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Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**GREECE AND THE MIGRANT CRISIS: THE THREAT  
OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS**

by

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June 2018

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**GREECE AND THE MIGRANT CRISIS: THE THREAT OF FOREIGN  
TERRORIST FIGHTERS**

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Lieutenant, United States Navy  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(EUROPE AND EURASIA)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the June 2014 establishment of the “caliphate” by the Islamic State, there has been an alarming increase in the number of terrorist attacks in Europe. Concurrently, wave after wave of migrants from war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan have landed on Greek shores—and the shores of other southern European countries—in search of safety and freedom. Could the increased number of migrants entering Europe have any correlation to the greater incidence of terrorist attacks in Europe? This thesis considers the effects of the Islamic State sending trained operatives, including foreign terrorist fighters, into Europe through Greece disguised as migrants. This thesis also explores the impacts of the migrant crisis on the Greek government and society. Further, it analyzes the security implications for the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This thesis concludes that if Greece, the EU, and NATO policies remain unrevised, the migrant crisis will continue to present grave challenges, including transit and recruitment opportunities for terrorist operatives in Europe. This thesis recommends greater EU and NATO coordination in receiving, hosting, processing, and identifying migrants entering Europe, notably via Greece.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

BICES	Battle Field Information Collection and Exploitation System
EES	Entry and Exit System
EU	European Union
EURODAC	European Asylum Dactyloscopy
FTF	Foreign Terrorist Fighter
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
ICI	Istanbul Cooperation Initiative
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IS	Islamic State
MD	Mediterranean Dialogue
MSG	Maritime Standing Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSG	Operation Sea Guardian
PKK	Kurdish Workers Party
SIS	Schengen Information System
SOCTA	Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment
TE-SAT	Terrorism Situation and Trend Report
VIS	Visa Information System

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The migrant crisis in Greece could in some circumstances become an existential threat to the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). One of the most pressing threats to security and public order in the EU and NATO, the migrant crisis in the eastern Mediterranean and Greece, has yet to be resolved. What are the specific threats and challenges imposed on the EU and NATO by the migrant crisis? Do NATO and the EU have the necessary skills and capabilities to solve this crisis? What solutions have these organizations proposed to remedy this crisis?

Undocumented migrants pose potential security risks because foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) can mask their movement to and from conflict areas by utilizing the irregular migrant crossings highlighted in the Greek migrant crisis. Since the June 2014 establishment of the “caliphate,” there have been 29 terrorist attacks in North America and Europe that can be linked to Islamic State (IS).<sup>1</sup> Terrorism and its link to the migrant crisis through foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants constitute a significant threat to the Alliance, the EU and their member states.

One expert suggests that over 5,000 “Western” foreign terrorist fighters have traveled to Iraq or Syria since 2011.<sup>2</sup> Several estimates put the total number of FTFs at 20,000, making the wars in Iraq and Syria one of the largest receivers of FTFs in history.<sup>3</sup> The fact that FTFs could be posing as migrants travelling to Europe through the irregular

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global: 143 Attacks in 29 Countries Have Killed 2,043,” CNN, February 13, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/>; Alice Foster, “Terror Attacks Timeline: From Paris and Brussels Terror to Most Recent Attacks in Europe,” *Express*, August 18, 2017, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/693421/Terror-attacks-timeline-France-Brussels-Europe-ISIS-killings-Germany-dates-terrorism>; The terrorist group in discussion has several names and abbreviations of its name that are widely accepted to include, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL), and Da’esh. This thesis will refer to the group as the Islamic State (IS).

<sup>2</sup> *Allies Under Attack, The Terrorist Threat to Europe: Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee On Terrorism, Nonproliferation, And Trade And The Subcommittee On Europe, Eurasia, And Emerging Threats Of The Committee On Foreign Affairs House Of Representatives*, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1 (2017) (statement of Mr. Seamus Hughes, Deputy Director Program on Extremism George Washington University), <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg26045/pdf/CHRG-115hhrg26045.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> John Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing: NATO and the Foreign Fighter Threat,” *Parameters* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 52.



border crossings highlighted in the Greek migrant crisis poses a “serious and significant” threat to NATO, the EU, and their member states.<sup>4</sup>

There is a high probability that IS foreign terrorist fighters have entered Europe, through Greece, disguised as migrants. According to the NATO website, “terrorism poses a direct threat to the security of the citizens of NATO countries, and to international stability and prosperity.”<sup>5</sup> In contrast with the “indirect” threat of Russia asserting its dominance in eastern Europe, the threat of terrorism is felt all over Europe. The NATO Allies agree that the terrorist threat stemming from the migrant population is a serious security challenge facing Europe. According the July 2016 Warsaw Summit Communiqué:

Terrorism, particularly as perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/Da’esh, has risen to an unprecedented level of intensity, reaches into all of Allied territory, and now represents an immediate and direct threat to our nations and the international community. Instability in the Middle East and North Africa also contributes to the refugee and migrant crisis.<sup>6</sup>

Since NATO’s inception, there has only been one instance in which Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty has been invoked. It was in response to the terror attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. After the Paris terror attacks in November 2015, France seriously debated invoking Article 5 in order to have an Allied effort to fight IS.<sup>7</sup> The French considered the need to possibly invoke this Article because they regarded the November 2015 terror attack as a significant and serious threat to their national security. Specifically, the French feared the foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants coming from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan to Greece and then on into the rest of Europe. After the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, two Syrian passports were found near the bodies of the terrorists, leading to the “speculation that terrorists were infiltrating the refugee flows

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<sup>4</sup> Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing,” 51.

<sup>5</sup> “Countering Terrorism,” NATO, last updated December 19, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_77646.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_77646.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>6</sup> “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” NATO, para. 5, last updated March 29, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

<sup>7</sup> Krishnadev Calamur, “Will NATO Respond to the Attacks on Paris?” *The Atlantic*, November 15, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/nato-paris-attack-article-5/416097/>

to the EU.”<sup>8</sup> This exemplified the fact that foreign terrorist fighters are posing as migrants while travelling from IS-controlled territory in the Middle East into Europe via Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean route.

The number of migrants crossing into Europe through Greece from 2014 to 2016 reached record-breaking numbers.<sup>9</sup> In 2015, a new record was set for migrants entering Europe: one million migrants came to the region in that year alone.<sup>10</sup> This migrant crisis has caused problems not only in Greece but throughout the rest of Europe. Greece is a key staging point for many of the migrants, most of whom intend to move on to other European countries. In comparison to Greece, Italy only received approximately 150,000 migrants via the central Mediterranean route during 2015.<sup>11</sup> With the exponential increase in numbers of migrants, there is a significant risk that the number of foreign terrorist fighters transiting through Greece into Europe or into the Middle East is also increasing.

The inability of the Greek government, NATO and the EU to reduce the flow of migrants transiting to other European countries represents a significant shortfall in security. Is it possible that undocumented migrants pose security risks as potential foreign terrorist fighters that can mask their movement to and from conflict areas by utilizing the irregular migrant crossings highlighted in the Greek migrant crisis? This research question requires an explanation from two broad areas of research. One area of research is terrorism, including foreign terrorist fighters, and the other is migration, specifically the illegal human trafficking and smuggling exposed in the Greek migration crisis. These two areas of research intersect at the study of foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants transiting Greece. There have been many scholarly studies on terrorism and migration individually, but only a few scholarly studies have been conducted linking terrorism and migration.

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<sup>8</sup> Marco Funk and Roderick Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, (Paris, France: The European Union Institute for security Studies (EUISS), 2016), 1. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/greece/resource/static/files/refugees-versus-terrorists.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> “Eastern Mediterranean Route,” Frontex, accessed March 21, 2017. <https://Frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/eastern-mediterranean-route/>

<sup>10</sup> Frontex, “Eastern Mediterranean Route.”

<sup>11</sup> “Global Migration Trends Factsheet,” Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, Organization for Migration, 2015, <http://gmdac.iom.int/global-migration-trends-factsheet>

Furthermore, little scholarly work has been published linking terrorism and the Greek migrant crisis via foreign terrorist fighters transiting the eastern Mediterranean.

There have been two major studies linking terrorism and migration. The first study, which was done to provide “quantitative evidence on the migration-terrorism debate,” is an article by Vincenzo Bove and Tobias Böhmelt entitled “Does Immigration Induce Terrorism?”<sup>12</sup> These authors hold that more migration into a country actually lowers the risk of terrorist attack. However, their findings also show that if the migrants come from a country prone to terrorist attacks, the risk of the migrant in-flow has “a positive and statistically significant effect on terrorist attacks” in the country to which the migrants have travelled.<sup>13</sup> In other words, if the migrants come from a country experiencing high levels of terrorism, the threat of terrorism is likely to accompany the migrants. Their article concludes with a policy recommendation that migration policies should not be overly restrictive and should not discriminate between certain types of migrants because more restrictive migration policies are “likely to have unfortunate consequences” such as more terrorist attacks.<sup>14</sup> This article makes a clear and statistically significant argument for migrants coming from countries already prone to terrorist attacks contributing to higher levels of terrorism in the country to which they migrated. This article, even though it is the “first” of its kind and relatively recent, relies on data from 1976 to 2000. If the authors were to use more recent data, especially data since 2011, their findings would probably be different and more statistically significant as the number of migrants from countries already prone to terrorism has dramatically increased since 2011. Additionally, this article fails to identify the causal relationship between the migrants coming from countries prone to terror attacks and the fact that terror attacks increase in the country to which they migrated. The authors fail to mention that the possible linkage could be that some migrants are foreign terrorist fighters or FTF facilitators.

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<sup>12</sup> Vincenzo Bove and Tobias Böhmelt, “Does Immigration Induce Terrorism?” *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 2 (2016): 572. <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/684679>

<sup>13</sup> Bove and Böhmelt, “Does Immigration Induce Terrorism?” 583.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 585.

The second article, “Links between Terrorism and Migration: An Exploration” by Alex P. Schmid, is a more recent and comprehensive analysis of links between terrorism and migration than the work of Bove and Böhmelt. Schmid’s article makes the same foundational argument as the first article but goes beyond the correlation between terrorism and migration, especially in the case of the recent and ongoing European migration crisis. This study also analyzes the foreign terrorist fighter threat among the migrant population entering Europe. Schmid’s analysis concludes that there have been “a few foreign terrorist fighters” engaging in terror attacks who have used the refugee stream to return to Europe, but he notes that this is the exception to the rule.<sup>15</sup> While his analysis is detailed and comprehensive, he fails to explore how dangerous the FTF threat actually has become since the start of the Greek migrant crisis and how dangerous it might be in the future. While Schmid downplays the threat of FTFs posing as migrants carry out attacks in Europe, his analysis is short sided. As the Islamic State is defeated, or significantly degraded, and it’s FTFs begin to return to their countries of origin in Europe, the likelihood of FTF posing as migrants inevitably increases along with the threat of possible terror attacks.

Within the broader category of terrorism and migration is the study of foreign terrorist fighters. There are some studies and scholarly articles on foreign terrorist fighters, but relatively few discuss FTFs in the European migration crisis. John Deni’s article, “Beyond Information Sharing: NATO and the Foreign Fighter Threat,” provides solid background on the scholarly debate about the FTF threat. This debate is centered on the significance and seriousness of the FTF threat. Some scholars he references claim the FTF threat is serious but not significant, while others claim the FTF threat is both serious and significant. Deni subscribes to the serious but not significant school of thought. Additionally, he holds that NATO’s role in responding to the FTF threat is unlikely to be significant because the threat of FTFs posing as migrants is not significant. He also notes that NATO is not the best organization to respond to the FTF threat. In his view, the EU is the organization most capable of handling this problem. His thesis is strongly supported in the academic arena, but his view on the FTF threat may not be entirely accurate. The FTF

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<sup>15</sup> Alex P. Schmid, *Links between Terrorism and Migration: An Exploration*, (The Hague, The Netherlands: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016) 43.

threat is one the most significant and modern threats facing NATO and the EU. From June 2014 to August 2017, there were 29 terrorist attacks carried out in Europe that have been linked to the Islamic State and foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>16</sup> This is a significant number, and the FTF threat is therefore significant. The EU has been unable to handle the FTF threat alone and must cooperate more with NATO as it increases its response to the FTF threat and the migration crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The other area of research to be examined is the Greek migration crisis, specifically the responses by Greece, the EU and NATO. Because the Greek migration crisis is a relatively new problem, only a limited number of scholarly articles have been published on the topic. However, research into the Greek migration crisis has produced more articles than the research concerned with linking migration and terrorism. As there is a lack of sufficient studies linking terrorism to the Greek migration crisis via FTFs, it is important to discuss and examine the literature on the Greek migration crisis and the responses of Greece, the EU and NATO.

Greece's response to this crisis has been limited and seriously deficient. Ismini Lamb points out in her article, "The Gates of Greece: Refugees and Policy Choices," that due to financial constraints from the recent financial crisis in Greece, the country is overburdened and ill-equipped to deal with the migration crisis. Therefore, she argues that the migration crisis in Greece is not just a Greek problem, but a European Union problem. Her conclusion, which is consistent with what most other scholars hold, is that Greece must follow the European Union's lead when it comes to policy decisions made by the EU in response to the migration crisis. While this idea may be the best way to deal with the current problem as quickly as possible, it leaves Athens acting as Pinocchio, the puppet, and Brussels as Mangiafuoco, the puppet master. Perhaps a better resolution to the migration crisis requires a more substantial and leading role by Athens.

As previously mentioned, the EU is the best organization to deal with this challenge because the migrant crisis is politically and practically an EU problem. The main sources for the current data on the Greek migration crisis are the International Organization for

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<sup>16</sup> Lister et al., "ISIS Goes Global; Foster, "Terror Attacks Timeline.

Migration and FRONTEX. These two entities are able to produce near real time data that many scholars have yet to analyze and publish. Many scholars have published on policy decisions made by the EU, and most scholars, like those at the Think Tanks Tandem in their article “Terrorist Threats and Refugee Crisis: France and Germany Must Work Together to Rise to the Challenge,” maintain that only a coordinated European policy approach will solve the migration crisis and the threat of terrorism.<sup>17</sup>

Other scholars are much more critical of the EU. In fact, Patryk Krugiel notes in his article, “The Refugee Crisis in Europe: True Causes, False Solutions,” that as of December 2016, the “EU still had no comprehensive strategy for dealing with the massive inflow of people claiming international protection, or for better managing migratory flows in general.”<sup>18</sup> His main argument is that Europe and the EU must look internally, especially at the EU’s asylum policy, to solve the migration crisis. He contends that looking outside Europe at the other factors that cause migration is not the EU’s concern. However, other scholars, such as Sarah Glazer in her article, “European Migration Crisis,” argue that the EU, along with an international coalition, should try to stop the migration flow by dealing with its root causes such as the Assad regime and IS in Syria. She does note the lack of consensus within the EU on this approach, though. While most scholars believe that the migration crisis is solely an EU problem, they are failing to acknowledge the role that NATO and its military assets could have in assisting Greece, the EU and FRONTEX in solving the migrant crisis.

Many NATO and EU security experts consider Russia the main threat in Europe. Despite the resurgence of Russia and the threat that Russia poses to NATO, others argue that the migrant crisis along Europe’s weakest flank is the biggest security concern for NATO and the EU.<sup>19</sup> The adverse situation on Europe’s southern flank “appears to be real

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<sup>17</sup> Yves Bertoincini et al., *Terrorist Threats and Refugee Crisis: France and Germany Must Work Together to Rise to the Challenge*, (Paris, France: Think Tanks Tandem, 2017), 1.  
<http://www.institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/terroristthreatsandrefugeecrisis-thinktankstandem-jan17.pdf?pdf=ok>

<sup>18</sup> Patryk Krugiel, “The Refugee Crisis in Europe: True Causes, False Solutions” *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, no. 4 (2016): 42.

<sup>19</sup> Constance Baroudos, “Securing NATO’s Weakest Flank” *Naval War College Review*, Volume 69, No. 3 (Summer 2016): 164.

and growing.”<sup>20</sup> Terrorism and its link to the migrant crisis through foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants may constitute one of the most significant threats to the Alliance and its member states. As noted previously, the only time Article 5 has been invoked was in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The only other time in NATO’s history that the invocation of Article 5 was seriously considered was after the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. Article 5, NATO’s powerful pledge promising collective defense, was never used in response to Soviet aggression during the Cold War nor was it used in response to Russia invading and annexing Crimea, a part of Ukraine, which is not a NATO Ally.

Therefore, current NATO and EU security policy must be aligned more toward the real and “direct” threat of terrorism that is a consequence of the migrant crisis in Greece. NATO’s political posture and rhetoric used to portray the Alliance’s stance on terrorism are well documented. NATO has taken a strong stand against terrorism since 2001 but more recently, as seen in the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, NATO has recast its stance on condemning terrorism. As noted in the communiqué, “The Alliance faces a range of security challenges and threats that originate both from the east and from the south; from state and non-state actors; from military forces and from terrorist, cyber, or hybrid attacks.”<sup>21</sup>

Besides its staunch rhetoric in the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, NATO is contributing to the fight against terrorism and efforts to address the migrant crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean in a variety of ways. This is shown mainly through “information sharing,” as John Deni describes in his previously mentioned article.<sup>22</sup> In a *Jane’s Defense Weekly* report, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is quoted as saying that “our ships will be providing information to the coastguards and other national authorities of

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<sup>20</sup> Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing,” 49.

<sup>21</sup> “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” NATO, Para 5. Last updated March 29, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

<sup>22</sup> Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing,” 52.

Greece and Turkey” and that “NATO is laying down direct links with FRONTEX.”<sup>23</sup> Stoltenberg has also stated that “NATO ships will not do the job of national coastguards in the Aegean. Their mission is not to stop or turn back those trying to cross into Europe. This in no way represents a militarisation of the response to the crisis.”<sup>24</sup> NATO’s Maritime commander notes that NATO’s current mission in the region is “surveillance of Aegean migrant trafficking.” NATO ships will “monitor patterns of life, track vessels of interest and conduct boardings on suspicion of illicit activity but also for training.”<sup>25</sup>

NATO’s response to the threat on its southern flank is limited because in order for NATO to take a more active role in the Eastern Mediterranean, according to Butch Bracknell in “NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism,” it would require a UN Security Council Resolution or the invocation of Article 51 of the UN Charter to grant NATO authority to act under international law.<sup>26</sup> Without any of these prerequisites being met and Article 5 being invoked, NATO will not have a decisive role to play in the Greek migration crisis.<sup>27</sup>

This thesis investigates the hypothesis that the inability of the Greek Government, NATO and the EU to reduce the flow of migrants transiting to other European countries is raising the threat level and increasing the risk of terrorist attacks. Do undocumented migrants pose potential security risks as foreign terrorist fighters that can mask their movements to and from conflict areas utilizing the irregular migrant crossings highlighted in the Greek migrant crisis? This question raises three other significant questions that ultimately lead to one, overarching research question. These three questions are: (1) What is Greece doing in response to the migration crisis within its own borders? (2) What is the

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<sup>23</sup> Brooks Tigner, “NATO Agrees Details of Aegean Sea Migration Crisis Mission” *IHS Jane’s Defence Weekly*, October 27, 2016. <http://www.janes.com/article/64977/nato-extends-active-endeavor-to-provide-new-support-to-eu-naval-mission>

<sup>24</sup> Jens Stoltenberg, “NATO and Europe’s Refugee and Migrant Crisis,” NATO, February 26, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_128645.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_128645.htm)

<sup>25</sup> Stoltenberg, “NATO and Europe’s Refugee and Migrant Crisis.”

<sup>26</sup> Butch Bracknell, “NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism,” *The International Lawyer* 49, no. 3 (Winter, 2016): 426.

<sup>27</sup> Bracknell, “NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism.” 426.



EU doing in response to the migration crisis in Greece that is affecting other EU members?  
(3) What is NATO doing in response to this migration crisis and FTFs posing as migrants that carry out terror attacks in NATO member states?

The overarching research question has been partially answered by Alex P. Schmid in his article “Links between Terrorism and Migration: an Exploration” and by John Deni in his article “Beyond Information Sharing: NATO and the Foreign Fighter Threat.” Alex P. Schmid notes there have been “a few foreign terrorist fighters” engaging in terror attacks who have used the refugee stream to return to Europe. However, he notes that this is the exception to the norm and therefore concludes that the FTF threat is not significant.<sup>28</sup> In addition to Schmid, Deni argues that the FTF threat is only “potentially significant.” Deni does not openly take a stand in the debate but tends to lean closer to the view that the FTF is not a significant threat. While these two authors may be among the most prominent in the debate on this question, they are both mistaken in their apparent assumption that the FTFs posing as migrants is not a significant threat. The fact that there were thirteen terror attacks linked to FTFs and IS from May 2014 to August 2017 makes the case that FTFs that could have posed as migrants are a serious and significant threat.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, as Deni has observed, returned FTFs are more dangerous than a typical lone wolf attacker because of their combat experience gained while fighting in a conflict zone.

Another consideration that could support the judgement that FTFs who could have posed as migrants are a serious and significant threat is the fact that most of the FTFs could still be engaged in combat for IS. Because IS still has a considerable foothold in Iraq and Syria, at least at this time of writing, most of its FTF are still engaged in combat. Europe has not seen most of its estimated 4,000-6,000 FTFs return because the conflict for which they left to engage in is still underway. It will only be after the fighting is over, if it ever truly will be, that Europe will see most of its FTFs return. These returned FTFs that stayed to the end with IS could prove to be the most dangerous upon their return to Europe.

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<sup>28</sup> Alex P. Schmid, *Links between Terrorism and Migration: An Exploration*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global”; Foster, “Terror Attacks Timeline.”

Most of these FTFs attempting to return to their native countries could use the irregular migration routes highlighted by the Greek migration crisis. The FTFs might prefer to use smugglers and human trafficking networks at irregular border crossings to avoid detection by authorities. Or alternatively, these returning FTFs could use fake Syrian or Iraqi passports and pose as migrants in order to return home. However, likely either scenario may be, the fact remains that some FTFs, and possibly the most dangerous ones, have yet to return to Europe. Unfortunately, it will take a large-scale, coordinated attack to prove this theory correct.

Therefore, it is the goal of this research to recommend actions that can be taken to avoid such an event. In order to provide recommendations on this topic this research will analyze Greek, EU and NATO responses to the migration crisis and the threat of FTFs in an effort to find a solution and counter the threats emanating from the crisis.

The research design of this thesis will be a qualitative analysis of the literature focused on a single case study, specifically the Greek migration crisis. The research design will also be based on acquiring information about the impacts of the Greek migration crisis from databases such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the EU's border control agency Frontex, in addition to the main scholarly articles discussed in the literature review. This thesis will conduct a qualitative analysis of the literature pertaining to terrorism, migration, and foreign terrorist fighters in order to establish a connection between terrorism and FTFs posing as migrants as a part of the Greek migration crisis. The research will then examine the roles of Greece, the EU and NATO in stemming the flow of FTFs posing as migrants. Finally, the thesis will conclude with recommendations as to what these three entities could do in order to curtail the threat created by FTFs who pose as migrants.

This thesis is organized as follows: Chapter I has introduced the topics of the migration crisis in Greece, terrorism, and foreign terrorist fighters to set the stage for the rest of the thesis. Chapter II examines the Islamic State in its current condition and examines the possibility of FTFs leaving Iraq and Syria to return Europe through IS organized crime networks. Chapter III explores the Greek migration crisis in more depth and the Greek Government's response to the crisis, both the humanitarian response and the

military and police response to the security implications of the crisis. Chapter IV examines the crisis within the context of the EU. It explores what the EU has done in response to the security implications of the crisis. Chapter V examines NATO's response to the crisis, specifically in the Eastern Mediterranean. Chapter V, in the conclusion, provides suggestions and recommendations for Greece, NATO and the EU to respond to the security implications of the Greek migrant crisis.

## II. THE ISLAMIC STATE AND THE EUROPEAN MIGRANT CRISIS: TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME CONVERGENCE

Since its abrupt beginning, “rising like a phoenix from the ashes in 2013,” the terrorist group known as the Islamic State (IS), has captured sensationalized news headlines and articles alleging that terrorists have infiltrated the flows of migrants coming to Europe from Africa and the Middle East.<sup>30</sup> Since the height of the migrant crisis in 2015, European states have been flooded with an unprecedented number of migrants fleeing war-torn countries and persecution in search of freedom and safety. Yet, paradoxically, the migrants face contempt, suspicion, and speculation stemming from the anxiety and fears deep within the European public because of the recent increase in the number and lethality of terrorist attacks linked to the Islamic State (IS).<sup>31</sup> To what extent have the European anxieties and fears been substantiated by an actual threat of terrorists posing as migrants in order to infiltrate Europe? Could it be that the Islamic State is actually systematically sending trained operatives to Europe masked as migrants in order to plan and carry out future attacks? Or are these headlines striking fear and unrest in Europe based upon an unwarranted frustration with misunderstood and desperate migrants who have little or no affiliation with the Jihadi terrorist group?

Regardless of which hypothesis is correct, the exact routes and methods by which IS sends trained operatives and foreign fighters to Europe have not been thoroughly explored. In those routes and methods may be found the nexus where terrorism, migration, and illegal smuggling overlap. Trained IS operatives and foreign fighter returnees could be utilizing the illegal migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks generated from the European migrant crisis to ensure their undetected movement into Europe.

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<sup>30</sup> Mohammed Hafez, “The Curse of Cain: Why Fratricidal Jihadis Fail to Learn from Their Mistakes,” *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 10, Issue 10 (November 2017): 1; This thesis will use the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘illegal migrant crossings’ to describe a certain group of people entering Europe and how exactly how they are entering. Although many of the migrants entering Europe are genuine refugees, this paper will avoid using this term as “refugee” is a special legal status granted only after an asylum request has been processed and granted. While the asylum system in Europe is the subject of much debate, the European Union’s asylum process is beyond the scope of research of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 1; Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global”; Foster, “Terror Attacks Timeline.”

This chapter examines how IS could be motivated with financial gains and operational advantages to send trained operatives out of IS-controlled territory into Europe via the illegal smuggling route derived from the European migrant crisis. First, this chapter points out that IS could easily reverse the flow of its already established trafficking network in which goods and people flow into IS-controlled territory in order to allow trained operatives to make their way out of IS-controlled territory. Secondly, this chapter explores the feasibility of trained operatives or foreign fighter returnees masking their movement into and through Europe with the assistance of the smuggling and trafficking networks established in the European migrant crisis.

As the Islamic State has suffered significant casualties, including the loss of Mosul and Raqqa, its de facto capital, the group has lost most of the “territory it once held in Iraq and is all but finished in Syria.”<sup>32</sup> Consequently, there is a major concern that a large number of the estimated 5,600 IS foreign fighters could return to Europe.<sup>33</sup> While ample literature exists about the fact that foreign fighters are likely to return to their home countries in Europe, little information is publicly available on how exactly these foreign fighter returnees plan to avoid security authorities on their journey home or find another battlefield such as Libya, to the extent that the IS is defeated in Syria and Iraq.<sup>34</sup>

The best possible solution for the European-born IS fighter to return home undetected is via the irregular border crossings highlighted in the European migrant crisis, particularly in Greece. Several scholars contend that “the threat of returning foreign fighters is further compounded by the refugee crisis.”<sup>35</sup> Yet, according to A. Reed, J. Pohl, and M. Jegering, most are hesitant to admit that “terrorists systematically hide among the

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<sup>32</sup> Hafez, “The Curse of Cain,” 6.

<sup>33</sup> Alastair Reed, Johanna Pohl, and Marjolein Jegerings, *The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat: Making Sense of an Evolving Phenomenon*. 8, no. 1 (The Hague, The Netherlands: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2017): 5.

<sup>34</sup> Reed, Pohl, and Jegerings, *The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat*, 5; Despite articles such as “How ISIS Smuggles Terrorists Among Syrian Refugees,” there is little to no evidence suggesting exactly how the terrorists have infiltrated the refugee flows; Arturo Varvelli, “Islamic State’s Re-Organization In Libya and Potential Connections with Illegal Trafficking” *The Program on Extremism*, George Washington University, November 2017, 2. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/extremism.gwu.edu/files/Varvelli%20IS%20Reorganization%20in%20Libya%20and%20Trafficking.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Reed, Pohl, and Jegerings, *The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat*, 6.

flow of refugees when trying to enter Europe,” despite “the fact that several of the perpetrators of the Paris attacks in November 2015 did enter Europe by posing as refugees highlights the threat posed by limited control over the migratory flow.”<sup>36</sup> As seen with the attacks planned and carried out by the Belgian terrorist cell linked to IS led by the notorious operative Abdelhamid Abaaoud, traveling into and out of Europe through Greece is possible via the illegal border crossings developed by migrant smuggling networks in order to avoid detection by authorities.<sup>37</sup>

Migrants are attempting to continue their undetected journey, from Turkey across the Aegean to Greece, and then northward to countries like Germany and the United Kingdom, avoiding law enforcement authorities. If illegal migrants are caught on their journey, the current EU asylum process requires that they be sent back to the country through which they entered the EU, which is, in many cases, Greece.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it is conceivable that IS operatives and foreign fighter returnees could travel on these same routes to conceal their movements and avoid detection by authorities.

It is probable that a terrorist group like the Islamic State, which already has a strong network for trafficking human beings and other illicit items into IS-controlled territory, could have motivations for exporting illicit items and trained operatives out of IS-controlled territory in order to expand its influence and conduct operations abroad. IS could, for example, infiltrate Europe by exploiting the smuggling and trafficking networks already in existence, such as the routes created by the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) nearly a decade ago through Turkey to smuggle migrants, terrorists, and illicit items through

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<sup>36</sup> Reed, Pohl, Jegerings, *The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Cruickshank, “The Inside Story of Paris and Brussels Attacks,” *CNN*, October 30, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/30/europe/inside-paris-brussels-terror-attacks/index.html>; Roderick Parkes, *Out of Syria: Shifting Routes and Returns*, Alert 8, (Paris, France: European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), April 2017): 2.; *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*, (The Hague, The Netherlands: Europol, 2017), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2017>

<sup>38</sup> Migrants emanating from the Middle East will make the trek starting from Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan to Turkey then attempt the perilous crossing of the Aegean in a rubber dingy in hopes of reaching Europe, more specifically on the of the Greek Islands like Lesvos or Samos.

Turkey.<sup>39</sup> The IS could gain control over these established routes and networks in Europe in order to exert its influence and dominance in the region. By embedding seasoned smugglers that are sympathetic to the group within the existing organized crime network, IS could successfully send trained operatives, terrorists, and foreign fighter returnees to Europe. IS could use these established smuggling and trafficking networks because of its long-standing connections in the smuggling and trafficking industry, including “IS-affiliated smugglers” already in the network. This could prove advantageous for European operatives because, “in addition to cash, operatives sometimes also receive forged documents, and IS-affiliated facilitators or human smugglers help arrange their travel.”<sup>40</sup> Another factor supporting the IS operative’s successful travel to Europe could be the simple fact that most smugglers would not investigate the possibility that their “client” was a terrorist or a criminal—as long as they were paid.

Operating the smuggling routes into Europe generated by people fleeing the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan has become a robust and lucrative industry. Europol’s European Union Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) reports that “more than 510,000 illegal border crossings between border-crossing points at the external border of the EU were registered in 2016. Nearly all of the irregular migrants arriving in the EU along these routes use the services offered by criminal networks at some point during their journeys.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, using smugglers, by either migrants or terrorists, could prove useful because “migrant smuggling networks offer their services including transportation, accommodation, the provision of fraudulent documents and

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<sup>39</sup> See Figure 2: Financial flows to Islamic State resulting from the sexual slavery market in Nikita Malik, “Trafficking Terror: How Modern Slavery and Sexual Violence Fund Terrorism,” *The Henry Jackson Society*, October 8, 2017. 43. <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2017/10/08/trafficking-terror-how-modern-slavery-and-sexual-violence-fund-terrorism/>; Mitchel P. Roth, Murat Sever, “The Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) as Criminal Syndicate: Funding Terrorism through Organized Crime, A Case Study” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Volume 30, Issue 10 (August 2007): 909.

<sup>40</sup> Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, Emilie Oftedal, “Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 10, Issue 6 (December 2016): 17.

<sup>41</sup> *European Union’s Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment Leaflet 2017: Crime in the Age of Technology*, (The Hague, The Netherlands: Europol, 2017), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment-2017>

information on contact points in other countries.”<sup>42</sup> These established organized crime networks “can rely on their existing knowledge of routes and infrastructure used to smuggle goods across borders.”<sup>43</sup> Finally, the assessment notes that the organized crime networks “involved in the trafficking of human beings often exploit existing migratory routes to traffic victims within the EU.”<sup>44</sup>

In addition to operational advantages, another factor leading the IS to establish smuggling and trafficking networks out of IS-controlled territory to transport operatives to Europe could be the financial gain from such endeavors. As previously noted, IS already has a well-established trafficking network into IS-controlled territory that results in a substantial source of capital for the group. A steady flow of sizable income has quickly made the IS powerful. IS finances are independent, diverse and lucrative. The top three sources of income for the group are (a) oil and natural gas, (b) taxes and fees, and (c) extortion.<sup>45</sup> The IS trafficking network falls under the extortion category. One of the group’s major sources of capital, trafficking people and other illicit items into IS-controlled territory, generated almost \$800 million in 2015.<sup>46</sup> What would be the prospects if the IS actually wanted to tap into the European market in order to send people and goods out of IS-controlled territory? In her book *Castaway: Stories of Survival from Europe’s Refugee Crisis*, Charlotte McDonald-Gibson ascertains that:

The business of smuggling people into the European Union would be worth nearly as much as the illicit drugs industry. Billions of dollars would change hands each year, with tens of thousands of criminals profiting from people’s desires to reach safety. As long as there remained no legal routes for people to ask a European country to grant them refuge from war and persecution,

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<sup>42</sup> *European Union’s Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment Leaflet 2017: Crime in the Age of Technology*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ISIS Financing: 2015* (Berlin, Germany: Center for Analysis of Terrorism, May 2016), 7–15.

<sup>46</sup> *ISIS Financing: 2015*, 15.



they had no choice but to pay criminals: The EU policy was actually creating the smuggling networks it kept vowing to dismantle.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, it could be beneficial for the IS to tap into the European smuggling market for financial reasons and operational advantages, as it would allow operatives to move into different countries without detection. Just as IS has well established smuggling and trafficking routes into IS-controlled territory, it could prove valuable for the group to have access to smuggling and trafficking networks leading from IS-controlled territory towards Western countries such as Turkey and Greece. The advantage would not only be the ability to cash in on the lucrative financial opportunities but also to solidify its future operational success by ensuring access and placement into Europe with the undetected movement of its operatives via the migrant smuggling networks.

Given the perceived operational and financial advantages in sending operatives and foreign fighters to Europe, there is a strong case for IS to send trained operatives disguised as migrants to Europe via smuggling networks. According to leading experts, “at least six well documented attack plots in 2014–16 involve people with refugee status. In many instances plotters have instructed foreign fighters to pose as refugees upon their return to Europe.”<sup>48</sup> Although these experts do not identify the exact routes used by foreign fighters posing as migrants to enter Europe, they do provide a strong case that the IS is sending operatives to Europe hidden in the migrant stream. According to one study, in “April 2016 European security officials interviewed by the *Washington Post*, said ‘more than three dozen’ people linked to plots had posed as refugees.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, with the unprecedented numbers of migrants arriving in countries like Greece, which “had neither the resources nor the willpower to register everyone who arrived...[and] had an incentive to let some people slip through and lessen the burden of overcrowded refugee facilities,”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway: Stories of Survival from Europe’s Refugee Crisis* (London: Portobello Books, 2016), 119–120.

<sup>48</sup> Nesser, Stenersen and Oftedal, “Jihadi Terrorism in Europe,” 10.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway*, 190.

it is probable that more foreign fighters have slipped through cracks and entered Europe undetected.

In conclusion, given the extremely porous borders within Europe and the fact that almost all migrants have used some form of criminal network to assist their movement through Europe, it is likely that foreign fighter returnees and other trained IS operatives have utilized the illegal smuggling and trafficking networks highlighted in the European migrant crisis to mask their movement into and through Europe to remain undetected by authorities.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *European Union's Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment Leaflet 2017.*

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### III. GREECE AND THE MIGRANT CRISIS

#### A. GREECE, MIGRANTS AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

The Greek Government's inability to reduce the flow of illegal migrants and potential foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) transiting to other European countries represents a significant shortfall in security.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, one of the most pressing threats to security and public order in Europe resides in the migration crisis in the eastern Mediterranean and Greece. There is a high probability that foreign terrorist fighters have entered Europe, through Greece, disguised as migrants. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, it is possible that the Islamic State (IS) has systematically infiltrated the refugee flows and illegal smuggling networks into and out of Greece with the intention of planting trained operatives in Europe to plan and carry out future terror attacks.<sup>53</sup>

The nexus where the migrant crisis, terrorism, and human smuggling overlap inside Greece creates a remarkable security challenge. Illegal border crossing routes poses a dual security risk because a migrant or a foreign terrorist fighter can mask his movement to or from Europe to conflict areas by employing smugglers involved in human trafficking networks along irregular border-crossing routes highlighted by the migrant crisis in Greece.

The inadequate Greek migration policy responses and the hostile social attitudes towards the migrants have propelled many migrants to opt for an expedited exit from Greece, mainly with the help of illegal smugglers. The situation in Greece has led to a perfect storm of security shortfalls in the chaos emanating from the migrant crisis, the

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<sup>52</sup> Also known as foreign fighters. For more information, see Alastair Reed, Johanna Pohl, and Marjolein Jegerings, *The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat: Making Sense of an Evolving Phenomenon*, 8, no. 1 (The Hague, The Netherlands: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> The Islamic State has a well-established, lucrative smuggling and trafficking network. See Figure 2: Financial flows to Islamic State resulting from the sexual slavery market in Nikita Malik, "Trafficking Terror: How Modern Slavery and Sexual Violence Fund Terrorism," *The Henry Jackson Society*, October 8, 2017, 43. <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2017/10/08/trafficking-terror-how-modern-slavery-and-sexual-violence-fund-terrorism/>; Roderick Parkes, *Out of Syria: Shifting Routes and Returns*, Alert 8, (Paris, France: European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), April 2017): 2.

illegal human smuggling networks, and the recent wave of violent terrorist attacks by operatives affiliated with the Islamic State (IS).

The Islamic State stands to benefit, both tactically and financially, from the fragile situation in Greece created by the migrant crisis, especially as the Islamic State is losing territory in Iraq and Syria and many of its foreign terrorist fighters could be returning home.<sup>54</sup> IS may have exploited the Greek government's inadequate responses and the overwhelming public resentment in Greece towards the migrants. If so, the IS gains strategic and tactical advantages by sending trained operatives to Europe through Greece disguised as migrants using IS-operated smuggling routes.<sup>55</sup>

The security concern with IS foreign fighters infiltrating the migrant flow into Europe is documented and discussed but most scholars contend that it is a rare occurrence. However, the exact routes and specific methods used by foreign fighters to infiltrate the migrant flows in order to mask their onward movement into and out of Greece have not been explored.<sup>56</sup> Marco Funk and Roderick Parkes argue that IS is unlikely to have success in systematically infiltrating the migrant flows into Europe because the routes, such as the eastern Mediterranean route, are not “efficient or feasible,” and because “the routes often require time, money and stamina, as well as (often multiple) registration procedures.”<sup>57</sup> According to Funk and Parkes, “these jihadist groups—being criminal organisations, involved in the smuggling business—see the refugee flows as cash cows.”<sup>58</sup> Yet Funk and

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<sup>54</sup> Human trafficking and illegal smuggling have been a major source of revenue for the Islamic State. For more information see *ISIS Financing: 2015* (Berlin, Germany: Center for Analysis of Terrorism, May 2016).

<sup>55</sup> There are many publications describing the smuggling and trafficking networks flowing into Islamic State-controlled territory. However, there is a lack of public evidence concerning the fact that the Islamic State could easily reverse the direction in which illicit goods and people are flowing along those illegal smuggling and trafficking routes. This thesis argues that IS could send people and goods out of IS-controlled territory for strategic advantages, including sending trained operatives to Europe, by way of its own smuggling and trafficking networks, to carry out future attacks.

<sup>56</sup> Despite articles with titles such as Marc Thiessen's, “How ISIS Smuggles Terrorists Among Syrian Refugees,” *Newsweek*, April 27, 2016, there is little to no public evidence suggesting exactly how the terrorists have infiltrated the refugee flows.

<sup>57</sup> Marco Funk and Roderick Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, (Paris, France: The European Union Institute for security Studies (EUISS), 2016), 2. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/greece/resource/static/files/refugees-versus-terrorists.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Funk and Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, 2.

Parkes fail to make a crucial connection: a jihadist group like IS, which is also a criminal organization “involved in the smuggling business,” may in fact have the financial resources and strategic intention of sending well-funded, trained, and combat-hardened operatives to Europe masked as migrants by means of the smuggling networks that IS employs in order to circumvent the registration and security checkpoints.<sup>59</sup>

The eastern Mediterranean route may be one of the most likely solutions for the migrant or foreign fighter to slip through cracks unchecked by authorities by using the illegal smugglers and smuggling networks along the irregular border crossings into and out of Greece. A thorough examination of the migrant crisis and the turbulent situation in Greece could provide some insight into how exactly IS could systematically infiltrate the flow of migrants and exploit the smuggling networks into Europe.

## **B. SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM**

The migrant crisis has caused political, social, and economic problems not only in Greece but also throughout the rest of Europe. Greece is just a stepping-stone for most migrants.<sup>60</sup> It appears that most of the migrants have plans to move on to other European Union countries. A citizen of a European Union country can move through most European Union countries, *sans* documentation, with relative ease because of the European Union’s Schengen agreement. Most migrants can use smuggling and trafficking networks inside the Schengen Zone to move undetected from Greece to other European Union countries without documentation. One of the common routes for migrants transiting through Greece is the Western Balkan route starting in Greece and then moving to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Serbia, and Croatia and on into Hungary and Austria. This route, with its Greek origins, implicates other European countries in the migrant crisis currently troubling Greece. Therefore, other European countries, including those in the European Union, have a vested interest in how the Greek government has responded to the crisis.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway*, 190.

The size and scope of the migrant crisis in Greece are as vast as they are complex. Frontex reports that “in 2015, some 885,000 migrants arrived in the EU via the Eastern Mediterranean route,” most of whom entered the EU through Greece. With the exponential increase in numbers of migrants, there is a significant risk that the number of foreign terrorist fighters transiting into Europe through Greece is also increasing.<sup>61</sup>

The migrant crisis has affected Greece and Europe as a whole in a multitude of ways. Beyond the immediate humanitarian issue as thousands of migrants have perished in the Aegean and the Mediterranean Seas, foreign terrorist fighters and the huge number of migrants have raised immediate and potentially lasting political and security concerns for Greece and the rest of Europe. The Greek government’s inability to reduce the flow of illegal migrants and filter out the FTFs has created a political and social backlash against the migrant population, the Greek government, and perhaps the European Union’s solidarity that could have serious political and security implications.

The migrant crisis in Greece has created one of the largest humanitarian aid efforts in recent times.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, it should be reiterated that many of these migrants are genuinely seeking refuge from war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Clear distinctions should therefore be made. Few of the migrants entering Greece are potential foreign terrorist fighters. In fact, most reports on the subject conclude that out of the many recent terrorist attacks in Europe, only a few have involved asylum seekers.<sup>63</sup> However, in the midst of the security shortfalls created by the migrant crisis in Greece, it is conceivable that additional foreign terrorist fighters, under direction and assistance from the Islamic State, have posed as migrants to infiltrate Europe. Therefore, Greece and its NATO Allies and EU partners should focus on two areas of emphasis. First, it is imperative to expose the routes and methods by which the migrants illegally enter Europe, including

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<sup>61</sup> Frontex, “Eastern Mediterranean Route.”

<sup>62</sup> Roxana Barbulescu, “Still a Beacon of Human Rights? Considerations on the EU Response to the Refugee Crisis in the Mediterranean,” *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2017): 302. DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2016.1194546

<sup>63</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016*, (The Hague, The Netherlands: Europol, 2016), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016>

via illegal smuggling networks that could be affiliated with the Islamic State, to slow the flow of migrants entering Greece and the EU illegally. The second area of emphasis should be on the Greek government's and society's responses, which have led many migrants to choose these illegal smuggling networks to leave the country.

### **C. THE GREEK GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE (OR LACK THEREOF)**

The Greek Government was certainly not prepared for the wave of migrants that washed up on its shores in 2015 and 2016. Athens' "unwillingness to recognise the issue and to take even the most elementary measures to prepare for a more effective management" of the migrants would prove detrimental.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, in April 2017 the Greek Ombudsman in a special report noted that

There is still no integrated management plan, with a clear, stated and coherent narrative, with milestones and deliverables, targets and time frames of implementation that are complied with. Instead, the Greek administration is still operating in a state of emergency, which results in ad hoc arrangements and allows procedures, especially as regards the selection of contractors for services and goods, in derogation from the applicable institutional framework.<sup>65</sup>

Most of the migrants have landed on the unprepared shores of small Greek islands. The inhabitants of Leros cater to tourists for their main source of income. After the relentless waves of migrants day after day "many Greeks on the islands where [migrants] washed ashore were sympathetic to the people fleeing war, [but] others were more concerned about the impression their bedraggled appearance could give the tourists."<sup>66</sup> Quickly the small islands became overburdened. Despite the Greek government's best intentions concerning established "hotspots" and reception centers to register and document the migrants, many of whom had little or no documentation after their arduous journey across the Aegean, the islands' reception centers became overcrowded. There were simply too many migrants and not enough physical infrastructure, manpower and money

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<sup>64</sup> *Migration Flows and Refugee Protection: Administrative Challenges and Human Rights Issues*, (Athens, Greece: The Greek Ombudsman, April, 2017): 9.

<sup>65</sup> *Migration Flows and Refugee Protection: Administrative Challenges and Human Rights Issues*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway*, 155.



on the islands to provide the migrants basic goods and services such as the “provision of nourishment, housing, health services and education, as well as security.”<sup>67</sup>

The overall lack of infrastructure to register, process, and house the migrants was one of the biggest failures of the Greek authorities during the migrant crisis. These “significant shortcomings and inadequacies of the reception and screening system in the country, in combination with the increase of the flows from 2015, are the main reasons that the competent authorities failed to manage the incoming population.”<sup>68</sup> Another noteworthy flaw among the many “shortcomings and inadequacies” to report was the failure of Greek authorities to correctly process and identify the migrants entering Greece. The Ombudsman reports that from January to November 2015, “Greece had registered 136,798 new entries in the Eurodac system from the 575,242 arrivals which Frontex had counted during the same period.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, “approximately one out of four arrivals were recorded following the correct and stipulated procedure and were directly traceable by the authorities of other countries.”<sup>70</sup>

It appears that most migrants have never registered with the Greek authorities but have still been able to make their way off the small island of Leros. Many seem to have purposely avoided registering themselves in Greece. With or without passports, most migrants seem to be convinced that they should not register themselves in Greece because it would be difficult, if not impossible, to travel to other European Union countries once they were registered in Greece as asylum seekers. Owing to the increased access to technology and perhaps connections to Europe through social media sites and the internet, many migrants appear to be fully aware of the implications of the EU’s Dublin Regulation

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<sup>67</sup> *Migration Flows and Refugee Protection: Administrative Challenges and Human Rights Issues*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>69</sup> Eurodac stands for European Asylum Dactyloscopy. For more information see the European Commission website at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/identification-of-applicants\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/identification-of-applicants_en)

<sup>70</sup> *Migration Flows and Refugee Protection: Administrative Challenges and Human Rights Issues*, 16.

and are extremely cautious about where they register for asylum.<sup>71</sup> The EU's Dublin Regulation states that if a migrant requests asylum and is granted refugee status, he or she is entitled to healthcare, a residence permit, and the ability to work in the labor market, all provided by the country within which he or she applies for asylum.<sup>72</sup>

Once in Athens, with no place to go, most migrants head for government-provided accommodation facilities, "several of which were intended only for temporary camping, whereas in other facilities the population was distributed in prefabricated containers, military type group tents or ordinary tents."<sup>73</sup> Despite the presence of non-governmental organizations, the living conditions inside these facilities have been appalling. The Greek Armed Forces have been in charge of many aspects of the migrants' survival, including handing out food and providing health services.<sup>74</sup>

With the multitude of Greek national government entities, local governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations, the design and operation of the reception have been chaotic at best. The several entities attempting to provide aid have included "the Ministry of Migration Policy, the Ministry of Defence, the local Municipality and humanitarian organisations (e.g. Chios (VIAL), Ritsona and Oinofyta in Viotia, Polykastro in Kilkis)."<sup>75</sup> These redundant agencies have created "an overlap of competences and [this] removes the possibility of comprehensive supervision and effective coordination by the main agency that has been appointed for this purpose."<sup>76</sup> These entities appear to have their hands in the pot, attempting to provide aid but also to receive the massive amounts of

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<sup>71</sup> "Country Responsible For Asylum Application (Dublin)" European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs, Last updated May 21, 2018 [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants_en)

<sup>72</sup> European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs, "Country Responsible for Asylum Application (Dublin)."

<sup>73</sup> *Migration Flows and Refugee Protection: Administrative Challenges and Human Rights Issues*, 42.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

EU relief funding.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the promise of funding for a Greek agency has been a stronger motivating factor to become involved in the relief efforts than the imperative of providing organized and timely aid to those in desperate need.

The horrid living conditions, with chaotic and sparse government-provided aid, have been among the main factors for many migrants determined to make the journey onwards to other European Union countries in hopes of submitting an asylum claim elsewhere. However, as previously discussed, their legal movement to these other countries is difficult because of the EU's Dublin Regulation. Therefore, most migrants opt for illegal smugglers to arrange their travel out of Greece. A second motivating factor for the migrants to exit Greece is the contempt and resentment that Greek society has expressed towards the migrants.

#### **D. RESPONSE FROM GREEK SOCIETY**

To repeat, the second contributing factor causing migrants to exit Greece could be the animosity the migrants have received from the Greek public. The recent influx of migrants appears to have contributed massively to political and social instability not only throughout Greece, but also throughout Europe. In her book, *Immigration and Perceptions of National Political Systems in Europe*, Lauren M. McLaren cites a European social survey conducted from 2002 to 2009, noting that “concern about immigration appears to be the highest in Greece, Great Britain, Portugal, Italy and France.”<sup>78</sup> In subsequent years the migrants have captured the headlines, especially with the recent wave of terror attacks in Europe. As Zygmunt Bauman has observed, “TV news, newspaper headlines, political speeches and Internet tweets, used to deliver foci and outlets for public anxieties and fears, are currently overflowing with references to the ‘migration crisis’—ostensibly

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<sup>77</sup> Nearly 700 million Euro are available in aid funds. For more information see the European Commission's factsheet “Managing the Refugee Crisis: Financial Support to Greece,” European Commission, 2016, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information_en)

<sup>78</sup> Lauren M. McLaren, *Immigration and Perceptions of National Political Systems in Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 107.

overwhelming Europe and portending the collapse of the way of life we know, practise and cherish.”<sup>79</sup>

Migration, and the resentment towards it, has increased not only in Greece but also worldwide. Trends for recent migration include “advancements in transportation have made travel faster and cheaper, and communication technologies have made it possible to connect with family and friends independent of physical distance.”<sup>80</sup> These advancements in technology have allowed “Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans [to] cross the border to save their lives and livelihoods.”<sup>81</sup> Yet instead of finding a place to re-establish their lives and livelihoods, the migrants have been persecuted by the public and almost forced to continue their journey onwards.

Despite the horrid living conditions in their struggle to establish a new life for themselves, the migrants transiting and stranded in Greece received hostility and resentment from the Greek public. One explanation for the animosity towards the migrants stems from the idea that migrants “pose clear threats to these [national] identities by bringing with them seemingly different values and ways of life...Muslim migrants vis-à-vis a predominantly secular Europe, for instance—may be especially difficult to reconcile with existing national identities.”<sup>82</sup> The migrants’ different ways of life and beliefs do not seem to mesh well with Greek society.

The Greek public has high levels of concern for immigrants because they fear that immigrants pose a potential threat to their national culture and values. In Greece, language, culture and religion are important factors for a shared cultural identity.<sup>83</sup> Not only does Greek society view the migrants as destroyers of culture and values, many Greeks and other Europeans share the opinion that migrants present a security risk as well. Some believe that migrants

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<sup>79</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>80</sup> Harald Bauder, *Migration Borders Freedom*, (New York; Routledge, 2017), 4.

<sup>81</sup> Bauder, *Migration Borders Freedom*, 18.

<sup>82</sup> McLaren, *Immigration and Perceptions of National Political Systems in Europe*, 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

are portrayed as more willing to break the country's laws than citizens...in the aftermath of 9/11, the March 2004 Madrid train bombings, and the 7/7 bombings in London, foreign-origin or immigrant-origin citizens in the modern day may be suspected of sympathizing with and even participating in terrorist organizations, leading people to conclude that they create a serious security risk for the country.<sup>84</sup>

With the recent increase in deadly terror attacks across Europe and the huge influx of migrants threatening the Greek way of life and culture, the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment has been almost inevitable. Owing to the anti-immigrant sentiment, far-right parties and political movements have surfaced and gained significant political traction. The reason the public may “prefer a fairly restrictive approach to immigration” could be that “they worry about the impact of immigration on national welfare, including social welfare benefits, education, and security; substantial numbers also express concern about the cultural impact of immigration.”<sup>85</sup>

As for Greece, the current government has seen the rise of its own far-right party called the Golden Dawn. In 2012, the far-right “Golden Dawn political party—whose leaders gave Nazi salutes and whose supporters prowled the streets assaulting foreign workers—took nearly seven per cent of the Greek vote,” and its support seems to remain at that level.<sup>86</sup> Golden Dawn is notorious for its extreme far-right political views, especially towards migrants. The current SYRIZA government in Greece, “rather than challenging the openly hateful rhetoric of Golden Dawn...launched Operation Xenios Zeus, the crackdown aimed at curbing illegal migration which ended up targeting people who had fled state brutality elsewhere.”<sup>87</sup> The Greek government seems to have responded to the Greek public's concerns about the migrants. As a result of Operation Xenios Zeus, which took place from August 2012 to February 2013, “around 85,000 people would be

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<sup>84</sup> McLaren, *Immigration and Perceptions of National Political Systems in Europe*, 68.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>86</sup> McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway*, 159.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

stopped on the streets and taken to a police station, simply for looking foreign. All but 4,811 had the legal right to be in Greece.”<sup>88</sup>

The rise of far-right political parties in Greece and throughout Europe presents cause for concern. Perhaps “far-right parties have been on the rise in Europe in great part because of anti-immigration sentiment...concern about immigration...may be more likely to translate into dissatisfaction with the political system when there is a strong far-right party in the country.”<sup>89</sup> It appears that there will be second and third order effects from the migrant crisis, including second and third generation immigrants who fail to assimilate into society. Greece and other “European governments of all political leanings are faced with the seemingly intractable problem of controlling immigration, [as well as] the existence of now permanent second- and third-generation immigrants who are often also the targets of concern on the part of the natives.”<sup>90</sup>

Together, the animosity of Greek society and the sparse and inadequate aid and policy responses by the Greek Government have propelled many migrants to make their way out of Greece illegally. Typical migrants have been on the receiving end of the Greek public’s resentment and have not received the aid they need to re-establish their livelihoods. Thus, they have opted to make their way out of Greece illegally with the help of smugglers. For most of the migrants stranded in Greece, “there was no work...[and] no assistance from the government...and the threat of arrest [was] hanging over them.”<sup>91</sup> In her book, *Castaway: Stories of Survival from Europe’s Refugee Crisis*, Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, describes the motivation to leave. In her view, because of the bleak outlook for a life in Greece, most migrants have opted for a way out of Greece. Because there appeared to be no legal way out of Greece, most migrants had to settle for illegal smuggling networks yet again. Just as in the process of fleeing Syria and transiting Turkey,

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<sup>88</sup> “Greece: Abusive Crackdown on Migrants, Police Sweeps, Invasive Searches, Arbitrary Detention,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 12, 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/12/greece-abusive-crackdown-migrants>; Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway: Stories of Survival from Europe’s Refugee Crisis*, (London: Portobello Books, 2016),159.

<sup>89</sup> McLaren, *Immigration and Perceptions of National Political Systems in Europe*, 114.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>91</sup> McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway*, 199.

the migrants had to spend what little money that they had left in order to make the journey out of Greece.<sup>92</sup>

Typical migrants contact the same smugglers that family members have used to transit through Greece. They meet the smugglers on the outskirts of Athens, and from there the smugglers drive them north to the illegal border crossing point with FYROM at Idomeni. There, migrants have passed through the barbed wire with relative ease, as the Greek authorities have looked the other way as migrants crossed the border into FYROM. Once out of Greece, migrants have continued their journeys northward towards Germany, Belgium and other European countries with smugglers' assistance. This examination of the path taken by many illegal migrants through Greece and into Europe shows how it is possible to conceive that the operatives of the Abaaoud cell responsible for the November 2015 Paris terror attacks used similar routes, methods, and smugglers.<sup>93</sup>

It is likely that migrants and foreign terrorist fighters could move through Greece with the help of smugglers. The smuggling routes through Greece into Europe generated by people fleeing the conflicts in the Middle East have become a robust and lucrative industry that jihadi groups have come to see as “cash cows,” just as predicted by Parkes and Funk.<sup>94</sup> Europol's European Union Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) reports that “more than 510,000 illegal border crossings between border-crossing points at the external border of the EU were registered in 2016. Nearly all of the irregular migrants arriving in the EU along these routes use the services offered by criminal networks at some point during their journeys.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, using smugglers, by either migrants or foreign terrorist fighters, could prove useful because “migrant smuggling networks offer their services including transportation, accommodation, the provision of fraudulent documents and information on contact points in other countries.”<sup>96</sup> These established organized smuggling networks “can rely on their existing knowledge of routes

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<sup>92</sup> McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway*, 201–202.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Cruickshank, “The Inside Story of Paris and Brussels Attacks.”

<sup>94</sup> Funk and Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> *European Union's Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment Leaflet 2017*.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

and infrastructure used to smuggle goods across borders.”<sup>97</sup> Finally, the assessment notes that the organized crime networks “involved in the trafficking of human beings often exploit existing migratory routes to traffic victims within the EU.”<sup>98</sup>

Up to 75% of the migrants entering Greece from January to November 2015 were undocumented.<sup>99</sup> Among these undocumented migrants entering Greece during this time were foreign terrorist fighters and members of the Belgian IS terrorist cell led by the notorious operative named Abdelhamid Abaaoud.<sup>100</sup> This same cell included “several of the perpetrators of the Paris attacks in November 2015” who entered Europe disguised as migrants through the island of Leros, thereby “highlight[ing] the threat posed by limited control over the migratory flow.”<sup>101</sup> With the unprecedented numbers of migrants arriving on these small Greek islands, whose government agencies “had neither the resources nor the willpower to register everyone who arrived...[and] had an incentive to let some people slip through and lessen the burden of overcrowded refugee facilities,” it is entirely possible that more foreign terrorist fighters have slipped through cracks and entered Europe undetected.<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps European-born foreign terrorist fighters can procure their return to Europe via the smuggling networks that got them out of Europe and into Syria. A BBC reporter was able to interview one such smuggler responsible for moving IS operatives out of Syria; the smuggler claims that “those highly placed foreigners have their own networks of smugglers. It’s usually the same people who organised their access to Syria. They co-

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<sup>97</sup> *European Union’s Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment Leaflet 2017*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Migration Flows and Refugee Protection: Administrative Challenges and Human Rights Issues*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Cruickshank, “The Inside Story of Paris and Brussels Attacks.”

<sup>101</sup> Jaime Grierson, “ISIS Recruiters Targeting Refugees In Europe, Say Counter-Terror Experts,” *The Guardian*, December 2, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/dec/02/islamic-state-recruiters-targeting-refugees-in-europe-counter-terror-experts-warn>; Alastair Reed, Johanna Pohl, and Marjolein Jegerings, *The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat: Making Sense of an Evolving Phenomenon*, 8, no. 1 (The Hague, The Netherlands: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2017): 6.

<sup>102</sup> McDonald-Gibson, *Castaway*, 190.



ordinate with one another.”<sup>103</sup> It is possible that foreign terrorist fighters have used the same smugglers that got them out of Europe into Syria in order to make their journey back into Europe undetected. The smuggling networks transporting migrants to Europe through Greece could also be transporting foreign terrorist fighters to Europe through Greece in order to coordinate and carry out future terror attacks.

## **E. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS**

The evidence supporting the judgement that foreign terrorist fighters have infiltrated the migrant flows into Europe and have used Islamic State-supported smugglers to do so is circumstantial at best. However, it is plausible. Therefore, the Greek government and the European Union should place special emphasis on response efforts focusing on the illegal smuggling networks transporting migrants into, out of, and through Europe as these could be the same smuggling networks responsible for smuggling European-born foreign terrorist fighters back home, possibly to carry out future attacks. This threat could be exacerbated as the Islamic State loses territory in Iraq and Syria, and European-born foreign terrorist fighters could return to Europe using the same smuggling networks that arranged for their transport out of Europe and into Syria.

Furthermore, European response efforts should focus on the Greek government’s inadequate responses towards the migrants as well as how Greek society has expressed animosity towards the migrants. These two factors could be major driving forces behind many migrants opting to leave Greece illegally with the help of smugglers. Additionally, since the closure of Idomeni and the rest of the Western Balkan route in March 2016, there have been up to 60,000 migrants still stranded in Greece. If these migrants continue to receive animosity and inadequate support in Greece, they could choose to leave via smugglers or worse, they could easily become radicalized by the Islamic State in their vulnerable state of limbo inside the government-provided aid facilities.<sup>104</sup> They might still

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<sup>103</sup> Quentin Sommerville, Riam Dalati, “Raqqa’s Dirty Secret,” *The BBC*, 13 November 2017, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/raqqas\\_dirty\\_secret](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/raqqas_dirty_secret).

<sup>104</sup> *Changes in Modus Operandi of IS Revisited*, (The Hague, The Netherlands: Europol, 2017), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/changes-in-modus-operandi-of-islamic-state-revisited>.

choose later to leave Greece with the help of smugglers but in a radicalized frame of mind. This problem could continue into the second and third generations of migrants if the current situation persists.

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## **IV. THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN GREECE: THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EU**

### **A. QUESTIONS FOR THE EU**

One of the most pressing threats to security and public order in the European Union (EU) lies within the migration crisis plaguing the eastern Mediterranean and Greece. The specific threat is the “foreign terrorist fighter” flow, amongst the migrant population, out of Syria through Turkey into Greece and then into the rest of Europe. Just as worrisome, the movement of foreign terrorist fighters could also take place in the opposite direction, out of Europe and into Iraq and Syria. The main security concern is that people from all over the world can travel to Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan to become trained terrorists and/or militants, and then proceed to Western European countries posing as migrants. The migration crisis has haunted European security institutions for the past few years, and yet the problem remains unresolved.

The EU needs to reevaluate its security efforts within Greece and the Southeastern Mediterranean in order to solve the undocumented migrant flow and the potential foreign terrorist fighter problem. The migrant crisis could present a systemic and existential threat to the EU and Greece. Does the EU have the necessary skills and capabilities to solve this crisis? How effective has Frontex, the European Union border control and coast guard agency, been in suppressing the number of migrants entering the EU?

### **B. DEFINING THE MIGRANT CRISIS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

Migrants crossing from Africa and the Middle East into Europe by means of the Mediterranean is an age-old issue. Historically, the number of migrants crossing into Europe has been significant but not problematic. The statistics concerning “irregular migrants” crossing into Europe are relatively new. Statistical assessments of the Eastern Mediterranean route starting in 2004 plot migrants fleeing from conflicts and oppression in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and other countries of the Middle East, travelling to Turkey and then into Greece by sea and land. These migrants have normally numbered around

25,000 to 30,000 per year.<sup>105</sup> Figure 1 shows the number of irregular migrants crossing from 2004 to 2011.

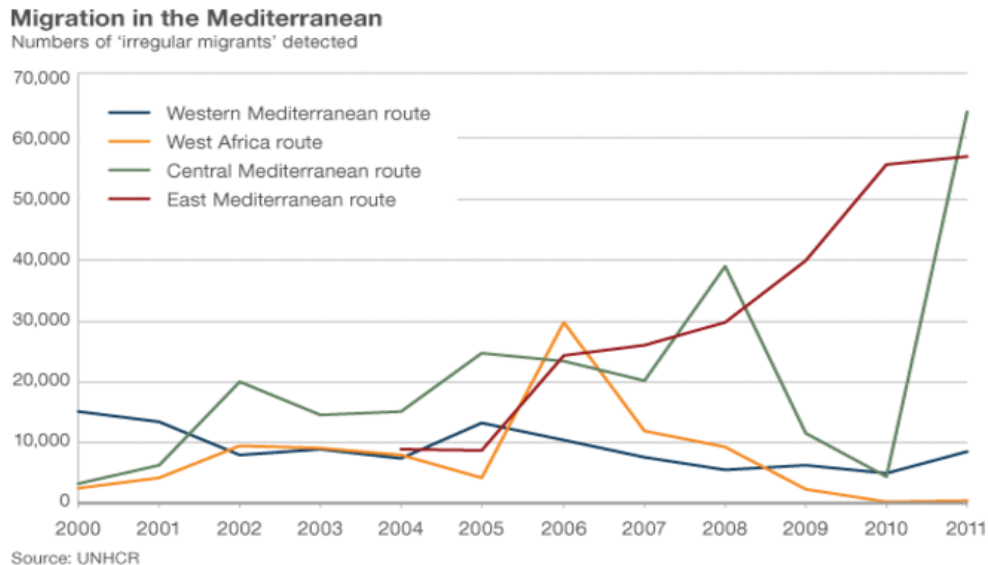


Figure 1. Number of migrants crossing into Europe using all four routes.<sup>106</sup>

The number of migrants crossing into Europe using the Eastern Mediterranean route had remained fairly consistent, not reaching more than 50,000 in 2010. 50,000 a year was the new norm until 2015 when the number of migrants using the Eastern Mediterranean route reached almost 1 million. According to Frontex, the exact number of migrants using this route was 885,386 in 2015. Frontex records that:

In 2015, some 885,000 migrants arrived in the EU via the Eastern Mediterranean route—17 times the number in in 2014, which was itself a record year. The vast majority of them arrived on several Greek islands, most on Lesbos. The numbers increased gradually from January to March, but began to climb in April, peaking at 216,000 in October.<sup>107</sup>

Frontex specifies the number of migrants using the Eastern Mediterranean route and measures the number of illegal border crossings in the region, as shown in Figure 2.

<sup>105</sup> Frontex, “Eastern Mediterranean Route.”

<sup>106</sup> Source: Frontex, “Eastern Mediterranean Route.”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

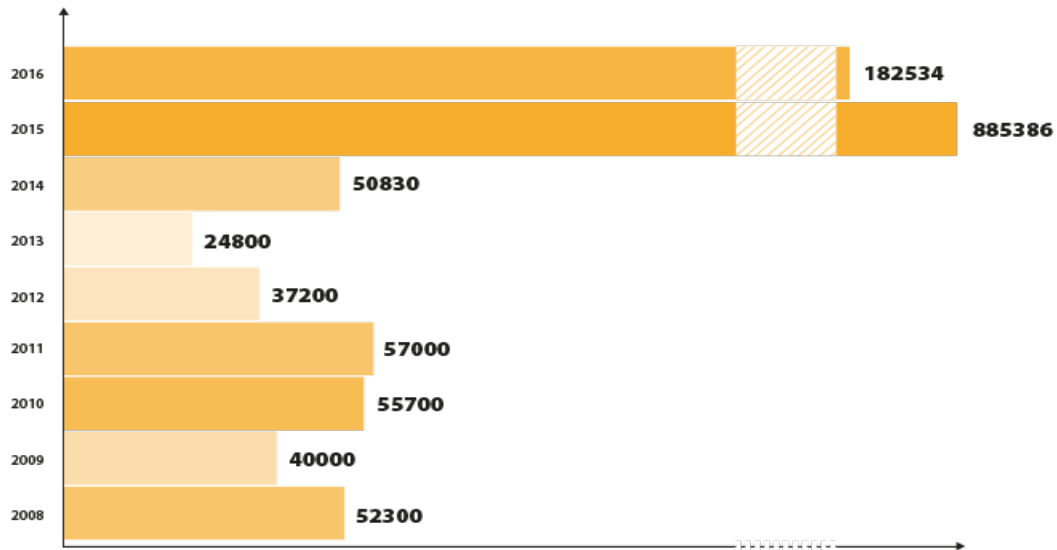


Figure 2. Number of illegal border crossings into Europe using eastern route.<sup>108</sup>

In regards to migrants entering Europe, 2015 was a record year. This migrant crisis has caused problems not only in Greece but throughout the rest of Europe. Greece is just the staging point for most of the migrants. It appears that most of the migrants have plans to move on to other Western European countries. The migrants, like EU citizens who can move to other countries, *sans* documentation, with relative ease because of the European Union’s Schengen agreement, can use illegal smuggling networks within the Schengen Zone to mask their movement. According to the EU, “the Schengen Area is one of the greatest achievements of the EU. It is an area without internal borders, an area within which citizens, many non-EU nationals, business people and tourists can freely circulate without being subjected to border checks.”<sup>109</sup>

While Greece does not share a border with another country in the Schengen Area, it does share a border with another European Union member state, Bulgaria. Most migrants transiting out of Greece choose one of three main routes to leave Greece. One option the migrants can choose, after they have taken a ferry to mainland Greece from one of the

<sup>108</sup> Source: Frontex, “Eastern Mediterranean Route.”

<sup>109</sup> “Irregular Migration and Return,” The European Commission Migration and Home Affairs, March 23, 2017. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/irregular-migration-return-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/irregular-migration-return-policy_en)

islands at which they arrived, is to take another ferry from Athens or Greece's western port city, Igoumenitsa, and then to Italy. Once they arrive in Italy transiting to many other EU member states in the Schengen Area is fairly easy. However, this is a costly option and risky because of the risk of being detected at the port. The next route the migrants can choose is the land border crossing between Greece and Bulgaria. This is a feasible option because of the ease of travel between these two countries. The major draw-back is the border check point between Greece and Bulgaria because both countries do not belong to the Schengen Agreement. The third and most popular option is the Western Balkan route. The land based routes are preferable because these routes are not impacted by weather as much as the first route involving travel via the sea. The Western Balkan route saw close to 800,000 illegal border crossings (mostly by Syrians) in 2015.<sup>110</sup> This route, starting in Greece, then heading into FYROM, then Serbia, on into Hungary and then into Western Europe, has been "closed" because of a border fence built by Hungary. Despite the closure, migrants still use the Western Balkan route, but the route has shifted to Croatia.<sup>111</sup> Figure 3 shows a visual representation of the three main migrant routes.

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<sup>110</sup> "Western Balkan Route" Frontex, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://Frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-balkan-route/>

<sup>111</sup> Frontex, "Western Balkan Route."



Figure 3. Eastern Mediterranean migration routes into Europe.<sup>112</sup>

### C. THE POSSIBILITY OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS AMONG THE MIGRANTS

Between 2014 to 2016 there were unprecedented numbers of people fleeing from the conflict areas of Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Migrants from other countries have also entered Europe using the eastern Mediterranean route but the vast majority of the migrants come from the three aforementioned countries. Most have been “predominately young, male and Muslim” and “do broadly fit the profile of those most susceptible to radicalization.”<sup>113</sup> After the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, two Syrian passports were found near the suspects’ bodies, leading to the “speculation that terrorists were

<sup>112</sup> Source: “View on Migration: Demand for Tents that Beat the Cold,” SciDev.Net, last updated November 13, 2105, <https://www.scidev.net/global/vulnerability/analysis-blog/view-on-migration-demand-for-tents-that-beat-the-cold.html>

<sup>113</sup> Funk and Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, 1.



infiltrating the refugee flow in the EU.”<sup>114</sup> Foreign terrorist fighters could travel from IS-controlled territory into the EU via the Eastern Mediterranean route posing as migrants.

According to the International Organization for Migration, 66 percent of the migrants entering Greece and Italy are men, military-aged men ranging from 18 to 55.<sup>115</sup> This leaves a large number of migrants in the demographic range as possible foreign terrorist fighters returning to Europe that are “susceptible to radicalisation” just because of their age and gender. The Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey into Greece can be the most advantageous and sustainable route for the FTFs to use because of the fact the transit can be largely land-based in the case of inclement weather like in the Mediterranean route during the winter months.<sup>116</sup> In the absence of inclement weather, the migrants can cram into tiny rubber hull boats and make the short sea journey from the coast of Western Turkey to the small Greek islands like Leros or Samos.

Foreign terrorist fighters from Europe have been reported to travel extensively across the globe. The 2016 TE-SAT reports that “in 2014, FTFs were present in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, Chechnya, Libya, Mali, Somalia and Yemen; there is no indication to suggest that this situation changed in 2015. Syria and Iraq, however, continued to be by far the most prevalent locations for European violent jihadists.”<sup>117</sup> Moreover, the 2016 TE-SAT estimates that 5,000 European, mostly military-aged males, travelled to Syria and Iraq in 2015, only to return as potential FTFs.

Travel to Syria and Iraq from Turkey is not difficult. First of all, travelling to Turkey from European countries is fairly easy. Ataturk International Airport is one of the largest international airports in the world, and it is accessible directly from almost every major European capital. Other travel options into Turkey include the over-land route by

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<sup>114</sup> Funk and Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, 2.

<sup>115</sup> “Mediterranean Western Balkans Update - New Numbers from Italy, Greece, the FYROM,” Press Release, The International Organization for Migration, September 29, 2015, <https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-western-balkans-update-new-numbers-italy-greece-fyrom>

<sup>116</sup> Funk and Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, 1.

<sup>117</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016*, (The Hague, The Netherlands: Europol, 2016), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016>

railways, foot or wheels from either Greece or Bulgaria. Once inside Turkey, FTFs wishing to travel to Syria or Iraq can do so with relative ease by utilizing some the border crossings highlighted by the PKK. FTFs that wish to remain undetected by border control agencies will not have trouble travelling to their destinations in Syria or Iraq because of the conflict occurring on the south eastern border of Turkey. The Turkish government is heavily involved in an offensive engagement against the Kurdish forces and the PKK. This conflict has created a fog along on the Turkish border, and this could act as a form of concealment for the FTFs transiting to Syria or Iraq.

#### **D. THE FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTER’S MOTIVATION**

Since taking control of certain territory within Syria and Iraq in June 2014, the Islamic State (IS) has established the “caliphate” in Iraq and Syria. This could be a potential motivating factor for FTFs to travel to IS-controlled territories because many FTFs are attracted to the idea of a utopian caliphate offered by IS.<sup>118</sup> According to the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2016, “IS considers it the duty of every Muslim to join it by migrating to the territories that it controls...Foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) are equated with the companions of the prophet Muhammad that left Mecca with him on his emigration to Medina and are, on this basis, awarded a higher status than the local population.”<sup>119</sup> Other motivations for FTFs are diverse and include the opportunity to fight Westerners, and to promote ideological, religious, or political aims.<sup>120</sup> Clearly, IS has forced tens thousands of people to flee their homes because of the mayhem and destruction caused by its actions. But IS understands that it can motivate those who feel like outcasts and who want to inflict harm onto Westerners, to travel to IS-controlled territory to join their cause. IS and what it stands for has an appeal to some.

In September 2015, after the mass exodus from IS-controlled lands, IS launched a propaganda campaign, containing videos on many social media outlets, in attempts to

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<sup>118</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

persuade the refugees to join IS instead of fleeing to “un-Islamic lands.”<sup>121</sup> IS has done little to slow the flow of refugees out of IS-controlled lands but instead have opted to capitalize on migrants entering Europe. IS “recruiters may try to take advantage of social, economic, and personal problems that make individuals susceptible to radicalisation.”<sup>122</sup> The TE-SAT warns that IS has direct access to EU nationals prepared to carry out attacks.

Additionally, TE-SAT reports that most of the FTFs have travelled to IS-controlled territories using their own genuine travel documents and under their own financial means. There are some instances in which FTFs have received financial assistance to travel but the assistance has come from local sources and not from within IS-controlled territory.<sup>123</sup> The primary country through which the FTFs travel to IS controlled lands is Turkey.<sup>124</sup> They arrive in Turkey from surrounding countries and from there proceed southeast to reach Syria and Iraq. More FTFs are beginning to “use more sophisticated tactics to enter Turkey,” thereby becoming more difficult to identify.<sup>125</sup>

Once the FTFs have reached Syria or Iraq via Turkey and join IS, they return to Europe, possibly via the Eastern Mediterranean route, as trained operatives. TE-SAT claims that “the training and combat experience gained by the returning FTFs means that they will have increased capability to carry out attacks, either under direction or independently. Furthermore, some individuals undergo specific psychological conditioning...enabling them to carry out terrorist actions.”<sup>126</sup> The TE-SAT reveals what is even more striking: many of the European FTFs are prominent leaders within IS and maintain communication lines with IS support networks from their home countries.

As seen with the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks and the attack on the Bataclan concert hall, and the Stade de France attack, the evidence gathered by the investigations of these

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<sup>121</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016.*

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

attacks suggests that FTFs with European origins have travelled to Syria and Iraq, received training from IS and returned to Europe, undetected by authorities.<sup>127</sup>

#### **E. THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS CAUSED BY THE MIGRANT CRISIS**

From 2014 to the end of 2016, there were 29 several major terrorist attacks carried out in Europe that have been linked to IS and possibly its foreign terrorist fighters who could have entered Europe disguised as migrants. The following is a list of the major terrorist attacks compiled from CNN and the Express.co.uk news articles outlining the attacks that are affiliated with IS but could have been carried out by foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants:

1. **May 24, 2014. Brussels, Belgium**—Three people killed and one more critically injured during a shooting at the Jewish Museum. The perpetrator was a 29-year-old French citizen who had traveled to Syria and spent a year there on his quest to become a radicalized Islamist.<sup>128</sup>
2. **November 13, 2015. Paris, France**—A deadly, coordinated sequence of attacks killing some 130 people and wounded 350 others. The attackers, “armed with assault rifles and explosives, targeted six locations across the city—including a soccer match as France plays world champion Germany and the Bataclan concert hall, where most of the fatalities occur.”<sup>129</sup> An online statement by IS claimed eight of its militants attacked selected areas in Paris. According to CNN, “The Institute for the Study of War described the attacks as the terror group’s ‘most sophisticated assault in the West to date.’ It was the worst violence in France since World War II. The attack is believed to have been conducted by ISIS or one of its affiliates.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Funk and Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, 2.

<sup>128</sup> Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global.”

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

3. **December 5, 2015. London, England**—A 29-year-old man attacked another man in an Underground metro station. The attacker “cut the man’s throat in a ‘sawing motion,’ . . . and shouted, ‘This is for Syria, my Muslim brothers.’ The attack is believed to have been inspired by ISIS.”<sup>131</sup>
4. **March 19, 2016. Istanbul, Turkey**—A suicide bomber detonated in a busy tourist area, killing four and injuring 36 more. CNN reports that the Turkish “Interior Minister Efkan Ala said the attacker is linked to ISIS. The attack is believed to have been carried out by ISIS or one of its affiliates.”<sup>132</sup>
5. **March 22, 2016. Brussels, Belgium**—“Two explosions at Brussels airport and another at a subway station in the Maalbeek leave at least 32 people dead and scores injured. In a statement posted online by several prominent supporters and by the ISIS-affiliated Amaq news agency, ISIS claimed that its fighters carried out the attacks.”<sup>133</sup>
6. **June 28, 2016. Istanbul, Turkey**—Three suicide bombers attack the Ataturk International Airport in Istanbul. The attackers killed 44 people with guns and exploding suicide vests. This specific incident “marks the highest death toll in a terror attack against an airport. Turkish officials told CNN the three had been dispatched from ISIS’ headquarters in Raqqa, Syria, and had occupied an apartment in Istanbul for a month before carrying out the attack.”<sup>134</sup>
7. **July 14, 2016. Nice, France**—A terrorist drove a truck into the crowds on National Day in Nice, France, killing 84 people. “The ISIS-affiliated news

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<sup>131</sup> Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global.”

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

agency Amaq described Bouhlel as ‘from the soldiers of the State,’” meaning the Islamic State.<sup>135</sup>

8. **July 16, 2016. Würzburg, Germany**—A 17-year old boy attacked passengers on a train in Germany. “The ISIS-affiliated news agency Amaq later claimed that Muhammad Riyad, who was shot dead by police after escaping from the train, ‘attacked the Crusader passengers with an axe and a knife.’ It later issued a video of Riyad in which he said he was a ‘soldier of the Caliphate’ and would ‘carry out a martyrdom operation in Germany.’ The attack is believed to have been inspired by ISIS.”<sup>136</sup>
9. **December 19, 2016. Berlin, Germany**—A terrorist drove through a crowd at a Christmas market in the center of Berlin on Monday, December 19. “ISIS claimed one of its ‘soldiers’ was responsible for the terror attack which killed 12 innocent victims and injured nearly 50 others.”<sup>137</sup>

The possibility of FTFs posing as migrants and carrying out terrorist attacks is not the only security concern surrounding the migrant crisis but it does perhaps have the most hype around it. Most Europeans and other Westerners are aware of the possibility of FTFs posing as migrants and conducting terrorist attacks on European soil. This has instilled a fear in Europeans and other Westerners, and has created a sense of xenophobia towards the migrants. The migrant crisis does pose other security risks and problems such as the overcrowding of public spaces, overcrowding public transport, overwhelming the host nation’s inability to support the high volume of migrants and refugees and supply them with food, water and shelter. The high influx of migrants in Greece has created a huge financial burden on the country that was already crippled from the 2008 crisis. The near 1 million migrants in Greece have increased the country’s population by almost 10 percent. Because Greece does not have the financial capability to handle the migrant crisis, it had

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<sup>135</sup> Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global.”

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Foster, “Terror Attacks Timeline.”

requested financial assistance and other forms of assistance from the EU. To help share the burden of assisting the migrants, the EU has mandated that other countries will host them. Figure 4 shows the number of migrants to be taken by EU member countries.

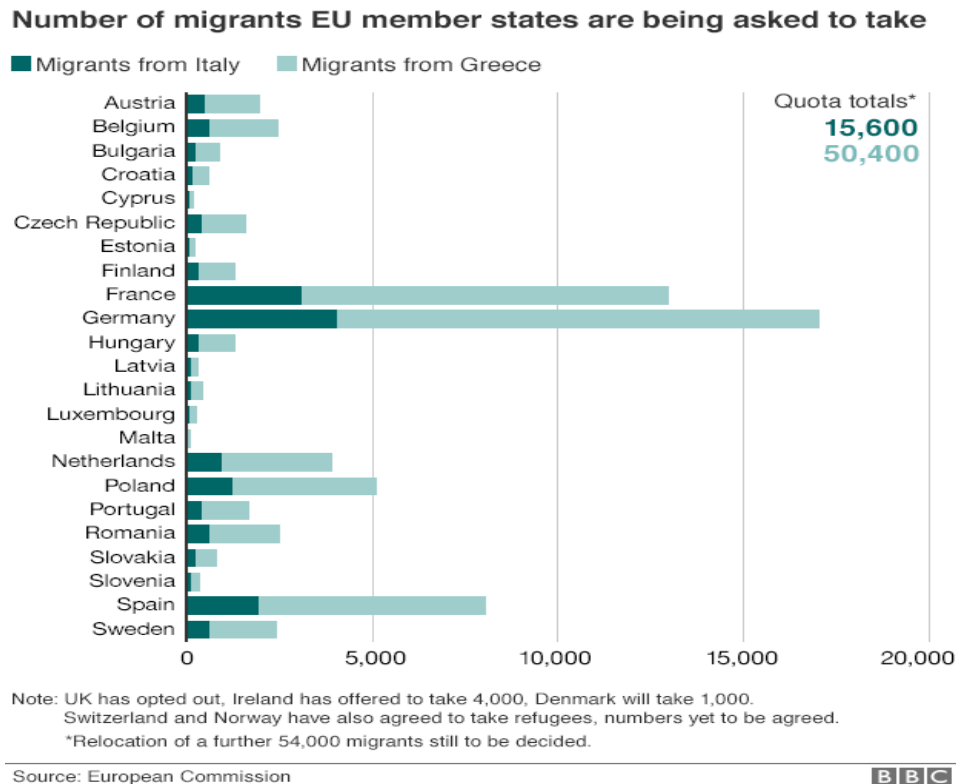


Figure 4. Number of migrants to be taken per country.<sup>138</sup>

Additionally, the migrants are creating political problems for other countries in the EU by requesting asylum. If a migrant requests asylum and is granted refugee status, he or she is entitled to healthcare, a residence permit and access to the labor market, all provided by the state within which they apply for asylum.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Source: “Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts,” *BBC*, March 4, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911> .

<sup>139</sup> European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs, “Country Responsible for Asylum Application (Dublin).”

## **F. THE EU'S RESPONSE TO THE MIGRANT CRISIS AND FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTER FLOW**

The migrant crisis has serious security implications for the EU as seen with the number of terrorist attacks from 2014 to 2016 that could be connected with the foreign terrorist fighter flow. The EU has received heavy criticism for how slowly and maladroitly it has handled the migrant crisis. With the arrival of nearly one million migrants in 2015, the EU has been under immense political pressure to find an adequate solution.

The EU's first attempt to alleviate pressure from Greece and Italy came in September 2015. The EU's plan was to share the burden of hosting the migrants by all the EU. The EU proposed to redistribute 160,000 migrants from Italy and Greece among other EU member states over a two-year period. (For the exact numbers per country, please refer to Figure 4 above). However, as of March 2016, only 660 total refugees had been relocated from Greece and Italy.<sup>140</sup> As of July 2016, only 3,300 migrants had been relocated from these two countries.<sup>141</sup>

Also in March 2016, the EU made an agreement with the government of Turkey that stipulated that irregular migrants and asylum seekers that have arrived from Turkey may be returned to Turkey, and in return, the EU will accept a migrant who has not chosen the irregular migration route.<sup>142</sup> Also, the EU has promised Turkey a 3 billion Euro facility in which to house the migrants.

Again in March 2016, the EU announced that the Western Balkan route, the most popular irregular migration route, and possibly the route chosen by FTFs, was closed because of the border fence built by Hungary on its border with Serbia in September 2015.<sup>143</sup> This border closure did slow the rate at which migrants entered the EU. But it also just altered their path, with the new route through Croatia.

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<sup>140</sup> Jon Henley, "EU Refugee Relocation Scheme Is Inadequate and Will Continue to Fail," *The Guardian*, March 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/04/eu-refugee-relocation-schemeinadequate-will-continue-to-fail>.

<sup>141</sup> "The EU and the refugee crisis," The European Commission, July 2016, <http://publications.europa.eu/webpub/com/factsheets/refugee-crisis/en/>

<sup>142</sup> The European Commission, "The EU and the refugee crisis."

<sup>143</sup> Frontex, "Western Balkan Route."



To alleviate some of the political pressure placed on the EU, the EU has been attempting to reform and standardize its asylum request process. The EU was under pressure to implement these changes because so many asylum requests were being filed for in Greece. The original system, established in 1999, stipulated that asylum requests were processed in the country in which they applied.<sup>144</sup> Clearly this was a troublesome task for a country like Greece because it simply could not keep pace with the tens of thousands of applications it received.

Perhaps the most important mitigation mechanism put in place by the EU was the establishment of the EU's border control and coast guard agency within Frontex in 2016.<sup>145</sup> Before the EU had established this agency within Frontex, Frontex itself struggled to help the authorities in individual countries to manage the migration flows by establishing reception centres around Europe.<sup>146</sup> This new agency was to be the action arm of the institution. It remains to be seen how effective this new agency will be at stopping irregular migration and possibly the flow of FTFs.

## **G. WAY AHEAD FOR THE EU**

The Eastern Mediterranean route used by migrants and possibly foreign terrorist fighters to enter Greece and the rest of Europe has serious security implications for the EU. The migration crisis in Europe has been more troublesome and more extensive than most people expected or imagined. Europe was subjected to several serious terrorist attacks from 2014 to 2016 that could have been carried out by FTFs using the Eastern Mediterranean route to travel from Europe through Turkey into Iraq or Syria, and then back into Europe in the opposite direction. IS and its influence on the migrants, real or imagined, have been a top security concern for the EU. The EU has made several attempts to alleviate the pressure and burden placed on certain EU member states in this continuing migrant crisis. But

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<sup>144</sup> Willa Frej, "What You Need To Know About Europe's Asylum Process Aside from the fact that it's pretty confusing," *The World Post, The Huffington Post*, January 4, 2017. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/europe-asylum-refugees\\_us\\_55e85a01e4b0b7a9633befe8](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/europe-asylum-refugees_us_55e85a01e4b0b7a9633befe8)

<sup>145</sup> "Mission & Tasks," Frontex, accessed March 26, 2017. <http://FRONTEX.europa.eu/about-FRONTEX/origin/>

<sup>146</sup> Frontex, "Mission & Tasks."

these mitigations have been slow and insufficient. The EU has fallen very short of its goal when it comes to its migrant distribution plan. The EU is still attempting to revise its asylum requests protocols and procedures to alleviate the pressure felt by Greece, Italy and Hungary. The EU has established the border control and coast guard agency within Frontex but tangible results in stemming the migrant flow as a result of this agency remain to be seen. The migrant flow in the Eastern Mediterranean has been slowing since the summer of 2016, but the damage has already been done and the EU is continuing to deal with ramifications of the migrant crisis.

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## V. NATO, THE GREEK MIGRANT CRISIS AND FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

One of the most pressing threats to NATO resides in the migration crisis burdening Greece. The Greek Government's inability, along with NATO's and the EU's inability, to stop the flow of migrants transiting from Africa and the greater Middle East to other European countries could lead to an existential threat to NATO and Europe. Undocumented migrants pose potential security risks because foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) can mask their movement to and from conflict areas by utilizing the irregular migrant crossings highlighted in the Greek migrant crisis. Since the June 2014 establishment of the "caliphate", there have been 51 terrorist attacks in North America and Europe.<sup>147</sup> In that same period, 29 of those 51 terrorist attacks carried out in North America and in Europe have been directly linked to the Islamic State (IS).<sup>148</sup> Terrorism and its link to the migrant crisis through foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants constitute a significant threat to the Alliance.

This research requires explanation from two broad areas of research. One area of research is terrorism, including foreign terrorist fighters, and the other is migration, specifically the Greek migration crisis. These two areas of research intersect in the specific study of foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants in Greece. An examination of the Greek migrant crisis and the terrorist threat to Europe and an exploration of the possibility that FTFs are posing as migrants are required.

Not all migrants are terrorists. In fact, all most all migrants have zero affiliation with and are openly opposed to the terrorists who may hiding in their ranks. Most migrants are fleeing war torn countries in the Middle East and have arrived in Europe seeking safety and economic opportunity. However, there is some correlation between the Greek migrant

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<sup>147</sup> *Allies Under Attack, The Terrorist Threat to Europe: Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee On Terrorism, Nonproliferation, And Trade And The Subcommittee On Europe, Eurasia, And Emerging Threats Of The Committee On Foreign Affairs House Of Representatives*, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1 (2017) (statement of Mr. Seamus Hughes, Deputy Director Program on Extremism George Washington University), <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-115hrg26045/pdf/CHRG-115hrg26045.pdf>.

<sup>148</sup> Lister et al., "ISIS Goes Global"; Foster, "Terror Attacks Timeline."

crisis and terrorism, even though it may be small. One expert claims that of the “51 attacks in Europe and North America...Only 5 percent of those who carried out the attacks were refugees or asylum seekers.”<sup>149</sup> Approximately twenty percent of terrorist attacks involve foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>150</sup> While these numbers are small, they are still significant, especially the FTF statistic.

One expert suggests that over 5,000 “Western” foreign terrorist fighters have traveled from Europe to Iraq or Syria since 2011.<sup>151</sup> Several estimates put the total number of FTFs at 20,000, making the wars in Iraq and Syria some of the largest receivers of FTFs in history.<sup>152</sup> The fact that FTFs could be posing as migrants travelling to Europe through the irregular border crossings employed in the Greek migrant crisis poses a “serious and significant” threat to NATO and Europe.<sup>153</sup>

There is a high probability that IS foreign terrorist fighters have entered Europe, through Greece, disguised as migrants. After the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, two Syrian passports were found near the bodies of the terrorists, leading to the “speculation that terrorists were infiltrating the refugee flows to the EU.”<sup>154</sup> This judgment was later supported in a more definitive statement by the 2017 EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) which stated that “the irregular migrant flow was exploited in order to dispatch terrorist operatives clandestinely to Europe.”<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, the 2017 TE-SAT acknowledged that this trend is continuing and reported:

The influx of refugees and migrants to Europe from existing and new conflict zones is expected to continue. IS has already exploited the flow of

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<sup>149</sup> *Allies Under Attack, The Terrorist Threat to Europe: Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee On Terrorism, Nonproliferation, And Trade And The Subcommittee On Europe, Eurasia, And Emerging Threats Of The Committee On Foreign Affairs House Of Representatives*, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1 (2017) (statement of Mr. Seamus Hughes, Deputy Director Program on Extremism George Washington University), <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-115hrg26045/pdf/CHRG-115hrg26045.pdf>.

<sup>150</sup> House, *Allies Under Attack, The Terrorist Threat to Europe*.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> John Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing.” 52.

<sup>153</sup> Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing.” 51.

<sup>154</sup> Funk and Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, 1.

<sup>155</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*.

refugees and migrants to send individuals to Europe to commit acts of terrorism, which became evident in the 2015 Paris attacks. IS and possibly other jihadist terrorist organisations may continue to do so.<sup>156</sup>

This report by European experts confirms the possibility that foreign terrorist fighters are posing as migrants travelling from IS-controlled territory in the Middle East into Europe via Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean route. FTFs posing as migrants that could carry out terrorist attacks are a real and direct threat to Europe and NATO. Stunting the flow of irregular migrants, which could be used by IS to “clandestinely” smuggle FTFs and operatives, should be a top security concern for NATO.

According to the NATO website, “terrorism poses a direct threat to the security of the citizens of NATO countries, and to international stability and prosperity.”<sup>157</sup> In contrast with the “indirect” threat of Russia asserting its dominance in Eastern Europe, the threat of terrorism is felt all over Europe. The NATO Allies agree that the terrorist threat stemming from the migrant population is a serious security challenge facing Europe. According to the Warsaw Summit Communiqué,

Terrorism, particularly as perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/Da’esh, has risen to an unprecedented level of intensity, reaches into all of Allied territory, and now represents an immediate and direct threat to our nations and the international community. Instability in the Middle East and North Africa also contributes to the refugee and migrant crisis.<sup>158</sup>

Since NATO’s inception there has only been one instance in which Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty has been invoked. It was in response to the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. After the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, France seriously debated invoking Article 5 in order to have an Allied effort to fight IS.<sup>159</sup> The French considered the need to possibly invoke this Article because they

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<sup>156</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*.

<sup>157</sup> “Countering Terrorism,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated December 19, 2017. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_77646.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_77646.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>158</sup> “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” NATO, , last updated March 29, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

<sup>159</sup> Krishnadev Calamur, “Will NATO Respond to the Attacks on Paris?”

regarded this act of terrorism as a serious and grave threat to their national security that would only continue as more FTFs came into Europe through Greece disguised as migrants. Terrorism has proved to be a considerable threat to NATO. Terrorism via FTFs hiding among the migrant population continues to challenge NATO on its southern flank as the migrant crisis in Greece continues.

Yet some experts claim that NATO is not the best organization to respond to the FTF threat because most European governments do not want to see the “international militarization” of what they consider a domestic problem that could be handled with local law enforcement.<sup>160</sup> Most European governments agree that the EU and its border control agency FRONTEX are best suited to respond to the Greek migrant crisis. However, NATO could have a role in counterterrorism efforts and responding to the Greek migrant crisis.

#### **A. THE GREEK MIGRANT CRISIS BY THE NUMBERS**

The number of migrants entering Europe through Greece from 2014 to 2016 reached record breaking numbers.<sup>161</sup> In 2015, a new record was set for migrants entering Europe as almost one million migrants came to the region in that year alone.<sup>162</sup> Frontex records that “in 2015, some 885,000 migrants arrived in the EU via the Eastern Mediterranean route—17 times the number in in 2014, which was itself a record year.” In comparison to Greece, Italy only received approximately 150,000 migrants via the Central Mediterranean route in 2015.<sup>163</sup>

This migrant crisis has caused problems not only in Greece but throughout the rest of Europe. Greece is just the staging point for most of the migrants. Most migrants transiting out of Greece choose one of three main routes to leave Greece. The most popular option is the Western Balkan route. The Western Balkan route saw close to 800,000 illegal

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<sup>160</sup> Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing,” 52.

<sup>161</sup> Frontex, “Eastern Mediterranean Route.”

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, International Organization for Migration. “Global Migration Trends Factsheet,” 2015. <http://gmdac.iom.int/global-migration-trends-factsheet>.

border crossings, mostly by Syrians, in 2015.<sup>164</sup> With an estimated 1 million migrants and refugees transiting to other European countries via the Western Balkan route, there have been ample opportunities for migrants and refugees to “disappear” and escape authorities because of the lack of border security and accountability along this route.<sup>165</sup> With the exponential increase in numbers of migrants, there is a significant risk that the number of foreign terrorist fighters transiting through Greece into Europe or into the Middle East is also increasing.

Germany alone has willingly received over 800,000 refugees and migrants, but the German government has admitted that it cannot positively identify all of the refugees and migrants living within the country.<sup>166</sup> In fact some “70,000 people still remain undocumented.”<sup>167</sup> There is a possibility that FTFs could be hiding among the 70,000 undocumented migrants and refugees in Germany alone. The same could be said of other European countries that have accepted migrants and refugees. With this lack of accountability, there is a serious security risk presented to NATO and Europe.

Europe is making progress in meeting this challenge. The flow of migrants via the Eastern Mediterranean route has slowed significantly because of the EU’s March 2016 partnership agreement with Turkey that allows for certain migrants and refugees to be directly relocated from Greece to Turkey. The central pillar of this agreement was to “address the overwhelming flow of smuggled migrants and asylum seekers traveling across the Aegean from Turkey to the Greek islands by allowing Greece to return to Turkey ‘all new irregular migrants.’”<sup>168</sup> According to IOM, in 2017 there have been only 12,000

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<sup>164</sup> “Western Balkan Route,” Frontex, accessed March 26, 2017. <https://Frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-balkan-route/>

<sup>165</sup> Frontex, “Western Balkan Route.”

<sup>166</sup> Rick Noack, “Germany Said it Took in More than 1 Million Refugees Last Year. But it Didn’t,” *The Washington Post*. September 30, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/09/30/germany-said-it-took-in-more-than-1-million-refugees-last-year-but-it-didnt/?utm\\_term=.12a0d2eb5cbb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/09/30/germany-said-it-took-in-more-than-1-million-refugees-last-year-but-it-didnt/?utm_term=.12a0d2eb5cbb)

<sup>167</sup> Noack, “Germany Said it Took in More than 1 Million Refugees Last Year. But it Didn’t.”

<sup>168</sup> Elizabeth Collett, “The Paradox of the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal,” *Migration Policy Institute*. March 2016. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/paradox-eu-turkey-refugee-deal>



arrivals by sea from Turkey to Greece as of August.<sup>169</sup> This number could increase by the end of 2017 as most migrant crossings happen in late summer and early fall. However, it seems that this agreement could have just shifted the migration route to the central Mediterranean as Italy has received nearly 100,000 migrants by sea already in 2017.<sup>170</sup>

## **B. THE FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTER THREAT TO NATO**

Foreign terrorist fighters are referred to as “nonindigenous individuals who choose to engage in insurgent military operations in foreign conflict zones without the promise of financial remuneration.”<sup>171</sup> Often these fighters are motivated only by their religious affiliation. Regardless of their religious or political incentives, these foreign terrorist fighters choose to leave their home country and travel to a conflict zone to join the fight. While in the conflict zone these FTFs could become highly skilled operators, gain valuable combat experience, and become more radicalized than ever before. After their tour in the conflict zone many FTFs could choose to return to their home country highly motivated to engage in acts of terrorism. These foreign terrorist fighters pose a “tremendous security risk to their home countries” because fighters with “battlefield experience are capable of committing more lethal attacks than those without it.”<sup>172</sup>

Since taking control of certain territory within Syria and Iraq in June 2014, the Islamic State has established the “caliphate” in Iraq and Syria. This could be a motivating factor for FTFs to travel to IS-controlled territories because many FTFs are attracted to the idea of a utopian caliphate offered by IS.<sup>173</sup> One expert estimates that since June 2014, IS

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<sup>169</sup> “Mediterranean Update, Migration Flows Europe: Arrivals and Fatalities,” International Organization for Migration, August, 8, 2017. [http://migration.iom.int/docs/MMP/170808\\_Mediterranean\\_Update.pdf](http://migration.iom.int/docs/MMP/170808_Mediterranean_Update.pdf)

<sup>170</sup> International Organization for Migration, “Mediterranean Update, Migration Flows Europe: Arrivals and Fatalities.”

<sup>171</sup> Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing,” 48.

<sup>172</sup> Jayaraman, Shiva, “International Terrorism and Statelessness: Revoking the Citizenship of ISIL Foreign Fighters,” *Chicago Journal of International Law*, Article 6, vol. 17, no. 1 (2016), <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cjil/vol17/iss1/6>; John Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing: NATO and the Foreign Fighter Threat,” *Parameters* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 51.

<sup>173</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016*.

has established over 25 provinces in 11 countries.<sup>174</sup> According to the 2016 TE-SAT, “IS considers it the duty of every Muslim to join it by migrating to the territories that it controls...Foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) are equated with the companions of the prophet Muhammad that left Mecca with him on his emigration to Medina and are, on this basis, awarded a higher status than the local population.”<sup>175</sup> IS has been successful in convincing over 5,000 Europeans to travel to IS-controlled areas to join their cause.<sup>176</sup>

After the mass exodus from IS-controlled lands, the IS launched a propaganda campaign featuring videos on many social media outlets in attempts to persuade the refugees to join IS instead of fleeing to “un-Islamic lands.”<sup>177</sup> IS has done little to slow the flow of refugees out of IS-controlled lands but instead has opted to capitalize on migrants entering Europe. IS “recruiters may try to take advantage of social, economic, and personal problems that make individuals susceptible to radicalisation.”<sup>178</sup> The TE-SAT warns that IS has direct access to EU nationals prepared to carry out attacks.

After the FTFs have reached Syria or Iraq to join IS, they can return to Europe, possibly via the Eastern Mediterranean route, as trained operatives with valuable combat experience. TE-SAT claims that “the training and combat experience gained by the returning FTFs means that they will have increased capability to carry out attacks, either under direction or independently. Furthermore, some individuals undergo specific psychological conditioning...enabling them to carry out terrorist actions.”<sup>179</sup>

As seen with the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks on the Bataclan concert hall and the Stade de France, the evidence gathered by the investigations suggests that FTFs with

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<sup>174</sup> *Allies Under Attack*.

<sup>175</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016*.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

European origins have travelled to Syria and Iraq, received training from IS and returned to Europe, undetected by authorities.<sup>180</sup>

The years from 2014 to 2016 saw unprecedented numbers of refugees fleeing from the conflict areas of Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Refugees from other countries have also entered Europe using the eastern Mediterranean route, but the vast majority of the refugees and migrants come from the three aforementioned countries. Most of these refugees have been “predominately young, male and Muslim” and “do broadly fit the profile of those most susceptible to radicalization.”<sup>181</sup> After the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, Europe’s deepest fears were confirmed when French authorities linked the terrorists responsible from the attack to the migrant crisis in Greece. The terrorists were able to cross the border into Greece posing as Syrian refugees and then were able to travel to France undetected. Foreign terrorist fighters may continue to travel from IS-controlled territory into the EU via the Eastern Mediterranean route while posing as migrants. The 2017 Europol report, *Changes in Modus Operandi of IS Revisited*, highlights another concern that:

Elements of the Syrian refugee diaspora may be vulnerable to radicalisation once in Europe and may be targeted by extremist recruiters. Given that it is in the interests of IS to inflame the migration crisis to polarise the EU population and turn sections of it against those seeking asylum, some infiltration of refugee camps and other refugee/migrant groups is likely.<sup>182</sup>

### **C. THE CASE FOR A NATO-LED RESPONSE**

The possibility of FTFs posing as migrants and carrying out terrorist attacks is not the only security concern surrounding the migrant crisis, but it does pose the most deadly threat. Most Europeans and other Westerners are aware of the possibility of FTFs posing as migrants and conducting terrorist attacks on European soil. Yet, it appears that there is still more to do when it comes to stemming the flow of migrants using irregular border crossings. The migrant crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean is a not just a Greek problem; it

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<sup>180</sup> Funk and Parkes, *Refugees Versus Terrorists*, 1.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> *Changes in Modus Operandi of IS Revisited*.

is a NATO and European problem as well. The migrants are creating political and security problems for NATO allies and other European countries.

The security implications of the migrant crisis have not been well documented to date. Also not identified are specific policy recommendations on how to combat this crisis. There have been several joint declarations between the EU and NATO, NATO and the OSCE, and so on that aim to “increase cooperation and coordination” between these institutions, but some scholars see the declarations as merely hollow political statements that are “lacking any real substance.”<sup>183</sup> NATO and the EU have received heavy criticism for how—and how slowly—they have handled the migrant crisis. With the arrival of nearly one million migrants in 2015, NATO and the EU have been under immense political pressure to find an adequate solution.

#### **D. NATO AND THE MIGRANT CRISIS**

Many NATO and European security experts consider Russia the main threat in Europe. Despite the resurgence of Russia and the threat that Russia poses to NATO, others argue that the migrant crisis along Europe’s weakest flank is the biggest security concern for NATO and the EU.<sup>184</sup> The adverse situation on Europe’s southern flank “appears to be real and growing.”<sup>185</sup> Terrorism and its link to the migrant crisis through foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants may constitute the most significant threat to the Alliance and its member states.

Therefore, current NATO security policy must be aligned more toward the real and “direct” threat of terrorism that is a consequence of the migrant crisis in Greece. NATO is a political–military alliance and therefore it has the capabilities to respond to the migrant crisis and terrorism both militarily and politically. Recently, NATO has begun to contribute to the military campaign to counter IS. It has joined in the international coalition to fight

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<sup>183</sup> Marten Zwanenburg, “What’s in a Word? ‘Partnerships’ between NATO and Other International Institutions and Some Issues of Shared Responsibility,” *International Organizations Law Review*, (2016).

<sup>184</sup> Constance Baroudos, “Securing NATO’s Weakest Flank” *Naval War College Review*, Volume 69, Number 3. (Summer 2016): 164.

<sup>185</sup> Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing,” 49.

IS, and it has also taken the lead in Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean. Politically, NATO has not achieved much progress in assisting the international responses to the migrant crisis. NATO has already established consultation frameworks such as the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the Mediterranean Dialogue to engage with partners on this issue. Perhaps NATO is best suited to assist in the international responses to the migrant crisis outside European borders. Perhaps NATO could do more to assist the international coalition against IS at sea, in the air, on land, and in the cyber domain.

### **1. NATO Response to the Migrant Crisis, FTFs and Terrorism**

Within the Alliance there seems to be “confusion and division” about how to “deal comprehensively with threats washing up on its southern tier: terrorism, radical Islam, anarchy in North Africa and uncontrolled migration.”<sup>186</sup> Some criticize the Alliance for not doing enough in the South, “given the scale of the terrorist threat to Alliance members.”<sup>187</sup> Despite the divisions among its members, the Alliance has responded to the threats on its southern flank both politically and operationally.

NATO’s political posture and rhetoric used to articulate the Alliance’s stance on terrorism are well documented. NATO has taken a strong stand against terrorism since 2001 but more recently, as seen in the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, NATO has recast its stance on condemning terrorism. As noted in the communiqué, “The Alliance faces a range of security challenges and threats that originate both from the east and from the south; from state and non-state actors; from military forces and from terrorist, cyber, or hybrid attacks.”<sup>188</sup>

Besides its staunch rhetoric in the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, NATO is contributing to the fight against terrorism and efforts to address the migrant crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean in a variety of ways. This is shown mainly through “information

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<sup>186</sup> Steven Erlanger, “Shifting Attention to Mediterranean, NATO Fights Internal Dissent,” *The New York Times*. June 16, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/17/world/europe/shifting-attention-to-mediterranean-nato-fights-internal-dissent.html?mcubz=0>

<sup>187</sup> Erlanger, “Shifting Attention to Mediterranean, NATO Fights Internal Dissent.”

<sup>188</sup> “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” NATO, para. 5, last updated March 29, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

sharing,” as John Deni observed in his previously mentioned article.<sup>189</sup> In a *Jane’s Defense Weekly* report, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is quoted as saying that “our ships will be providing information to the coastguards and other national authorities of Greece and Turkey” and that “NATO is laying down direct links with FRONTEX.”<sup>190</sup> Stoltenberg has also stated that “NATO ships will not do the job of national coastguards in the Aegean. Their mission is not to stop or turn back those trying to cross into Europe and this in no way represents a militarisation of the response to the crisis.”<sup>191</sup> NATO’s Maritime commander, Vice Admiral Clive Johnstone, notes that NATO’s current mission in the region is “surveillance of Aegean migrant trafficking.” NATO ships will “monitor patterns of life, track vessels of interest and conduct boardings on suspicion of illicit activity but also for training.”<sup>192</sup>

NATO’s response to the threat on its southern flank is limited because, in order for NATO to take a more active role in the Eastern Mediterranean, according to Butch Bracknell in “NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism,” it would require a UN Security Council Resolution or the invocation of Article 51 of the UN Charter to grant NATO authority under international law to engage in the use of force.<sup>193</sup> Without any of these prerequisites being met and without Article 5 being invoked, NATO may not have a decisive role to play in the Greek migration crisis.<sup>194</sup>

However, it should be noted that NATO has developed a Readiness Action Plan aimed at responding “to the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighbourhood, the Middle East and Africa.”<sup>195</sup> NATO has also established a Joint Forces Command Center in Naples, Italy, with a specialized counter-terrorism unit under the NATO

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<sup>189</sup> Deni, “Beyond Information Sharing,” 52.

<sup>190</sup> Brooks Tigner, “NATO Agrees Details of Aegean Sea Migration Crisis Mission.”

<sup>191</sup> Jens Stoltenberg, “NATO and Europe’s Refugee and Migrant Crisis.”

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Butch Bracknell, “NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism,” *The International Lawyer* 49, no. 3 (Winter, 2016): 426.

<sup>194</sup> Bracknell, “NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism,” 426.

<sup>195</sup> “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” NATO, last updated March 29, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

Intelligence and Security Division with the goal of examining “regional threats and terrorism.”<sup>196</sup>

Additionally, NATO has formally joined the international coalition against IS even though every ally was already part of the coalition.<sup>197</sup> This move was “largely a formality” and essentially political, designed to send a strong message of official support.<sup>198</sup> NATO is contributing to coalition against ISIS primarily by employing “NATO AWACS surveillance planes to backfill national AWACS capabilities.”<sup>199</sup> NATO also had deployed a Standing Maritime Group to the region but its involvement with the refugee crisis and Operation Sea Guardian seem somewhat limited. But could NATO do more to stop the flow of migrants in the Eastern Mediterranean and possibly flush out the foreign terrorist fighters?

Currently, NATO is engaged in Operation Sea Guardian in the Eastern Mediterranean. Operation Sea Guardian is the successor of Operation Active Endeavor and is “aimed at working with Mediterranean stakeholders to deter and counter terrorism and mitigate the risk of other threats to security.”<sup>200</sup> The three main goals of Operation Sea Guardian are “maritime situational awareness, counter-terrorism, and capacity building.”<sup>201</sup> NATO’s Maritime Commander, Vice Admiral Clive Johnstone, notes that OSG is about the “surveillance of Aegean migrant trafficking.” Compared to its predecessor, Operation Sea Guardian has more robust set of rules of engagement with a focus and mandate on Counter-terrorism. Admiral Johnstone notes that OSG uses “separately resources [sic] forces so that the Standing Naval Forces can remain focused on

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<sup>196</sup> “NATO’s Continuing Adaptation,” *Strategic Comments*, vol 23, no. 6, (2017), iv-vi, DOI: 0.1080/13567888.2017.1356603

<sup>197</sup> “NATO’s Continuing Adaptation.”

<sup>198</sup> Julian Barnes, “Alliance Seen Joining Coalition Fighting ISIS,” *Wall Street Journal*. 19 May 2017.

<sup>199</sup> Bracknell, “NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism,” 426.

<sup>200</sup> “Operation Sea Guardian,” NATO Allied Maritime Command, 2017, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/fact-sheets.aspx>.

<sup>201</sup> NATO Allied Maritime Command, “Operation Sea Guardian.”

high-end training and rapid response.”<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, the “OSG task group will make several surge deployments a year into intel-driven focus areas in the Mediterranean.”<sup>203</sup> It appears that NATO has a vested interest in the Eastern Mediterranean and will continue to have a forces in the region for the foreseeable future.

## 2. What More Could NATO Do?

While NATO is actively engaged in the Eastern Mediterranean, it could do more. NATO is at a critical juncture when it comes to the Greek migrant crisis. The other regional institutions have failed to solve this problem adequately. And with the roughly 60,000 migrants that are stranded in Greece, these migrants could be more susceptible to radicalization in response to the harsh living conditions forced upon them by Greece and the rest of the EU.<sup>204</sup> These disgruntled migrants could breed the next generation of radical extremists. These radical extremists might travel from Europe to the IS-controlled conflict zone and back to Europe as FTFs because “an increasing number of returnees will likely strengthen domestic jihadist movements and consequently magnify the threat they pose to the EU.”<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, as NATO and the international coalition begin to retake IS-controlled territory, and if “IS is defeated or severely weakened in Syria/Iraq by the coalition forces, there may be an increased rate in the return of foreign fighters and their families from the region to the EU.”<sup>206</sup>

NATO could bolster its maritime efforts in the Mediterranean through OSG, but perhaps not under Article 51 of the UN Charter or Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. But it could act under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in order to conduct boarding and visits to vessels in the area.

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<sup>202</sup> Vice Admiral Clive Johnstone, NATO Maritime Commander, *Graduating Class - Ensuring Connectivity, Building Relationships and Trust*” (Hellenic National Defence College, 31 March 2017).

<sup>203</sup> Johnstone, *Graduating Class - Ensuring Connectivity, Building Relationships and Trust*.

<sup>204</sup> “European Union: Events of 2016,” Human Rights Watch, accessed August 20, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/european-union#6b7186>.

<sup>205</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*.

<sup>206</sup> *Changes in Modus Operandi of IS Revisited*.



It appears that the NATO forces assisting in OSG are not organic to the Maritime Standing Group (MSG) in the region. The MSG forces in the Mediterranean could be there to shadow and monitor Russian vessels, among other purposes. As such, the forces operating in OSG have a very high turnover rate because they are sourced separately. They are on station for roughly two to four weeks, two to four weeks does not allow an adequate amount of time to monitor vessels and establish a pattern of life.<sup>207</sup> Such a short tour of duty also creates a high amount of duplicated efforts. Instead, NATO forces assisting in OSG should be on station for longer periods of time in order to build rapport with local fisherman and merchants in order to truly identify the routes used by smugglers.

Once NATO forces have identified the smuggling routes, they should conduct regular boardings and visits to vessels along these routes in accordance with NATO Maritime Interdiction Operations doctrine. During these boardings and visits it could be wise to collect biometric data on those persons aboard the vessels. This biometric data could then be shared with other European and international security institutions thereby raising overall situational awareness on the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean.

NATO could be the institution to integrate European agencies when it comes to collecting and sharing biometric and identification data. NATO could combine assets and integrate with other institutions such as Frontex, Europol, National border and customs agencies, and local police unit could be in the unification of Identification networks used throughout Europe by different institutions. According to the European Commission website for migration and home affairs, there are four different systems in which European countries and border control agencies use to identify individuals entering the EU.<sup>208</sup> These identification networks and databases include: the Visa information system (VIS), the Schengen Information System (SIS), the Entry and Exit System (EES), and the European

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<sup>207</sup> This observation was made by monitoring the NATO's Maritime Command website for several months. The forces operating under OSG appear to be on station for approximately two weeks. For more information see "Operation Sea Guardian," NATO Allied Maritime Command, 2017, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/fact-sheets.aspx> and <https://mc.nato.int/missions/operation-sea-guardian/focused-operations-force-composition-17-6.aspx>.

<sup>208</sup> "Schengen, Borders and Visas," European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs, accessed October 09, 2017 [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas_en).

Asylum Dactyloscopy (EURODAC). With so many different databases to check at entry points to the EU, it is understandable that some people might slip through the cracks and enter Europe undetected. NATO might assist by using its political and military capabilities to unify these Identification networks and databases, perhaps under its own network named the Battle Field Information Collection and Exploitation System (BICES). NATO could prove useful.

Some experts suggest that NATO does have the authority to play a crucial role in the migrant crisis and counter-terrorism efforts associated with the crisis.<sup>209</sup> However, NATO may be able to conduct boarding in accordance with International Law on which Operation Sea Guardian is based, particularly “the resolutions taken by the North Atlantic Council on 7–9 July 2016.”<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, “general maritime law applies, as do a number of resolutions by the UNSC...”<sup>211</sup> Operation Sea Guardian and the general maritime law provided by UNCLOS allow for NATO vessels to conduct boardings and collect data both on the high sea, outside 12 nautical miles and within a coastal state’s territorial seas.

Specifically, UNCLOS stipulates that if vessels are outside a nation’s territorial waters, 12 nautical miles in most cases, but 6 nautical miles around many islands in Greece, a NATO warship may board the vessel “without the flag state’s or master’s consent if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the ship is engaged in one of these unauthorized activities.”<sup>212</sup> Under these auspices, NATO may be able to conduct boarding and gather valuable information on the migrants and refugees before they reach European shores. NATO, under Operation Sea Guardian could be Europe’s first line of defense when it comes not only to identifying FTFs and preventing them from entering Europe illegally but also in identify and process migrants and refugees before they reach the shores thereby alleviating some of the pressure on the border control agencies on land.

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<sup>209</sup> Bracknell, “NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism,” 426.

<sup>210</sup> “Bundeswher Taking Part in Sea Guardian Mission,” Federal Government of Germany, September 29, 2016. [https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2016/09\\_en/2016-09-14-sea-guardian-nato\\_en.html](https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2016/09_en/2016-09-14-sea-guardian-nato_en.html) Accessed October 10, 2017.

<sup>211</sup> Federal Government of Germany, “Bundeswher Taking Part in Sea Guardian Mission.”

<sup>212</sup> Terry D. Gill and Dieter Fleck, *The Handbook of the International Law of Military Operation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 388.

This NATO led biometric database could be expanded on land, perhaps in Turkey. If NATO were to establish a migrant and refugee processing center in Turkey, it could share the biometric data with its maritime forces as well as with other international security institutions, in order to possibly identify FTFs.

Politically, NATO could assist the EU and its member states by ensuring Turkey continues patrolling its coasts in order to stem the flow of migrants.<sup>213</sup> NATO could also establish bilateral information sharing agreements with other organizations, including the EU and Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe. Additionally, NATO could engage partners through the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) to increase military cooperation and assistance as part of its counter-terrorism efforts with the partner nations that are susceptible to IS.<sup>214</sup>

NATO certainly is doing its part to counter the terrorist threat and to respond to the migrant crisis. NATO's participation and success on its southern flank could prove NATO's strategic relevance for conducting non-Article 5 operations. As the migration crisis continues to evolve and adapt by moving to the Central Mediterranean route, NATO should continue to evolve and adapt its responses.

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<sup>213</sup> Angelos Chrysogelos, "NATO's New Migrant Mission in the Aegean is a Victory for Turkey and Proof of Europe's Strategic Irrelevance," *London School of Economics* (blog), February 24, 2016. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2016/02/24/natos-new-migrant-mission-in-the-aegean-is-a-victory-for-turkey-and-proof-of-europes-strategic-irrelevance/>.

<sup>214</sup> Isaac Kfir, "NATO's Paradigm Shift: Searching for a Traditional Security–Human Security Nexus," *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol 36, no. 2, (2015) 219–243, DOI:10.1080/13523260.2015.1061766.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The migrant crisis burdening Greece, the EU, and NATO, has several serious security implications. These implications are pervasive, affecting every facet of life in Europe. From the hotels and resorts turned into reception facilities on the small islands of Greece, to the victims of the Paris attacks in November 2015, and to the crews of the NATO ships on patrol under Operation Sea Guardian, all of Europe is intimately affected by this crisis. Given the responses to date by the Greek government, NATO and the EU, it is evident that if the current policies remain unrevised, the situation will continue to be grave and could become more problematic.

The case has been made that there is a high probability that IS foreign terrorist fighters have entered Europe, through Greece, disguised as migrants. Furthermore, it is likely that the Islamic State could have motives for systematically sending trained operatives from IS-controlled territory into Europe by means of IS-affiliated human smuggling and trafficking networks, in order to plan and carry out future attacks. Given the extremely porous borders on Europe's southern flank, coupled with the crippling internal machinations of the Greek government, the Islamic State could still have opportunities to send its remaining operatives and FTFs to Europe disguised as migrants before the group is degraded and pushed further underground.

The exact routes and methods by which IS sends trained operatives and foreign fighters to Europe have yet to be thoroughly explored and charted. In those routes and methods may be found the nexus where terrorism, migration, and illegal smuggling overlap. Trained IS operatives and foreign fighter returnees could continue to utilize the illegal migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks generated from the European migrant crisis to ensure their undetected movement into Europe with the aim of carrying out future attacks.

Greece is where the nexus of the migrant crisis, terrorism, and human smuggling has surfaced. Greece is at the forefront of this remarkable security challenge combining international terrorism, human trafficking, and illegal migration. Unfortunately, it appears

that Greece is not well suited to cope with a challenge of this magnitude and scope. The inadequate Greek migration policy responses and the hostile social attitudes towards the migrants have propelled many migrants to opt for an expedited exit from Greece, mainly with the help of illegal smugglers, which only pushed the problem to other European nations.

Because of the fragile situation in the Greece, there are numerous strategic and financial benefits for the Islamic State created from migrant crisis, especially as the group continues to lose territory in Iraq and Syria. As a last ditch effort to expand the reach of its ideology and garner future supporters, given the fact that Greek borders remain porous, the IS could have the impetus to send its European born FTFs back to Europe before the group is degraded. In addition to the permeable borders, the IS may have exploited the Greek government's inadequate responses and the overwhelming public resentment in Greece towards the migrants. The IS could therefore be actively trying to recruit operatives and supporters from among the migrants stranded in Greece as they could have the strongest grievances and motivation to join the IS because of their current situation.

In order to alleviate pressure inside Greece and prevent FTFs from conducting more attacks within Europe, Greece and its NATO Allies and EU partners should focus on two areas. The first is exposing the routes and methods by which migrants enter Greece at illegal border crossings, including with the assistance of illegal smugglers that could be affiliated with the Islamic State. If these locations, routes, and methods were exposed, Greek authorities could reduce the number of illegal migrants entering the country, or at the very least gain an opportunity to properly document them. Furthermore, if the routes and methods are exposed, the networks of human traffickers and smugglers will be uncovered. If any connections between the human trafficking networks and the Islamic State were discovered, the possibility of FTFs entering Greece and the rest of Europe could be reduced or detected.

The second area of emphasis should be on the Greek government's and the Greek society's responses that have led many migrants to choose these illegal smuggling networks to leave the country. The Greek government's inability to reduce the flow of illegal migrants has created a social backlash against the migrant population. Coupled with

the animosity of Greek society, the sparse and inadequate aid and policy responses by the Greek Government have propelled many migrants to make their way out of Greece illegally, thereby exacerbating the problem for the rest of Europe.

As for the 60,000 migrants still reportedly stranded in Greece, because of the dire circumstances and harsh treatment the migrants have experienced, these populations could become breeding grounds for the next wave of European Islamist terrorism. The migrants and their families will not forget the difficult and troubling times they have experienced in Greece, especially because they expected better treatment escaping the hardships and toils of the worn-torn countries from which they fled. However, many migrants have been mistreated and kept in limbo or a transient status, giving them no rights or hope for a decent future. If the mistreatment continues, the grievances and motivation for radicalization may be present in the current generation and in future generations. The cycle of terrorism may be propelled forward indirectly in this situation as IS “recruiters may try to take advantage of social, economic, and personal problems that make individuals susceptible to radicalisation.”<sup>215</sup>

Many migrants choose to emigrate to the EU because of its economic and political stability and the high standard of living, but most choose to come to the EU for its liberal, democratic ideals promising a safe life, religious freedom, and equal opportunity.<sup>216</sup> Despite the EU’s many efforts to help alleviate the pressures from the migrant crisis, the crisis continues, albeit at a slower rate (which could be due to internal and external factors such the Islamic losing ground and influence as well as the EU’s migrant agreement with Turkey and the rise of right wing political parties promoting animosity towards the migrants). Despite its failures, the European Union may be the international institution best suited to deal with the migration crisis.

In attempts to stifle the migrant crisis before greater numbers reached European soil the EU in March 2016 established an agreement with the government of Turkey,

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<sup>215</sup> *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016*.

<sup>216</sup> *The European Union: What it is and What it Does* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018), 34.

stipulating that irregular migrants and asylum seekers who have arrived from Turkey may be returned to Turkey, and in return, the EU will accept migrants who have not chosen the irregular migration route.<sup>217</sup> The central pillar of this agreement was to “address the overwhelming flow of smuggled migrants and asylum seekers traveling across the Aegean from Turkey to the Greek islands by allowing Greece to return to Turkey ‘all new irregular migrants.’”<sup>218</sup> While this idea sounded promising from a Greek and EU point of view, the practical execution has been poor. The flow of migrants via the Eastern Mediterranean route has slowed significantly since the conclusion of the deal, but as of March 2017, only 3,500 migrants have been relocated under this agreement.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, this agreement has constantly been held hostage by Turkey’s President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in his attempt to gain political power over the EU with his threats of flooding Europe with migrants unless his demands are met.<sup>220</sup>

The closure of the Western Balkan route in the spring of 2016 was another attempt to relieve Europe of future waves of migrants. This border closure at Idomeni to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), coupled with the agreement in Turkey, has been in large part the reason why so many migrants are still stranded in Greece. The border closure did not necessarily slow the flow of migrants into Europe; it simply altered their path. Additionally, the border closure at Hungary, and the wall that was built along Hungarian borders symbolically represented the animosity and resentment of the right wing European leaders towards the migrant population. Despite the EU’s best efforts to win support from the European populace for humanitarian measures concerning the migrant

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<sup>217</sup> “The EU and the refugee crisis,” The European Commission, July 2016. <http://publications.europa.eu/webpub/com/factsheets/refugee-crisis/en/>

<sup>218</sup> Elizabeth Collett, “The Paradox of the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal,” *Migration Policy Institute*, March 2016. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/paradox-eu-turkey-refugee-deal>.

<sup>219</sup> Nick Squires, “A Year On From EU-Turkey Deal, Refugees and Migrants in Limbo Commit Suicide and Suffer From Trauma,” *The Telegraph*, March 14, 2017. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/14/year-eu-turkey-deal-refugees-migrants-limbo-commit-suicide-suffer/>.

<sup>220</sup> Safak Timur and Rod Nordland, “Erdogan Threatens to Let Migrant Flood Into Europe Resume,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/25/world/europe/turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan-migrants-european-union.html>.

crisis, the EU has implemented some policies that contradict its liberal and democratic values.

In an effort to modernize its antiquated asylum process under the Dublin Agreement, the EU has been attempting to reform and standardize its asylum request process. The original system, established in 1999, stipulated that asylum requests were to be processed in the country in which they arrived.<sup>221</sup> Clearly, this was a troublesome task for a relatively small country like Greece because it simply could not keep pace with the tens of thousands of applications it received. While the efforts to establish reforms of the EU asylum process have been valiant, the reforms have been inadequate and untimely, ultimately having little impact to assist the migrants still waiting for their asylum claim to be processed.

Perhaps the most important mitigation mechanism put in place by the EU was the establishment of the EU's border control and coast guard agency within Frontex in 2016.<sup>222</sup> Before the EU had established this agency within Frontex, Frontex itself had struggled to help the authorities in individual countries to manage the migration flows by establishing reception centres around Europe.<sup>223</sup> This new agency was designed to be the action arm of the institution. It remains to be seen how effective this new agency will be at stopping irregular migration and possibly the flow of FTFs in the future.

The EU is still far from having defined a streamlined process to identify and register migrants entering the EU. According to the European Commission website for migration and home affairs, there are four different systems that European Union countries and border control agencies use to identify individuals entering the EU.<sup>224</sup> These identification networks and databases include: the Visa information system (VIS), the Schengen Information System (SIS), the Entry and Exit System (EES), and the European Asylum Dactyloscopy (EURODAC). With so many different databases to check at entry points to

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<sup>221</sup> Willa Frej, "What You Need To Know About Europe's Asylum Process Aside From The Fact That It's Pretty Confusing."

<sup>222</sup> Frontex, "Origin."

<sup>223</sup> Frontex, "Origin."

<sup>224</sup> European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs, "Schengen, Borders and Visas."



the EU, it is understandable that some people might slip through the cracks and enter the European Union undetected.

The EU with its many action arms and agencies, coupled with the capabilities of national and local governments, has the ability and resources to lead a coordinated effort to stem the flow of illegal migrants entering Europe. However, because of the many different entities involved, a coordinated and streamlined approach seems unlikely. If the EU were to choose one area to focus on in a coordinated effort at all levels of government, it should be identifying and exposing the routes and methods that illegal smuggling networks use to ferry migrants into and through Europe undetected. This coordinated effort should be led by Frontex in coordination with Europol and national government police and intelligence agencies. If these agencies launched a coordinated effort against the illegal smuggling networks into and within Europe, perhaps they could identify and implement measures to reduce the number of illegal border crossings while highlighting suspected FTF facilitators who could give valuable information to expose future FTFs before they enter Europe.

Finally, NATO with Article 5 and collective self-defense at its core is taking part in managing the migrant crisis and in the fight against terrorism, but perhaps it could play a larger role. Terrorism and its link to the migrant crisis through foreign terrorist fighters posing as migrants constitute a significant threat to the Alliance. Currently, many argue that terrorism is not the most pressing threat to the Alliance. Many believe that NATO should primarily focus on countering Russian aggression. While Russia remains a noteworthy concern, terrorism and its links to the migrant crisis constitute the most immediate current threat. In fact, the only time the Allies have invoked Article 5 has been in response to the attacks on 9/11. Additionally, immediately after the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, France seriously debated invoking Article 5 in order to organize an Allied effort to fight the IS.<sup>225</sup> The French considered invoking Article 5 because they regarded the attacks on Paris as a serious and grave threat to their national security that would only continue as more FTFs came to Europe.

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<sup>225</sup> Krishnadev Calamur, "Will NATO Respond to the Attacks on Paris?"

Despite NATO's Article 5 history, some experts claim that NATO is not the best organization to respond to the FTF threat because most European governments do not want to see the "international militarization" of what they consider a domestic problem that could be handled with local law enforcement.<sup>226</sup> While the migrant crisis may not require a militarized response, the campaigns against terrorism and certain types of organized crime do need a militarized response. NATO is well suited for these responses. NATO is currently contributing to the military campaign to counter the IS and has officially joined the coalition. This move was "largely a formality" and essentially political, designed to send a strong message of official support.<sup>227</sup> NATO is contributing to the coalition operations against the Islamic State primarily by employing "NATO AWACS surveillance planes to backfill national AWACS capabilities."<sup>228</sup>

Furthermore, NATO has also taken the lead in Operation Sea Guardian (OSG) in the Mediterranean. The three main goals of Operation Sea Guardian are "maritime situational awareness, counter-terrorism, and capacity building."<sup>229</sup> However, it appears that the NATO forces participating in OSG are not given the opportunity to conduct effective operations against illegal smugglers or would-be terrorists. Instead, the OSG forces in the Mediterranean seem to be there to shadow and monitor Russian vessels, among other purposes. The forces operating in OSG have a high turnover rate because they are sourced from separate nations, and those nations are reluctant to assign their forces for sustained periods. As a result, the ad hoc forces are on station for roughly two to four weeks.<sup>230</sup> Two to four weeks do not offer an adequate amount of time to monitor vessels and establish a pattern of effective surveillance. Such a short tour of duty also creates a high amount of duplicated efforts. Instead, NATO forces assisting in OSG should be on

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<sup>226</sup> Deni, "Beyond Information Sharing," 52.

<sup>227</sup> Barnes, "Alliance Seen Joining Coalition Fighting ISIS."

<sup>228</sup> Bracknell, "NATO Approaches in Response to ISIL and International Terrorism," 426.

<sup>229</sup> NATO Allied Maritime Command, "Operation Sea Guardian."

<sup>230</sup> "Focused Operations: Force Composition," NATO Allied Maritime Command, 2017, <https://mc.nato.int/missions/operation-sea-guardian/focused-operations-force-composition-17-6.aspx>.

station for longer periods of time in order to build rapport with local fishermen and merchants in order to truly identify the routes used by smugglers.

If NATO were to work in conjunction with Frontex and Europol along with local authorities, who have the most extensive knowledge of the situation in their area, NATO could prove a useful asset in identifying smuggling routes and methods used by traffickers in the Mediterranean. In essence NATO could be one of the layers of defense used to illuminate smuggling routes and methods, allowing Frontex and local authorities to identify and process migrants at the source. This coordinated effort led by NATO could provide valuable information to Greece and the EU authorities to identify potential FTFs entering Europe.

The European Union is making progress in meeting the security challenges presented by the migration crisis in Greece. However, the valiant yet disjointed and uncoordinated responses by the Greek government, the EU and NATO still leave much room for improvement. While the number of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa entering Europe is on the decline, the number of FTFs trained by the IS returning to Europe may be on the rise as the Islamic State is degraded and losing territory.

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