THE IRAQ AND SYRIAN QUAGMIRE; IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY

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Abstract
National security and state survival are two fundamental features of international relations. According to the Realist school of thought, a state must maintain supreme authority over its territory i.e. sovereignty and must have the ability to deal with all sorts of threats, whether domestic or international. Taking the case of contemporary Europe's security, this paper examines the various challenges the European Union member states are facing due to the ongoing crises in Iraq and Syria and the measures they are taking for dealing with these challenges.

Introduction
The ongoing crises in the Middle East such as the Syrian civil war and the spreading tentacles of the militant Islamic State (Daesh) in Iraq and Syria pose a formidable security threat to Europe. The group's fighting force comprises several thousand foreign fighters, mainly from other Middle Eastern states. A substantial number of European nationals are also involved. Though Iraq and Syria are presently the nucleus of this conflict, Daesh has become a global threat. The spillover effect of this conflict threatens to engulf the neighbouring states, but the security fabric of Europe – though it has no contiguous borders with the region – is also in jeopardy, as its citizens have joined the fighter ranks of the group. Reports of generous donations to the militant group by wealthy Europeans is also a matter of concern for European leaders. The conflicts in the Middle East and the consequent refugee crisis have provided ammunition to the propagandists of the right-wing extremist parties of Europe. The popularity of these far-right parties in many countries is now rising and they are fast gaining adherents among the European population. The volatile situation in Iraq and Syria has also strengthened the already present radical groups in Europe which are involved in terrorist activities.

The current situation in Europe and the security threats from Europe's neighbourhood have revived the debate on the security of the European

Union area. The European states have started taking measures to counter the peril. This research paper, while focusing on the crises in Iraq and Syria, also discusses their implications for European security. The concept of security will also be briefly discussed.

Iraq and Syria: Historical background

Present day Iraq and Syria were home to the world's oldest civilizations. Iraq, earlier called Mesopotamia, has a several millennia-old cultural history and is considered one of the cradles of human civilization. Between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, Iraq enjoyed the status of the heartland of the Islamic empire. However, its importance began to decline after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258. From the fifteenth century until the end of the First World War, Iraq remained under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

The French Revolution of 1789 and the subsequent Napoleonic wars helped to propagate the idea of the nation-state throughout Europe. Inspired by this philosophy, "Europeans aimed to establish their domination outside of Europe".[1] With the strengthening of the nation-state across the continent, major European powers made a bid to take over the Middle East from an enfeebled Ottoman Empire. With the rise of Napoleon in France, the country's territories and borders started to expand. Not only did he establish French domination over Europe, he was also able to take over Egypt and some territory in Palestine. However, the French remained in occupation of Egypt only for a brief period. Great Britain, after finally defeating Napoleon at Waterloo reinforced its influence in the Mediterranean and gained a foothold in the Middle East towards the end of the 19th century.[2]

During the First World War, Baghdad fell to British forces on March 11, 1917, with another British offensive launched in the north. By October 1918 British forces reached the outskirts of Mosul. Following the withdrawal of Turkish troops after an armistice, Mosul was promptly occupied by the British.[3] On October 1, in the same year, British and Arab

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[1] Ewan W. Anderson and Khalil H. Rashidian, *Iraq and the Continuing Middle East Crisis* (London: Printer Publisher, 1991), 3.

[2] Ibid.

[3] George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs,* 3rd Edition (USA: Cornell University Press, 1992), 60.

forces entered Damascus. The coastal areas of Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, and Tripoli were occupied by a British column, and moving in parallel direction, a combined British-Arab force captured Homs, Hama, and Aleppo in Syria's hinterland. However, during the last days of the war, the remaining Seventh Turkish Army under Mustafa Kemal Pasha gave stiff resistance to the British forces. This resistance at Aleppo blocked the Allies' entry into Turkey proper. A few days later, a truce was signed which ended the hostilities among the contesting armies.[4]

The allied forces had entered into secret agreements in the initial months of the First World War. Britain and France signed the Sykes-Picot agreement to divide the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire, after the conclusion of the war. It was agreed that Russia too would be a beneficiary of the break-up of the Turkish Empire. France was to gain control over the coastal strip of Syria, while Britain would establish its hold over southern Mesopotamia and its capital Baghdad.[5]

After the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France set up military administrations in these areas which were later replaced by civil administrations.[6] To give their respective occupation of the erstwhile Turkish Empire legality, on April 24, 1920, European leaders signed an agreement, creating the Mandatory system. The mandates, granted by the League of Nations, allowed the Mandatory powers to run the affairs of some former Ottoman territories. France was given the mandate for Syria while Britain was granted a mandate for Iraq and Palestine.[7] The fact is that although the mandates were issued to Britain and France when the Treaty of Lausanne was implemented in August 1924, the two Allies had already made various *de facto* arrangements, and therefore, the League of Nations was actually in no position to reverse them at that time.[8] While the mandates lasted, the region experienced turmoil and revolutionary movements and there was a surge in pan-Arab nationalism. The British and French administrations suppressed all independence movements.[9]

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[4] Ibid, 58-59*.*
[5] Ibid, 72.
[6] Anderson and Rashidian, *Iraq,* 7.
[7] Lenczowski, *Middle East,* 91.
[8] Peter Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 196.
[9] Anderson and Rashidian, *Iraq,* 9.

Designated in category 'A' of the mandate system, which promised early independence, the British mandate of Iraq came to a formal end in 1932. Following independence, Iraq, sponsored by Britain, joined the League of Nations.

Since independence to the present day, Iraq's politics have remained complex. It underwent many military coups, rule of dictators, and wars with its neighbours, which have adversely affected its economic progress despite its being an oil-rich country. With the US and British invasion of Iraq in March 2003, a new chapter of turmoil and bloodshed made the country's landscape more appalling. The infiltration of Al-Qaeda, the Kurdish issue and the formation of various militias resulted in the killings of several thousand Iraqi civilians in subsequent years. Suicide bombings, mainly against the Shia majority by groups of Sunni extremists, widespread corruption among the ruling elites and political deadlocks, halted development and obliterated the dream of prosperity and peace in the country.

Iraq's neighbour Syria, is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. In 1936, after successful negotiations, a Franco-Syrian treaty was signed. By this treaty France in principle agreed to grant independence to Syria. The treaty envisaged "Franco-Syrian consultation on foreign policy, French priority in advice and assistance, and the retention by France of two military bases." [10] The Druze and Alawite dominated districts were to be incorporated into Syria.

When during the Second World War French forces were defeated by Germany in 1940, Syria fell under the control of the Axis powers. However, in 1941, British and Free French troops reoccupied Syria. In 1946 Syria became independent after the departure of French forces. It was not smooth sailing for the newly independent Syria, for it faced many challenges including military coups, political turmoil and instability, hostilities with neighbours and wars with Israel. In 1970, Hafez al-Assad came into power through a coup d'etat. During his three decades in power the country remained stable, but he ruthlessly crushed all opposition and pursued a weapons acquisition programme. Assad also intervened in neighbouring Lebanon, which suffered from a prolonged civil war. With the

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[10] Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East,* 200-201.

demise of Hafez al-Assad, his son Bashar al-Assad succeeded him as president.

After gaining power, the young President Bashar al-Assad tried to end Syria's diplomatic isolation, and succeeded in mending the country's relations with neighbouring countries. Two years after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri which was blamed on Syria, the European Union and the United States resumed dialogue with Syria in 2007. In 2011, protests in the southern city of Deraa for the release of political prisoners turned violent when security forces opened fire on the protestors. The unrest spread to many other cities of Syria in the following months. To resolve the crisis President Assad announced some conciliatory measures. Dozens of political prisoners were released and granted amnesty and the nearly five decade old state of emergency was lifted. Despite these measures the demonstrations continued. To suppress the anti-government protests, the government resorted to ruthless measures. In June 2011 around 120 security forces' personnel were killed in armed attacks in a northwestern town of Syria. The opposition now organized itself and formed the Syrian National Council, a common front representing local and exiled opposition activists and leaders. Towards the end of 2012, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces was formed in Qatar which was given recognition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people by the US, the UK, France, Turkey and the Gulf states.[11]

The rise of Daesh and Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria
Daesh is a radical militant Sunni extremist group which first emerged as an offshoot of the insurgent group Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. It was led by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian. After Zarqawi's death in 2006, AQI created an umbrella organization named the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI).[12] In the subsequent years of 2007 and 2008, the Sahwa movement[13] somewhat weakened it. However, in 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assumed the leadership of ISI and began to strengthen the group. By 2013, under Baghdadi's leadership, the ISI carried out several

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[11] "Syria profile", http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995.

[12] "What is Islamic State?," http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144.

[13] The Sahwa movement dominated by Sunni tribes in Anbar province, was supported by the US. It had the objective of reducing the influence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. After the US withdrawal from Iraq, the Sahwa movement came to an end.

bombings and suicide attacks in Baghdad and other areas of the country. Baghdadi and his group joined the Al-Qaeda's extension in Syria, the Jabhat al-Nusra, which was fighting in the civil war against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.[14]This force has now gained notoriety worldwide for its brutal manner of killing opponents. In April 2013, Baghdadi merged his forces in Iraq and Syria and created the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Daesh. The leaders of al-Nusra and Al-Qaeda rejected the move, but fighters loyal to Baghdadi dissociated from al-Nusra".[15]

With the gradual withdrawal of US and British forces from Iraq and the handing over of security responsibility to Iraqi forces, the turmoil in Iraq did not subside. The tenure of Prime Minister of Iraq Nuri-al-Maliki, who became Prime Minister in May 2006, was marked by tumult. He was accused of marginalizing the Sunnis from politics and key posts in government. The policies he pursued were criticized for stoking the sectarian divide in the country. The alienation of Sunnis from politics and government positions boosted the Sunni extremist groups. Some former Baathist generals also joined their ranks to exploit the situation.

After the complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq in December 2011, violence intensified to unprecedented proportions. Nearly 200 people were killed in bombings targeting Shia Muslims immediately after the US withdrawal,[16] and bomb and gun attacks targeting Shia areas continued throughout the year. Violence continued in 2013 and in July of that year, at least 500 militants including senior Al-Qaeda terrorists escaped from Taji and Abu Ghraib prisons in a mass breakout.[17]

As mentioned earlier, the unfair treatment of the Sunni population by Prime Minister Maliki's coalition government heightened resentment among Sunnis. This proved advantageous to Daesh, which gained more adherents in the Sunni areas of Iraq. Many areas in the majority Sunni Al-Anbar province began slipping out of the government's control. There was an escalation of violence in the province and the militants of Daesh took over some areas of the province, including Fallujah.

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[14] "What is Islamic State?".
[15] Ibid.
[16] "Iraq profile," http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14546763.
[17] Ibid.

At this juncture, the Maliki government came under pressure from its regional and international supporters to form a more inclusive government, which would include Sunni and Kurd politicians. In July 2014, Daesh gained strength in the Western Anbar province and began to pose a formidable challenge to Iraqi security forces. Daesh made a lightening advance and swiftly seized the northern parts of Iraq, including Mosul. Iraq's security forces did not offer much resistance. The Iraqi army soon fled the areas, deserting the check posts and leaving behind a huge stockpile of American-supplied weapons which greatly increased the fire power of Daesh. Meanwhile Prime Minister Nuri-al-Maliki began to lose the support of his allies, particularly Washington and Tehran. He also lost support within his own Dawa party and his political alliances. Iraq's senior-most Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, during his Friday sermons declared the need for change and finally wrote to the leaders of Dawa to select a new prime minister.[18]Under intense pressure from many quarters Maliki resigned on August 14, 2014.

Daesh successfully captured territories in Syria after clashing with Syrian government forces, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which was fighting the government forces and also with other Islamist insurgent groups. Daesh gained control of the northeastern province of Raqqa after it occupied the capital of this strategically located province in January 2014. Raqqa was made *de facto* capital of Daesh and the militant group imposed harsh Islamic laws in the province. Raqqa was now used by the group as a hub where its militants assembled and were sent "to other battlegrounds across the country".[19] Having strengthened its control over the vast territory from Raqqa province in northeastern Syria to Iraq's western province of Anbar and the towns of Mosul, Tikrit and others in northern Iraq, Daesh declared the formation of a caliphate. The declaration was made from the Grand Mosque of Mosul and the leader of the group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was proclaimed Caliph.

In the backdrop of the Syrian civil war, many jihadi groups who were fighting the forces of Bashar al-Assad, had begun receiving massive aid from wealthy individuals in the Gulf states. Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar

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[18] L. Morris and K. De Young, "Maliki Steps Aside Easing Iraq's Political Crisis", *The Washington Post*, 14 August 2014.
[19] "The Fight for Raqqa," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, available from http://carnegieendo wment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=55782.

considered these jihadi groups as important for regime change in Syria. This support was reduced when aid ended up in the hands of Daesh, as many militants joined the caliphate. By the time the support was withdrawn owing to atrocities committed by Daesh in areas under its control, the group had become self-sufficient by generating enough wealth of its own. It started running its war economy by selling oil from the oil rich areas under its control in Iraq and Syria to the Kurds in neighbouring Turkey.[20]

Daesh fighters are from various countries including many European Union member states. By September 2014, according to the European Union's anti-terrorism chief, Gilles de Kerchove, the number of persons from Europe joining Islamist fighters in Syria and Iraq had risen to more than 3,000.[21]The biggest number of fighters from the Middle East are reportedly from Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. According to the Soufan Group, since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, an estimated 3,000 fighters from Tunisia, 2,500 from Saudi Arabia and 2,089 from Jordan have arrived in Syria and Iraq for waging what they perceive as jihad, and many of these fighters are now part of Daesh.[22]

Militancy in Iraq and Syria and the threat to Europe's security
The strategic and territorial advances of Daesh and its gruesome mission of violence fuelled the European security debate among the continent's leaders and the academia. The rising number of fighters joining Daesh from the continent was seen as a major security threat for Europe. Britain, France and Germany have large Muslim populations, therefore radicalization has become a major concern for Europe.

In international relations, international security is firmly rooted in the traditions of power politics.[23]Realists pay particular attention to the "values

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[20]   "Islamic   State: Where   does   Jihadist   Group   Get   its   Support,"   at
http://www.bbc.com/news/w orld-middle-east-29004253.

[21]   "Islamic   State   Crisis: 3,000   Europeans   Jihadists   Join   Fight,"   at
http://www.bbc.com/news/wo rld-middle-east-29372494.

[22] "Foreign Fighters Flow to Syria," *The Washington Post*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/ world/foreign-fighters-flow-to-syria/2014/10/11/3d2549fa-5195-11e4-8c24-487e92bc99 7b_graphic.html.

[23] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998), 21.

of national security and state survival".[24] Maintaining territorial integrity and sovereignty is of prime importance to a state, and this objective is achieved by bolstering national security, which primarily narrows down to the military aspects of security. It is imperative for a state to maintain supreme authority over its territory i.e. sovereignty. A state must have the ability to deal with all sorts of threats, whether domestic or international.

According to Bary Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, security is about survival. A security threat can be defined as an "existential threat to a designated referent object (traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society)".[25] The European states are concerned about the threat posed by Daesh to their citizens as well as their states. Although European states, except Turkey, (which is not really considered by the Europeans as belonging to Europe), do not share direct borders with the conflict zone i.e. Iraq and Syria, it is feared that hundreds of foreign fighters in Daesh from Europe, upon their return would propagate violence and radicalization in their respective countries. Moreover, well-trained militants believing in a radical ideology could spread unrest and violence in Europe. According to Ole Waever, "traditionally, by saying 'security', a state representative declares an emergency condition, thus claiming a right to use whatever means are necessary to block a threatening development".[26]A state, according to Theda Skocpol is "a set of administrative, policing and military organizations headed, and more or less coordinated, by an executive authority".[27] A state must be capable of dealing with the challenges it faces from within or from external forces. Charles Tripp provides a concise but all-embracing concept of state. He says it is an "institution that administers and coerces the peoples and territories over which it rules and over which it claims supreme authority, sovereignty. Politics are first and foremost not about oppositions, but about the state's ability to control challenges from within and without, and to meet the expectations of its peoples, including,

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[24] Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68.

[25] Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, *Security*, 21.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Farhan H. Siddiqi, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Pakistan, The Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir Ethnic Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 20.

in modern times, that of representing the wishes of the people, if only in the field of standing up to the outside world".[28]

Besides the fear that the Muslims residing in Europe could be radicalized and recruited by Daesh, European governments also nurse apprehensions that this extremism would brew tensions between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in their respective countries. To counter this danger a number of European states have begun adopting major measures.

Buzan, Waever and de Wilde present a sectoral approach towards security. This approach deals with different sectors within a state that need to be securitized. According to the Realist school, the military sector is of foremost importance as it secures the state from internal and external aggression. Though the primary function of the military sector is to defend the state, the militaries of states are at times also assigned other tasks. These may include peacekeeping missions in conflict zones or humanitarian intervention.[29]Military force can also be utilized "to defend states or governments against nonmilitary threats to their existence, such as migrants or rival ideologies."[30] The present conditions in Iraq are relevant to the military context of security. Though a military intervention for peacekeeping or to avert a humanitarian crisis is not yet in the offing, delivering arms and training to Kurdish Peshmerga forces in their fight against Daesh,[31] aerial surveillance and airstrikes in Daesh captured areas of Iraq and Syria have engaged the militaries of major European states.

The political aspect in this sectoral approach is also of great significance. Major political issues are also seen as a challenge to state sovereignty. The military and political sectors may overlap as both deal with the sovereignty of a state. The political sector however is more concerned with the nonmilitary threats to sovereignty. According to Buzan:

> Political threats are aimed at the organizational stability of
> the state. Their purpose may range from pressuring the

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[28] Frad Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations Power, Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 41.

[29] Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, *Security*, 22.

[30] Ibid, 50.

[31] "Defense Minister Von der Leyen visits Peshmerga Training in Bavaria," *DW*, http://www.dw.de/defense-minister-von-der-leyen-visits-peshmerga-training-in-bavaria/a-17970894.

government on a particular policy, through overthrowing the government, to fomenting secessionism, and disrupting the political fabric of the state so as to weaken it prior to military attack. The idea of the state, particularly its national identity and organizing ideology, and the institutions which express it are the normal target of political threats. Since the state is an essentially political entity, political threats may be as much feared as military ones. This is particularly so if the target is a weak state.[32]

In the current situation, although Daesh does not seem capable of overthrowing any European government or fomenting secessionism, it is capable of sparking violence in European countries by triggering tensions between Muslims and other communities. With the arrival in Europe of thousands of refugees from Iraq and Syria, tensions and hostilities have already hit a few towns and cities in EU member states. The ongoing crises in the Middle East have displaced several million people and many of them have tried to take refuge in Europe at the risk of their lives. Amid this ongoing refugee crisis some policy makers and politicians have warned that that these refugees might pose a threat to the EU member states' security. The present challenges that the European countries are facing and the measures which these countries are adopting to tackle them are discussed in the following section.

Middle Eastern crises and challenges to European security
EU states began to favour an attack on Daesh positions in Iraq after two American journalists and a British aid worker were beheaded by the militant group. The Western states now fear that some battle hardened militants in Iraq and Syria, who are from Europe, on their return home might carry out terrorist attacks in the continent.[33] In 2014, the British government revealed that some 500 British nationals had joined the fight in Iraq and Syria[34]. On September 1, 2014, the then British Prime Minister, David Cameron, increased the powers of the police and authorized it to seize the passports of terrorist suspects at UK borders. He also pledged to introduce new laws to prevent British-born terrorists from returning to the

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[32] Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, *Security*, 142.
[33] "Confronting Islamic State," *The Economist,* 13 September 2014, p.48.
[34] "UNSC Resolution 2178: How Easily Can it Be Enforced," at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29359901.

UK from Iraq or Syria.[35] Considering the possibility of violence by radical groups, the United Nations Security Council in September 2014 adopted a resolution which is binding on all member states. According to UNSC Resolution 2178, member states must stop the movement of individuals believed to be foreign terrorist or militants, stop and ban their funding, prosecute, rehabilitate and reintegrate fighters who have returned to their countries, and stop the recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping of anyone going abroad for terrorists acts or training.[36]

In September 2014, US Secretary of State John Kerry visited the Middle East to form an alliance of Gulf and Arab states against Daesh. He succeeded in bringing together ten Arab countries in an alliance including two key states, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.[37] In Europe, France had already shown willingness to carry out military strikes against the group. The British government won a comfortable majority of 481 votes in parliament endorsing airstrikes against Daesh in Iraq.[38] Though Britain, Belgium, France, Denmark and the Netherlands backed military action in Iraq they have been reluctant to launch military action in Syria.[39]

However, battling Daesh and other radical groups involved or suspected of terrorist activities, especially on the home ground, is harder than was anticipated. In August 2014, three Dutch citizens were arrested from The Hague on the suspicion of recruiting and sending people to Iraq and Syria. According to the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service, Daesh has as yet succeeded in recruiting only a few hundred Dutch, but there are several thousand sympathizers of the militant group in the Netherlands.[40]

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[35] "Cameron Unveils Fresh Terror Crack-Down to Tackle Jihadist Threat to Britain," http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2739893/BREAKING-NEWS-Terror-suspects-forced-away-ex tremists-networks-says-Cameron-unveils-new-security-laws.html.

[36] "UNSC Resolution 2178: How Easily Can it be Enforced?".

[37] Jonathan Marcus, "Will Obama's Global Anti-IS Coalition Work?" *BBC News,* 14 September 2014.

[38] "UK Parliament Approves Air Strikes Against Isis in Iraq," http://www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/live/2014/sep/26/mps-debate-and-vote-on-air-strikes-against-islamic-state-politics-live-blog.

[39] Stephen Castle and Steven Erlanger, "3 Nations Offer Limited Support to Attack on ISIS," *New York Times,* 26 September 2014.

[40] Thessa Lageman, "Islamic State Fears Take Hold in Netherlands," *Al Jazeera,* 5 September 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/09/islamic-state-fears-take-hold-netherlands-201492131426326526.html.

Tensions between radical Muslims and Holland's far-right Pro Patria organization increased in recent years.

In 2014, Spain also arrested a few suspects having alleged links with Daesh. A statement was issued by the Spanish interior ministry which said that Spanish and Moroccan police had arrested nine suspects belonging to a militant cell linked to Daesh. The militant cell was based in the Spanish enclave of Melilla, on the northern coast of Africa, and the neighbouring town of Nador, in Morocco. According to the interior ministry, one suspect was a Spanish national while the others were Moroccans.[41]

In Belgium, forty six members of an organization, 'Sharia4Belgium', were accused by authorities of sending fighters to Syria. Eight members of the organization, who were charged with brainwashing Belgian youth and sending them to Syria, were tried in the northern Belgian port city of Antwerp. The remaining thirty six were believed to be still in Syria. According to the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, a Britain based think tank, among the fighters in Syria, three hundred are from Belgium, making it the highest ratio in relation to population among western European countries.[42] This trial came four months after an attack on a Jewish museum in Brussels, which killed four people. The presumed attacker was identified by former French hostages in Syria as Mehdi Nemmouche who was one of their jailers in Syria.[43]

In Austria, the ratio of fighters joining Daesh is almost equal to that of Belgium. The country has a population of a mere 8.4 million, but according to its interior ministry more than 140 young Austrians are believed to have gone to Syria and Iraq to join the fighters. The authorities expressed the apprehension that this number was likely to rise if the conflict in Iraq and Syria prolongs. The government is deeply concerned about the extent to which radicalization has penetrated Austria's Muslim youth population. What is most disturbing is that many recruits are minors, including girls. There has been a steep rise in the Muslim population of Austria in the past few years. Authorities fear that the ideology espoused by Daesh would

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[41] "3,000 European jihadists."

[42] Robert-Jan Bartunek, "Belgium Launches its Biggest Islamist Extremist Trial," *Reuters,* 29 September 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/29/us-syria-crisis-belgiu m-islamists-idUSKCN0HO1IJ20140929.

[43] "Confronting Islamic State," *The Economist,* 13 September 2014, p.48.

radicalize the vulnerable sections of the Muslim community.[44] In November 2014, at least 13 people were arrested, including a 'Bosnian preacher', on suspicion of their affiliation with a terrorist organization.

After the introduction of strict laws by the British government, which authorize police to seize the passports of suspected terrorists and enable authorities to debar British nationals from returning to the UK from Iraq and Syria, several charity organizations have also been placed under investigation by the Charity Commission.[45]This has hampered the process of delivering of humanitarian aid to Syria. In comparison to the measures taken by the British government, Denmark is dealing with terrorists with a softer approach. The Danish government has launched an innovative programme for the rehabilitation of the returning fighters in its second largest city, Aarhus. This rehabilitation programme provides an opportunity to fighters of Danish origin to escape from conflict zones and return to Denmark without the threat of prosecution. The programme holds out the promise of normal life to those who are willing to give up militancy. Officials provide them free psychological counseling and also help them find employment or resume education in colleges and universities.[46] This innovative approach is appreciated by many scholars but European statesmen are wary about adopting it. Probably they want to first see the results this strategy produces.

There was even greater alarm in Europe when the new Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abbadi claimed without revealing the source of information, that terrorists belonging to Daesh were planning to attack the West, particularly the US and France. He claimed that terrorists planned to attack transport systems in the two countries. Although the US and French intelligence officials refuted the claim, saying they had no such evidence, this bit of information caused much alarm among policy makers in Europe.[47]Abbadi's

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[44] Simona Foltyn, "Austrian Youth Flocking to ISIL," *Aljazeera,* 10 October 2014, http://www. aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/10/austrian-youth-flocking-isil-2014108101425255 506.html.

[45] Simon Hooper, "UK Charity Crackdown Riles Syria Aid Workers," *Al Jazeera,* 15 October 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/10/uk-charity-crackdown-riles-s yria-aid-workers-20141012123534159897.html.

[46] Anthony Faiola and Souad Mekhennet, "Denmark Tries a Soft-Handed Approach to Returned Islamist Fighters," *The Washington Post,* 19 October 2014.

[47] "Iraqi PM Reveals ISIL Plot to Attack West," http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/201 4/09/iraqi-pm-reveals-isil-plot-attack-west-2014925212535183281.html.

claim came three days after the American attack on the Khorasan group in Syria, in which around fifty fighters of this group were killed, including Muhsin al-Fadhli, a Kuwaiti national who had served as Osama bin Laden's bodyguard. Officially, the airstrikes were aimed at targeting Daesh and not the Khorasan group, which is allied with Jabhat al-Nusra. However, the US justified its strikes on the Khorasan group by maintaining that the outfit was plotting terrorist attacks on Western countries.[48]A few days after these strikes, US Attorney General Eric Holder claimed that the Khorasan group was about to carry out a terrorist plot targeting commercial flights in Europe or the US. Without sharing details, he stated, "There is no question that the Khorasan Group had moved into the execution phase of a plot [and the airstrike was] designed to disrupt and stop that plot that was imminent."[49] The target of this airstrike was also a 24-year-old French intelligence officer David Durgeon who had defected from his services and joined Al-Qaeda. According to a European intelligence official, Durgeon was trained in intelligence and explosives. He apparently survived the attacks against the Khorasan group,[50] but is believed to have been killed later in a US airstrike on Syria on November 7, 2014. [51]

Amid the growing security fears in Europe, the UK government thwarted a terror plot in early October 2014. In armed raids in London, four men in their early twenties who were suspected of plotting a terrorist attack in the UK were arrested. They had alleged links to Daesh in Syria.[52]

European states are worried about the security of their citizens not only in Europe, but also in other parts of the world where radical movements and groups are active. Europe's fears are not unfounded, for such incidents

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[48] "The Khorasan Group New Kids on the Block," *The Economist,* 27 September 2014, p.23.

[49] "Khorasan Group Hit by US Airstrikes was in Execution Stage of a Plot," http://www.daily mail.co.uk/news/article-2771687/Khorasan-group-U-S-air-strikes-earlier-week-execution-st age-plot-involved-putting-explosives-aircraft-bound-Europe-U-S.html.

[50] "Sources: U.S. Airstrikes in Syria Targeted French Agent who Defected to Al Qaida," McClatchyDC, http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2014/10/05/242218_sources-us-air-strikes-i n-syria.html?sp=/99/117/&rh=1.

[51] "US Airstrikes 'Kill French Khorasan Bombmaker' in Syria," *The Telegraph*, at http://www. telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11215196/US-airstrikes-kill-French-Khora san-bombmaker-in-Syria.html.

[52] "First Alleged Isil Terror Plot on UK Foiled," *The Telegraph*, at http://www.telegraph.co.uk /news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11147495/First-alleged-Isil-terror-plot-on-UK-foiled-a mid -growing-fears-of-beheadings.html.

have taken place. One such case was the beheading of 55-year-old French mountain guide Harve Gourdel in Algeria. Gourdel was kidnapped a day after he arrived in Algeria by a group called Jund al-Khilafah which released a video of Gourdel's beheading. The kidnappers, who were thought to be linked with Daesh, said in the video that the murder was in retaliation to the French government's action against Daesh in Iraq.[53]

Radical groups, particularly Salafis, are active in Europe since the past many years. The Salafi movement is seen as the fastest growing Islamist movement. In Germany, it is considered as one of the greatest national security threats. This is mentioned in the annual report of 2013 of the Lower Saxony branch of Germany's domestic intelligence agency the Bundesamt fur Verfassungsschutz (BfV).[54] Radical Salafis were found involved in some terrorist activities in Germany. Violent clashes broke out in various cities in 2012 between Salafis and members of a regional far-right party Pro NRW belonging to the North-Rheine Westphalia Lander of Germany. Several people, including policemen, were injured in the clashes. In the same year, a bomb was planted at the platform of Bonn's central railway station, which did not explode. Investigations found Salafis behind the plot and suspected members of this group were arrested and put on trial.[55]

The crises in the Middle East strengthened the Salafis, who began arranging benefit events since 2012. They used propaganda material such as videos, horrific photographs and images of the Syrian civil war etc. to enhance people's willingness to make donations.[56] In 2014, there were clashes between members of the Kurdish diaspora and the Salafis in some German cities, which resulted in injuries on both sides.

The sudden influx of refugees in Europe, mainly from strife torn Syria and Iraq is being portrayed in popular media and public discourse as a security challenge for Europe. It is feared that these refugees might be recruited by

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[53] "French Tourist Beheaded in Algeria," *The Guardian*, at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/24/french-tourist-beheaded-algeria-isis-linked-jihadis.

[54] Visit http://www.verfassungsschutz.niedersachsen.de/aktuelles_service/meldungen/innenmi nister-pistorius-stellt-neuen-verfassungsschutzbericht-2013-vor-124756.html.

[55] http://www.dw.com/en/german-terrorism-trial-gets-off-to-halting-start/a-17909087.

[56] http://www.verfassungsschutz.niedersachsen.de/aktuelles_service/meldungen/innenmi nister-pistorius-stellt-neuen-verfassungsschutzbericht-2013-vor-124756.html.

radical Muslim groups in Europe to engage in militant activities. Media reports and analyses project that the radicals particularly in Germany, are seeking out refugees from the Middle East and Asia for radicalization. There are apprehensions that a few, if not many, might join these groups and participate in militant activities. Since most of the refugees are of Arab extract, speak Arabic and share a common culture with the Salafis, it is projected in some analyses that they can be an easy target of these groups in their recruitment drive.

The refugee crisis has strengthened the European far-right and the anti-immigrant political parties. The attacks on refugees and their shelters, particularly in Germany, have increased. Since the beginning of the crisis till May 2016, over 1,000 cases of attacks against refugees and asylum seekers, their shelters and volunteers were reported in Germany.

Conclusion
The ongoing crises in the Middle East have brought unprecedented challenges to Europe. The already present radical Islamic groups in Europe and the far-right extremist parties have both benefited from the turmoil. The security threats to Europe and its citizens have undoubtedly risen to unprecedented levels. Europe is not only facing a rise in radicalization of its citizens but has also been hit by deadly terrorist attacks which have claimed scores of lives particularly in Belgium, France and Germany. The tensions between the large Muslim community of Europe and right-wing parties have disturbed the otherwise peaceful social environment of the continent. The refugee crisis has also challenged the internal cohesion of the EU. The member states are now divided on the issue of how to deal with and accommodate the refugees. In the discourse of international relations it is considered necessary for a state to use its power to protect its territory and its citizens. Despite the security measures the EU member states have adopted, the terror threat still looms large. The mass migration to Europe will continue until peace is restored in the Middle East. Thus, the situation in Europe is likely to remain volatile in the coming years.