

# European Response to Security Threats: Limitations and An Alternative

Written by Mohamed Charfi

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MOHAMED CHARFI, JAN 16 2016

The attacks on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in Paris had an important effect on France and could be a turning point in managing security threats and the war against terrorism in Europe. France and other European countries responded by tightening their security measures and intensifying their commitment to fight 'Daesh' (the Arabic acronym for The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS). In this article, I review European Union (EU) member states' response to the new security challenges. Hard-line measures are necessary to restore the confidence of the worried public and might limit the strike force of terrorist groups. However, this response will be insufficient if it does not consider the root causes of the problem, particularly political instability in the Middle East and Muslim integration into European society. I argue that Europe should adopt a comprehensive security approach (Buzan, 1991; Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, 1998; Stone, 2009), which go beyond the hard-line security measures, by taking into account the impact of conflicts in the Middle East on Europe (Fawcett, 2013; Roy, 2009) and the failure of the integration of young European Muslims (Archick et al, 2011; Adam and Torreken, 2015).

### European Union Response to Paris Attacks

#### *Hard-line security measures*

European Union member states have responded to the Paris attacks by strengthening security measures. In France, a state of emergency was declared, and border controls were restored (Valls, 2015). In several European countries, the alert level was increased, including in Belgium where a number of the Paris attacks perpetrators originated (Centre de Crise, 2015).

At the European institutions level, EU Justice and Home Affairs ministers adopted on 20 November 2015 a set of conclusions accelerating the implementation of certain counter-terrorism measures, such as the EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) directive, firearms, controls of external borders, information sharing, terrorist financing, criminal justice response to terrorism and violent extremism (JHAC, 2015). These measures will be added to others adopted by the EU in the last years, such as the revised EU strategy for combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism (CEU, 2014) and the new rules to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing (OJEU, 2015).

#### *Intensification of Military Action in the Middle East*

The Paris attacks had a strategic consequence change on French foreign policy. A more realistic approach was adopted through the research of new allies, such as Russia. The question of the Syrian regime became a minor point. Even if the French president stressed that Assad cannot be part of a political solution, Daesh as designated as the priority and the enemy of the nation (Herreros, 2015; Hollande, 2015). France has decided to intensify the bombing against the group and sent new reinforcements, such as the deployment of the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier in Syria (MD, 2015).

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France is also pressing other countries to join in a more intensive cooperation in order to defeat Daesh. The resolution 2249 (20 November 2015), initiated by Paris and adopted unanimously by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) calls member states to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by Daesh, al-Nusra front and other groups as well as entities associated with Al-Qaeda. In addition, the UNSC 'urges member states to intensify their efforts to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Iraq and Syria and to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism' (UNSC, 2015).

France has also requested assistance from European countries through the activation of article 42 (7) TEU (Treaty of the European Union) (FAC, 2015 : 6). Member states responded to this request by expressing their unanimous and full support to Paris and their readiness to provide all the necessary aid and assistance (FAC, 2015 : 6; Barigazzi, 2015).

This was the first time the EU mutual assistance clause was invoked, and many questions have arisen regarding its scope (Cîrlig, 2015: 1). In practice, there is no obligation for EU countries to provide assistance to France. Because of the neutrality of some countries (Ireland, Sweden, Finland, Austria and Malta) and the vagueness of article 42 (7), the mutual assistance clause does not clearly determine what kind of assistance the member states should bring (Mills, 2015; Vaudano, 2015). However, in a show of European solidarity, Britain launched air strikes on Syria (Fallon, 2015), and Germany's parliament has approved a plan to join the military campaign against Daesh (Connolly, 2015).

## *Limits of the Hard-line Approach*

The adoption of hard-line security measures and the strengthening of military operations against Daesh in Iraq and Syria could reduce the group's strike force and prevent their ability to prepare other attacks; however, the effectiveness of these measures are questionable for several reasons, in particular:

- The challenge of building alliances: For strategic and sectarian reasons, the main forces in the region have other priorities. Assad's regime has no interest in defeating Daesh, his main enemy is the Syrian opposition (Reuter, 2015; Gul, 2015); the priority of Turkey is the rebel Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) (Arun, 2015); and Iraqi Shiites are mainly concerned with defending their sectarian borders, but they seem in no hurry to bring the Sunni Arab minority back into the Iraqi political game (Roy, 2015).
- Lessons from the past show the difficulty of managing the post-war environment in the region. The Iraq war is the most recent example. After 10 years, US forces left the country without pacifying it. Iraq is divided and the country has become a haven for terrorist groups (Norton, 2013: 133; Roy, 2009; Gergis, 2014).
- Even if Daesh is destroyed, it will not be conclusive whether or not terrorism is defeated. The group might displace its central command to other countries such as Libya (Kirkpatrick et al. 2015). Additionally, if the Middle East remains unstable, other terrorist groups will emerge.
- Zero risk does not exist. Even strong authoritarian states such as Russia have experienced terrorist attacks, which prove that hard-line security measures will not eliminate the problem (Walt, 2015).

## **Towards A Comprehensive Security Approach**

The term 'comprehensive security' has been frequently used since the end of the cold war, but with different meanings (Jones, 1998: 6). It is very often used by international institutions and national governments in their policy documents (Drent, 2011: 2). At the European level, it has been applied as the organising principle for EU action in many cases in recent years, for example, in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Great Lakes (EC, 2013). According to Buzan, security should not be limited to military security, but should be analysed in terms of five sectors: security-political, military, economic, societal and environmental (Buzan, 1991; Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, 1998; Stone, 2009). There are many other definitions, but in general, they are all conceptions that refer to responses to security threats, which are not strictly of a military nature (Drent, 2011: 2). The term used here refers to the idea that the

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security threat management should not be limited to the military and police measures but should take into account the other parts of the problem, in particular, the chaos in the Middle East and the failure to integrate young European Muslim citizens.

## *European Union Foreign Policy in the Middle East*

The Paris attacks, similar to those perpetrated in other parts of the world, have a close link with the political instability in the Middle East, especially in three cases:

**Iraq:** The American intervention in Iraq, supported by some European countries like Britain, was the starting point of the chaos in the region. This war was based on false justification: there were no links between Iraq and Al-Qaeda, and no weapons of mass destruction were found (Fawcett, 2013: 325). The post-war management was catastrophic and has contributed to the sectarian division of the country. The marginalisation of the Sunnis in the political space promoted the rise of extremist groups such as Daesh, which presents itself as the protector of Sunnis in the region (Gerges, 2014: 339).

**Syria:** During the past five years, despite the grave violations of human rights, the murder of thousands of civilians and evidence of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, the international community has refrained from any action. Since the beginning of the conflict in March 2011, EU action has been limited to humanitarian assistance, economic sanctions, and the call for political solution (FAC, 2015: 5-6 ; FACa, 2015 : 5).

**Libya:** Since the beginning of the conflict on February 2011, EU member states, especially France and the UK, tried to play an active role, but their actions were incoherent (Koenig, 2011: 28). After the removal of Gaddafi, the former Libyan president, from power, European action was inefficient, and they failed to combine their different priorities (support of UN mission, the rise of Daesh and the support for the Tobruk government) in coherent strategies (ECFR, 2015: 72). In addition, some EU member states, such as Italy, France and the UK, competed with each other to secure contracts with Libya for their own defence industries (Kostanyan and Blockmans, 2014: 2).

The re-examination of EU foreign policy in the Middle East should be a matter of priority. The EU's presence in the region should not be limited to military action. A viable alternative to the current chaos in the region could be a launch of regional security dialogue. The EU should make every effort, at the diplomatic, political and financial levels, to initiate such a dialogue with the main regional powers. It is true, however, that in the present circumstances, with the involvement of several players in the conflict, including Russia, a peaceful solution seems difficult to obtain (see Engle, E. and Danyliuk, T., 2015: 168); however, it is necessary that the EU agree and set aside their differences in order to take action in the region. The EU could contribute by taking a leading role as facilitator and key actor in this security dialogue in order to promote peace and security in the region, not only for the cases mentioned above but also regarding other conflicts in the area and, especially, the Middle East peace process between Israel and Palestine.

## *Integration of European Muslim Youths*

The perpetrators of the Paris attacks were young Muslims born and/or raised in Europe (Counasse and Bordecq, 2015). Every time after such an event, a public debate is opened about Muslims and the link between Islam and violence (Howeidy, 2015; Nossiter and Alderman, 2015). However, several incidents of our past and recent history, such as the July 2011 massacre committed in Oslo by Anders Breivik or the persecution of Muslim minorities (Rohingya) by radical Buddhists in Myanmar (Kuntz, 2015), serve as stark reminders that the perpetrators of violent extremism may be of any ethnicity, religion or political ideology (Archick et al, 2011: 1; Walt, 2015). We should think about the root causes of terrorism. Some experts believe that past failures to fully integrate Muslims into European civic, political and economic life may leave some European Muslims more vulnerable to extremist ideologies (Archick et al, 2011: 1; Burman, 2015). A comprehensive security approach should take into account this situation. Priority should be given to the following key elements: unemployment, representation of Muslim communities and media coverage of Muslims.

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**The problem of unemployment:** Many experts have highlighted the inequalities suffered by young Arab Muslims (Haenni, 2006: 112; Adida, Laitin and Valfort, 2010). According to a recent study on Belgian-Moroccan and Belgian Turk citizens, 'While the social capital (education level, job type, revenue, etc.) of these groups tends to increase, there are still specific obstacles blocking their equal inclusion and participation in society, particularly in the field of employment' (Adam and Torreken, 2015: 10). Another study confirmed that 'a Muslim candidate is 2.5 times less likely to receive a job interview callback than is his or her Christian counterpart' (Adida, Laitin and Valfort, 2010: 22384). Governments in EU countries should develop an effective policy in order to promote young Muslims' access to the job market. It is an essential element for their integration.

**The problem of representation:** There is a real deficit of representation of Muslim communities in Europe. Several organisations exist, such as the French Council of the Muslim Faith (Conseil Français du culte musulman) or the Muslim Executive of Belgium (Executif des musulmans de Belgique), but they suffer from the problem of dispersion. They are devised by traditions, language and ethnicity (Archick et al, 2011: 10), and they don't contribute to the integration of Muslims in European countries. These organisations should take a leading role as interlocutors with the governments and as promoters of a European Islam in order to allow the rising generation of Muslims to play their part in society while respecting European values.

**Media coverage of Muslims:** Research has demonstrated that media plays an important role in establishing popular views and attitudes in society (Allen, 2012: 3; Burton, 2010). Several studies confirmed that Muslims are often portrayed in Western news media as violent, fundamentalist and as threats to Western civilisation (Elmasry, 2015; El-Aswad, 2013). According to the findings of the INSTED report (in Allen, 2012: 10-11) such media coverage is likely to provoke and increase feelings of insecurity amongst non-Muslims and Muslims, and in this way, to weakens the government's measures to reduce and prevent extremism; and could be a major barrier preventing the success of the government's community cohesion policies and programmes. Therefore, it is important that media in Europe adopt a more constructive role in their coverage of Muslims in Europe.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to review the limits of EU member states' response to the raising security threat after the Paris attacks. Hard-line security actions could be necessary to reassure the public and to prevent further strikes. However, these measures have proven their limits in the very recent past. I have argued that a security strategy should be comprehensive and take into account the root causes of the problem, particularly the following two factors:

- **Instability in the Middle East:** The EU should use its diplomatic and economic influence to initiate a regional security dialogue with the participation of the main regional powers. This goal requires more coordination among EU member states themselves and between them and the European External Action Service (EEAS), especially given member states' crucial role in European foreign policy and the limited prerogatives of European institutions in this area (ECFR, 2015: 13; Blockmans and Hillion, 2013).
- **Failure of the integration of young European Muslims :** Priority should be given to promoting youth employment, addressing the representation deficit and reviewing media coverage of Muslims. EU member states should be aware of the necessity to provide the human and financial resources required to translate these priorities into operational realities. In the current unfavourable political environment characterised by the rise of the far-right parties in several European countries (Ivaldi, 2014), this support could send a strong signal to young European Muslims that they are an integral part of society.

**NB:** The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author, and they do not reflect in any way those of the institutions to which he is affiliated.

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