

Transcript of Episode 7, “The Post-Conflict Politics of Migration and Refugee Return”

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[Note: This is a rough transcript of the audio recording, based on digital transcription and human review.]

[00:00:00] **Morgan:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we know this is a difficult time for everyone. So from all of us here at *International Security*, we hope you're staying healthy and safe.

Music: One, two, three, go.

Morgan: Hello. And welcome to *International Security's* Off the Page. This episode engages with the politics of refugee return, humanitarian assistance, and post-conflict violence. I'm Morgan Kaplan, the Executive Editor of *International Security*. And to begin our conversation, we invite Professor Stephanie Schwartz, who was the author of the recent *International Security* article “Home, Again: Refugee Return and Post-Conflict Violence in Burundi.” And a little later, we'll go off the page with Professor Anne Richard, who was formerly the Assistant [00:01:00] Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration during the Obama administration.

In the next episode of Off the Page, we'll be talking about Chinese views on nuclear escalation. You don't want to miss it. So subscribe to Off the Page on your favorite podcast platform.

Stephanie Schwartz is Assistant Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California. Stephanie, welcome to the show.

Stephanie: Thanks for having me.

Morgan: So tell us a little bit about this article you've written for *International Security*.

Stephanie: When we talk about refugees in the world today, we tend to focus on what causes refugees to flee.

And this article instead looks at what happens when refugees return, and what are the consequences for their countries of origin. And in particular, I look at how that process of refugee return can create new sources of conflict at the local level between people who stayed in country during the war and those who fled and then [00:02:00] returned.

Morgan: Can you tell us a little bit about the tension that does emerge between those who leave and those who stay once refugees come back? You know, what exactly are the mechanisms tying refugee return to potentially additional conflict?

Stephanie: Sure. Absolutely. Part of the reason this project came about was because of an observation. I saw that in many, many, many countries recovering from civil war, there was sort of a spectrum of tension between non-migrant and returning populations. And this tension could be everything from sort of general resentment (so in Bosnia we see resentment between returnees and non-migrant features in pop songs) to competition for land that sees destruction of property and sort of low-level violence. And then in Burundi we see widespread violence, including murder, between returnees and non-migrants at a time that we assume it's sort of peace time.

Morgan: What explains that variation? That's quite a [00:03:00] significant scale going from some angry pop songs to actual physical violence.

Stephanie: So the article tries to do two things. It says, one, why are we seeing this everywhere? And then two, why do we see the variation? And so why do we see this everywhere? We tend to see it everywhere because the process of fleeing and returning is likely in any country to create sort of a latent potential to categorize people based on where they were during the war.

So that process of out migration, fleeing, adapting to a new country, learning a new language, eating a new food, is going to be a collective set of experiences that differentiates those folks from people who stayed behind and their collective experiences of surviving during the war. So the question then becomes, all right, now that people are returning, when is it more likely that we're going to see that these identities of returnee and non-migrant reach the surface and not only reach the surface but become violent?

And I argue that it's [00:04:00] the institutions in countries of origin, so whether that's a language law or a land law or a new commission dealing with land (as it was in Burundi), all of those things can create the situation where there's a perception that one of these groups, a returnee or a non-migrant, is doing better than the other based on their migration history.

So, "he's getting land based on his migration history and therefore I resent him." It builds resentment and you can then escalate to violence. Those institutions may be intentional policies that are trying to favor returnees as a political statement or non-migrants, or they may be unintentional. It may have to do with the land laws in a local country or language laws that unintentionally favor one group over the other.

Morgan: Right. So what's the story in Burundi? Because this is the main empirical focus of your work. Can you illustrate for us how these dynamics played out in this particular conflict?

Stephanie: They had a civil war from about 1993 to [00:05:00] 2005 and during the civil war, which was at the beginning largely divided along ethnic lines between Hutu and Tutsi, similar to Rwanda. We saw a large majority Hutu population in Burundi flee to Tanzania, and as the conflict was coming to a close, that large sort of ethnically, predominantly Hutu population from Tanzania moved back to Burundi, and the expectation was, "Oh my goodness, this return of refugees is going to reignite ethnic divisions."

But instead, what we saw was not necessarily a reigniting of ethnic divisions, but a layering on top of new divisions between those who stayed in country and those who fled. You might have someone who had an uncle or a brother who fled to Tanzania, and an uncle or brother who stayed behind.

And then upon return because of local institutions in Burundi, this sort of patrilineal inheritance that meant that men and family [00:06:00] needed to own land and they needed to own that land for sort of subsistence agricultural purposes would then – you'd have intra-familial fights over land, Hutu versus Hutu.

I would have interviewees sort of refer to each other as “the one who returned,” even if it was their brother or their uncle or something like this. So, we see these new identity divisions layering on top of both ethnic divisions and kinship division.

I went in with the intention of studying refugee return to Burundi after the country's civil war. I was going in in 2014-ish. It just so happened then that in 2015 Burundi experienced another national crisis. The president, Pierre Nkurunziza, decided that the first sort of constitutional limit on the, on the presidency of two terms, that he wanted to run for another, third term, and that caused a protest, riots in the street.

And those protests and riots were met with mass repression from the government and the ruling party, and it [00:07:00] coincided with another wave of out migration and refugees going to Tanzania. And what I was noticing from the folks that I had been working with was that the first people to jump the border were those returnees who had had the hardest time recovering their land and were in a conflict over land with their neighbors and people who stayed in country during the war.

And these were the first folks to jump the border. And so I decided to end up, sort of, going with them across the border and asking Burundian refugees in Tanzania how their prior experiences of return affected their decision, whether or not to flee again.

Morgan: Interesting. So you were doing the research and the field work as this was happening and you yourself were moving with refugees across the border. I mean, from a, from a process standpoint of doing research, I mean, it leads me to ask the question: When you originally started this project, did you think you were just going to simply write about what home politics was when refugees returned? And did you suddenly find yourself saying, actually, I have [00:08:00] something to say about second waves of, uh, refugee flows because I'm now experiencing it, or was this planned all along to focus on the fact that actually first rounds of refugee movements can potentially explain patterns of second and even third?

Stephanie: Yeah, absolutely. This idea that the process and experiences of return can help explain repeat displacement with something that definitely came out of this research. It wasn't necessarily an intentional finding I was looking to explore. I mean, the, the first part of this project was actually supposed to study return migration to South Sudan around the time of the country's independence and for various reasons, including renewed civil war in South Sudan, I decided that I was going to take this theory that I developed there while I was

watching a returnees from the North and Khartoum and from East Africa interact with people who stayed behind in Juba, and test that theory in Burundi. And then again, adjusting to events on the ground, decided to move my field site to Tanzania and was [00:09:00] able to capture this really interesting findings about the connection between return, migration and repeat displacement.

Morgan: So what's the policy recommendation here?

Stephanie: I think the primary takeaway from my work is that refugee return is not an endpoint to a crisis or a panacea. It is an ongoing political process. And if managed well, we can see refugee return contributing to the post-conflict reconstruction in a community. And if managed poorly, it can turn violent.

And so international interveners need to a) Be aware of this going in and trying to anticipate how different institutional factors might make those divisions work. Number two, they need to listen and then third, adjust. So by listen, I mean even if you design institutions with the best intentions, "Hey, let's try and adjudicate claims for land between people who are returning and people are fleeing so it stays nonviolent." We need to [00:10:00] listen and see, "Is this process actually helping or is it creating a worse situation?" And if it's creating a worse situation, let's adjust and let's do something different. And it's this listening and adjusting that's one of the hardest things, uh, for especially international interveners to do.

Morgan: Great. Well, Stephanie, I only have one more question for you and that is, are you ready?

Stephanie: Oh man. Ready for what?

Morgan: To go off the page.

Stephanie: Oh, yeah. Off the page, for sure.

Morgan: Off the Page is a production of the quarterly journal *International Security*, which is edited and sponsored by the Belfer Center at the Harvard Kennedy School and published by the MIT Press. To learn more about the journal, please check out our website at belfercenter.org/is.

Joining us now is Anne Richard, who is currently an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of International Migration, and she previously [00:11:00] served as the Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration in the Obama administration from 2012 to 2017.

Secretary Richard, thank you for joining the show today.

Anne: Thank you for having me.

Morgan: So we thought we'd start the conversation by asking you a little bit about what your initial impressions were of Stephanie's article.

Anne: I was pleased to read Stephanie's article. I was impressed by the amount of work she had done in terms of carrying out so many interviews, in Burundi and nearby, then pursuing it in what was an academically rigorous way in order to try to collect as much information as she could about the experiences of returned refugees, repatriated refugees, as they're called in the article, and also what people had stayed in Burundi and had not fled.

So, I was overall very impressed.

Morgan: You, of course, have a tremendous amount of experience in the policy world engaging with these [00:12:00] issues of refugee movements, but also return migration. Can you tell us how the dynamics discussed in this article? How well or perhaps not? Well, they fit with your experience at the state department from 2012 to 2017

Anne: First, we always talk about three durable solutions, these so-called durable solutions for the plight of refugees. And by durable, we mean long lasting, sustainable solutions to their situations. And the three are, one, they be allowed to go home again, which is what Stephanie is looking at. Two, that they be allowed to put down roots and stay in the places to which they've fled. And three, that they get resettled in, yet another location, a new place. The U.S. used to lead the world in resettling refugees in our country. And so this discussion around these solutions for the plight of refugees is a constant [00:13:00] conversation that's going on, but during the time I was Assistant Secretary, we found that these were certainly not enough for the record levels of refugees we were seeing around the world.

And you would have heard that the number of refugees in the world today, the number of forcibly displaced are at levels not seen since World War II. And so we have far too many conflicts that are lasting way too long. And the situations the refugees find themselves in are not being resolved and are protracted. This has been a major concern for everyone and working in the Mediterranean sphere.

Morgan: Sometimes these conflicts are not resolved or maybe possibly recurring, and we're seeing, in some ways, higher numbers than ever because we can't resolve certain conflicts. Is there a finding out there that some of this is perpetuated by policies that go wrong when trying to bring people home?

Anne: The material that Stephanie is producing [00:14:00] that looks at the problems that can happen after refugees are returned, is so far at the far end of the refugee experience. It has not been a central point of discussion.

Instead, most of the work I was doing as Assistant Secretary was trying to figure out how to get more aid out to refugees, how to do a better job protecting refugees, how to get the rest of the world to do more to help the refugees, how to make their situation during their exile better.

And so, we bemoaned the lack of examples we could point to where peace was achieved and people were able to go home again. And in fact, in my mind, I saw repatriation as a happy success story, you know, something that we really wanted to happen. And so I find it really interesting to read Stephanie's [00:15:00] article and to see that she said, you know,

they're, they didn't just live happily ever after. There in fact were divisions that had been made in these societies when the people split up, and even within families, when some family members became refugees and some stayed behind.

I made a list of some of the crises that were going on at the same time that Stephanie was taking a look at Burundi. So if you look at spring and summer of 2015 and going into the following months and into 2016, you had massive displacement out of inside and out of Syria.

Six million refugees, five to six million internally displaced persons, millions more conflict victims inside Syria, and we also had ISIS on the march towards Iraq terrorizing the Yazidis particularly, but also coming within almost getting to the Baghdad airport in Iraq.

[00:16:00] In the spring of 2015 I was in Thailand meeting with Southeast Asian governments, talking about the boats that had been floating abandoned in the Andaman Sea that were filled with migrants and refugees from Bangladesh and Burma. In Africa, there were also many other hotspots that we were focused on. The Kenyans were threatening to send Somalis back to Somalia from the Dadaab camp, and Secretary Kerry had gone to meet with the Kenyan government. He asked them not to do that. South Sudan's fighting that had broken out in December 2013 had left many, many refugees fleeing in different directions, many gone to Uganda. I attended a pledging conference in Nairobi around that time. Similarly, Boko Haram had terrorized people in the Lake Chad area, northeastern Nigeria and sent people fleeing into neighboring countries [00:17:00] there and resettlement was that year becoming a hot political issue in the United States.

So when I look back at where I had traveled in 2015, some of it was to pledging conferences for Syria. Some of it was pledging conference for South Sudan, but part of it was a trip to South Carolina to talk to people there about allowing refugees to be resettled in the United States because it was becoming a very controversial issue there and with their congressmen.

So, there was a full plate of issues going on. Now, I also want to say though, I was very much looking around for good news stories, and one of the few that I worked on was work in the Balkans to build permanent housing for people who had been displaced during the Balkan Wars of the 1990s.

So that was one of the few situations where I was working on a post-peace agreement displacement situation. [00:18:00] And that was years after the peace agreement had been signed. So, I guess the message there is we do continue to work on these issues, but they're not on the front page of the newspaper or, you know, in your social media feeds. They can be neglected. They can definitely be under-resourced, and they're fighting for attention with all these other crises.

Stephanie: When you're recounting all of these things were happening at the same time, a couple of things come to mind. It's true there's an overwhelming amount of displacement and coverage of displacement in the media these days, and in particular in 2015, I think we were starting to hear about especially Syrians trying to cross into Europe. Right? And so there was, as you say, this growing sentiment about, or resentment of potential refugees

coming into what I would call the Global North. And it's really hard to reframe the story towards where the [00:19:00] majority of displacement is happening or where the majority of refugees are living.

So one thing I always like to talk about is that, you know, today, it is only 15%, approximately, of the refugee population that is trying to find or living in the Global North, right? 85% even of the Syrian population is living in a neighboring country, in Turkey. In Burundi, the vast majority are living in Tanzania. In South Sudan, the vast majority of those refugees are living in Uganda. So when we want to think about durable solutions, as you suggest, I think part of the issue is that we're so focused on popular opinion about refugee resettlement because we think that like this is going to be the number one way to help these refugees is to resettle them.

But it's only 15% of those refugees who are living in the Global North. And in fact of the refugees who do sort of annually get resettled, it's like less than 1% that are able to gain that resettlement in a third country every year, which is why sort of looking at durable solutions or that are like local [00:20:00] integration or looking at repatriation potentially, or even breaking out of the durable solution straightjacket, if I might say, might be sort of some alternative possibilities for how we deal with these issues.

Morgan: So hearing both of you speak about the breadth of issues and also places where refugee crises are happening at any given point in time, I mean, it does, you know, raise some interesting questions in terms of how are priorities set, and where interventions to alleviate refugee crises, you know, are more likely to make it to the top of the list.

How do you decide what type of intervention to make?

Anne: I can start by pointing out that, you know, you have international organizations that make it their daily business to go out around the world and try to improve the welfare of the poor and vulnerable people. And, and the Bureau I headed, the Population, Refugees, and Migration Bureau worked very closely, we were the top funder of the [00:21:00] UN refugee agency, so that the US government did not have to be everywhere, but we did support UNHCR [the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] for being in all the places where refugees needed help. And if they weren't, we would want to know why they weren't there. And they, in turn, rely a lot on non-governmental organizations to carry out programs on the ground in challenging locations outside national capitals, in far-flung locations around the world.

And what we've tried to do was to monitor what was going on everywhere. And so we had, even as I say that, I wasn't focused on Burundi, I had an excellent Deputy Assistant Secretary and office director and Africa staff looking at everything happening in Sub-Saharan Africa and trying to keep their fingers on the pulse to fund organizations to make a difference. I looked back at what we were doing in 2015. [00:22:00] We were evaluating programs to help returned refugees in Burundi to pursue livelihoods. But even there, one of the things that the evaluation was finding was that some of the help being given was very much one time. And that could be, for example, giving farmers tools to resume farming, and not

anything that was going to be enduring, like training programs that go on for a period of time.

And so a big fault to the arrangements that I've just described to you, where the U.S. is a leader and has a staff paying attention, and the UNHCR then carries the mantle to go out and really make a difference working with the nongovernmental organizations, is that if you don't have the resources or resources are spread very, very thin, which they are, because of all these crises that I'm talking about, then the impact that you're having on the ground is going to be limited.

Stephanie: Yeah, [00:23:00] absolutely. I think one of the biggest problems with support for a voluntary repatriation is this sort of funding issue of, well, we're, we're getting people, we're getting them home, and we can give them as much as we can, whether it's a shovel to help with the farming, but we've got all these other things happening and we need to focus elsewhere on the bigger emergencies.

And again, I think it's sort of a, we're not gonna get to the point where we can do long-term monitoring or long-term support for repatriation until we start thinking about repatriation as process and a political process that involves sort of active engagement with the community, between the government and the community, between the community members who returned and those who stayed for everyone to sort of be, feel fully identified as citizens.

So, it'll take some change, I think.

Morgan: Well, so thinking of this from a policy perspective, if we know that repatriation can lead to some unforeseen issues that can lead to conflict recurrence at home, I also still have the question of, [00:24:00] Where does the jurisdiction of aid provision end with that regard? Where does that responsibility end? Is it when people cross the border back home? How can these organizations involve themselves in the, the very localized type of politics that you've described in your article to actually have a sort of legitimate influence on these issues? Because it does seem to some extent, like it would require almost another sort of mandate.

Stephanie: I don't know if it requires another mandate. I do think what it requires is an open mindset and a flexibility that hasn't always characterized peacebuilding interveners or post-conflict governments. Right? So it requires first anticipating if there is a mass population movement going to be coming back to this country that might change things, and we should be anticipating potential conflict between returnees and non-migrants and anticipating how we might be able to alleviate that if it comes up.

We should try and anticipate if any of the institutions we're building, whether [00:25:00] it's a land institution or, you know, quotas in the parliament or whatever it is, we should talk to people and see if this in any way could set off those new cleavages and make them worse. And so part of that is anticipating.

The next part is updating, and I think this is the part that was definitely missed in Burundi and tends to be missed across the board in a lot of places, is when things get going, checking in with the local population and say, "Hey, how is this working? Is it going well? Is it causing

new problems?” And then listening, that's another big thing that we don't necessarily do super well as an international community.

And then changing our behavior and not that I think is going to be the hardest part.

Anne: If you look at how the international community divvies up the response to humanitarian crises, the responsibility for putting a crisis zone back on its feet and on the road to recovery, is what's called the “early [00:26:00] recovery cluster,” and that responsibilities is assigned through the cluster system to the UN Development Program.

But they're not assigned 100% the responsibility for doing it. They're the ones who have to do it if no one else does. And I think if you look at a major crisis in the world, people do early start thinking about, what are we going to do when the fighting stops? How can we get people home? How can we reconstruct this society? How can we start to rebuild? And their thinking when they do that, they think in terms of development aid, development experts, you know the top notch donors – like at the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department for International Development in the U.K., the World Bank – bringing its resources to bear, potentially setting up some kind of trust fund, having pledging conferences to rebuild countries. But the problem becomes, if you don't really have a [00:27:00] sustainable peace, if you don't really have people feeling secure, feeling that there is a future for them in that country, that can undermine a lot of what the rest of the world can be trying to do.

I think some of the things that Stephanie has talked about in terms of checking in with the local population and listening are very, very, very important. I found it interesting in going back and looking at our materials on Burundi in the U.S. government. We did talk about refugees who return, displaced people, and a third category that I had rarely seen called “stay-ees,” people who had stayed. And so it's certainly in the design of those very small scale programs, they did have the right identification of the people involved. You see with refugee programs, often there's an [00:28:00] acknowledgement that you can't just provide aid to refugees, especially if they're being hosted in poor areas of a country that you also have to, at the same time that you're helping the refugees, provide help to local people or else you will be definitely building resentments and dividing a wedge between the hosts and the refugees. And so, Stephanie's admonitions to pay attention, both in the article and then what you just said, are very, very important, I think.

Stephanie: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, you know, even identifying it at the big level, so I was very much reminded of, you know, one of the derogatory nicknames that people used against returnees and Burundi in the early 2000s was to call them “the U.N.”

Because they would be seen either coming in on UN trucks or receiving UN disbursement and there was resentment from the rest of the community that they weren't getting that, you know, aid or at least the perception that they weren't from the UN. And I think that's common in a lot of places.

Morgan: One interesting [00:29:00] question I think comes up from this discussion is, is obviously when refugees come back and are repatriated at home, it affects civil society

there, but I imagine that depending on how long refugees are out of country and are ingrained in the social, economic and political fabric of their host countries, that upon their leaving, it probably also has massive effects from where they're leaving. What is the kind of politics of, of negotiating that?

I, I feel like the assumption may be that host countries are looking to have refugees returned, but is it ever the case that they don't, out of fear that it may cause some sort of economic or political or social upheaval based on how long and how well integrated refugees have become in the host country?

Stephanie: Man, I wish that were the case. What you're observing, it could be absolutely true, and at the same time, I think there's just an assumption that politicians especially, who are [00:30:00] facing reelection, who are looking at popular opinion in their country, think that that's better for them potentially politically to try and get the refugees to go back.

I mean, we're seeing that in Tanzania right now. The Tanzanian government made an agreement with the Burundian government that any of the Burundians currently still remaining in Tanzania from 2015 will, quote, "voluntarily repatriate." And there has been some cables that have been leaked that even if the refugees don't do so voluntarily, the governments have agreed to force them back. And I think they do see that it is in their interest politically to do so.

For me, one of the challenges is, and I would love, Anne, to hear your opinions about this, is how do we try and engage policy makers like directly on those incentives? How do we try and change the understanding of what the incentives are to host refugees?

Anne: This is where there was a lot of work done in 2016 to try to change the [00:31:00] conversation from countries that neighbor crisis zones. Change the conversation from them being seen as shouldering a burden, and instead, flip it so that the rest of the world could be called on to shoulder their responsibilities, so responsibility sharing to back up the host countries and to provide more assistance both to the refugees and to the host countries. So that when countries do the right thing and allow refugees in, they don't get penalized for that. They don't end up providing less services to their own citizens because they've done the right thing and allow lot of people fleeing for their lives to come in.

And so this was the thinking that underpinned several initiatives that year: the New York Declaration that launched the two compacts, the Global Compact on Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees, that have been worked in the last couple of years, and last year were finalized. And [00:32:00] also President Obama's Leaders Summit that called on countries – and there were some 49 countries that attended – to make specific commitments to help refugees either by providing more money, accepting more refugees for a settlement. And the big push was that host countries agree to allow children to go to school and adult refugees to, to work.

The initial work on these issues is very much a work in progress. And also it is in some ways undermined by all of this backlash against refugees that we see in countries around the

world, far-right governments coming in in some countries and speaking out against asylum seekers and against refugees and against migrants.

Stephanie: And I, I think that responsibility sharing in that framework is sort of one crucial step on the way there. I wonder if also part of the incentive structure could be changed by [00:33:00] sort of trying to make the idea of hosting refugees seem a little less invasive. So one of the things that I've been talking about folks with is trying to allow medium-term solutions. We talked so much about durable solutions, and I think that governments get put in a bind: it's either, "I nationalize and give full rights to refugees or I keep everybody out," and then there's no middle ground. And sort of the thought I have is, what if we instead embrace mobility, you know, in certain regional economic zones? What if there was a way to give refugees priority on a medium-term labor visa that allowed them to travel and sort of embrace the mobility that's already generally experienced there? And most importantly, as you say, to have their kids access schools and for them to access jobs. So they're not a quote unquote "burden," but they are able to move freely to protect their safety. I understand it's for the refugee even [00:34:00] community, it's a bit of a controversial suggestion.

Anne: What we've been doing is trying to change the image of refugees as scary people, criminals, would-be terrorists, and instead flip that around to a more accurate picture of families who did not intend to end up this way, who could easily be us, and people who have talents and have potential and have something to contribute and really want to have that control of their own lives and destinies that all of us want to enjoy.

And so just flipping that image away from refugees as carriers of disease and terrorists, um, to people who are an asset and, and really generally are seen as very hard workers, highly motivated to make a contribution wherever they [00:35:00] are. Um, that's been, that's been a tough sell in places where people have never met refugees.

Morgan: Thinking forward in thinking about ongoing crises now, I imagine we could come up with a list of the most obvious refugee crises that make it to the front page of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. But in both of your experiences, where are the refugee crises taking place that may not get a lot of the big attention, but there really is a crisis happening and it's, it's worth flagging?

And perhaps related to that, you know, where our high potential for refugee crises areas right now that maybe we're not quite there yet, but you think has a high potential in the future?

Anne: Well, first I would say that almost all international crises are now lately taking a back seat to U.S. domestic politics and a very partisan and overheated electoral politics that, you know, we have right now in the U.S. [00:36:00]. So I think we as a nation are much more introspective these days because there's, there's so much political noise on the television and in social media and, and that eats up a lot of the time and attention that would normally, some of which would go to international crises.

I think that one of the things that's not well understood is when you look at all of the forcibly displaced people around the world – and UNHCR estimates about 70 million people – most

of them are internally displaced people. Over 40 million are people who have fled their homes in their own home countries.

So, these are people who have fled their homes in Syria, but are still in Syria. And the responsibility for them lies with their own government. But in, in Syria, the Assad regime has bombed some of its own people. So, and then it's been quite a deadly place for displaced people to live. Innocent civilians are the targets of the government attacks.

[00:37:00] There are other places where displaced people get much better treatment. And we can look there and look for lessons there. I mean, we look at what Colombia was trying to do in terms of hammer out a peace deal and welcome people home. And that's been set back a little bit by the fact that there are Venezuelan refugees now throughout Latin America, including in Colombia, and they also need help.

Among humanitarians, there's sort of agreement that one of the most neglected crisis zones is what's happening in Yemen, and you don't hear a lot about it. And you heard almost nothing about it until *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered by Saudi operatives. And then suddenly there was a whole review of the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia.

And then all of a sudden there was more attention to the crisis in Yemen and the Saudi role in that and U.S. support for the Saudis in the, in the war in Yemen. So it doesn't seem to [00:38:00] me that we are giving the type of attention we ought to be. Our government is not doing it. Our Congress is not doing it. Our publics are not doing it. And this is particularly too bad when there are so many crises right now.

Stephanie: I think, Anne, what you say about internally displaced persons, absolutely. If we're talking about displaced people that are the most frequently ignored, it's the, it's the internally displaced persons, the IDPs, and they in fact represent the majority of displaced persons today.

And I was also gonna mention, I think the way that we read the news, we assume that the majority of refugees today, it's still the same pattern as it was in 2015, which was so many folks fleeing from Syria. But in fact, I think the crisis in Venezuela is about to outpace that, or at least was on the way to do so very recently.

But I will say, you know, we talk a lot about crisis and crisis levels, and these are humanitarian emergencies. But I think, and there was an interesting [00:39:00] article that came out that it's a bit of a detriment to potentially to refer to displacement today as crisis level. It is, you know, highest since we've seen since World War II, but we don't also have great numbers, and if we look at the total refugee population, it is less than 1% of the global population.

It's a humanitarian emergency that we need to engage, but it's doable. I think that when we talk about crisis and it's an overwhelming number of refugees banging down our door, there's this sense that we need to put up defenses and it's not doable. But if we think about the actual numbers of people that need resettlement, it is doable. It is possible. And I think if

we can reframe some of the conversation around a humanitarian emergency, deep need from this smallish number of people comparatively, maybe that might help a little bit too.

Morgan: So at this point in the conversation, we like to ask our special policy guests if you have any advice to give to junior [00:40:00] scholars, junior practitioners, analysts, people going into the foreign service, in the armed services. Based on your experience, what advice would you give for them going forward?

Anne: One of the things that I think is a smart thing to do early in your careers and for some while still in school is to push yourself a bit out of your comfort zones, to do more public speaking, to compete for fellowships, for study tours, for special opportunities. Even if you feel that you're going to risk embarrassment or rejection, you got to start somewhere, and I think starting locally ending up and delivering remarks to a student group, let's say, or applying for a special program that will take place over a weekend or a week long study tour. That's the way to start building on your resume, the fact that [00:41:00] you can handle these kinds of assignments. And that will help you then qualify for year-long fellowships and really special opportunities later on.

Morgan: That's wonderful advice. I want to thank you both, Stephanie and Anne, for being fantastic guests on our podcast today. So thank you so much for joining us.

Anne: Thank you.

Julie: Off the Page is a production of *International Security*, a quarterly journal edited and sponsored by the Belfer Center at Harvard Kennedy School and published by the MIT Press. Our program is produced and edited by Morgan Kaplan, the Executive Editor of *International Security*. The associate producer and technical director is Benn Craig; digital communications by me, Julie Balise; production support by Carly Demetre.

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