and debate in regard to these refugees after the fall of Saigon, and as South Vietnamese were on the run, further damaged the USG’s reputation abroad and created a humanitarian crisis.

The depth and breadth of the U.S. government involvement in Vietnam rivals the U.S. government involvement in World War II Europe. The U.S. government was heavily invested in the health, welfare and success of South Vietnamese government. Quantitatively, the U.S. was in Vietnam from the mid-1950s to April 1975 and the U.S. military troop presence reached 500,000 at its height. Qualitatively, the Vietnamese economy, political system, and security system was entirely dependent on the U.S. government (Hein, 1995).
With only weeks before the fall of Saigon, the Ford administration was left with the incredible responsibility of creating and enacting a policy for Vietnamese allies who would be targeted after the fall of Saigon. With creative interpretation of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 (INA), the administration accepted an initial 130,000 Vietnamese under the parole status. To properly operate and administer the incoming Vietnamese immigrants, the administration established the Indochinese Migration and Refugee Assistance Act (Indochinese Refugee Program), which consisted of an Interagency Task Force (IATF) of 12 federal government agencies (Marsh, 1980). Although the Indochinese Refugee Program and IAFTF’s broader mission included immigrants from Laos and Cambodia, the majority of parole and immigrants that were processed and resettled in the U.S. were Vietnamese (Loescher & Scanlan, 1985).

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, a refugee, as defined by the 1951 United Nations Convention, is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UNHCR, 2015). Defining the Vietnamese who fled South Vietnam before the fall of Saigon as refugees is somewhat complicated and murky. In April of 1975, the Vietnamese allies that were air-evacuated from South Vietnam were not displaced in another country and the notion of their persecution by the North Vietnamese was preemptive. The U.S. policymakers created a refugee group by evacuating the South Vietnamese because the alternative appeared to be persecution by the invading North Vietnamese.
The defining immigration status—immigrant or refugee—of Vietnamese who fled South Vietnam before the fall of Saigon and thereafter was not clear. As Gail Paradise stated in her book *From Vietnam to America*, “They went into the camps as refugees; and came out of the camps as immigrants” (Kelly, 1977). The South Vietnamese departed Vietnam as refugees but were given a pathway to Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status upon arrival in the U.S.

In this chapter, I will use the term “immigrants” to represent those Vietnamese who processed through Guam and arrived in the U.S. Further, the Vietnam evacuation and more importantly resettlement represents the benchmark and foundation for all future government policy and action. This conflict will serve as an indicator and start point for all future policy and decisions in reference to resettlement in the U.S.

**Political**

The political fault lines that either supported or opposed war, party politics, or immigration were not necessarily present in the decision to assist South Vietnamese allies to the U.S. For many Americans, Vietnam was a proxy war against Russia and communism. For the U.S. to capitulate and appear weak in Vietnam would speak to the greater resolve of the nation and our overall ability to support allies throughout the world. When Vietnam began to crumble and the question of Vietnamese immigrants arose, American policymakers from both parties came to agreement and supported, funded, and advocated evacuating and assisting South Vietnamese allies, albeit very late in the game (Kissinger, 2003; Loescher & Scanlan, 1985).

One could argue that America had a moral obligation to aid and assist the waves of Vietnamese immigrants. The first two waves represented, or at least were designed to represent,
those Vietnamese who worked for and with the U.S. forces and would be targeted because of that relationship. President Ford gave multiple speeches leading up to the evacuation of Saigon. In those speeches, he continually uses the term “moral obligation” to describe America’s debt to those who worked for and with the U.S. (Sahara, 2012).

With little time to act through Congress or to allow the agencies of the government (Department of State, Immigration and Naturalization Services) to formulate an immigration policy, the Ford administration took a chapter from past humanitarian crises in Cuba, Hungary, and Haiti to exercise parole status. Parole status is a little known but extremely expedient path found in the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 (INA) (Loescher & Scanlan, 1985).

In passing the INA of 1952, the executive and legislative branches have influence on the process and acceptance of immigrants. According to the immigration code and agency regulations, CIS may grant parole status: “To anyone applying for admission into the United States based on urgent humanitarian reasons or if there is a significant public benefit, or for a period of time that corresponds with the length of the emergency or humanitarian situation” (CIS, 2014). The Ford administration loosely interpreted the immigration language in advocating for the parole status. Congress was not interested or motivated to keep thousands of allies in Vietnam and watch them be tortured, imprisoned, and killed because of their allegiance to the U.S (Loescher & Scanlan, 1985). The executive act would inject some level of compassion, heroism, and humanity into an otherwise-depressing narrative. This temporary action allowed Congress and the President the ability to positively spin an otherwise failed foreign policy.
Congress both supported the President’s action and went a step further in 1977 by passing Public Law 95-145. The law allowed those Vietnamese who were granted parole status to change status and apply for legal permanent residency after residing in the U.S. for two years. Further, the law expedited citizenship for all Vietnamese who entered the U.S. under the status of parole (Marsh, 1980).

The Ford administration viewed the loss of Vietnam and the eventual massive exodus of Vietnamese as a moral and ethical obligation of the U.S. Despite the lack of planning, the bureaucracy worked to act within the ambiguous language of the INA. In the ad hoc evacuation of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, the legal and political maneuvering by the administration and Congress was incredibly creative.

The Operation

Vietnam represented the first time in our nation’s history that U.S. military forces were used and the conflict did not result in a pro-American outcome. Policymakers at all levels of the government and military had no playbook or lessons learned from past conflicts to help manage an evacuation of 6,000 Americans and an estimated million Vietnamese foreign nationals who worked with and for the U.S. government and would be targeted due to that relationship (Kissinger, 2002).

Saigon eventually collapsed on April 29, 1975. Remarkably, the first high-level conversations and planning about the evacuation of U.S. personnel or South Vietnamese did not begin until April 8, 1975. Several factors contributed to the hasty planning. The intelligence estimates on the strength of the South Vietnamese military and attack planning of the North
Vietnamese were miscalculated. The U.S. intelligence was approximately one to two years behind the actual planning and operations ambition of the North Vietnamese. Also, President Ford and his administration were lobbying Congress for an additional spending bill of $722 million dollars that would have resupplied the Vietnamese military and stabilized the economy. Any planning or action of withdrawal would have inevitably sunk the spending bill (Kissinger, 2003). Finally, the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon, Graham Martin, did not want to spark panic in the streets of South Vietnam and therefore refused to conduct planning or formulate working groups on the evacuation or ensuing immigration crisis (Sneep, 2002).

With the Ford administration’s acceptance that no further Congressional aid for the South Vietnamese government were forthcoming, Operation Frequent Wind was launched and set in motion around the clock flights, buses, boats and helicopters out of South Vietnam. C-141s and C-130s flew around the clock for 10 days, transporting approximately 65,000 Vietnamese, by air and boat, out of the country while approximately 65,000 Vietnamese left without U.S. government assistance (Loescher & Scanlan, 1986).

According to Rutledge (1992), a fourteen year old immigrant described her experience in the hasty withdrawal by boat. While floating out at sea with her family, they were picked up by pirates:

I did not know that they were pirates. But one of them grabbed me and forced me onto their boat along with some other girls. Four men took me into the boat and raped me over and over again. I tried to fight them, but they only beat and laughed at me. (p17)

At the U.S.’s request, through diplomatic channels with Russia, the North Vietnamese allowed a safe passage and evacuation for the Americans. With this window for safe passage,
planners stacked flights with South Vietnamese allies and evacuated in tandem (Kissinger, 2003).

The evacuation of Vietnamese immigrants was far from orderly. With only days before the overthrow of Saigon, Vietnamese immigrants could not depend on flights alone to exit the country. One Vietnamese immigrant stated that during his evacuation by boat, the engine broke down. Fortunately, the boat was met by a U.S. Navy ship. Mechanics from the U.S. attempted to fix the boat, were unable to, and permitted the Vietnamese to board the ship (Sahara, 2012).

Knowing that Vietnamese would also attempt to evacuate by boat, the U.S. Navy served as mid-level transportation and became a temporary holding area for Vietnamese immigrants. One immigrant departed on April 29 and was met by the U.S. Navy Ship American Challenger. She stated that the boat’s capacity was 1,080 and eventually picked up 7,500 people (Sahara, 2012).

Even the Vietnamese Navy departed the country using military ships. A group of immigrants who departed the country on their own boat saw the Vietnamese Navy at sea, followed the ships for seven days and arrived at Subic Bay, The Philippines. The group eventually found their way to Fort Chaffee via Wake Island (Sahara, 2012).

With the Department of Justice’s approval to waive visa restrictions and grant parole status for up to 130,000 Vietnamese, the final evacuation of the 6,000 Americans began on April 21, 1975. The visa waiver legally granted “parole” status to Vietnamese foreign nationals, selected by the U.S. government, to resettle in the U.S (Kissinger, 2003).

The evacuation of Vietnamese from South Vietnam was both an impressive military operation and a disturbing display of America’s bureaucratic failure to properly assist foreign nationals who worked for and with the U.S. and would be targeted due to that relationship. From
one perspective, the U.S. built a template, albeit flawed, on the evacuation of allies following a failed foreign policy. From another perspective, policymakers were either negligent or criminal to ignore the possibility of a hasty withdrawal. The lack of a program or policy to properly aid and assist our allies was, and continues to be, a global embarrassment.

**Immigrant Arrivals**

Vietnamese immigrants arrived in three waves. The first wave consisted of those who left Vietnam right before the fall of Saigon (1975). The second wave came immediately following the fall of Saigon (1975-1977) and fell under the government-sponsored Operation New Life /New Arrival. The final phase of Vietnamese immigrants spanned the years 1977-1985 and are known and characterized as boat people (Schaefer, 1975; Rutledge, 1992; Buenker and Ratner, 2005). In this chapter, I focus on the resettlement of immigrants from the first and second phase known as Operation New Life /New Arrival.

**First Wave.** The initial wave of 10,000-17,000 Vietnamese arrived right before the fall of Saigon. The first wave represented wealthy and educated Vietnamese with marketable skills who were previously connected with U.S. government and business. Also, the second wave, like the first wave fled as refugees (Buenker and Ratner, 2005).
Second Wave. As Operation Frequent Wind began the U.S. withdrawal and South Vietnamese evacuation of Vietnam, Operation New Life/Arrivals served as the processing and resettlement operation of evacuated South Vietnamese. With Saigon to fall on April 29, 1975 and no official order for evacuation approved until April 21, 1975, there was little time to organize people and property to conduct the evacuation. The U.S. government had to identify the known Vietnamese allies who had been granted a parole status, logistically process and fly them and their families out of the country, and do all of this with a coordination that only began in mid-April 1975 (Sneeep, 2002). By the end of April, up to 100,000 Vietnamese passed through the Philippines and the western Pacific by sea or air and were routed to U.S. staging areas to be relocated in the U.S. (DoD, 1977).

In an interview with Rutledge (1992), an immigrant stated:

I left Vietnam by boat, and headed to Hong Kong. I was helped by Americans who gave me American money to buy my tickets so that I could escape Saigon…When I got to Hong Kong, I had an American sponsor which my American army friends had arranged. I did not have a hard time getting to America. (p. 21)

Between April 1, 1975 and June 1, 1976, the Indochinese Refugee Program, administered by the Interagency Task Force for Indochina (IATF), was the Ford administration’s solution to managing the incoming Vietnamese refugees. During this time, the IATF was responsible for the processing and resettlement of 130,000 Vietnamese refugees who were granted parole status by the Ford administration (DoD, 1977).

Due to their proximity and space, Guam and Wake Island became the primary staging points for all 130,000 immigrants prior to entering the U.S. From the three branches of the service, the DoD received base nominations that were geographically spread throughout the U.S. and divided
somewhat equally according to the size of the branch. The Navy’s responsibility consisted of transporting Vietnamese via ships to the Philippines and Guam, as well as staffing the reception center in Camp Pendleton. The Army operated the reception centers in Guam, Fort Chaffee, and Fort Indian-Town Gap, and the Air Force was tasked to transport Vietnamese from Vietnam to the Philippines, Guam, and other U.S. resettlement locations (DoD, 1977).

From Operation New Arrival, 133,000 Vietnamese refugees resettled in the U.S. Of that total, 112,000 Vietnamese refugees arrived and were received and processed at Orote Point, Guam. Some Vietnamese flew directly from the Philippines or Wake Island to the resettlement camps (DoD, 1977). As seen in Figure 1, Fort Chaffee received and processed 50,000 immigrants from May 2 through December 20, 1975, while Fort Indian-town Gap received and processed 20,000 between May 28 and December 15, 1975. Eglin Air-Force Base and Camp Pendleton, CA, were responsible for processing and resettling the remaining 61,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Processed</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>23 April 1975 – 24 June 1975</td>
<td>112,000</td>
<td>*Initial site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Chaffee</td>
<td>2 May 1975- 20 December 1975</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Indian-Town Gap</td>
<td>28 May 1975- 15 December 1975</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eglin/Camp Pendleton</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>61,000</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Department of Defense, Army After Action Report.
Third Wave. Once Saigon fell, South Vietnamese fled the country by boat, plane, or foot. Many were in refugee camps throughout the Pacific. With neighboring countries constrained and regime change happening in Cambodia and Laos, some Asian countries began to turn away Indochinese refugees. With a growing humanitarian crisis, the U.S. was forced to act. On May 31, 1979, the United Nations Commission for Refugees and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam created the Orderly Departure Program (ODP). The ODP was created because of the unorganized departure of refugees from Indochina, a growing number of countries denying entrance and U.N.’s attempt to regulate the exodus (Rutledge, 1992).

The ODP granted asylum seekers from Vietnam refugee status under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1980. To qualify for entrance under the ODP, Vietnamese had to fit into one of three categories. Category I represented Vietnamese nationals who were close family members of an American. Close family member was defined as spouse, son/daughter, parents, and grandparents. Category II represented Vietnamese who were employed by the U.S. government for a minimum of one year of service after Jan 1, 1962. Category III represented Vietnamese with ties (other than category I, II) with the U.S.

Domestic Support Structure

Vietnam represented the first time in our nation’s short history where foreign nationals who worked for and with the U.S. government were targeted en masse, and a massive exodus of immigrants and a humanitarian crisis would ensue. After failing to convince neighboring countries to accept the fleeing Vietnamese as refugees and failing to convince the United Nations Human Rights Council to leverage its influence with countries around the world, the U.S. was
left to create an alternative solution. To thwart the embarrassment of leaving Vietnamese allies to be killed, captured, tortured, or jailed by the North Vietnamese, the Ford administration initiated the Indochinese Refugee Program. From April 1, 1975 to June 1, 1976, an interagency task force administered Operation New Life/New Arrival, which processed and resettled 130,000 Vietnamese immigrants (Hein, 1995).

Created on April 18, 1975, and under the direction of the Department of State, the Interagency Task Force (IATF) New Life/New Arrival was a groundbreaking fusion of 12 U.S. government agencies tasked to accept U.S.-sponsored Vietnamese immigrants and provide safe passage and travel to a relocation center, with the final objective of placement with an American family and resettlement in the U.S. Members of the IATF included Departments of State; Defense; Justice; Health, Education, and Welfare; Transportation; Treasury; Labor; Interior; and Housing and Urban Development, plus representatives of the US Agency for International Development; the US Information Agency; the Central Intelligence Agency; the Office of Management and Budget; and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (DoD, 1977).

As a member of the IATF, the DoD was given enormous duties and responsibilities. The Department of Defense was tasked to operate reception centers, located in the Pacific and the United States, transport the Vietnamese immigrants, and provide for the shelter, meals, medical support, and the security of the immigrants. As DoD took on the service support and operational responsibilities, the other 11 agencies focused on the processing and resettlement of the Vietnamese immigrants (DoD, 1977).

With the primary reception and staging center in the Pacific at Orote Point in Guam, the Department of Defense tasked the military service branches to support reception and resettlement
centers domestically as well. The domestic reception centers were located and operated in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas and Fort Indian-Town Gap, Pennsylvania (Army); Camp Pendleton, California (Marines); and Eglin, Florida (Air-Force) (DoD, 1977).

The main cost to evacuate, relocate and eventually resettle thousands of Vietnamese immigrants who worked with and for the U.S. government was incurred at Operation New Life/New Arrival. Under Public Law 94-23, the interagency task force received congressionally appropriated funds through the Indochinese’s Refugee Program totaling $405 million (DoD, 1977).

Resettlement

Prior to the resettlement of the first and second wave Vietnamese, the resettlement system in America was designed to take in a limited number of refugee’s over time and not 130,000 at once. Notwithstanding, the fusion of hard working Vietnamese citizens into America was a fascinating relationship. The assistance for the Vietnamese immigrants came from the U.S. Department of State, Health and Human Services (previously the Health, Education, and Welfare) which funneled funds and grants to state immigration and resettlement agencies (Rutledge, 1992).

In the resettlement of Vietnamese immigrants, the story is both triumphant yet fraught with unfortunate bigotry. To the credit of the Vietnamese people, Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) played a crucial role in the integration and adjustment into American society. Despite the government’s goal of dispersing the immigrants, the Vietnamese community migrated to certain states and cities. Despite gaps in the logistical, medical and social infrastructure provided
by the US government, the Vietnamese immigrants prevailed and became a positive and
enduring ethnic group in America.

The U.S. policy and formula for receiving and resettling Vietnamese immigrants was to work
with state level resettlement groups who receive funds and grants from the federal government
for resettlement type services. The resettlement agencies provided job training workshops,
English language training, cash assistance, and support in navigating the state and federal
agencies. Because of the massive infusion of immigrants, the earlier Vietnamese arrivals worked
directly with the newly arrived immigrants. MAAs were established across the U.S. in 1975,
managed and operated by Vietnamese refugees. MAAs were affiliated nationally but operated
independently and were remarkably successful. MAA’s went above and beyond resettlement
agencies and served immigrants at a personal level. In some cases, workers would accompany
immigrants to the grocery store, arranged driver’s training, and provided family reunification
services. The MAAs success led to the organization’s powerful lobbying effort to members of
Congress for better assistance at home and refugee support abroad. (Rutledge, 1992)

From an employment perspective, the Vietnamese immigrant’s work ethic and willingness to
adjust, adapt, and forge through any hurdle or obstacle surpassed the U.S. government’s
expectation of self-sufficiency. The economy welcomed the willingness and work ethic of
Vietnamese immigrants to take low wage and low skill jobs, eventually becoming successful
entrepreneurs. From 1975-1977, less than 5% of Vietnamese heads of households were
unemployed in Houston and 6% in Oklahoma City. There were certainly hurdles with highly
educated Vietnamese downgrading to take entry level jobs, and some communities were
unresponsive to an infusion of South Asians. However, the Vietnamese immigrants represent a
success story in their arrival and ability to adapt and integrate into society (Rutledge, 1992).

The federal government provided immigrants with a minimum of one year of medical
benefits without cost to the family. That said, the medical challenges and problems for
Vietnamese immigrants was cultural and not from a lack of benefits. Southeast Asian medical
philosophy differs greatly from Western medicine. For traditional Southeast Asians, illnesses are
caused by physical, supernatural and metaphysical sources. A belief in demons, deities, or angry
souls is not recognized or treatable in the American medical system. In general, mental illness
was an untreatable and unspeakable disease within the Vietnamese culture. Even with the
separation of family, years of war, incredible and terrifying evacuation, and the Vietnamese
immigrants sought to isolate anyone displaying signs of trauma, post-traumatic stress, or other
illness. (Rutledge, 1992)

Conclusion

The planning, operation, processing and completion of the evacuation of South Vietnamese
were both embarrassing and impressive. In one narrative, the U.S. government experienced a
colossal foreign policy and military failure. The defeat to the North Vietnamese had a profoundly
damaging effect on the U.S. reputation at home and throughout the world. At the most basic
level, the U.S. abandoned an ally and poorly planned the evacuation of those Vietnamese who
sacrificed and worked for and with the U.S. government. In another narrative, the U.S.
evacuated, processed, and resettled 130,000 Vietnamese immigrants within one year. The
establishment of Guam as an initial processing center and of domestic military bases for further
processing and resettlement was groundbreaking.
The birth and success of the MAA’s represents the close network within the Vietnamese community. The American resettlement agencies and communities were unable to handle the influx of newly arrived immigrants. Further, the resettlement agencies do not operate to serve a specific ethnic group. These MAA’s filled in the gaps with personal services and addressed challenges that were specific to the Vietnamese immigrants.

The South Vietnamese evacuation and resettlement served as a foundation and experience for policymakers moving forward. The template in South Vietnam evolved into the eventual use and management of the Special Immigrant Visa in Iraq and Afghanistan
Chapter 4

Kurdish Iraqi

The web that entangled the U.S. in the 1991 Gulf War, and the eventual targeting of Kurdish allies in Iraq is a multi-layered story. From the simplistic perspective, the U.S. had to act against a brutal dictator who had chemically bombed his own citizens and invaded the sovereign country of Kuwait. The other narrative is far more complicated, laced with vengeance and aligned with oil interests.

Following the 1979 overthrow of the U.S.-backed Shia and the hostage crisis of U.S. embassy employees in Tehran, the U.S. was both embarrassed and seeking vengeance against Iran. With the removal of the Shia and the friendly Western alliance, the Ayatollah swept in a new wave of strict Muslim fundamentalism. In Cold War fashion, the U.S. backed and provided material support to the Iraqi government to wage a war with Iran. In 1979, Saddam Hussein, who represented the minority Sunni population, became the newly anointed President of Iraq and was interested in gaining Western allies to solidify his power (Khadduri & Ghareeb, 2001). At that time, an alliance with the U.S. was in the interest of both countries. From 1982-1989, Iraq and Iran engaged in a bloody war that claimed the lives of millions of citizens. In the end, neither side gained any land or claimed victory.

Following the end of the war, the Iraqi military was damaged and the government deficit enormous. With aid from the U.S. drying up as the Cold War came to an end, the Iraq government was faced with a depleted military, a stagnant economy built on oil revenue, and massive loans from Kuwait that had been used to fund the Iraq/Iran war. Rather than properly deal with the loan payments to Kuwait, Saddam Hussein made a massive miscalculation,
overestimated his relationship with the West, and invaded Kuwait (Khadduri & Ghareeb, 2001). An invasion by the Iraqi military allowed Saddam Hussein to manipulate or stoke nationalist sentiment to mask the country’s economic problems.

The U.S. led a worldwide U.N.-backed coalition which ousted the Iraq military from Kuwait and placed heavy sanctions on the Iraq government. The U.S. stopped short of invading Iraq and overthrowing Saddam Hussein. However, the U.S. did covertly and overtly support the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by the Shias, predominately located south of Baghdad, and the Kurds, predominately located north of Baghdad. Neither group was able to successfully unite their own region or even come close to Baghdad and Saddam Hussein (Khadduri & Ghareeb, 2001).

In an effort to seize control from Hussein and aid U.S. allies in the north and south of Iraq, the U.N. established safe havens in the north and south of the country. In the U.N. safe havens, the Iraqi military was unable to fly or operate military machinery. There was limited U.N. oversight with NATO air patrols in the regions. Safe havens had initial success while the U.N. coalition was strong and Saddam Hussein’s military was weak. Over time, the oil for food program, which was established to limit Saddam Hussein’s oil revenue, largely failed in limiting Saddam’s power. Iraqi leadership was able to circumvent all restrictions placed on the Iraqi Government. Further, U.N. support to counter Hussein’s growing violations in the safe havens weakened (Khadduri & Ghareeb, 2001).

Northern Iraq is dominated by Kurds, who were left without a state following the end of World War II as French and British colonial powers partitioned the region in order to retain control. The Iraqi Kurdish north is divided by two distinct and extremely divided groups. The
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) inhabits the northeast of Iraq, has a large land border with Iran and has typically had good relations with the Iranian government. To the north, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) has a large land border with Turkey and has had a divisive relationship with the Turkish government.

**Figure 3.1: Map of Northern Iraq**

Source: University of Texas, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iraq.html](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iraq.html)

In my interviews with both military members present in Kurdish Iraq and Kurdish immigrants, there was a very minimal U.N. force operating in Northern Iraq. According to interviews with the U.S. Department of State, military and Kurdish immigrants, the tipping point
for Hussein’s threatened invasion of the north came in 1996. At that point, the KDP and PUK had entered into another civil battle against each other. The KDP, led by Massoud Barzani, was losing ground to the PUK, led by Jalal Talibani. The PUK was backed by the Iranians, thus forcing the KDP to form an alliance with Hussein. Hussein sent troops into the KDP region and quickly cleared out any PUK presence. With no international push-back to his movement into the north, Hussein felt emboldened to verbally threaten Kurdish Iraqis working with U.N. and U.S. forces who were serving as non-governmental, security, and logistical support.

Interviewees state that after sending troops into the north without any reaction from the U.N., Hussein announced in several speeches that those working with the U.N. would be jailed. Hussein never sent troops into Kurdistan but the threat served as a warning to Kurds and the U.N. Shortly thereafter, foreign troops in the north, representing the U.N., closed bases and began to develop evacuation plans for allies who worked with or on behalf of the U.N.

**Political**

From 1991-1996, the U.S. leveraged safe havens in the north by establishing relationships with military and government leaders and supporting non-governmental organizations. According to the interviews conducted in this study, the 1996 Iraqi Presidential Election played into the decision making by the Executive branch. Even though it was unlikely that Hussein would actually send troops north, the Executive branch did not want to deal with a foreign policy crisis during the election. For this reason alone, the Executive branch ordered the Joint Staff, an organization within the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to develop evacuation options. According to an official in the planning of the resettlement, placing the Kurds in Fort Indian-
Town Gap, Pennsylvania was not politically acceptable. Guam was a middle option that allowed the potential problem to be shelved.

**The Operation**

A joint task force, named Operation Pacific Haven, was established to evacuate the Kurdish Iraqis from northern Iraq to be resettled in the U.S. by way of Guam. Very similar to the Vietnam operation, the operation consisted of a combination of government and non-profit agencies, led by the U.S., and used Andersen Air Force Base in Guam as the processing center (DoD, 1997). According to interviews, the option of resettlement to domestic bases, similar to South Vietnamese, was not politically acceptable. Placing Kurds in the U.S. would create too much press coverage to an issue that the Executive branch sought to remain out of sight.

Operation Pacific Haven was established on September 16, 1996, and lasted 218 days. In total, 6,600 Kurdish evacuees were processed through Andersen Air Force Base with their final destination to be in the U.S. The joint U.S. government humanitarian effort consisted of 1,600 military and interagency personnel. Once again, Guam served the needs of allies who were targeted due to their relationship with the U.S. government. Kurds were provided with medical care, food, housing, and a basic education in language, customs and culture for what lay ahead in America (DoD, 1997).

In addition to meeting the immediate needs of the newly-arrived refugees, Guam served as a special immigration-processing center for the Kurds. The Immigration and Naturalization Service was responsible for processing applicants into the federal immigration database and conducting background checks, while the Department of Health and Human Services was responsible for medical screening and matching evacuees with volunteer agencies to be resettled.
in the U.S. At that time, a typical asylum process for one person ranged in duration from six months to one year. While on Guam, the interagency task force was able to simplify and expedite the asylum process. The average time for an asylum hearing for the Kurds in Guam was 90-120 days (DoD, 1997).

According to Lieutenant Colonel Ray Charlesworth, the local community in Guam provided overwhelming support to the Kurdish evacuees. In total, the local nationals volunteered over 40,000 hours to supporting, assisting and aiding the Kurds and U.S. government. In addition, the U.S. government spent $10 million dollars, within the local communities, for support and logistical services. (DoD, 1997).

The Kurdish evacuation, processing and resettlement on Guam were a bright light and best practice for the U.S. government in the use of resources and in streamlining the processing and resettlement of the Kurdish refugees. Guam served as a central location for federal, state, and non-government organizations to combine talent and resources to produce an optimal solution for future American citizens.

**Immigrant Arrivals**

According to interviews with Kurdish immigrants and government experts who participated in this evacuation and resettlement, the U.S. policy and decision making for Iraqi Kurds was accomplished for security and political purposes. At the highest levels of the Joint Staff and Pentagon, the decision was made to evacuate any nongovernmental organizations and security and logistical personnel working directly or indirectly with the U.S. Equally, the decision was made to include no family members beyond spouse and children. Via Guam, all
nongovernmental groups, security, and logistical personnel would be approved to depart Iraq and resettle in the U.S.

According to interviews with state resettlement agencies and Kurdish immigrants, previous Kurdish refugees had settled in Tennessee following the 1991 Gulf war and therefore had established roots and inroads into the community. The State Department, through resettlement agencies, immediately began coordinating with Tennessee officials to resettle a large portion of the 6,600 Kurds waiting in Guam.

**Domestic Support Structure**

The support structure, within the existing Kurdish community, was organic and accounted for the successful adjustment and integration of the new arrivals. The State Department and Health and Human Services provided similar resettlement benefits that were afforded to Vietnamese and other refugees in accessing medical services, social assistance, and a path to citizenship. However, the existing Kurdish community members worked at a local and personal level with the arrivals. This grassroots relationship provided the Kurds with a network for employment and comfort level to integrate while maintain cultural integrity.

From interviews, the Kurdish Iraqis who worked for the U.S. in Iraq were highly motivated and educated. Upon arrival in the U.S., the Kurds adjusted and integrated into society. To some extent, the evacuation was a brain drain of some of the brightest and best citizens in northern Iraq. Currently, the Kurdish arrivals work in a variety of areas ranging from academia, entrepreneurship, and as civil servants.
Conclusion

The Kurdish evacuation and resettlement is a little known yet highly successful story. The speed in which the U.S. government developed a course of action, logistically moved, and resettled the Kurds was impressive in 1996. Unfortunately, not enough research or published material has been written about this period. With time, many of the government officials or immigrants are fading and difficult to contact.

In part, the success of the Kurds was because of what a state official called “Southern Hospitality.” The people of Tennessee had experienced and integrated Kurds into society in 1991, so the new arrivals did not pose any new challenges that had not already been accounted for. In addition, Kurds had done a remarkable job in accepting the values and norms of American society. Kurds, like the Vietnamese, were eager work, educate their children, and live out the “American Dream.”
Chapter 5

Afghanistan

The United States has a storied history and involvement in Afghanistan dating back to the 1979 Soviet invasion. Back then, the Cold War meant that countries either sided with the U.S. or U.S.S.R and wars were fought in proxy countries. From Asia to South America, the two superpowers treated countries like pawns in a game of chess. Afghanistan ended with the withdrawal of the Soviets and birth of radical Islam.

Although the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan caught U.S. foreign policy experts by surprise, the U.S. response was a successful textbook counterinsurgency. The Soviets initially invaded Afghanistan to support a newly formed Communist government. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviets had successfully squelched democratic uprisings in Hungary and had growing support in France and Italy. The ruling government body in the U.S.S.R had a special interest in the success of new and fragile communist governments. (Coll, 2004)

The U.S. struggled, initially, to properly respond to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan but eventually waged a brutal insurgency campaign resulting in a heavy loss of life for Afghans and Soviets. This insurgency became a precursor and foundation for the Taliban. The U.S. and Saudi government provided funding and military equipment through the Pakistani government. Through the Pakistani intelligence agency, Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), the Afghan mujahidin fighters were equipped with surface to air missiles, automatic rifles, and intelligence. The Saudi and U.S. support backed by the Pakistani safe-haven forced the Soviet military to withdraw in 1989 (Coll, 2004).
Following the Soviet defeat and eventual collapse of the Afghan government, Afghanistan went from a front page topic in global news to a forgotten country. The mujahedeen backed militias no longer had a common enemy or foreign funding stream. In a short time, the country broke out in a civil war with little governance or social progress. An emerging militia began to gain momentum in the areas along the Pakistani border that had previously served as safe-havens for foreign fighters and mujahedeen. A group known as the Taliban, who imposed adherence to a strict interpretation of the Koran and were led by Mullah Omar, swept through the south and began to unite, or destroy, warlords and gain ground.

As Mullah Omar and the Taliban gained ground in Afghanistan, a disenfranchised Saudi named Osama Bin Laden grew frustrated at the U.S. presence in the Middle East. The U.S. had established several major military bases in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia following the Gulf War. Osama Bin Laden had served in Afghanistan and both funded and worked with the mujahedeen. However, upon returning to Saudi Arabia, the government became anxious about his ideology and restricted his travel within the Kingdom.

In response to his disdain for the U.S. and treatment by the Saudi government, Osama Bin Laden founded a global Islamic network whose ideology and foundation was, and still is, the destruction of the West, establishment of Sharia law, and liberating all Muslim occupied land. Osama Bin Laden loosely organized international jihadist organization, Al-Qaeda, arrived in Afghanistan in 1996. Around the same time, Mullah Omar, and the Taliban, emerged onto the scene. The Taliban offered Osama Bin Laden safe-haven and a place to train and recruit members of Al-Qaeda.
With a sanctuary in Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden began issuing fatwas and encouraging attacks against the U.S. The Kobar Towers, U.S.S. Cole, and World Trade Center bombings in 1998 were all backed, to some degree or another, by Al Qaeda and OBL. With a booming U.S. economy, the political will to respond militarily was minimal. However, the events of September 11th, 2001 changed the U.S. and world calculus.

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and the downed flight in Pennsylvania, policymakers and the American public prepared for war. The intelligence, and explicit acknowledgement of Osama Bin Laden, traced the funding, training and leadership of the 9/11 attack to Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. As early as October of 2001, units from the U.S. military arrived in Afghanistan (Kean, 2004).

With the invasion of U.S. and coalition troops, as well as a reestablished diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, the U.S. hired a number of Afghans, known as local hires, to assist the military operations and provide translation, security and logistical support. Although it is difficult to quantify the number of Afghans who work directly for the U.S. government, the interpreter or translators are the face of the foreign national hires. In 2007, the contract for linguist services in Afghanistan was worth $414 million and was increased to $2 billion by 2012. According to Mission Essential Employees (MEP), a total of 5,816 Afghan linguists were employed on behalf of the government in the 2012 contract (Ellison, 2012).

As the security situation weakened in Afghanistan, interpreters are easy targets for insurgency. U.S. and coalitions forces would be highly degraded without the ability to speak to the local population. Janis Shinwari has become the face of a long list of Afghan interpreters and direct employees who have been targeted due to his relationship with the U.S. Janis served as an
interpreter for the U.S. since 2006. Once his identity was discovered by enemy forces, he and his family’s life became compromised. He routinely received threats by the Taliban and eventually had to move his family every couple days to remain in hiding. After two years of battling with the U.S. bureaucracy and Congressional inquiries into his delayed process, Janis and his family were finally issued a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) to enter the U.S. in 2013. (Packer, 2013)

**SIV Issuance**

The story of the Afghan SIV arrivals is illustrated in Table 1.1. The tables show that the U.S. simply did not begin issuing SIVs until 2014. In the early years, the issuance of SIVs seemed to start off low and then increase. In 2007, 100 interpreters were issued SIVs and then 206 in 2008. Similarly, 199 SIVs were issued to Afghans who worked for the U.S. government in 2007 and then 262 in 2008. In both years, the issuance increased substantially. However, the following three years saw single to double digit issuance.

Although the same SIV that was authorized for Iraqi interpreters and Iraqis who worked on behalf of the U.S. government was available for Afghans, the issuance of visas for Afghans is dismal. According to Table 1, Afghan interpreters and employees working on behalf of the U.S. saw early approvals in the inception of the program. From 2007 through 2009, the embassy in Kabul appeared to be complying with the authorization and making in-roads with the bureaucratic process.

In 2007, the 100 visas were issued to interpreters. The following year, the embassy doubled the issuance and approved 206 visas. The initial program that began in 2008 and was eligible to Afghans who worked on behalf of the U.S. government issued 199 visas in the first year and 262 visas in 2009. Although these numbers may appear low compared to the normal issuance of visas
at an embassy, the process, at the onset, was gaining ground and working out the kinks in the bureaucratic process.

The visa issuance process appears to have regressed in 2010 for both employees and interpreters. In Table 1, the embassy issued only 165 SIVs for interpreters between the years 2009 and 2013. Further, the embassy only issued 73 SIVs to Afghan employees between the years of 2010 and 2012.

There may be many reasons why the visa issuance slowed down. In a cable obtained from the Associated Press, then Ambassador Eikenberry wrote to Secretary of State Clinton and voiced concern that the SIV program would reduce needed support for the mission in Afghanistan. According to Ambassador Eikenberry, “This act could drain this country of our very best civilian and military partners: our Afghan employees.” The Ambassador believed that issuance of visas could “have a significant deleterious impact on staffing and morale, as well as undermining our overall mission in Afghanistan. Local staff is not easily replenished in a society at 28 percent literacy” (Seiff, 2013).

Another reason for the lagging issuance of SIVs is the perception that Afghanistan is safe or at least safe enough that Afghans do not have to leave the country. In the Population Refugee and Migration (PRM) 2014 Congressional Presentation, the objective of the Department of State is to support the international community and Afghan government’s resettlement of returning refugees. The report states that over 94,000 Afghans voluntarily returned and UNHCR projects 162,000 will return in 2013. A goal of the State Department is to aid and assist the resettlement of displaced persons. From the 2014 report, DoS’ vision for Afghanistan is a safe and secure
environment that is worthy of returning refugees and not to aid and assist Afghans to depart (PRM, 2014).

According to several Afghan SIV applicants, their case was rejected because the embassy was not convinced that a serious threat existed. According to the DoD, by virtue of an association with the U.S. government, these interpreters and their family members were clearly in danger of being killed. Even with multiple letters from DoD offices attesting to the threat, the embassy denied interpreters who worked in prisons or conducted numerous raids with Marine units (Sieff, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
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<tr>
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<td>415</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>79</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>123</td>
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<td>2013</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 (prelim)</td>
<td>3484</td>
<td>5793</td>
<td>9277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5145</td>
<td>7870</td>
<td>13015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs. The data do not include dependents born in a country other than Afghanistan.
According to interviews with immigrants and non-profit groups formed to support the resettlement of Afghan and Iraqi SIVs, the Afghan SIV process has severely affected the morale of those applying for the visa. Those applying for the visa live every day under duress and are typically displaced from their family for safety and security purposes. Some families are left to move around the country to avoid detection and all the while depend on the embassy to properly process their application. If they are lucky enough to receive an SIV, the holder and family have a matter of days to sell any possessions, borrow money, and depart Afghanistan. The process, from an Afghan’s perspective, is fraught with uncertainty and bureaucracy.
Participants described a SIV system that was disorganized and unwilling to reform in order to issue the allocated SIVs. For reasons unknown to outsiders, the process continually denied perfectly eligible applicants or administratively misplaced documents that delayed the processing. A participant from one nonprofit organization described the process as a leaderless operation. After calls were placed to inquire about an applicant, the State Department was unable to properly indicate where the application was in the process.

**Domestic Support Structure**

Unlike previous resettlements which provided immigrants with a processing and administrative gathering at Anderson Air-Force Base in Guam, Afghans departed their war torn country and eleven hours later arrived in America. The processing, education, and resettlement details were, and continue to be, entirely provided to the SIV holder and family in Kabul, Afghanistan. The SIV holder and family have very little time to prepare for or ask questions about their new country, state or town.

Afghans arriving under the SIV receive the same benefits and support package as Iraqi SIV and refugees. From the onset, the resettlement agency, contracted by PRM, provides the initial 90 days of support and consultation. The secondary and longer term assistance is then provided by HHS/ORR. ORR provides funds to state resettlement agencies that then administer social, medical and cash assistance programs. This structure and process is described in detail in Chapter 7.

The same domestic support structure that existed for Iraqi SIV holders was in place for Afghans. However, there has been little attention paid to the Afghanistan resettlement process compared to the Iraqi resettlement process. The Iraqi resettlement process has gained much
attention and several government and non-government agencies have conducted reports on the support structure and resettlement process. In contrast, there is very little research done on Afghans who have settled in the U.S. as SIV holder.

The lack of reporting and research is in large part due to the small numbers of SIV arrivals. In interviews with SIV holders in the U.S., the arrival of Afghans has been challenging because the process abroad is so cumbersome. According to Tables 1 & 2, Afghanistan spent several years with fewer than 40 SIVs issued annually.

With the lack of Afghans in the U.S. compared to Iraqis or other displaced groups, Afghans have had a difficult time creating a comfortable space in America. The culture and customs of Afghanistan do not have the same benefits as the Vietnamese in California, Iraqi Kurds in Tennessee, or Iraqis in Maryland and Florida. Afghans lack the network, social groups, or a political base to aid and support their adjustment and integration into society. In interviews, Afghans were typically displaced and had been on the run throughout Afghanistan before being issued a SIV. Interviewees reported that there is little time to gather belongings and put their affairs in order before shipping out. This adjustment period is hardly idea for anyone or even a family with children.

An interview with one Afghan support group illustrated the chaotic treatment of the SIV process with a powerful and unfortunate story of an Afghan SIV holder. The SIV holder and family arrived in the U.S. with two small children. Upon resettlement, their landlord never received a check from the resettlement agency and filed for an eviction. The SIV holder paid no attention to letters in the mail from the municipal court. After several months, the court granted an eviction and the entire family was instantly homeless. With an outstanding warrant for unpaid
rent, the SIV holder and family had no credit, no money, and were living in a homeless shelter. The SIV holder was unable to find a job and became depressed and disenchanted. He eventually returned to Afghanistan with his family, was found by the Taliban, and killed.

Resettlement groups that work to aid Afghans have argued for better support upon arrival. Afghans are resettled in subpar locations and provided with dilapidated furniture. The groups argue that Afghans who sacrifice for the U.S. are being resettled in abysmal conditions. Afghans are already struggling to exit the country and upon arrival are resettling in substandard conditions.

Conclusion

The story of the Afghan SIV issuance and resettlement is about the absence of those resettled. There were many Afghans working for the U.S., yet so few to be resettled. Afghan SIV applicants faced the real possibility of death before issuance. Few arrived. Among those that did, resettlement into the U.S. has come with years of uncertainty. The U.S. government did not resettle Afghans with a solid sense of security or enthusiasm. Those who have arrived came into the U.S. in a haphazard form.

The networking ability that aided previously resettled groups does not exist for Afghans. With just over 2,000 resettled as of 2012, the group has not benefited from a networked or social community from previous waves of immigrants or large scale resettlement. Further, Afghan are hardly a unified group. The country is extremely tribal and diverse in ethnicity. Unlike Vietnamese, Kurds, or Iraqis, Afghans have not been unified in any under a national identity. Within the country, Afghans are very separated geographically with abysmal transportation capability. Further, ethnic groups speak a variety of languages. Afghanistan’s history is one of
war and turmoil with the Soviet invasion in 1979, Taliban and Al Qaeda rule in the early 1990s and then U.S. backed government after the attack on the World Trade Center.
Chapter 6

Iraq

President Saddam Hussein had ruled Iraq since the late 1970s and had become an adversary of the U.S. following the invasion of Kuwait in 1991. In a botched attempt to empower the southern Shia population and northern Kurds, the U.S. was unable to remove Saddam from power following the Gulf War. Even with U.N. sanctions in the oil-for-food program and northern/southern no-fly zones, Saddam’s power only grew more lethal.

Over time and with international attention moved from Iraq to events in the former Yugoslavia, Saddam began to chip away at and defy the U.N. sanctions. With a robust domestic economy and liberal foreign policy, the Clinton administration was not interested or motivated to commit additional military assets or attention to Iraq (Woodward, 2004).

Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government, the American public and many nations around the globe became focused on al-Qaeda and Muslim radical fundamentalism. Policymakers overwhelmingly approved the Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMF) which expanded the reach of military action beyond Afghanistan (GPO, 2001). The broad language of the authorization gave President George H. Bush the capacity to preemptively defend the U.S. against any direct or perceived threat, such as Iraq.

In the 2002 State of the Union Address, President Bush placed an immediate priority and target on Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi government (DoD, 2002). He labeled the Iraqi leader and Iraq itself as a member of the “axis of evil” and stated that the war on terrorism had only begun with Afghanistan. For many Americans, this was an education and introduction to a foreign policy problem that had remained largely off the international radar (Woodward, 2004).
The case for war in Iraq was vastly different than in Afghanistan where the Taliban, who had claimed responsibility for the September 11, 2001 attack and allowed the global terrorist network Al Qaeda to operate, lived and operated their global terrorist organization, al-Qaeda. The administration’s narrative for war against Iraq depended on the U.N. defiance of sanctions to forfeit all weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (DoD, 2002).

For a number of years following the Gulf War, Saddam had defied the U.N. sanctions because the political will to respond to his actions did not exist. The events of September 11, 2001 changed that, and the Bush administration was quick to advance an Iraq war agenda. The Bush administration tied the events of September 11, 2001, to Saddam Hussein’s defiance of the U.N. sanctions. According to the administration’s narrative, a defiant and rogue government with WMDs could hold the U.S. and possibly the world hostage to a future attack. Further, if Saddam Hussein did not comply with the U.N. sanctions, the U.S. could legally preemptively invade and overthrow the existing leadership.

Although getting into war seemed quite easy, the actual situation on the ground in 2005-2006 was much different. To begin, no WMDs were ever located. Further, the country’s three main ethnic groups (Shia, Sunni, and Kurds) were far more fractured than U.S. policymakers and the Bush administration had ever envisioned. The country’s infrastructure was also deteriorating. With the official fall of Baghdad and the Iraqi government on April 9, 2003, the U.S., which had assumed responsibility for the country’s status, was unable to provide water, electricity, or basic security. With a light and unprepared U.S. footprint, the U.S. was unable to secure and gain support from the Iraqis. Iraq was now governed by the U.S.-led Multi National Force-Iraq (MNF-I). U.S. Ambassador Paul Bremmer III led the Coalition Provincial Authority (CPA). This
group was responsible for the immediate leadership, policy, legislation, and basic governing of Iraq until future elections could be held (Sissons & Al-Saied, 2013).

**De-Ba'athification**

Compounding the ill-prepared military and U.S. government occupation force in Iraq, Paul Bremmer approved a controversial policy known as De-Ba'athification. The term De-Ba'athification refers to actions to prevent the reemergence of the Baath Party. Under the legal and policy action, members of the former ruling Baath Party were not permitted to reenter public service. From the fall of Baghdad in mid-2003 to 2005, the initial phase of De-Ba'athification meant the disbanding of the thousands of Iraqis across the government and, more importantly, the military and security institutions. The policy was implemented with little knowledge of the Baath Party hierarchy or Iraqi politics. The implementation of the policy left a vacuum that the MNF-I was unable to fill. Entire institutions, such as the military and security service, and civil servants as well as public institutions were vacated (Sissons & Al-Saied, 2013). This action by the U.S. immediately polarized the country and contributed to instability and the rise of the Sunni insurgency (Sissons & Al-Saied, 2013).

Early on, the U.S. military demonstrated their inability to restore order; however, the De-Ba'athification policy continued till 2008 when a clearer vetting process was implemented (Sissons & Al-Saied, 2013). As the U.S. government strictly enforced De-Ba'athification, it became the center of gravity in Iraq. Iraqi citizens would be required to pledge allegiance and be beholden to the U.S. government. Because of De-Ba'athification, the U.S. became the biggest employer, to one degree or another, in Iraq. All contracts, rebuilding projects or work for the government required U.S. approval via the MNF-I and CPA.
Iraq quickly fell into a civil war as the U.S. military was unable to secure the country or resolve political and cultural problems. As the insurgency grew, foreign nationals who worked for and with the U.S. became immediate targets. In 2006, the U.S. Congress acknowledged this crisis and approved the Special Immigrant Visa. The legislation first approved a limited number of translators. In 2008, the eligibility criteria were expanded and number of visa issues raised (Bruno, 2015).

**Immigrant Arrivals**

Unlike previous resettlement processing procedures, Iraqis were not required to process in Guam or any other third country. The Iraqi resettlement process, for a majority of applicants, occurred in Iraq. Applicants applied for and were adjudicated at the embassy in Baghdad, Iraq. Following successful adjudication, SIV holders boarded planes and flew directly to the U.S. where they were resettled by either friends and family or a resettlement agency.

As seen in Tables 6.1, 7,138 principal applicants and 9,242 dependents have been issued SIVs since 2007. In total, 16,380 principal applicants and dependents have arrived in the U.S. as holders of the SIV (Bruno, 2015).

According to a 2010 GAO report, both refugees and SIV holders from Iraq were settling in predominantly six states. From 2006 to 2009, California and Michigan accounted for 14,014 Iraqis; and Texas, Arizona, Illinois and Virginia accounted for 9,223 resettled Iraqis. Iraqis are widely dispersed across the U.S., with only ten states resettling less than 100 Iraqis.
Table 6.1: SIV for Iraqi and Translators, Interpreters and employees of the U.S.

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<th>Fiscal Year</th>
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<td>1345</td>
<td>2226</td>
<td>3571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 (prelim)</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>1079</td>
<td>1516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7138</td>
<td>9242</td>
<td>16380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs. The data do not include dependents born in a country other than Iraq.

According to interviews with Iraqi SIV holders in America, the actual application and processing was fairly simple. This could be due to the fact that the embassy in Iraq is the largest embassy in the world and is well staffed with State Department personnel who are responsible for processing the application. The SIV holder interviewed stated that the forms, interview, and issuance was seamless.

Even without the interviews, the sheer number of SIV and United States Refugee Admission Program (USRAP) arrivals indicates that the embassy staff were both prepared and authorized to push the adjudication of Iraqis. To accomplish the numbers in table 6.1 and 6.2, the Consular Affairs section, which is responsible for the issuance of visas and U.S. passports, could not have issued so many visas without authorization and staffing.
### Table 6.2: Iraqi Refugee Processing 2007-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referrals to USRAP</td>
<td>12098</td>
<td>28769</td>
<td>49276</td>
<td>46472</td>
<td>39878</td>
<td>10950</td>
<td>203321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USCIS Interviews</td>
<td>4437</td>
<td>23862</td>
<td>29096</td>
<td>27277</td>
<td>26831</td>
<td>11094</td>
<td>142670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved by USCIC</td>
<td>2909</td>
<td>18674</td>
<td>25238</td>
<td>24021</td>
<td>22323</td>
<td>9045</td>
<td>119202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admitted by US</td>
<td>1608</td>
<td>13823</td>
<td>18838</td>
<td>18016</td>
<td>9388</td>
<td>11066</td>
<td>84902</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The U.S. Customs and Immigration Service.

*As of April 2013.

** This does not include SIV’s.

### Figure 6.1: The Iraqi refugee and SIV resettlement from 2007-2010

Source: Government Accounting Office.
Iraqi resettlement occurred in the past during the first Gulf War in 1991. With the 2006 SIV holders settling in a handful of states, a similar networking and ethnic unity existed. Iraqis arriving in the U.S. and resettling in a number of states may find networks that developed organically over time.

Although my research does not include refugees and asylum seekers in the overall number, the story in Iraq is unique. In parallel with the SIV program, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has resettled a substantially large number of Iraqi refugees. According to the USRAP mission in Iraq, the goal is to resettle vulnerable Iraqi refugees. Under the current policy, an Iraqi who qualifies for the SIV can also apply for admission to the U.S. in the USRAP. (USCIS, 2013)

According to table 6.2, the U.S. admitted 84,902 Iraqi’s from 2007 through April of 2013. That number dwarfs the actual SIV admittance which totaled 16,380 in 2013. Together, the population of Iraqis in the U.S. in 2013 was increased to over 100,000. The likelihood of an Iraqi knowing or resettling in communities with other Iraqis was greatly enhanced because of the USRAP and SIV migration programs.

**Domestic Support Structure**

According to interviews with non-profit groups that support Iraqi SIVs and Iraqi immigrants, the domestic support structure is abysmal. The resettlement agencies placed SIV holders in communities that were either outside of the commuting area or in towns that lacked support services for immigrants without a vehicle. Further, the level of motivation and competency within the resettlement agency was questionable. One interviewee stated that the resettlement agency workers hardly spoke English and had themselves only been in the U.S. for a short time.
He stated that his social security paperwork was incorrectly submitted and, therefore, delayed benefits and his ability to integrate in society. Eventually, the living conditions and support was so poor that he moved in with friends who were living nearby. Other participants stated that the resettlement agency does a subpar job to find the SIV holder a job that is near their home and will earn enough income to feed a family.

According to the GAO report, SIV holders have limited option for government employment in the U.S. (GAO, 2010). The report’s findings were confirmed in an interview with an Iraqi SIV holder who stated that his resettlement town did not have any military base. He was employed by the military, at the highest levels of Special Operations, and was unable to use his language and expertise for employment in the U.S. After months without a job, he enlisted in the military. He now works remotely with the Defense Language Institute (DLI) as a language instructor for students learning and writing in Arabic.

SIV holders are not evaluated, holistically, before their arrival. No one in the government or resettlement agency served as a “Head Hunter” to match the SIV holder’s skills and motivation with the settlement location or employer. In an interview with an SIV holder, he stated that many of the Iraqis who he worked with, as well as soldiers in the U.S. military that were back in the U.S. served as an informal network. The groups would discuss their situation, what benefits were helping, gaps in their resettlement, and job placement. He said that the Iraqis who worked together on the Special Operations team flew to Utah for a reunion. This reunion served as a springboard for his eventual enlistment as a fellow SIV has joined several months before.

The Iraqi SIV holders that I interviewed were single upon arrival to the U.S. and have subsequently married. They stated that the arrival to the U.S. without a wife and children made
the difficult flight and resettlement much easier. Their ability to travel, adapt, be unemployed, and mobile would have been very difficult with a family.

**Conclusion**

The story of Iraqi evacuation and resettlement begins in 2003 with the U.S. policy of De-Ba'athification which is when the U.S. took ownership of the Iraq’s aging infrastructure, corruption, and government. Compounding the problem, the U.S. lacked the capability and manpower to fix the problems created by De-Ba'athification. To place a band aid on the problems of De-Ba'athification, the U.S. employed and relied upon a large number of Iraqis to serve directly for the U.S. government.

When the Iraq’s instability and government become defunct, most of these former Iraqi employees who worked on behalf of the U.S. were now targeted. When legislation was finally passed in 2006, the resettlement system was not prepared for such a large influx of immigrants. While much has been made about the processing abroad by the U.S. Embassy, the gaps in the processing and evacuation of SIV holders was not nearly as cumbersome and challenging as the resettlement process. Similar to the Vietnamese evacuation and resettlement, many immigrants who were crucial to the U.S. mission were packed into the U.S. in a short amount of time and with little domestic planning.

The resettlement from 2006-2015 cannot be thought of as award winning or a best practice. The U.S. government and resettlement agencies do not operate best when placed with an overload of SIV holders. The U.S. government and resettlement agencies would have been more prepared had a policy been in place, at some level, to prepare for an eventual influx of Iraqis at
the onset of the war in 2003. Proper planning, locations, infrastructure could then have been mapped out for the maximum success of future SIV arrivals.
Chapter 7

Agencies

The processing and resettlement of refugees and special immigrants spans multiple U.S. government agencies at the federal and state level as well as non-governmental organizations. These agencies are responsible for identifying eligible applicants, conducting background checks, medical evaluations, processing, aligning a U.S. city in the U.S., transportation to the U.S., housing, and services for a host of social, medical and monetary benefits. Although the duties and mission of these agencies listed have not changed dramatically since 1975, the roles and responsibilities described below are taken from the current SIV policy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Further, these agencies and programs service a variety of groups that are eligible for resettlement processing and benefits; however, for this paper, I will only focus on refugees, asylees and SIVs. By law, refugees, asylees and SIVs receive the same resettlement and benefits package.

Immigration and Naturalization Act

The legal authority to assist foreign nationals who worked for and with the U.S. government and are then targeted due to that relationship is found in the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA). As amended by the 1980 Refugee Act, the INA legislation encompasses asylees, refugees and SIV holder. Within the INA, Congress has outlined procedures for admission criteria, authorizes federal assistance programs and requires refugees to apply for Legal Permanent Residency status. (Bruno, 2011)

As the INA’s goal in refugee resettlement is to promote self-sufficiency, the Department of State (DoS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are responsible for
administering programs to achieve that goal. The DoS’s bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration administer the Reception and Placement Program and HHS’s Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) administers grants to states for social services, medical programs and cash assistance. (Bruno, 2011)

The INA, by law, both defines and establishes eligibility to the various groups entering the U.S. for resettlement assistance. A refugee, authorized in the South Vietnamese evacuation, is defined as an individual who is outside of his/her country and is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular political or social group. An asylee, authorized in the Kurdish Iraqi evacuation, is defined as an alien within the U.S. who has established the claim of refugee under the INA. A SIV, authorized in the Iraq and Afghan evacuation, is defined as a foreign national who has worked directly with the U.S. armed forces or under the Chief of Mission. The criteria for eligibility for the SIV are described in Section 1059 and Section 1244 of the National Defense Authorization Acts of 2006 and 2008. (USCIS, 2015)

**Federal Agencies**

At the federal level, the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services are responsible for identifying eligible applicants, verifying authorization of immigration, processing applicants abroad and assisting immigrants upon arrival.
**U.S. Department of State.** The U.S. Department of State serves two vital roles in the SIV process. At embassies and consulates abroad, the U.S. Department of State conducts the final interview and issuance of the SIV prior to entrance into the U.S. Further, DoS is charged with managing the Reception and Placement Program (RPP). Because the U.S. Department of State is at the forefront of the visa issuance, typically, DoS is charged with the overall responsibility with any lag or shortcomings in the SIV.

**SIV Issuance.** Since the 2006 SIV application and adjudication process is ongoing, is post 9/11, and builds off of past evacuations, I will highlight the current policies, practices and procedures. The most basic function of the U.S. Department of States Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) is to issue visas and passports in embassies and consulates abroad. To obtain an SIV, the current procedures for an Iraqi and Afghan is initiated with a letter of recommendation from the Chief of Mission (CoM). To obtain the letter of recommendation, the CoM requires that the SIV applicant show proof of employment with the U.S., letter of recommendation by a U.S. supervisor and be in good standing with the U.S. government. The entire packet is sent to the National Visa Center (NVC) for processing. Upon completion of the background check, DHS will alert NVC who will then coordinate a final appointment with the SIV applicant and the Embassy for the final interview. For security purposes, the extent and limitations of the security check is not advertised. Upon receiving a scheduled appointment by NVC, the SIV applicant will come into the embassy to be interviewed by the DoS consular affairs officer who will ensure the packet is complete. After reviewing the DHS background check and NVC packet, the consular officer will determine final eligibility and either issue or deny the applicant. The SIV application can be denied or delayed by either DHS, NVC or DoS. (The Department of State 2014)
Reception and Placement Program. The DoS Reception and Placement Program is led by the Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration (PRM). PRM provides grants to public and nonprofit agencies (known as Volags or resettlement agencies) that provide standardized services for arriving SIV holders. At home, PRM initiates the resettlement process by proposing a grant for the resettlement of incoming SIV holders. In an effort to win the grant, participating Volags will propose a specific affiliate and demonstrate, with a narrative and data, the benefits of the particular community and services available at the resettlement site. PRM will oversee the services of the flight, which arranged by the Organization for Migration (IOM), as an interest free loan to the SIV holder. PRM oversees the resettlement process and program that is carried out by the Volag. PRM does this by assuring, through site visits and conferences, that Volags are fulfilling the contractual grant awarded to the agency (Bruno, 2011)

PRM’s narrow scope in the resettlement process ends 90 days after the SIV holder arrives in the U.S. The resettlement agencies funding and services, from PRM, are for initial placement in an apartment and transition. The funding provided will entail food, lodging, furniture, cloths and administrative assistance in initiating HHS benefits. Beyond the 90 days of benefits, the grant from PRM to the resettlement agency ends.
Table 7.1: Obligated Funds for Resettlement Agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Obligated Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY2006</td>
<td>$49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY2007</td>
<td>$56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY2008</td>
<td>$67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY2009</td>
<td>$90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY2010</td>
<td>$141.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The U.S. Department of State, Population, Refugee and Migration.

**Department of Homeland Security.** The Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Immigration Service (CIS) process the I-360 petition for a SIV. This process begins immediately following the letter of recommendation from the Chief of Mission and concludes when the SIV holder arrives at the U.S. port of entry. Once the applicant is given a letter of recommendation from the CoM, the SIV applicant will file a petition and send required paperwork to the U.S. Customs and Immigration Service (CIS). CIS will conduct checks and processing and upon completion, CIS will alert NVC of the final results. (State.gov, 2015)

**Health and Human Services.**
With a limited budget, The Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is responsible to provide social services and benefits to enable eligible SIV holders with the ultimate goal self-sufficient. (INA, 1980) The current package available to SIVs includes medical benefits, cash assistance and social services.

The legislative mandate establishes four requirements in the resettlement assistance process. According to the INA, eligible SIV holders must gain economic self-sufficiency through
employment training and placement, have English language training, limited cash assistance, and the benefits provided must be gender neutral. (Bruno, 2011) Social services, cash assistance and medical care are the three primary services that ORR provides to the SIV holder upon arrival in the U.S. Award grants to resettlement agencies make up 10% of the budget and are granted upon a competitive bidding process (Bruno, 2011)

The funds allocated to ORR for social services, medical and cash (known as Targeted Assistance) encompass refugees, asylees, and refugees. According to Table 2, the appropriations for refugees and asylees, which includes SIV holders, has remained constant from 2010 through 2012. This presents a problem for HHS because the SIV population has increased the pool of eligible stakeholders. Although the SIV program was authorized in 2006, the actual process and system of issuing visas did not occur, in mass, until 2010 through 2014. During this critical time, funding for ORR should have seen a sharp increase. The SIV holders have created more demand on the system and services provided by ORR; however, ORR has not seen an increase in funds.
Table 7.2: Funding and Funding Needs-Office of Refugee Resettlement (in millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item/Account</th>
<th>FY ’10 Actual</th>
<th>FY ’11 House</th>
<th>FY ’11 Senate</th>
<th>FY ’11 Obama</th>
<th>FY ’11 Actual</th>
<th>FY ’12 Obama</th>
<th>FY ’12 Needs Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transitional and Medical Services</td>
<td>$353.30</td>
<td>$353.30</td>
<td>$353.30</td>
<td>$417.00</td>
<td>$352.59</td>
<td>$394.22</td>
<td>$469.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Social Services</td>
<td>$154.00</td>
<td>$154.00</td>
<td>$154.00</td>
<td>$179.00</td>
<td>$153.69</td>
<td>$154.01</td>
<td>$204.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventive Health</td>
<td>$4.70</td>
<td>$4.70</td>
<td>$4.70</td>
<td>$4.70</td>
<td>$4.69</td>
<td>$4.75</td>
<td>$6.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Assistance</td>
<td>$48.60</td>
<td>$48.60</td>
<td>$48.60</td>
<td>$48.60</td>
<td>$48.50</td>
<td>$48.59</td>
<td>$61.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal – Refugee and Asylee Resettlement Services</td>
<td>$560.60</td>
<td>$560.60</td>
<td>$560.60</td>
<td>$649.30</td>
<td>$559.48</td>
<td>$601.57</td>
<td>$715.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance to Trafficking Victims</td>
<td>$9.80</td>
<td>$9.80</td>
<td>$9.80</td>
<td>$9.80</td>
<td>$9.78</td>
<td>$9.81</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance to Torture Victims</td>
<td>$11.00</td>
<td>$11.00</td>
<td>$11.00</td>
<td>$11.00</td>
<td>$10.98</td>
<td>$11.09</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaccompanied Alien Children</td>
<td>$124.30</td>
<td>$149.30</td>
<td>$149.30</td>
<td>$207.00</td>
<td>$149.00</td>
<td>$177.23</td>
<td>$207.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total – Office of Refugee Resettlement</td>
<td>$705.90</td>
<td>$730.90</td>
<td>$730.90</td>
<td>$877.60</td>
<td>$729.44</td>
<td>$824.69</td>
<td>$987.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

**Cash Assistance.** As appropriated by Congress, the monetary cash assistance programs for immigrants are the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). It is important to note, only immigrants with children qualify for TANF. TANF benefits are available for five years, RCA is eligible for eight months, and SSI is available for seven years. To be eligible, SIV holders must register with the state employment service, participate in the jobs program and accept job offered by the employment service. From eight months to seven years, SIV holders are eligible for cash assistance programs upon arrival. The amount and eligibility at the state level is determined by the state refugee coordinator and funds available are fluid. Depending on the Federal budget and allocation of funds, some programs and services may not be sustained year-to-year (GAO, 2010).
**Medical.** Medical assistance, in the form of Medicaid, is provided to the SIV holders for the first 8 months. In states that have accepted matching federal funds under the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid will typically insure SIV holders beyond the eight month window if needed (Bruno, 2011) However, states have the option, and do, cover SIV holders with state plans as an alternative.

At a minimum, ORR provides the state refugee coordinator and state health coordinator with 8 months of Medicaid coverage or parallel coverage by a different insurer. Beyond that period, the SIV holder will be uninsured unless the state has additional coverage programs. For example, California has accepted Medicaid expansion, as a part of the Affordable Care Act, and is able to insure SIV holders beyond the 8 months if needed. Because of this decentralized approach, medical care, coverage, and service differ from state-to-state.

**Social Services.** The primary goal of the ORR social services, according to INA section 412, is economic self-sufficiency. ORR currently interprets this guidance and provides job training, day care, refresher training, English language classes, and recertification services. Throughout these job training programs and services, ORR’s objective is to adjust and integrate immigrants into the job market. The funding from ORR to the states is accomplished by a grant based formula. Based on the formula, funds are allocated from ORR and to the state based upon the number of refugees living in a particular state over a 24 month period (Bruno, 2011) Typically, resettlement agencies receive money, in the form of grants, from the state refugee coordinator. The state refugee coordinator or office dealing with immigration affairs does not specifically perform any social programs; instead they generally oversee the funds allocated and perform audits on the resettlement agencies.
Volunteer Agencies

Volunteer Agencies (Volags) provide a variety of services in the resettlement process. There are nine DoS approved Volags who can apply for grants from HHS and DoS for refugee, asylee and SIV resettlement services and benefits. Prior to 2010, the grant provided by DoS for one incoming foreign national was $900. The per capita grant was increased to $1,800 January 1st, 2010. The nine approved Volags have affiliates in multiple field offices and hundreds of satellite offices throughout the U.S (Bruno, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.3: Nine Approved Resettlement Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church World Service (CWS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Relief Corporation (WR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Rescue Committee (IRC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Health and Human Services (HHS)

State Refugee Coordinator

The state government can either elect to fund the state and health coordinator position and program or withdraw from the program. In states that fund the program, the state refugee and health coordinators report to the governor’s cabinet appointee. In 38 states, the governor and legislature appropriate funds for the program and the coordinators bill out either PRM (refugee coordinator) or ORR (Health Coordinator). In states that withdraw from the program, the Wilson-Fish program is the alternative structure. It is established in twelve states. In these states, the state’s refugee coordinator is chosen by ORR from amongst the nine resettlement agencies.
While the billing process from the state to the federal government is the same, the health coordinator reports to the refugee coordinator (Health and Human Services, 2015).

The state refugee coordinator works directly with state resettlement agencies to determine the optimal number and location of SIV holders in a particular year. Upon a proposal by the resettlement agencies, the state coordinator can agree or disagree with the proposed resettlement count for the year. In the end, the state refugee coordinator does not have authority to deny or refuse a resettlement agency’s placement of an SIV holder (Health and Human Services, 2015).

In Arlington VA, a weekly meeting is held by PRM, ORR, and Volags to determine the future of incoming SIV holders. This meeting is mandated, by law, and requires the agencies to coordinate with all stakeholders to determine the placement and settlement in the United States. (Bruno, 2011) Based upon the previous year’s resettlement, the resettlement agencies, ORR, PRM, in coordination with resettlement affiliates and state refugee coordinators develop target resettlement numbers for the year. The weekly meetings are an opportunity for all stakeholders to review the incoming SIV holders and discuss the best fit for the state and incoming SIV holder.

**Conclusion**

These processing, security screening, reception, resettlement and integration of refugees, asylees, and SIVs is a fusion of agencies at all levels of government and span the private, public spectrum. The resettlement process is bound by several agreements, grants, Memorandums of Understanding, and cooperation agreements assist those who are less fortunate and want more for themselves and family. My research has not located anyone at the National Security Council (NSC), Director of National Intelligence (DNI), or Department of Defense’s Joint Staff who is
leading the process from an operational or policy position. In my literature review and interviews, I continually heard a theme and attitude of “Can Do”, and “It Just Works” from agencies.
Chapter 8

Discussion and Results

According to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, the goal in the resettlement of SIV holders is such holders to achieve self-sufficiency in a timely manner.

State Agencies

At the state level, state agencies serve as middle management to fulfill the INA policy. Based upon my interviews and research on published reports, the benefits provided to SIV holders, and overseen by state immigration offices, both support and undermine this objective. State agencies oversee resettlement agencies, serve as liaisons with federal agencies, and have the strategic vision for their state’s capability. However, without transportation, transferability of benefits across states, and with limited attention to access to medical care, state agencies consistently and legitimately question whether self-sustainability is realistic and achievable, with the current funding, policies, and economy.

Sustain. And with no uniform federal policy on the management of state resettlement agencies, each state operates and funds resettlement services uniquely. According to interviews, this has benefits in making the resettlement process personal and local. Some states operate and fund the resettlement agency from the state budget. This structure ensures that the executive and legislative branch is vested in the success of the program. With a limited staff and budget, state resettlement agencies advocate and oversee medical and resettlement benefits for SIV holders. States agencies are more vested, for practical reasons, in the success of the SIV holder in their respective state and their integration into society. At the state level, agency workers become subject matter experts who provide knowledge, expertise and strategic oversight to resettlement
agencies. Conversely, states that opt out of the program and allow resettlement agencies to run state resettlement services do not have the burden of dealing with fluid state budgets or shifting legislative priorities.

**Improve.** According to interviews with state agencies, SIVs are given a limited financial and medical benefits package under the assumption that this incentivizes self-sufficiency rather than dependency on the government for financial and medical assistance. State agencies consistently stated that the benefits package is insufficient and does not support interstate travel for employment or mobility within the state. Further, the medical package afforded is not standard throughout the U.S., lacks preventative and mental health care, and risks losing the population in the bureaucracy. With no federal resettlement policy and diverse state resettlement packages, the random placement for resettlement can impact an SIV holder’s success in America.

The inattention to transportation needs works against the U.S. policy for self-sufficiency. SIV holders are severely limited without adequate access to transportation. A transportation deficit severely inhibits the SIV holder’s ability to attend medical and social service appointments. Because benefits do not include driver’s training or subsidies to purchase a vehicle, SIV holders are limited to public transportation. The forced reliance on public transit is especially problematic where SIV holders are settled in car dependent places. Resettlement agencies argued that the cost of living is cheaper in rural areas compared to urban areas that have regular train and bus service. The hours of operation and routes of a local public transit system may not coincide with shift work or jobs outside of the commuting area. Further, having to use
public transportation for a family with small children could dissuade SIV holders from attending crucial medical and resettlement appointments that would lead to self-sufficiency.

The benefits required to be self-sufficient also do not transfer efficiently from state to state. If an SIV holder was resettled in Maryland and shortly upon arriving was offered a position in South Dakota, the resettlement agency in Maryland would not be able to assist because it lacks an administrative channel to transfer costs, payments, or even the file to South Dakota. Since the SIV holder was not originally resettled in South Dakota, the resettlement agencies in South Dakota would not receive payments from the federal government for services rendered. The funding for the eight months of medical insurance is provided to the state. Therefore, states bill the federal government for the entire cost of the medical insurance. If the SIV holder leaves the state, the state will not transfer the unused insurance to another state and the receiving state is not eligible to apply for another eight months of medical benefits for the SIV holder.

The total medical package is not standardized from state to state. For example, states that have accepted the Affordable Care Act and expanded Medicaid coverage to adults under 65 with income up to 133% of the federal poverty level, such as California, will provide medical coverage for most SIV holders and family members beyond the mandatory eight months. Unless the SIV holder gains insurance through an employer, states that have not accepted the Affordable Care Act (ACA), such as Tennessee, will leave SIV holders uninsured after eight months. SIV holders are clearly better off in some states than others, but often do not have the information to resettle in a state that has accepted the Medicare expansion under the ACA. I did not find any data or information about whether access to medical insurance is taken into consideration during the process of deciding where to settle SIV holders.
The lack of mental health coverage works against the goal of self-sufficiency. SIV holders and family members have lived in and come to America from a war zone. Many of these arrivals have serious underlying post-traumatic stress that is not accounted for in fiscal appropriations of the medical care package. Further, SIV holders and family members are often unfamiliar with Western medical practices and systems. According to Lipson and Meleis (1983), the western medical system is extremely bureaucratic compared to the Middle East and creates cultural and communication barriers. Current SIVs holders and family members represent a vulnerable population that lacks a network to lean upon and has potential medical risks that, if untreated, could cause more harm to individuals and society.

This study supports the findings in a comprehensive report concerning SIV resettlement (International Rescue Committee, 2010). The study found that Iraqis come to the U.S. with serious illness, trauma, and post-traumatic stress. Several physicians in Atlanta and Phoenix interviewed by the International Rescue Committee described Iraqis arriving in the U.S. in poor health and suffering from war-related trauma (International Rescue Committee, 2010).

The post-2008 economy also does not favor SIV holders. Entry level positions that previous SIV holders took advantage of are simply no longer available. It takes 9-12 months for SIV holders to find jobs, and even if they do, there is no guarantee that insurance will be provided by the employer (GAO, 2010).

The average SIV holder loses medical benefits before acquiring employment and therefore risks losing what little savings he or she has brought from Iraq. SIV holders without resources and benefits are at risk for becoming homeless. As their benefits and resources are depleted, landlords seek eviction (International Rescue Committee, 2010). The “Resettlement
Lottery,” as the International Rescue Committee terms it, where SIV holders could land in a state with better or worse benefits packages, does not support the goal of self-sufficiency.

**SIV Holders**

SIV holders and family members endure an exhaustive and sometimes cumbersome application process to escape the threat of insurgents who are targeting them because of their relationship with the U.S. SIV holders have practical experience in working with the U.S. government in a war zone, are extremely motivated, and typically represent the hope and dreams that America was founded upon. Upon arrival, SIV holders are faced with a very decentralized resettlement process, a completely new and complicated health care system, and very limited benefits package. Which randomly selected state and city he is resettled in has an enormous effect on the success or failure of the SIV holder. Finally, the act and opportunity of resettlement is not lost on the SIV holders and family members no matter the challenges faced domestically. By fortune and luck, SIV holders with access to grassroots organizations, established for the sole purpose of resettlement of Iraqi and Afghans, are better off and less dependent on the resettlement agencies.

**Sustain.** Throughout the interview process, a continual theme was the gratitude and appreciation immigrants felt toward the U.S. government. Immigrants, no matter how difficult the process and resettlement was, are honored and excited to live in America and have the opportunities that come with living in America. An Iraqi interviewee stated:

“I lost everything while working for the U.S”. I knew that America was bigger than a resettlement agency. At the end, I came to America and can carry on with their lives. The overall experience until you get to the United States is I think it’s looked upon in a
positive way. People appreciate the help of the government and the legislations that are in place to help these people that helped the US government.”

In the case of the Kurdish resettlement, a large portion of Iraqi Kurds had immigrated to Tennessee in the 1991 following the first Iraq war (known as the Gulf War). This foundation and network aided the resettlement of Iraqi Kurds in 1996. A Kurdish interviewee stated,

“Perhaps Americans thought because there is a huge Kurdish community in Nashville, if we send these people, the Americans would not have to look after them. It would be easier for them to live with their fellow Kurds, and then the Kurds who were in Nashville before their arrival, they would be helping them, which I think it was a smart decision, good perception, because once they arrived in Nashville, people did help them to find a job, to resettle, to make it better for themselves.”

SIV holders who came to the U.S. alone, versus those with a wife or children, were better prepared to deal with resettlement agencies, change and employment. Navigating the resettlement system and operating in an entirely new environment is troublesome enough; however, those without children and a wife felt less burdened and more capable of dealing with setbacks or unmet expectations. An interviewee stated, “Because I was a single guy, I had many friends. I had money. I came speaking English. I was able to do things on my own. I’ve seen families that are struggling. They were left alone. They couldn't do anything about it because the resettlement agency.”

**Improve.** A persistent theme throughout the interview process was the location upon arrival in the U.S. from which derived multiple secondary and tertiary problems and sometimes benefits. From all four conflicts, immigrants were given a choice to settle in the U.S. at a
specific, desired location or as directed by the resettlement agency. If immigrants chose to relocate with a close family member, resettlement benefits were not always provided. Otherwise, immigrants were relocated based upon the unfilled locations across the U.S.

Immigrants stated that this process is a coin toss. In some cases, their location is in an area with job opportunities, public transportation, and immigrant-friendly policies. In other cases, immigrants are left to forge their own path in unfriendly areas lacking jobs and transportation. According to one SIV holder, he was assigned Indianapolis, Indiana as his resettlement location. However, he had served and had maintained contact with members of the Massachusetts Army National Guard. So after arriving in Indiana with little job prospect or contact network, he contacted his friends and moved to Massachusetts.

Due to budget constraints, immigrants are resettled in affordable neighborhoods, which often already possess a supply of lower wage workers. As a consequence, they have a hard time finding jobs in the local area that have not already been taken. Immigrants must often look outside the commuting area for a job. Employment opportunity in some cases required transportation that does not exist in a majority of affordable neighborhoods across America. The job opportunity then becomes narrowly tailored and extremely challenging.

Since there is little to no reliable public transportation across most of the U.S. in affordable communities, immigrants scrambled to buy a car. Immigrants come to the U.S. with little or no savings. Purchasing a quality vehicle requires financing, which immigrants are unable to get because they lack a credit history. Without a vehicle, gaining employment or accessing valuable medical and social services becomes extremely challenging.
Despite the government’s best effort at educating immigrants in their country of origin and resettlement services’ work in assisting immigrants navigate bureaucracies, each and every immigrant comes to the U.S. with different challenges, goals, expectations, and competency. An immigrant with a mental handicap and dependent children is in a vastly different position than a healthy immigrant who comes to the U.S. alone and settles near his or her family members. The system is established to assist and fund at a very basic level and immigrants who are outside the margins of basic functionality struggle.

Not all states, resettlement agencies, and towns are equal. The range of success and failure of an immigrant, scaled out, depends on several variables. One immigrant interviewed stated that the resettlement agency failed to pay the landlord on time, which led to his two-child family’s eventual eviction. After spending all their resettlement time and money at a hotel, he was unable to find employment and his credit history was crushed. In contrast, better established resettlement agencies in other towns were able to work with landlords as the rent payments were delayed. From a health and social perspective, immigrants experience communities that are accommodating as well as communities that are unable to integrate immigrants or service their particular needs. For example, an SIV whose child is developmentally handicapped may be resettled into a town without services to properly assist the child and family.

Compounding the lack of transportation, resettlement agencies and medical appointments are often not in the same location. Without transportation, immigrants had a choice of traveling to and from the resettlement offices in taxis or not attending the appointments. Because of the limited health care providers available in the area, immigrants had to travel beyond their commuting capability or wait months for an appointment.
Resettlement Agencies

On the front lines, resettlement agencies take on the responsibility of assisting immigrants with great pride. From the national headquarters to the local offices, these individuals are passionate about their work and overloaded with cases.

Sustain. The resettlement agencies have been in place for decades and are built into the fabric of refugee and immigrant resettlement. These same nine headquarter agencies, and dozens of field offices and hundreds of satellite offices, serve as institutional knowledge for past, current and future resettlement.

The level of positive communication between and among state immigration offices throughout the states interviewed is remarkable. The resettlement centers do not work for the state or federal government but rely on the government for funds and grants. The positive communication and relationship works in the best interest of the newly-arrived immigrants. In an interview with a state office speaking about the relationship between resettlement agencies and state offices,

“So, that negotiation occurs and kind of... We agree on it or we don't agree, perhaps. But, that's the number that I feel good about. So, that's the number we put on the piece of paper. From that point, the re-settlement Directors submits a number to their national VOLAG....” From that point, the national resettlement agencies start to send immigrants to the state. She further states, “I think if I had major concerns about a county, "Hey, you've proposed 600 refugees in a county that normally gets 130. I have serious concerns about that; that can't happen." I think they would hear that. But, if it's like 220 versus 200, I don't know if they spend a lot of time...”

Albeit new, resettlement agencies are now beginning to coordinate and meet regularly with local leaders. This relationship was lacking for many years and created problems that the
state immigration office is often too small to address. Local resettlement agencies should be, and
now are, meeting with local officials before placing immigrants into their community. Local
municipalities can assist and fill in gaps where resettlement services fall short. For example, a
particular county or town may be better suited to handle an immigrant family versus an adjacent
town. Variables could be school districts with English as a second language capability,
affordable housing, town medical services, emergency services or employment opportunity.

**Improve.** Resettlement offices are either reluctant to or lack the capability to operate
outside their prescribed formula. Most agencies see a diverse group of refugee and immigrants;
however, others have a steady flow of one particular group. The resettlement agencies do not
pool resources or cater to an arriving community. Resettlement agencies lack the dynamic,
outside-the-box capability to provide personal attention to immigrants.

Although coordination with city and county officials is happening at some locations, the
practice is not standard and is largely dependent on the personalities and leadership within the
agency. The placement of an immigrant in an affordable housing unit without alerting local
officials or knowing the city’s infrastructure works against the best interests of the newly arrived
immigrant.

Caseworkers, at the ground level, have far too many cases to pay proper attention to each file.
Since the 2006 SIV legislation, the caseworkers, in states that typically accept a large number of
immigrants have had two to three times their typical case load. According to a 2010 GAO report,
a resettlement office had budgeted and expected to serve 300 refugees in 2009 but received
1,200. In 2008, the average case load was 30 per case worker and spiked to 120 the following
year.
Advocacy Groups

Several non-profit organizations have sprung up following the 2006 SIV legislation to advocate specifically for Iraq and Afghan SIV holders. These groups have arisen to fill the gaps, in much the same way as Multi-Cultural Community Association (MAA) during Vietnam did. These groups formed after personal stories of mismanagement and organizational inefficiencies were exposed by the U.S. policy on resettlement of SIV holders. Since 2006, a number of groups have formed and provide comprehensive service to Iraqi and Afghan arrivals, legal services for immigrants in the U.S. and those stills seeking refuge, and political advocacy for additional services and more effective legislation. Some of the most prominent groups are the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), The List Project, and No One Left Behind.

Sustain. From a strategic perspective, each group serves a specific function or provide a service that is unique and valuable for incoming immigrants. The missions and duties do not overlap; one organization provides legal services for incoming immigrants while another provides money for proper furniture or the purchase of a car. Another group works with SIV applicants who have not been approved as SIV and are waiting for processing due to bureaucratic delays.

The groups have worked together and with Congressional staff to enhance and broaden the current legislation. Together, the organizations serve as advocates and a fund of suggestions for legislators who are interested in assisting SIVs. Whereas the resettlement agencies aid and assist SIVs, refugees, and immigrants, the nonprofit organizations focus specifically on SIV holders’ and family members’ concerns and welfare. The organization’s successful lobbying effort is responsible for the extension and expansion of the current Iraq and Afghan SIV.
**Improves.** However, the organizations are small in number and size. The groups operate at a very strategic level and struggle to function locally. Although their effort and work is amazing, immigrants would be better off if there were more organizations of this type at the local level.
Chapter 9

Recommendations

The 2006 SIV process can be summed up as inconsistent and inefficient. Congress and the President were quick to act in 2006 by creating, and then amending, the legislation to authorize the Special Immigrant Visa. Federal agencies however lacked the inability to retain “Lessons Learned”, experience, and leadership to address the challenges that come with interagency relationships.

Because the SIV is initiated overseas yet directly impacts and interfaces with the Department of Homeland Security as well as several other federal agencies, the process and workflow struggled to meet the demand. To this day, the SIV process and systematic issuance does not have one clear leader that would answer to Congress or the President. Instead, a group of agencies and civil servants are left to piece together a policy until the SIV process is terminated.

In the 2006 SIV legislation, Congress and the President acted with speed and haste. The SIV legislation had proponents in the American public and Department of Defense. However, the creation of legislation alone is not enough. A policy such as the SIV does not have a matter of years for agencies to work out the kinks. For a policy such as the SIV, the window for agency action is extremely narrow. The SIV policy in 2006 was legislatively efficient but bureaucratically inefficient.

Self-sustainability is the primary goal in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This has driven the policies and benefits of inbound immigrants who worked for and with the U.S. government and were displaced or targeted due to that relationship. To achieve self-
sufficiency, the US policy is to provide minimal and time limited social and medical services to incentivize independence. In the 1970s, with the arrival of South Vietnamese immigrants following the fall of Saigon, the policy of self-sustainability was achievable in the American economy and social structure. For the Kurdish Iraqis in 1996, similar conditions existed that allowed for adjustment and integration. By 2006, the economic and social environment in the US changed. Currently, self-sustainability is unrealistic, extremely difficult, and even unachievable without changes to public policies and practices.

**Vietnam**

**Cultural.** The wave of Vietnamese entering the U.S. in 1975 was met with political and social acceptance. The pain of a lost war could be assuaged by assisting fleeing allies. Communities across America, for the most part, played a significant role in integrating the arrivals. The President advanced a narrative asserting that it was the U.S.’s moral obligation to aid and assist Vietnamese who were forsaking their country and communism to live in liberty and democracy. For the most part, Americans rallied to this narrative; the nation was willing to integrate this wave of immigrants.

**Economic.** The U.S. economy in the 1970s and 1980s welcomed low-wage workers. There were fewer immigrants and women in the labor market to compete with. Vietnamese immigrants were able to fit into this labor structure; they entered the job market earning low wages even when their skill set overqualified them for the position. Further, the urban flight that had begun after World War II left behind cheap, affordable housing in many cities. Living in an urban environment was ideal for the Vietnamese, or any immigrant, since they could access medical services, grocery stores, jobs and friends without transportation. The combination of
available low wage jobs, a willing workforce, and affordable housing in many cities proved to be ideal conditions for Vietnamese immigrants.

**Social.** The resettlement agencies had established a foundation for entrance and administrative processing, but the role of integration was filled by Vietnamese community centers. These organizations were staffed and largely funded by Vietnamese who had arrived in the U.S. in earlier immigration waves. Interaction at a personal level with Vietnamese immigrants who spoke their native language and had dealt with the immigration process proved to be extremely helpful to the 1975-1977 waves of immigrants. The ability to arrive in the U.S. and achieve self-sustainability was made possible, in large part, because of these grassroots organizations.

Before arriving in the U.S., Vietnamese immigrants benefited from the arrival and staging location in Guam. Immigrants were able to discuss and plan out their eventual path to the U.S. while being educated, at a superficial level, on topics ranging from western healthcare, school systems, social security, and their benefits package. By stopping in Guam for a limited time, the Vietnamese were able to interact, in one place, with the full range of federal, state and resettlement agencies. Bringing together a variety of groups with separate missions and responsibilities provided an interaction and dialogue that was impossible to achieve in Vietnam or America.

In their time, the Vietnamese resettled and occupied spaces and jobs that had otherwise been left vacant in America. Their resettlement was a textbook success and a testament to the INA goal of self-sustainability. From the staging location in Guam to the establishment and work
by community centers, the U.S. model for resettling Vietnamese immigrants who worked for the U.S. was a success.

**Iraqi Kurds**

**Cultural.** Divided among several Middle East countries after World War I, the Kurds have been persecuted for decades. Over the years, Kurds have immigrated as refugees to America. From the 1970s through the present day, America has opened its doors to this group. With threats made to a group of Kurds working with the U.S., the U.S. government did not want to risk an escalation in the Iraqi conflict. The resettlement was met with less publicity than in the case of the Vietnamese, and was accomplished without a large publicity campaign. For the most part, the public was unaware of and uninterested in the Kurdish resettlement. This low-key resettlement worked to favor the Kurds who did not face large scale discrimination or bias upon arrival.

**Economic.** The economic conditions of the late 1990s were favorable to immigrants who were willing to occupy low wage jobs. While the Kurdish Iraqis came to the U.S. with a variety of skills, they were willing to enter the job market at any level. This work ethic and attitude was well received and served both the domestic and immigrant community well. By the late 1990s, the numbers of undocumented immigrants from Latin America were increasing throughout America. Additionally, an increasing number of women had entered the workforce. Although this was a change from the 1975 Vietnamese immigration, the effect on Iraqi Kurds was minimal. The Iraqi Kurds resettlement was capped at 6,600 and thus was unaffected by the increased labor market or women in the workforce.
Social. The Gulf war in 1991 began the first wave of Kurdish resettlement in Nashville, Tennessee. The welcome reception, successful adjustment and integration coupled with southern hospitality created an environment for the second wave of immigrants to follow in 1996. The 1996 wave of SIV holders, who had worked directly for the U.S., arrived in Nashville to an established group of Kurds who both welcomed and had created inroads in the community. By the time the second wave arrived in 1996, the Kurdish community had established a network and community for adjustment while maintaining cultural integrity. For the most part, the challenges and adjustment hurdles had been successfully addressed.

Similar to the Vietnamese resettlement, the Kurds had a brief layover and were staged in Guam, where federal, state, and resettlement agencies were able to work together internally and directly with the incoming immigrants. The U.S. used this time to provide basic language skills, cultural classes, medical checkups, and benefits registration. No doubt, the Kurds were better off to have this time to gather, reflect and prepare for the intending immigration.

The Iraqi Kurds, like the Vietnamese, were a successful immigration story. The cultural, economic, and social conditions were ideal for the INA policy of self-sustainability. Had the group been larger, resettled throughout the U.S., or been settled under different economic conditions, the story might have been different.

Iraq and Afghanistan

Culture. In almost every way, the immigration of SIVs from Iraq and Afghanistan is the complete opposite of what happened with the Vietnamese and the Iraqi Kurds. What cannot be overlooked or lightly noted is the American, and Western, outlook on the Muslim community post 9/11. While there are certainly many tolerant and accepting people throughout the world and
in the U.S., the global war on terror and domestic terrorism has created a major backlash and bias towards Muslims. According to a 2013 Congressional Research Report titled: *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat*, the influence of radical Islamic groups, both at home and abroad, has increased since 2001. Because they are easy targets for recruitment, the growth of radical Islam cannot aid the ability for SIV holders to adjust and integrate into society. This level of bias and discrimination only adds to the already difficult task of immigrating into any society.

Further, both the Iraq and Afghan SIV holders have been spread throughout the U.S. Without a community or network, the adjustment and integration of the SIV holder into the community becomes strained. The resettlement process, which was staged in Guam for Vietnamese and Kurds, occurred entirely abroad in the country of origin. The resettlement agency would interact with the SIV holder for the first time at the airport. Unless the SIV holder can identify direct family and is willing to forfeit resettlement benefits, a randomly selected state and city is assigned to the SIV holder, at the embassies in Baghdad or Kabul, and the resettlement agency is alerted to the flight arrival. This process places SIV holders throughout America and lacks even a basic evaluation or consideration of their skills, desires, or family needs.

**Economic.** The arrival of SIVs from Iraq and Afghanistan has coincided with the 2008 housing market crash. Iraqi and Afghans have entered an American economy that is oversaturated with low wage earners and lacks entry level jobs. Adding to the troubles, urban living, which was affordable in previous resettlements, is now expensive. This pushed SIV holders to rural or suburban communities. Living in the suburbs or a rural community negates the
ability to walk to a job or medical appointment. Although rural and suburban living is cheaper for SIV holders and the government’s budget for rent is limited, the downside is that many SIVs are resettled in areas that lack public transportation or jobs in walking distance.

Social. The Muslim community is very diverse. The three main denominations of Islamic groups among Iraq SIV holders are Sunni, Shia and Kurds. There are many ethnic groups among SIVs from Afghanistan, including Pashto, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimeq, and Turkmen. Collectively, these groups struggle to join and work together in their home countries and share little sense of nationalism. This absence of unity among the SIV holders has been accompanied by lack of a nationwide and effective grassroots support network by fellow Iraqi and Afghans. In the U.S., the community network that the Vietnamese or Kurds benefited from has not been found in the Iraq and Afghan community.

Recommendations

My recommendations to more effectively resettle foreign nationals who work for and with the U.S. government and are targeted due to that relationship are based on maintaining the INA policy of self-sustainability. Although some reports have questioned the policy and effectiveness of self-sustainability, I do not. My recommendations will serve to achieve self-sustainability in the shortest amount of time by restructuring the process, benefits, and organizational infrastructure for optimal efficiency. The 2006 SIV of Iraq and Afghans exposed the half century old resettlement process as outdated and insufficient. These recommendations will account for current gaps and expand upon successes in the four case studies.

Enhanced Immigration status and benefits beyond refugee. Future immigrants, who work for and with the U.S. and are targeted due to that relationship, need to be legally identified
and provided separate resettlement and entitlements beyond that of a refugee. The current resettlement benefits for SIV mirror, for the most part, that of refugees. Resettlement agencies bill the HHS and DoS the same amount for resettlement for SIVs as for refugees. A foreign national who serves with, risks, works for, and in some cases dies for the goals and foreign policy of the U.S. should be given benefits above and beyond a refugee. In order to create additional resettlement benefits for SIV holders, Congressional legislation is required.

**Add transferability of benefits and transportation.** The ability of SIVs to achieve self-sustainability is fractured for two main reasons. First, SIVs without a vehicle are tied to jobs in their local area. Without public transportation throughout most of America, SIVs must forfeit many jobs that are not in walking distance, thus hindering their ability to earn a self-sustaining wage. Because urban living has become expensive, SIVs are now being resettled, due to the very limited budgets for rent, in rural areas. Due to these considerations, in order for an SIV to obtain a job, a car donation or loan program needs to be established. Congress should either increase funds to the existing resettlement package or create tax credits to citizens who donate cars to resettlement agencies. SIVs come here without credit and in most cases without the money for a decent car. Establishment of a vehicle program would be a wise investment for the SIV, broaden the tax base, and allow immigrants to achieve self-sufficiency.

The lack of resettlement benefits transferability is the second hurdle in mobility for SIVs. Resettlement benefits are tied to a state and are non-transferable. Because the state and resettlement agencies bill the HHS and DoS for services and register the SIV for benefits, the SIV holder is tied to the state for an extended period of time. When an SIV holder resettles in one state, the state will bill the federal government for eight months of medical benefits upon his
arrival. If the SIV holder receives a job offer in another state, he risks losing his medical benefits if he accepts the job. The current system lacks support for mobility and, therefore, should be nationalized. SIV arrivals should be registered in a database that is accessible by federal and state officials. Mobility and transferability should be seamless. Agencies, led and funded by HHS and DoS, can implement this change and require states and resettlement agencies to upgrade to a national system. This policy change does not require legislation.

**Develop best practices from Vietnamese and Kurdish community support centers.** We should expect that future SIV holders will not be a unified group or resettled in one city or state. The federal, state and resettlement agencies need to study the success of Vietnamese and Kurdish community centers and groups, the level of support provided, and attempt to replicate that level of care and attention. Resettlement agencies will never have the background and knowledge possessed by foreign nationals from the originating country. Because of this, PRM and ORR should dedicate grant money and a working relationship with local community centers and groups of the same nationality or ethnicity. Replicating the work of an organically created organization would be extremely challenging. However, learning more about the success of the Vietnamese and Kurdish immigration cases would provide the government with a better understanding of the gaps that exist and what these groups did to adjust and integrate their members. An effort should be made at the federal level to fund these organizations, which currently operate with pro bono lawyers and minimal staff and are 100% financed through donations.

The best tools to capture past events and shortcomings in the government are Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports and the Center for Army Lessons Learned
(CALL). These organizations have rich material and capture relevant stories that would close the knowledge gap that occurs over time, administrations, and organization changeover.

**Utilize the National Guard to enhance network and community integration.** The National Guards have a clear and influential role to play in assisting the resettlement of SIVs. National Guard units have established a powerful networking capability. The citizen soldiers live throughout the state, are employed in a variety of jobs, and can provide a network and community upon arrival for SIVs. In the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, many of the Guard members have served with SIVs and this situation will most likely exist in the future. Guard members can provide assistance in integration, adjustment, a community network, and friendship that many current SIVs lack. To accomplish this, the Guard would develop a position and duty description at the state level to serve as the SIV coordinator. The Guard coordinator would then liaison with state resettlement agencies to be alerted on SIV arrivals.

**Identify a location for in processing, integration and adjustment.** The Guam staging area was a best practice for Vietnamese and Kurds. Guam assisted the immigrants by focusing on preparing them for resettlement in the U.S. The benefits of fusing these groups cannot be overestimated. From the immigrant’s perspective, attention was solely focused on preparing themselves and their family for arrival in the U.S. instead of being killed at home or on the run throughout the country. From the government’s perspective, collaboration and best practices are developed when groups are able to work in the same physical space. The 2006 Iraq/Afghanistan SIV did not have a fusion of agencies and the arrival and resettlement process and SIV holders were not well served. To accomplish this, the U.S. government must direct or approve the resettlement of future SIVs through a staging location.
Holistically evaluate and advise the individual before resettlement. The SIV resettlement process must holistically evaluate the needs, abilities, and goals of the individual SIV holder. Currently, the federal government and resettlement agencies treat the SIV arrivals as numbers. The federal government pushes out arrivals to the national agencies, which then contact the states. States agree upon a yearly quota and will accept or decline based upon the quota. The SIV’s skills, individual situation, or potential is not a major factor in the resettlement. For example, SIV holders with a fishing background or fishery skills are not encouraged to settle or considered for settlement along the coast. As well, SIV holders should be resettled with either a pre-identified contact or a network of family or friends. To accomplish this, the DoS/HHS and national resettlement agencies must change the decision making process. Rather than placing SIVs randomly in the states, the process should determine the best suited place for the specific family given the skills, contacts, desires, goals, and healthcare needs of the individual. With a small investment of time and effort, immigrants will be better equipped to meet the self-sustainment objective in the INA. This delay should coincide with the previous recommendation of an in-processing and staging location outside of the immigrant’s country of origin.

Resettle in states with the best social, medical and support structure for immigrants. SIVs should not be resettled in states that have not accepted the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and expanded Medicaid to cover adults under 65 years old with income up to 133% of the federal poverty level. SIVs are provided with eight months of medical benefits that states bill to HHS. In states with the ACA, the eight months of medical benefits roll over into Medicaid if the SIV holder does not obtain employer-covered insurance. It is unconscionable to recruit and employ a foreign national to work on behalf of the U.S., who is then forced to flee for security concerns,
and after eight months drop all his medical coverage. To accomplish this, the DoS/HHS would be required to create a resettlement policy that favors ACA states.

**Properly integrate immigrants into the medical system.** The western medical system is highly complicated for Americans, and is much more so for foreign nationals who are unfamiliar with the system or who do not speak English. The disadvantage to the SIV holders is perpetuated by their lack of English, transportation and familiarization with the medical system thus costing the U.S. taxpayer and medical system more in the long-term. SIV holders who are encouraged and understand how to address existing and future complications are more likely to use the medical system thus preventing costly emergency surgeries. A gap exists in both the mental health, medical, and dental system. SIV holders are provided with one medical appointment only. To properly address and practically close the hole, the resettlement process needs to include assignment to a primary care physician and a dentist. Once the SIV holder has a primary point of contact for medical and dental appointments, the staff and doctors can follow through and assure the SIV holders do not get lost in the shuffle. From a security perspective, foreign nationals who are resettled in the U.S. are often marginalized, and socially and culturally isolated. In various ways, they are vulnerable to domestic terrorism recruitment. The mentally handicapped are a vulnerable population that is susceptible to radical Islamic groups. Gaining proper medical and support services to a mentally challenged can influence the effect that terrorist groups have pried upon in recent attacks. To accomplish this, Congress will need to fund and HHS will need to add this task onto future grants to resettlement agencies.
Closing

The level of gratitude and respect put into the resettlement of our allies, who have bled for our nations, is a direct reflection of the values and morals of the U.S. The mere resettlement of foreign nationals is not enough. Arguably, a haphazard resettlement policy is worse than not resettling foreign nationals at all.

Immigrants can be an untapped resource for employers across America. Immigrants come to the U.S. with immense optimism and motivation, unique skills, as a result of working with American forces in a combat zone, and a cultural range that enhances America’s diversity. It is not in America’s best interest to treat newly arrived and credentialed immigrants so cavalierly.

The resettlement policies and practices of the 1950s and 1960s have been made obsolete by a new 21st century economy. The recessions of 1970, 1975 and 1982 are distinctly different than the recessions of 1991, 2001, and 2009. Jobs labeled as routine, which are typically occupied by immigrants, have declined with each recession and recovery. These economic trends do not favor SIVs or aid the government’s policy of self-sufficiency.

There is no indication that these economic trends will abate. Further, there is no indication that the U.S. will be less involved abroad. Because of these obvious indicators, U.S. policymakers must reform the policies or be faced with a range of bad options following the next migration of allies served on behalf of the U.S.

The resettlement agencies are aware of their limited budget and job constraints. For the agencies to be maximally effective, the caseworkers need to be more fluid in their approach to arrivals, other agencies, and new programs. Further, the caseworkers need a manageable case load to provide sufficient attention to each arrival.
With proper leadership and priority placement by the federal government, the U.S. should treat the SIV holders and family members as an investment. Because SIV holders dedicated and sacrificed for the U.S., a proper resettlement should be afforded and will make America a stronger and richer superpower. Policymakers should judge the quality and dedication of resettlement with the same attention and scrutiny given the returning American soldiers. The process, resettlement, and adjust an SIV holders should be a conversation prior to war and not after the system has struggled or failed.
References


(Sahara, 2009)


Appendix A – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Each participant will have one session of questioning lasting approximately 30 minutes. I will contact each participate at the time and date and phone number of their choosing.

**SIV Holder**

1. What work did you perform for the U.S. government
2. What years did you work for the U.S. Government
3. What agency did you work for?
4. When did you apply/receive an immigration visa?
5. What year did you come to the U.S.?
6. Describe the process for applying, receiving and departing with the SIV?
7. Which volunteer organization received you at the port of entry?
8. In your opinion, how well did the Volunteer Agency perform in resettling you upon arrival?
9. What kinds of services were made available to you? Did you receive hospital care, education, monetary public assistance, language training, and vocational training?
10. Where public services, provided to you upon arrival, adequate to your needs?

**State/Federal Government Participants**

1. What was your level of involvement with the SIV and the following conflicts-Vietnam (1975, Kurdish Iraqi (1996), Afghan and Iraq (2006))?
2. How has the policy in your organization changed over the years as different groups from these conflicts have arrived?
3. How has your relationship with volunteer organizations evolved over the years between the conflicts?
4. How is current and past funding for SIV holders appropriated?
5. How are services for SIV’s currently and previously allocated?

**Volunteer Organizations**

1. What was your level of involvement with the SIV and the following conflicts -Vietnam (1975, Kurdish Iraqi (1996), Afghan and Iraq (2006))?
2. How has your policy changed over the years as different groups from these conflicts have arrived?
3. How has your relationship with the state/federal government evolved over the years and between the conflicts?
4. How is funding for SIV holders appropriated?
5. How are services for SIV’s allocated over the years?
Appendix B – INTERVIEW AUDIO WITH AGENCIES

TO: FEDERAL & STATE GOVERNMENTS, AND VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS

FROM: JEFF CARSON

SUBJECT: IMMIGRATION POLICY FOLLOWING MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS

My name is Jeff Carson and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Northeastern University in the College of Professional Studies and am completing my Doctorate in Law and Policy. In my quest to obtain the Doctorate degree, I am conducting research on the government’s use of special immigrant visas to assist foreign nationals who work with and for the U.S. government and are then threatened or displaced because of that relationship.


Your organization is intimately involved in this process once policymakers enact legislation to assist foreign nationals.

Your office’s actions, involvement, understanding, operations, and thoughts would be extremely beneficial to my research and understanding of the implementation of special immigrant visas and the supports to these visa holders. I respectfully request an interview with you or someone within your organization who is able to discuss these processes and programs.

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes and your involvement and participation will be kept in complete confidentiality. Neither your name nor position will be used in any publications of my research.
My contact information, and the contact information of my thesis advisor, is listed. I look forward to answering any questions you may have and further discussing my research topic with you or someone in your office.

Respectfully,

Jeff Carson  
Carson.j@husky.neu.edu  
614-209-6211

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Neenah Estrella-Luna 617-373-6472 n.estrellaluna@neu.edu
Appendix C – INTERVIEW AUDIO WITH IMMIGRANTS

TO: IMMIGRANTS WHO WORKED WITH AND FOR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

FROM: JEFF CARSON

SUBJECT: IMMIGRATION POLICY FOLLOWING MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS

My name is Jeff Carson and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Northeastern University in the College of Professional Studies and am completing my Doctorate in Law and Policy. In my quest to obtain the Doctorate degree, I am conducting research on the government’s use of immigrant visas to assist foreign nationals who work with and for the U.S. government and are then threatened or displaced because of that relationship.


Your perspective and story is a compelling and valuable part of my overall research. I respectfully request an interview with you to discuss the immigration process, your journey to the U.S., and what support you received when you arrived.

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes and your involvement and participation will be kept in complete confidentiality. I will use neither your name nor position in any publications of my research.

My contact information, and the contact information of my thesis advisor, is listed below. I look forward to answering any questions you may have and further discussing my research topic with you.
Respectfully,

Jeff Carson  
Carson.j@husky.neu.edu  
614-209-6211

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Neenah Estrella-Luna 617-373-6472  n.estrellaluna@neu.edu
Appendix D – IRB Approval Letter

Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action

Date: January 5, 2015

IRB #: CPS14-12-05

Principal Investigator(s): Neenah Estrella-Luna
Jeffrey L. Carson

Department: Doctor of Law and Policy
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: How the US government Assists Foreign Nationals Who Work with and for the US Abroad

Participating Sites: Permission pending from several agencies

Informed Consent: One (1) unsigned consent

As per CFR 46.117(c)(2) signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required.

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

Approval Expiration Date: JANUARY 4, 2016

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630