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TRUMP CONSIDERS SLASHING NUMBER OF REFUGEES ALLOWED TO RESETTLE IN U.S.

Administration weighs cap of 25,000 for 2019, a drop of 44% from this year's limit, already low by historical standards

By Vivian Salama
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WASHINGTON – The Trump administration is considering slashing the number of refugees it allows to come to the U.S. next year by as much as 44 percent as it looks to tighten its immigration crackdown, a senior administration official said.

The plan under discussion seeks to cap the number of refugees granted resettlement in the U.S. in 2019 to 25,000 people, the official said. President Trump has already reduced the number of refugees allowed in since taking office. This year the limit is 45,000, low by historical standards.

A National Security Council meeting to discuss the proposed plan is scheduled for this week, the official said. If the plan is implemented, the number of refugees granted admission into the U.S. would be at its lowest level in about four decades.

The White House and Department of Homeland Security didn't respond to a request to comment.

The discussions were reported earlier by the New York Times.

Those within the administration who advocate for slashing the refugee cap, including Stephen Miller, a senior adviser to Mr. Trump, say that as a matter of national security, the government can't keep up with the extensive vetting that refugees require. Such a measure would reduce the backlog, they say.

Refugees remain outside the U.S. while their applications are considered; asylum applicants are filed by people who are already in the U.S. The refugee and asylum programs are similar in that both require applicants to show a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political belief or membership in a social group.

Last year, the State Department had initially pushed for a cap of at least 50,000 but later, then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson overruled career staff and lowered its recommendation to the president to 45,000. The Department of Homeland Security recommended a figure closer to 40,000.

The administration settled on a cap of 45,000 refugees for this year, though the number admitted has been significantly lower. As of June 30, the U.S. had admitted 16,230 refugees, according to the State Department. The Democratic Republic of Congo saw the most people resettled, with nearly 5,000 arriving.

Since 1980, the president has had sole authority to set annual refugee admission caps, and until last year, the cap had never been set below 67,000. In the early 1990s, it topped 110,000 every year, but more recently, the cap hovered between 70,000 and 80,000.

Before leaving office, then-President Obama said the U.S. would accept as many as 110,000 refugees in 2017.

Mr. Miller has become one of the most outspoken advocates of the Trump administration's hard-line approach to immigration, weighing in on a discussion that is typically dominated by foreign-policy concerns. Early in the process, Mr. Miller recommended a cap as low as 15,000.

(Alicia A. Caldwell contributed to this article.)