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## Issue Brief

# Post-Paris Scenario in Europe

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**9/11** brought a new shift in international relations as terrorism was described as an existential threat to the world. President George W. Bush emphasized that “virtually every terrorist group on the planet – including those that had no beef with Washington – was the enemy and had to be eliminated if the Global War on Terrorism (GWOt) was to be won”.<sup>1</sup> On November 13, 2015, the world saw another horrific terrorist act – attacks in Paris, killing at least 129 people and critically wounding hundreds. Taking the credit for the attacks, ISIS declared that it was in retaliation to the French airstrikes on ISIS targets in Syrian Raqqa province.

The inflated threat of Al Qaeda, countering of rogue states like Iraq and Syria and later on withdrawing and leaving Iraq in a quagmire, demonstrate the failure of the Western alliance as it led to creation of ISIS. The ISIS said that the Paris attacks were “the first downpour.” The countries on the enemy list will apparently continue to devise a strategy to counter it. But the best way to deal with this is to find out why it is raining in the first place and how best to find shelter.<sup>2</sup> Al Qaeda, for the moment has lost grounds, but ISIS endurance depends on how the world leaders tackle the menace.

While political thinkers and practitioners were contemplating the strategic changes in different regions of the world, attacks in Paris surfaced as a game changer. This time again – like in the past – the views remain divided on whether it is Islam that is breeding violence and pitting the West and Muslim world against each other or it is a violent minority that is acting in the name of Islam. While these discussions would continue to engage academia and policy makers in the foreseeable future, political leaders on the far right are trying to sell their anti-immigrant policies and intensify ‘xenophobic romanticisms’ towards Muslims.

Baumgartner identifies four things to emerge in the aftermath of the Paris attacks: backlash against immigrants, growing anti-Muslim sentiments, cooperation with Russia in military action against ISIS in Syria and an increased security in everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Most of us, no doubt, agree on fighting ISIS but the first two aspects will not only multiply the number of the anti-West Muslims but will also aid terrorist groups to play on the sentiments of Muslims leading to more radicalization of youth within Muslim communities.

The Paris attacks could have a major impact on social and political issues in Europe and other western countries. This time besides Muslims, the migration issue has been linked with the attacks. Europe had struggled to find a common policy to address the humanitarian crisis resulting in a massive influx of

largely unregulated migration. Nearly half of the 700,000 refugees and immigrants arriving in Europe are Syrian. There is a renewed opposition to the unregulated migration towards Europe after ISIS statement of claiming responsibility for the Paris terror attacks. The links between the refugee crisis and the Paris attacks also find resonance in European authorities' statements that one of the attackers entered the continent posing as refugee. While these fears are logical, it is also believed that the anti-immigration policy could cause further radicalization and worsen an already dismal humanitarian crisis.<sup>4</sup>

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was criticized for her stance on EU policy towards migrants in the light of European migrant crisis. Poland was among the countries that raised its concern about the EU refugee relocation scheme. Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban's action to erect an \$80 million fence to block immigrants' passage into the country, combined with similar thinking shared by the leaders of the Netherlands, Britain and Belgium, has conflated the migration crisis with threats to security. Markus Soder, a German politician, has sharply criticized his own government's open immigration policy. The rest of Europe issued similar statements by rejecting the idea of equitable distribution of the people currently seeking asylum in Europe. Though the Schengen border controls have been tightened since the attacks, the Czech Deputy Prime Minister proposed closing the Schengen borders.

Noting that Islamophobia has remained in the forefront, a German anti-Islamic movement - PAGIDA (Patriotic European Against Islamization of the West) - has started organizing rallies in support of their political stance. Leader of the French National Front, Marine Le Pen, called on the government to stop taking in refugees and migrants and asked for a ban on Islamic organizations, expulsion of 'preachers of hatred' and illegal immigrants and closing down hardline mosques for security reasons.<sup>5</sup> Polish Defense Minister, Witold Waszczykowski floated an idea of training the young immigrants and sending them back to Syria to fight ISIS and liberate their country. Geert Wilder, leader of Dutch Party of Freedom, known for his anti-Islam and anti-immigrant stance, demanded that the Dutch government close the borders for Muslim immigrants and protect the Dutch people. He compared the Quran with Hitler's Mein Kampf. These anti-Muslim and anti immigration statements and rallies skyrocketed the popularity of the far right politicians in Europe in their respective countries.

One can imagine the anger of Europeans about the attacks, but the overall negative reaction towards the Muslims, not only in Europe but across the globe, has increased manifold. As a result of such harsh criticism and stereotyping in the Western countries, Muslims feel alienated and that makes some of the youth more susceptible to ISIS recruitment.

Amidst this hue and cry, came President Francois Hollande statement which while pledging a “pitiless” retaliation, very strongly stated, “We must not make any confusion concerning these terrorists and fanatics that have nothing to do with the Muslim religion.” This is a sound policy. While combating ISIS with full vigour, it is not sensible or advisable to exaggerate the threat of ISIS to the extent that it would start inter-communal relations in European societies. There should be a realization among the Western policy makers that by arousing sentiments against Muslims and without having the sane voices in the Muslim world on their side, they cannot win this war against violent extremism and terrorism.

Realizing the gravity of situation post-Paris, Muslim world responded in an affirmative way to act against these abhorrent acts of violent extremism and terrorism. On December 14, 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the creation of a of 34–nation Islamic military coalition to combat the nuisance. President Obama on the same date, in a national security meeting at the Pentagon, while praising the role of his European and other allies, namely, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia and Italy, also asked the United States' Arab allies to do more.

This leads one to ponder why the West is relying only on Sunni Muslim states and not taking along the Shia Muslim states. ISIS is a so-called Sunni group with its own territory and economy. It could incite the aspirant Shia terror groups to seize territory and start yet another war. It is very important to understand that the world is going through a difficult phase as the ‘enemy’ now has face in the shape of a ‘state’. Therefore, the realist theorist’s focus on the centrality of the state has to transform. Besides focusing on sovereign states, they have to include (non) states run by non-state actors.

Because there are two reasons why these Paris attacks are alarming; first; terrorists’ external capabilities are beyond conventional wisdom; and second, there are gaps in Western surveillance. The simultaneous attacks in France, which has a highly advanced antiterrorism infrastructure, suggests that terrorist groups are gaining in external attack capability.<sup>6</sup> Jan Techau, Director Carnegie–Europe, sees Europe to have always relied on and followed the US in the Middle East whereas the US itself is not willing to get into yet another armed entanglement on the ground. He says the Paris attacks merit a decisive foreign policy reaction from France and its European partners; and adds that contrary to the strong words of politicians and even stronger military reaction that some in the foreign policy hardliners would prove nothing more than a chimera. So, in the absence of political capital and strategic depth to pull a more active role for Europe, the next terror attack could come, God forbid, followed by more fruitless discussions<sup>7</sup> without offering sustainable solutions.

## Notes and References:

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- <sup>4</sup> See, Nick Robbins–Early. Why a backlash against refugees only helps ISIS, (November 18, 2015) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/paris-attacks-refugees\\_5648961ae4b060377349702c?utm\\_hp\\_ref=world](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/paris-attacks-refugees_5648961ae4b060377349702c?utm_hp_ref=world) (accessed December 15, 2015)
- <sup>5</sup> See, Nick Robbins–Early. Europe’s far right seeks to exploit post Paris attack fears, (November 18, 2015), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/europe-far-right-paris-attacks\\_564b84bfe4b045bf3df16a03](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/europe-far-right-paris-attacks_564b84bfe4b045bf3df16a03) (accessed December 15, 2015)
- <sup>6</sup> See, Armin Rosen, 2 Reasons the Paris attacks were specially alarming. (November 14, 2015), <http://www.businessinsider.com/paris-attacks-implications-2015-11> (accessed December 15, 2015)
- <sup>7</sup> For details see, “Europe’s foreign policy reaction to the Paris attacks? Noise” (November 17, 2015). [carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=62001](http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=62001) (accessed December 15, 2015)