

The Surge in Illegal Migration to the Old Continent: a Formidable Challenge to the European Intelligence Apparatus

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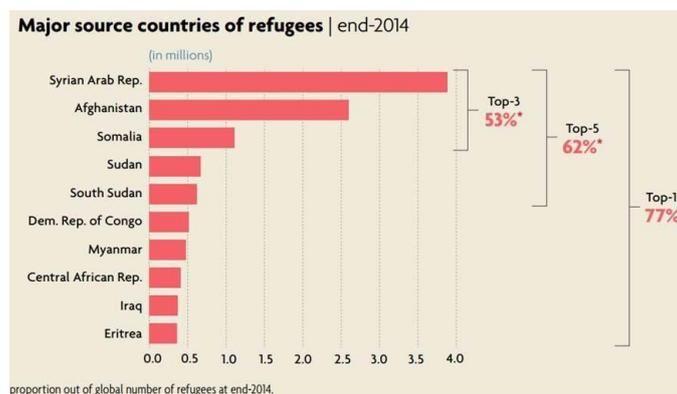
Population transfers, a form of either directly or indirectly forced migration, have taken place throughout human history. In the early 13th century BC, the Assyrians used to deport insurgents, and four centuries later, the Hittites developed a structured policy of mass-displacement of conquered peoples (Bryce, 1999). Between 1300 and 1600 AC, the Ottoman Turks actively enforced migration of various ethnic groups within their empire, and in the second half of 20th century, masses of refugees emerged in Europe during and after the 2nd world war, in Indo-China after the fall of Saigon in 1975 and last but not least, in the Middle East in the 60s and early 70s.

However, nothing in human history compares to the tsunami of illegal migrants from Africa and the Middle East that flooded southern Europe since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011.

The present commentary addresses this surging displacement of mainly Muslim populations to Europe within a context of national and supranational security. The author tries to make more graphic the formidable challenge to the European intelligence apparatus. The timeframe is not ‘tomorrow’, with the integration of the incoming illegal migrants still in process, but the ‘day after tomorrow’, when the newly ‘naturalised’ Europeans will be – hopefully – active parts of their host-societies.

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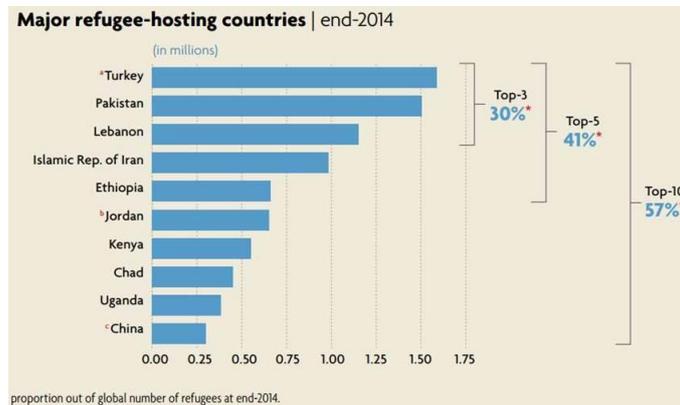
In 2014, there were 59.5 million of forcibly displaced people worldwide (UNHCR, 2015 i). Among them, 19.5 million were categorised as refugees, of whom 5.1 million were Palestinians - who fall under the remit of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and not under the one of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. On a national level, the major sources of refugees are given in Graph 1, with Syria easily identified as the primary point of origin of refugees and an unprecedented 77% of the total number of refugees originating from just ten countries.



Graph I: World at War, (UNHCR, 2015 ii)

Usually, refugees on their way to a better and safer future may find temporary shelter in a country different from their final destination. In fact, as it has been the case with the Syrian refugees in Turkey, nations acting as ‘transit conduits’ may – even temporarily – end up hosting a disproportionately high number of people over prolonged periods of time.

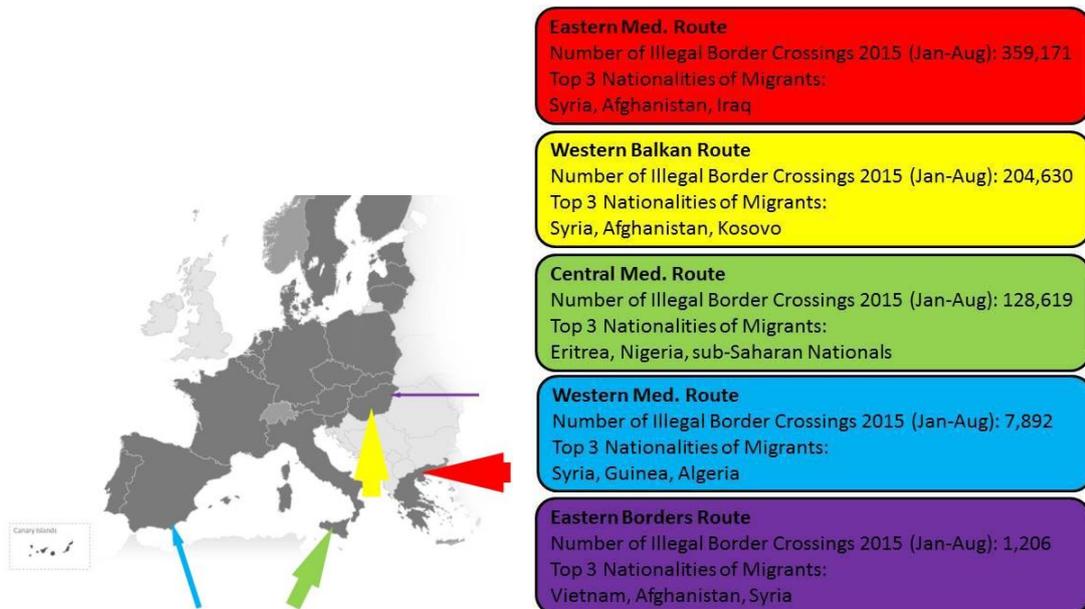
The landscape of hosting nations is given in Graph 2, with Turkey standing out as the primary transit-hub and conduit for Syrian refugees – more than two million people as of October 2015 – and developing countries worldwide hosting in the overall an astonishing 86% of the world’s refugees.



Graph II: World at War, (UNHCR, 2015 ii)

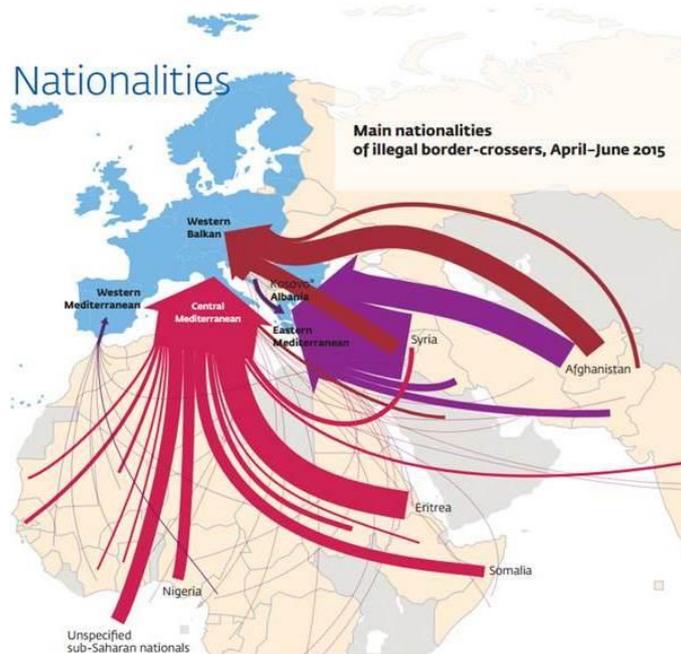
Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, Europe has prevailed all along as the destination of choice for the bulk of illegal migrants from Africa and the Middle East. It is understood that the Old Continent has exercised an irresistible *‘pull force’* onto the hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants. As main agents of attraction one can promptly identify the relative geographic proximity, the political stability, the civil society, the economic prosperity, the entrenched multicultural social model and the enviable religious tolerance.

The geography of the main gates of entry for illegal migrants is depicted and further described on Map I:



Map I: Gates of Entry of Illegal Migrants, (FRONTEX, 2015 i)

Map II depicts the main migratory routes in conjunction with the corresponding points of origin of illegal migrants:



Map II: Migratory Routes and Points of Origin: (FRONTEX, 2015)

In the qualitative analysis of the phenomenon, Map II renders obvious two salient features of the wave of illegal migrants to Europe:

- With the exception of southern Nigeria and some pockets of Christianity both in the rest of Africa and the Middle East, Islam is the prevailing religion in all the nations that generate large numbers of refugees. This is an attribute of paramount importance and notwithstanding Europe’s cultural openness and religious tolerance, a source of potential friction and political grievances. Facing this unprecedented wave of mass immigration, Europe has not yet worked out a political balance. As a manifestation of the ongoing process in flux, one could mention that on the 7th of October 2015 in the midst of this year’s tsunami of illegal migrants, Germany’s Chancellor Merkel made headlines and was broadly praised when she said that (World Economic Forum, 2015):

“When someone says: ‘This is not my Europe, I won’t accept Muslims’ ... I have to say, this is not negotiable... Who are we to defend Christians around the world if we say we won’t accept a Muslim or a mosque in our country? That won’t do.”

However, the same leader nine days later was quoted as saying:

“This [multicultural] approach has failed, utterly failed.”

- All migrants to Europe originate from geographies featuring at best political repression like in the case of Eritrea, or war at worst. Prospective refugees are fleeing regional wars like the one in Syria (between rival political and religious groups) and pockets of insurgency (Boko-Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabab in Somalia and the Taliban in Afghanistan).

In the post 9-11 world and given the political sensitivities that were duly developed in the western hemisphere, coupled with the corresponding shifts in the security paradigm of major intelligence agencies, the Old Continent has to look in the mirror and ask itself two straight-forward questions: firstly, ‘by throwing the national gates open, or partially open,

am I importing the latest version of jihadi terrorism from the Middle East and the Magreb...?', and secondly, 'if yes, how can I protect myself while preserving my strong culture of humanism...?'

The former of these problematics represents a major challenge to the European intelligence apparatus and as such, it opens the deck for some deep reflection.

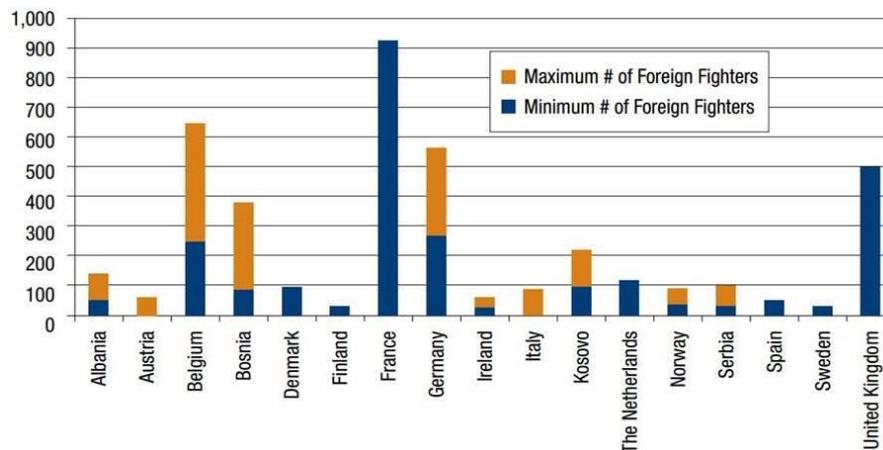
Under the Microscope: the Formidable Challenge to the European Intelligence Apparatus

Not all terrorist groups are the same. A good differentiator and simultaneously a nice key for their categorisation is their ability to inflict damage, along with the distance of their command and control centres from potential targets. Table I depicts three different categories of terrorist groups. The most threatening one features the ability to strike homeland from abroad, the second one is able to strike 'hard assets' like embassies and citizens only abroad – not in homeland – and the third one possesses limited capability, enough to project force only on a local or at best regional scale.

	High Threat	Medium Threat	Low Threat
Characteristics	Plotting or instigating attacks against the homeland and targets overseas (e.g., embassies and citizens)	Plotting attacks against targets overseas (e.g., embassies and citizens)	Limited or no active plotting against homeland or targets overseas
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula • Core al Qa'ida (including the Khorasan Group) • Da'ish • Some inspired individuals and networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al Shabaab • Jabhat al-Nusrah • Ansar al-Sharia Libya groups • Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb • Boko Haram 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Turkestan Islamic Movement • Suqor al-Sham

Table I: Categorisation of Major Terrorist Groups: (Rand Corporation, 2015 i)

In the case of ISIS it is well known that there are European nationals bolstering its ranks (see Graph III). For instance, there are allegedly roughly 600 British passport holders who have travelled to Syria and Iraq with the ultimate aim to join the terrorist cause in the Middle East (RUSI, 2015). These individuals could hypothetically try to return to Europe as Syrian illegal migrants or – highly unlikely but not impossible – using their passports. This is a clear and present terrorist danger to any potential host or even transit country.



Graph III: European Fighters in Syria, (Brookings, 2014)

Broadly speaking, there are basically three different platforms on which an *'imported'* or repatriated terrorist can inflict damage on the host nation or correspondingly his native one (Rand Corporation, 2015 ii):

1. he can become active as mentor and help with the indoctrination and eventual proselytization of new recruits;
2. he can facilitate the *'import'* of ready-made terrorists from abroad;
3. he can personally take on *'high value assets'* in the host country;

The above three platforms of terrorist activity encapsulate in its totality the formidable challenge to any European intelligence agency: how to respond within the context of national security to the emerging threat of massive illegal migration from the Middle East and the Magreb to Europe.

Some Additional Reflection...

Within the above equilibrium of national security versus jihadist threats, one can easily spot a growing gap between on the one side the limited capacity in all types of intelligence resources – due mainly but not exclusively to budgetary constraints – and on the other side the skyrocketing number of potential terrorists. The latter problematic becomes even more daunting, if one considers the *'lone wolf'* model of attack, with most recent examples the incidents that took place in France (Charlie Hebdo), Australia (gunman stormed into a cafe), and Canada (gunman stormed into Canada's House of Commons).

For the intelligence community, a glimmer of hope has been around for some time in the form of online media platforms and the use of big data (RUSI, 2015). However, technology cannot be taken as a silver bullet. National authorities should go upstream and actively control – or at least try to – the flow of migrants and at the same time develop and enforce a bouquet of informed and multifaceted policies when granting political asylum or refugee status.

All in all, it boils down to the concept of *'doing more with less'* as the British P.M. David Cameron put it, heading his previous administration of Tories and Liberal Democrats. The question of literally life and death then becomes: *'How much more...?'*

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Analysis

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