EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS: REFUGEES TODAY,

NOT YESTERDAY

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I. INTRODUCTION

A small toddler found lifeless on a beach in Greece, Parisians mourning the deaths of friends and family killed in the Bataclan attack: these are the emotive stories that illustrate the turmoil of Europe as they strive to find a balance between security, solidarity and humanitarian aid in the wake of the refugee crisis in Europe. Historically, refugees were a part of the aftermath of war. Refugee camps would house those persecuted by war until they could return home or were granted permission to move to a new country to resettle. Today, the dynamics for refugees are much different. Behind the bloated channels of asylum applicants to Europe, political fissures, and xenophobic Europeans lies a complex international dilemma with far-reaching effects. The current system of refugee identification and resettlement does not have the capacity to address the multifaceted components that underlie the chaos that besets Europe as they scramble for a short and long term solution for the refugee crisis.

The refugees of today have little resemblance to the refugees of World War II that inspired the international Refugee convention of 1951. The refugee crisis of today calls for the recognition of three core issues. First is the humanitarian response of food, health care, shelter and identification for incoming migrants. Second is the question of integration within the nations of resettlement. Third is the issue of security with specific regard to the relation of refugees and the threat of terrorism. The current application of the European refugee response does not adequately address all of these issues, polarizing many member states in regards to how to address the needs of their nation while upholding their responsibilities to the European Union. An effective reexamination of the European Refugee System will recognize the plurality of factors contributing the complexity of refugee and include a legal basis that addresses all the core components of the issue. This paper will analyze the European refugee crisis by elucidating existing dynamics in a new framework that will promote the creation of a new refugee system that works within present complexities.

II. GIVING CONTEXT

In the past, war was generally a conflict of state actors framed in terms of aggressors and belligerents. Conclusion of the war resulted in displaced people that would be cared for by state actors involved in the war. The current climate that is producing refugees is unique in the fact that there are state actors as well as non-state actors and the terms of aggressors and belligerents is not clear in the channel between refugee producing states and refugee receiving states. Understanding historical context for the preexisting system that guided the initial response for the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe is critical for understanding the limits of the framework in which member states currently interact with. This section gives context to the existing legal framework, the Syrian plight and the dynamics between Syrian refugees and ISIS.

*A: Traditional Legal System*

The current legal model used in the EU dates back to 1951 in response to World War II[[1]](#footnote--1) and has functioned smoothly until recent events. The initial legal framework was developed to address the issues of that time: immediate needs of housing, health care, food and resettling a displaced population largely similar to the receiving population.

Today the system of aid and settlement of refugees is an international effort. Thus, working within a single standard legal framework has been key in collaboratively distributing the responsibilities of refugee response and determining the movement of refugees.

The term refugee is a legal designation of an individual who is outside their country of nationality and who “unable or unwilling to return due to a well founded fear of persecution”[[2]](#footnote-0). Once this “founded fear” is proven and their status as a refugee is granted, they may seek resettlement in a new country. This process is conducted through collaboration of the UNHR and government efforts as well as supporting organizations (NGOs) that operate collection camps and settlement programs. When security clearance is granted and the receiving country invites the refugee, the individual or family will be flown into the country to begin the process of resettlement[[3]](#footnote-1). This entire process often takes years.

In the case of the Syrian refugees, they were forced to seek asylum. Theirs is a similar process but with an expedited timeline due to necessity. An asylum seeker applies for refugee status once they have crossed the borders into a second country[[4]](#footnote-2). Over 3 million Syrian refugees that have fled their country have sought refuge in neighboring countries[[5]](#footnote-3). They have occupied refugee camps and have tried to find work to support themselves. Survival in these conditions is strenuous due to the financial climate of the refugee camps and limited employment opportunities[[6]](#footnote-4). The 1951 Refugee Convention among other conventions established refugees as autonomous persons who are entitles to dignity and rights including the right to engage in wage-earning employment and self-employment[[7]](#footnote-5). Despite this, many refugees are legally barred from employment opportunities “due to de-facto barriers such as strict encampment and exorbitant permit fees”[[8]](#footnote-6). Pushed to desperation, the refugees are left with few options. They can apply for resettlement from the camps and often must wait 3-12 years for an invitation or wait to be repatriated.

Another option and often the most appealing is to make the trip directly to a country that will provide a livable future and apply for asylum. While the decision to make the perilous journey is a significant risk, the non-refoulment clause acts as a small insurance policy. Article 33 in the 1967 Refugee Convention prevents participating states from returning a refugee to “the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened”[[9]](#footnote-7). This legislation has contributed significantly to the complexity of the reaction of European states that receive a majority of asylum seekers like Greece and Italy. With the closure of many government facilities in Syria, the law recently changed allowing Syrians to renew their passports without returning to Syria[[10]](#footnote-8). The combination of these three legal factors provided a long awaited catalyst to prompt Syrians to risk the trip across land and sea to apply for asylum in Europe where many felt they were sure to be accepted on arrival.

*B: Understanding the Syrian Plight*

There are millions of refugees and displaced people around the world[[11]](#footnote-9). This has been the case for years. This leaves one to wonder why now, we see the surge of Syrian asylum seekers into Europe. The first and most obvious reason is proximity. Due to their location, Syrians have the unique opportunity to evade the pandemonium of their home country and make the trek to Europe. Unlike refugees stranded in remote camps, Syria is physically close enough for desperate individuals to justify the risk of the journey. Whether by ground or by sea, an individual with enough money and connections can effectively plan a way through all the obstacles, such as human smugglers or government roadblocks, to eventually reach their destination.

This risk, however significant, is not uncalculated. The Syrian population is backed with impressive intellectual capital. Unlike many refugees in Africa or rural Afghanistan, Syrians have wealth and knowledge to spare and they use it in a collective effort to help each other reach their goals. Syrians understand refugee laws and the resettlement systems that await them upon arrival on European soil. They have set up a system of shared economy to support travelers. Pockets of businesses have popped up along the route to Europe providing resources ranging from non-smuggling travel agents to resettlement assistants. The use of technology has drastically changed the landscape of refugee travel. Syrian refugees have created apps to check in with, and reconnect with travelling loved ones, make meals using wild urban plants[[12]](#footnote-10), and negotiating the bureaucracies of enrolling in social services once in country[[13]](#footnote-11). In this way, smart phones have been the central tool in building trust and community between Syrians families and friends have broken away from their homes to pursue a future in Europe.

The presence of such a strong network of support combined with strenuous circumstances in the refugee camps creates a structured channel of access to Europe. The collective movement has created pressure in receiving countries to accelerate documentation for the surges of Syrians landing on Greek and Italian shores[[14]](#footnote-12). This preferential treatment has ruffled the feathers of asylum seekers from other countries[[15]](#footnote-13) and has raised concern for the deterioration of security mechanisms. Months before the Paris attacks, western countries expressed deep concern regarding potential threat of ISIS infiltration through refugee channels[[16]](#footnote-14).

*C: The Relationship Between Syrians and ISIS*

Syrian refugees are fleeing the same enemy that Europeans are bracing against. While the growing security risks in Europe are legitimate, the majority of the refugees are putting everything on the line to escape the reach of ISIS. In order for the extremist group to fulfill their goal of building a caliphate, ISIS needs the support of the local population to stay to assist war efforts through their professional skills and their taxes[[17]](#footnote-15).

According to a news reporter, Alberto Fernandez, who ran the State Department’s counterterrorism communications unit before joining MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute), the refugees are “leaving because their relatives were killed by Assad, but the people brutalized by Assad are not turning to ISIS”[[18]](#footnote-16). This reaction has been a slap in the face for ISIS. Propaganda videos by ISIS directed at the refugees have made it clear that they want their support and look to the Syrian population to help build their Caliphate. The exodus of the Syrian Muslim community to a western society is an affront to the basic ISIS ideology. For these ideological militants, their basic message purports that “real Muslims” must become part of ISIS, and if one is “trapped” in the West, they should “go kill someone," explains a Fernandez[[19]](#footnote-17). The rejection by so many Syrians has caused ISIS to attempt to counter the message of the west through videos aimed specifically at the fleeing refugees.

In propaganda videos, ISIS shows clips of European hostilities, mostly events in Hungary, while warning the refugees of the lies of the West[[20]](#footnote-18). Titles of these videos range from rebukes for the refugee to flight beyond ISIS territories[[21]](#footnote-19) to pleas for Syrians to reconsider their choices and return to the holy caliphate[[22]](#footnote-20). These mixed messages reflect the group’s dissonance on how to address the issue of the endless flow of Syrians out of ISIS territory. The ideal solution for ISIS would be for all of the “good Muslims” to travel to Iraq and Syria and join the fight against local enemies, alternative aggressions are also acceptable options for the Islamic State. Despite this incohesive agenda depicted in ISIS communication, the underlying intention in their message is to unify the despondent refugees against the non-Muslim society in Europe.

III. BREAKING DOWN THE CONFLICT IN EUROPE

Social, political and legal conflict within Europe has emerged as each member state analyzes the needs of incoming refugees against the needs of their nation. Competing voices have taken the stage as different states have justified their positions with seemingly disjointed logic. For example, Hungary has taken a strong stance for state protection in the interest of national security while Germany opens its doors for economic and humanitarian reasons and Greece continually welcomes thousands of refugees on their coast due to legal obligations under asylum law. This section will separate the different components of the refugee crisis and use the new framework to better understand the complexities that underlie the dynamics of the EU’s response to the refugee crisis.

*A: Europe’s Response to the Humanitarian Crisis*

The first and most familiar component of the refugee crisis is the need for humanitarian attention. Thousands of asylum seekers arrive daily on Greek and Italian beaches in need of medical care, food, shelter and identification. The current system is built for this type of response, but this year, however, this year (2015) the number of asylum applicants jumped from 132,405[[23]](#footnote-21) (total for the EU in 2014) to 715,755 by the end of July[[24]](#footnote-22).

The unprecedented volume of asylum seekers has made this element quite difficult.

The European Union’s system of refugee policy carefully weaves through multilateral agreements and respect for state sovereignty. When the system is pushed beyond capacity, elements begin to fall short. One prime example of this is the Dublin Convention of 2014. This regulation states that asylum seekers must register in the first country that they first enter[[25]](#footnote-23). The purpose of this convention is to prevent immigrants from travelling aimlessly through states as they decide where to settle down. In the case of the Syrian refugees, this has created a bottle-neck effect that has overwhelmed receiving countries like Greece and Italy. In response to the disproportionate responsibility in coastal counties, the German Federal Office for Migration of Refugees has called for a suspension of the Dublin rules for Syrians in order for Germany to become the member state to process the claims of the applicants by using the “sovereignty clause” stated in the Dublin rules[[26]](#footnote-24). This allows Germany to voluntarily assume responsibility for processing asylum applicants to alleviate pressure that these coastal member states have undergone[[27]](#footnote-25).

This decision was made by Germany in response to the humanitarian need of refugee plight. German leadership justified their stance on her open door policy by citing moral responsibility. Germany’s Secretary-General Yasmin Fahimi stated, “we had to give a strong signal of humanity to show that Europe’s values are valid also in difficult times”[[28]](#footnote-26).

Despite conservative voices gaining traction since the attacks in Paris, key bloc leaders have held strong in their promise to continue to process and place asylum seekers. These governments support the decision by emphasizing the humanitarian responsibility as a core value of their country and not to be compromised in the threat of terrorism[[29]](#footnote-27). The decision to admit refugees into countries like France and Germany alleviates the pressure that Europe’s asylum system feels as a whole and takes a step forward in the dialogue of separating out issues of humanitarian aid from security and integration issue.

That being said, humanitarian aid cannot be the sole basis for refugee policy in a climate as complex as this. Questions of security and integration are still present for countries like Germany and France who have stepped up to the plate in the name of humanitarian values. In the same regard, questions of integration and security are not a reasonable excuse to disregard humanitarian action as we have seen in the case of Hungary that has taken controversial measures to bar entry of refugees into the country[[30]](#footnote-28).

Methods of how, where, and to what degree Europe should process the thousands of asylum seekers present questions that reach far into the future of Europe. The humanitarian aspect appeals primarily to the short-term issues. Countries that are making long-term commitments to the absorption of refugees must address the complete gamut of issues in their policy plan, but on a humanitarian level, solutions may not be so complicated. Regardless of ongoing political debate, incoming groups of asylum seekers should be recognized as humans that need access to the necessities of life and humane treatment as the European Union sorts out the best strategy for identification and resettlement.

*B: Addressing Security Threats*

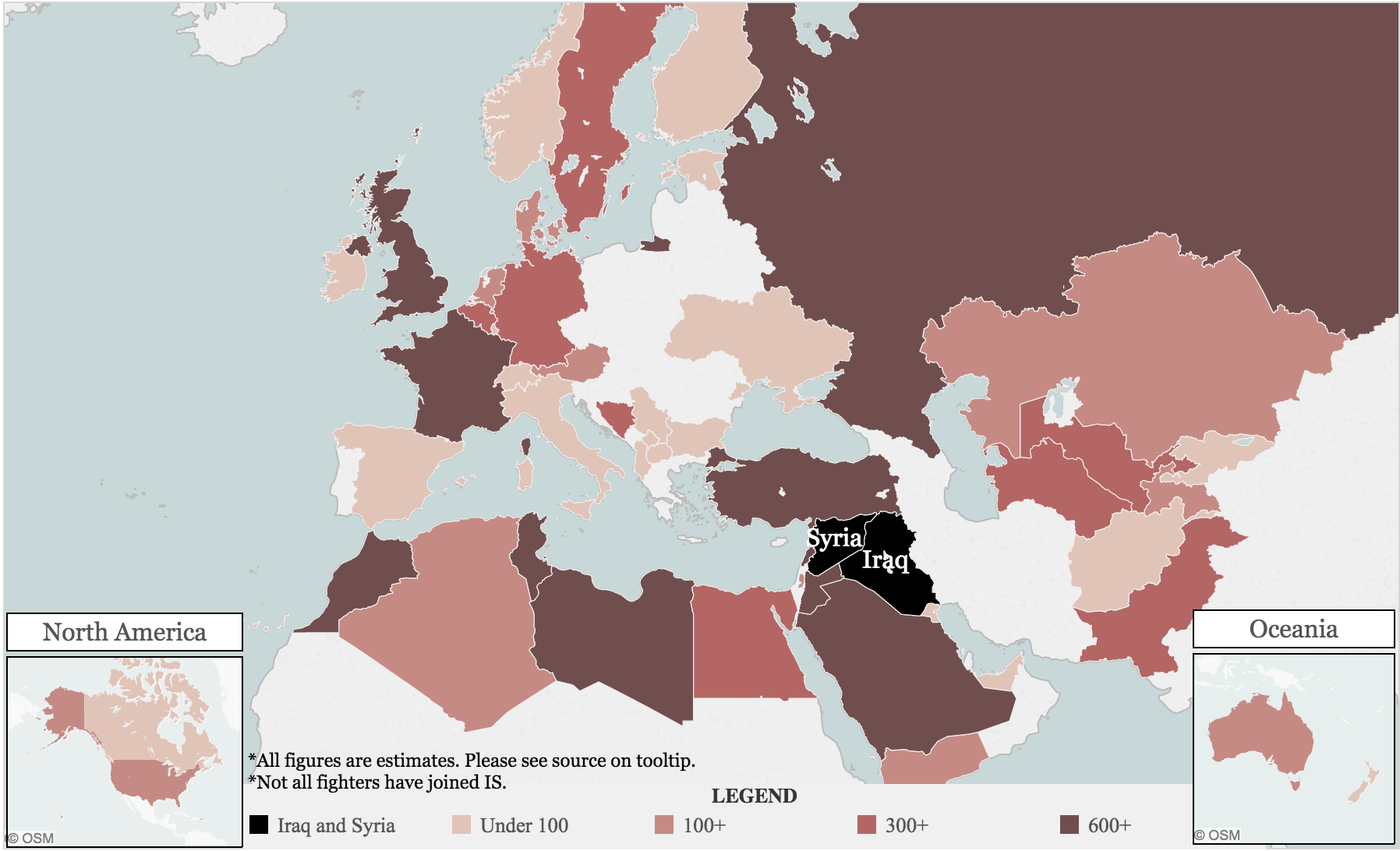
Communication between member states has illustrated the difficulty of distinguishing between humanitarian aid and security. November 13, 2015 Paris suffered a series deadly terrorist attacks that left 130 civilians dead[[31]](#footnote-29) and thousands traumatized. The following day, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attacks calling it the “first of the storm”[[32]](#footnote-30). Aside from the shock and devastation of the event, the Paris attacks alerted Europe to the real possibility of increased terrorist attacks on home soil. Fear of infiltration of terrorists through refugee channels had been voiced previous to the Paris attacks. This fear was substantiated when authorities found a Syrian passport on the body of Ismäel Omar Mostefai, one of the perpetrators of the Paris attack, who had been registered by Greek officials at the Aegean island of Leros[[33]](#footnote-31).

Throughout Europe, political dichotomies have ensued leaving governments to introduce an effective way to deal with ISIS while still recognizing the humanitarian responsibilities to asylum seekers. Right-wing voices in France gained popularity in the weeks following the attacks. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front party in France told reporters that “urgent action is needed” to “annihilate” Islamic Fundamentalism by regaining control of the borders and expelling “illegal migrants”.[[34]](#footnote-32) Other European countries added extra security measures to their immigration policy. Many leaders have voiced concern on the reliance of the security of external borders that leave the underbelly of the Shengen area countries exposed to loosely controlled internal borders[[35]](#footnote-33). Some countries like Poland have threatened to pull back from its EU-wide quota commitment until the security process can be enhanced[[36]](#footnote-34). All of these proposed measures are a reaction to the threat of ISIS infiltration, yet further research would show that cause for concern lie both on the borders and within the country. All but one of the terrorist in the Paris attack were radicalized European Muslims.

Radicalized Muslims in Europe have existed for years. Radicalization is a process where one shifts their beliefs to an extreme end of an ideological spectrum. In the case of Islamic extremism, radicalization usually involves the subscription to an extremist group. The danger of radicalization is when one commits to carry out violent acts in accordance with the teachings of the extremist group. According to researcher Daniel Byman the threat of radicalized European Muslims should not be underestimated.

Europe already has a terrorism problem, and the bigger danger is that radicalized European Muslims will transform the Syrian refugee community into a more violent one over time. [Thousands of Europeans have gone to fight with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria](http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2014/11/western-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq-byman-shapiro/be-afraid--web.pdf" \t "_blank), and al-Qaida has long had a presence in Europe. These volunteers are sustained by radical preachers who condemn European ideals and support the idea of Muslims taking up arms. In addition, many European Muslims are alienated from their governments and societies, believing that as Muslims they never truly will, or should, belong. [[37]](#footnote-35)

The presence of radical Islam can be gauged through external ISIS recruitment numbers in Europe. The chart below depicts numbers of European fighters that have joined extremist groups in the Middle East (clicking on link is highly recommended).



<http://www.rferl.org/contentinfographics/foreign-fighters-syria-iraq-is-isis-isil-infographic/26584940.html>[[38]](#footnote-36)

It is estimated that about 5,000 fighters have made their way From Europe to ISIS.[[39]](#footnote-37) illustrating the level of susceptibility to extremist behavior among Muslims within Europe.

While sealing borders and intensifying security measures may constrict the movement of refugees and potential terrorist, the data shows that the battle for peace and security in Europe will be fought not only at the borders, but within the confines of community relationships. As professor Max Abrahms from Northeastern University explains, “Counterterrorism tries to do two things, you try to neutralize existing terrorists and you try to not breed new ones.”[[40]](#footnote-38) The recent events in Paris illustrate that the concern of radicalized Muslims entering the country through refugee channels does not prove to be a proportionate threat compared to the risk of new and current Muslims becoming radicalized once in the country. A spokesperson from the Bavarian Internal Security Service reported, “Salafists are trying to talk with unaccompanied youths who have come to Germany without their families and who are in particular need of support and connections. The Salafists are trying to use the desperate situation that refugees find themselves in for their own purposes”[[41]](#footnote-39). Exchanges between European Salafists and newly arrived refugees has been reported to happen at refugee camps in Germany as well as at train stations where refugees commonly arrive[[42]](#footnote-40). The concern from the authorities is that Salafists will exploit the vulnerability of young refugees to by offering humanitarian assistance with the intention of converting them to their extremist views. Salafi Jihadism is conservative Islamic ideology within Sunni Islam that is devoted to restoring Islamic purity and strict adherence to the Qur’an[[43]](#footnote-41). This is definitively different from ISIS in the sense that Salafi Jihadism is a school of thought regarding the practice of Islam, but is not inherently linked to any particular Islamic extremist group[[44]](#footnote-42). In the past, analysts have linked Salafi Jihadism with Wahhabism and Al Qaeda and now the Islamic State has claimed its own brand of Jihadi-Salafism[[45]](#footnote-43). The office for Protection of the Constitution in Germany reported that the number of Salafi Jihadists in the country has progressed from 7,500 to 7,900 between June and September 2015[[46]](#footnote-44) suggesting to some that this dynamic between newly arrived refugees and European fundamentalist Muslims is taking effect.

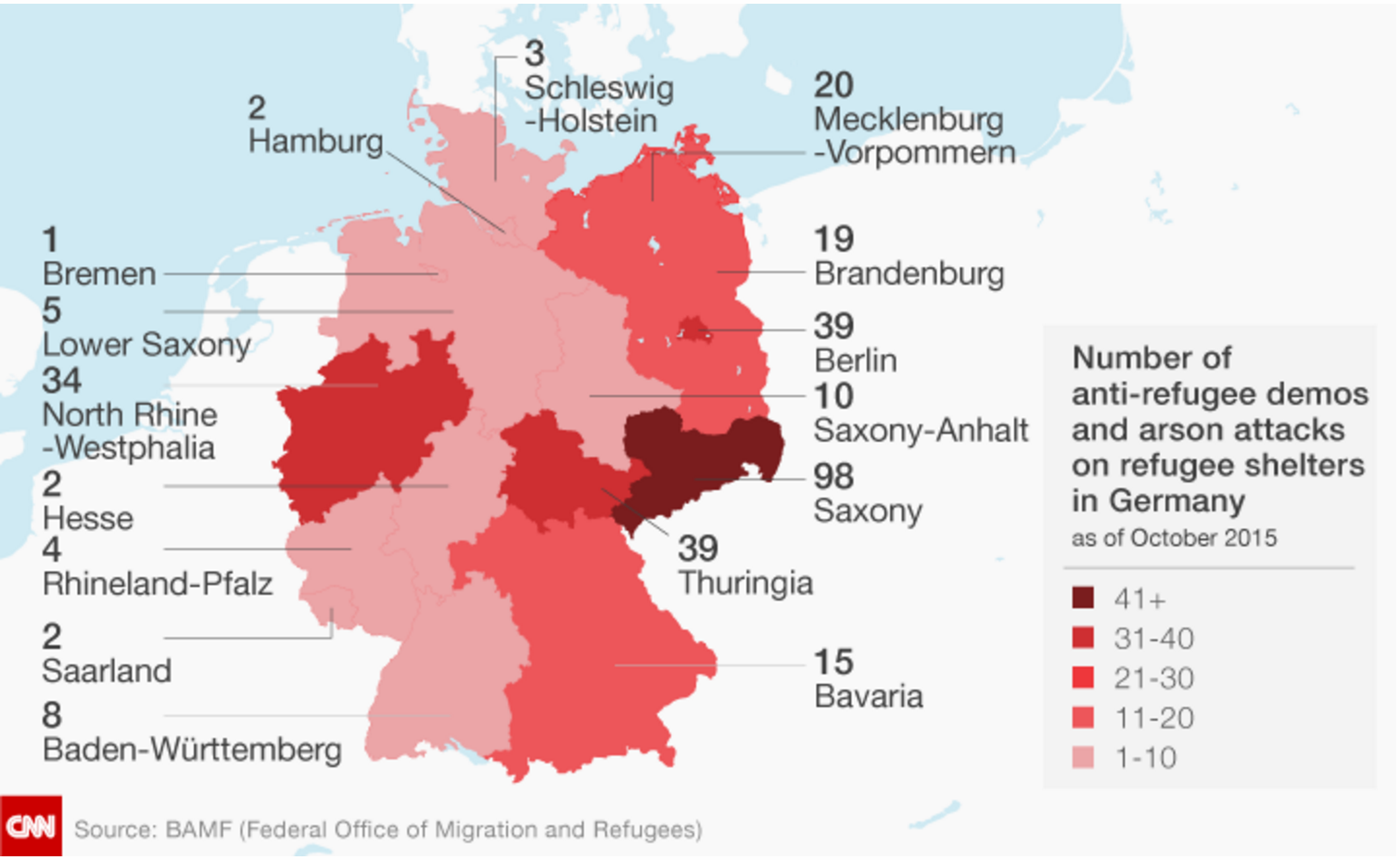
The view that the incoming refugees present real security concerns is valid on the basis of infiltration and internal dynamics. It is the primary interest of nations to promote the peace and security within its borders. The refugee crisis does introduce new threats to this peace and security. Countermeasures to security threats is not exclusive to humanitarian aid or the possibility of peaceful resettlement. Consideration of security and counterterrorism is merely one important dimension through which the EU should consider in reaction to the refugee crisis.

*C: State Views on Refugee Reception*

It is up to the individual states to determine the method of integration for the resettling refugees. The social psychology of “us” versus “them” has existed through the ages, yet the barriers to social integration are higher than usual due to natural differences of culture, religion and language. These are not insignificant, however the widespread awareness of the concerns of their presence in local communities bring heightened tension and often discrimination toward the foreign newcomers. Pervasive wariness regarding cultural difference, fear of terrorism, or simply resentful cohabitation lie at the source of much anti-refugee sentiment.

A common goal in government to “not make [the refugees] suffer for coming from regions from which the terror is being carried to [Germany]”[[47]](#footnote-45). At the onset of the flow of asylum seekers, there was a popular movement of support by the citizenry of Europe[[48]](#footnote-46). Throughout the summer and early fall 2015, many people throughout Europe come forward to show their support for the incoming refugees. But then the refugees kept coming. Eagerness to help turned to compassion fatigue and slowly the dissenting opinion took the stage as uncertainty grew into fear and resentment. By then mid December an estimated 991,000 refugees and migrants had crossed into Europe[[49]](#footnote-47).

Political leaders fear increased xenophobia across Europe as Europeans fail to distinguish between members of ISIS and ordinary asylum seekers. The Paris attacks have pushed wary European residents to discrimination or outright violence toward their new foreign neighbors[[50]](#footnote-48). The chart below illustrates the threat many in Germany feel towards the incoming population of refugees.



Much of the hostility is primarily due to fear that the landscape of the country may change to adapt to the incoming migrants and leave behind the existing culture that local populations hold close to their sense of identity[[51]](#footnote-49). Anti-immigrant groups such as PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) use links between refugees and ISIS to fuel their violence against the refugees in Germany[[52]](#footnote-50).

While article 31 in the 1951 Refugee Convention prevents contracting state from imposing penalties on refugees who entered the country illegally[[53]](#footnote-51), despite this, states are still free, under claims of sovereignty, to take measures create the an environment that is integrates or isolates incoming refugees[[54]](#footnote-52). The discord of political stances on the acceptance of refugees has allowed anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments to fester and has delayed the process of establishing a unified integration system. The time to formulate a comprehensive integration policy for refugees is now. Jens Spahn, parliamentary state secretary at the finance ministry stated, “If we now have to deal with this situation anyway, we should really invest in developing the [refugees’] human resources and start the integration process from the first day”[[55]](#footnote-53). The question of how this is done and what it looks like in a long-term policy must account from a number of considerations. Integration, migration, and refugee issues are often perceived as problems that need to be solved, rather than as realities that need to be managed. But migration and refugee movements are permanent features of today’s world and will not go away[[56]](#footnote-54). The intensity of movements might shift over time, but by and large, people will continue to come to Europe so it important that Europe finds a way to negotiate the best avenue of integration in the current context of the refugee crisis.

A unified policy for the integration of refugees is key to promoting the cultivation of the most pressing markers of integration such as language acquisition, education, employment and respect for the law. In order for effective forward movement to occur, states must determine pieces of legislation they can agree on and allow for EU institutions to consolidate, review, and create a plan for implementation of actions that do meet the priorities of state directives. A recent policy brief published by the Migration Policy Institute outlined priorities for the Common European Asylum System that will established shared values for refugee protection in the EU[[57]](#footnote-55). These pillars include increased engagement of member states in practical cooperation as a way to strengthen implementation existing EU laws, promoting common understanding of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, and investment in integration strategies[[58]](#footnote-56). The strength of the European Union lies in unification and solidarity. In 2015 almost 1 million refugees have entered Europe. Leadership must acknowledge the impact this will have on social and political dynamics and begin building a policy to guide the development of this process in a way that will strengthen the future of Europe.

III. CONCLUSION

The refugee crisis in Europe is unlike any refugee issue in the past. Without the legal framework equipped to address the various aspects of the issue, member states in the EU have claimed one aspect over another as if they were priorities rather than dimensions of the same issue. Most of the states are seeking to find the optimum resolution that protect the interests of their nation while still recognizing their duty to the unity of the European Union through their best interpretation of existing legal frameworks. Some countries like Hungary have put up walls in response to security issues and resistance to integration[[59]](#footnote-57), while other countries like Germany have opened their doors to honor humanitarian values[[60]](#footnote-58). Separation and recognition of these dimensions must be addressed before an effective refugee system can be established

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