Can France really stop them?

A study grounded on the realist perspective about the French foreign policy towards Syria as the root cause of the Phenomenon of French Foreign Fighters

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Leonis catulum ne alas*

(Don’t raise a lion cub - From *Adagia 2.3.77*)
Abstract

During the Syrian conflict the number of European Foreign Fighters has increased exponentially and has become an ever-growing concern for European policymakers. This phenomenon presents host of major security challenges for European policymakers and governments. Among European countries, France provides the highest number of citizens who have gone to Syria to fight against Assad´s regime. The French authorities have estimated that by mid-2014, over 700 French citizens have left France and travelled to Syria to fight. Historically France has had a relationship with Syria which started with its role as a border-drawing colonial power. Grounded in a framework of realism, that emphasizes nation-states as the primary actor within the international system, the analysis concentrates on the role of France´s foreign policy on the Syria as push factor for terrorism and radicalization. This paper attempts to determinate a specific correlation between the policy that France has been conducting towards Syria between 2000 and 2015, and the phenomenon of French Foreign Fighters. Findings suggest that France´s foreign policy towards Syria is the main root cause of the French Foreign Fighters phenomenon.

Key words: France, Syria, realism, terrorism, Foreign Fighters, process tracing
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Introduction

Nick Rasmussen, chief of the National Counter-terrorism Centre, said the rate of Foreign Fighters travelling to Syria has no precedent, far exceeding the rate of foreigners who went to wage jihad in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen or Somalia at any other point in the past 20 years. According to the last updates from U.S. intelligence officials, Foreign Fighters are streaming into Syria and Iraq in unprecedented numbers to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or other extremist groups, including at least 3,400 from Western nations among 20,000. Between the European member states, the United Kingdom and France have provided the highest numbers of their citizens or residents who have gone to Syria to fight, though some have now returned or died. Over 700 French citizens are participating or have participated to the conflict in Syria¹. The number of European Foreign Fighters has increased exponentially over the past months and has become an ever-growing concern for European policymakers. It is particularly the possibility that some of the Foreign Fighters, who come from 90 countries, will return undetected to their homes in Europe or the U.S. to mount terrorist attacks. At least one of the men responsible for the attack on a satirical magazine in Paris had spent time with Islamic extremists in Yemen. This phenomenon presented European policymakers, governments and legal practitioners with a host of new and major challenges. In order to deal with the complex threat (potentially) posed by departing mujahidin, and returnees to Europe’s security, new strategies and legal mechanisms must be made available to address the Foreign Fighters’ phenomenon. Like other European member states, France has adopted new national practices against terrorism. Its counter-terrorism measures have been primarily focused on criminal prosecution and as a result of that, the French government adopted a new counter-terrorism law on 21 December 2012, allowing authorities, “to prosecute French citizens who return to the country after having committed an act of terrorism abroad, or after training in terrorist camps (notably in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region) with the intention of returning to France to commit terrorist attacks”². Nevertheless, the French situation is complicated and the presence of so many French jihadists in Syria presents French authorities with an uncomfortable reality. According to the words of Leading French anti-terrorism Judge Marc Trévidic, “No one is trying to stop them going into Syria,” referring to what

he called an “authorized jihad”\(^3\). Two facts are important to understand what Trévidic means. The first is that the prosecution of French Foreign Fighters remains difficult since it is very complicated to qualify whenever their time in Syria can be classified as acts of terrorism or as merely leaving to or returning from combat in the Syrian rebellion as a legitimate soldier, which is not considered as a crime pursuant to French law. The French government can’t file charges against those French citizens that are going to fight against Assad’s bloody regime, no matter how notorious or dangerous their allies are in that effort. The second fact is that France was the first western country to recognise the Syrian National Council as the legitimate Syrian interlocutor and it continues to support the revolutionaries’ ambitions. Because France officially supports the effort to overthrow the Assad regime, it is difficult for the French government now to come out and say that it does not support those who are fighting the war.

Historically France has had a relationship with Syria which started with its role as a border-drawing colonial power, and later in managing complex relationships with dictators in Damascus. Syria proved useful in advancing French interests in Middle East politics. France is now taking lead with the Syrian opposition in order to give political and diplomatic recognition to the rebels. It’s a gamble, though, as the EU and other Western countries, most of all the US, may not recognize or take any steps to legitimize the Syrian National Council. Potentially worst, the Foreign Fighters phenomenon might become a double-edged sword risking the security not just of a fragile Middle East but of Europe as well.

List of abbreviations

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy
CTC: Counter Terrorism Coordinator
EEAS: European External Action Service
ESDP: European and Defence Policy
EU: European Union
EUROPOL: European Police Office
FF: Foreign Fighters
IS: Islamic State
JHA: Justice and Home Affairs
NCC: National Co-ordination Committee
UK: United Kingdom
US: United States of America
UN: United Nations
1 Scope of the study

This study has a number of important aims. First, it aims to provide an overview of the key debates at international, European and national levels, of the terrorism with particular regard to the definition of the terms “terrorism” and “counter-terrorism”. We do not claim that these are the only controversies taking place among terrorism debaters, simply that it seems to be the most important and pressing at the time. Defining terrorism is an ongoing debate and there is no unanimity among the experts on what kind of violence constitutes an act of terrorism. Governments, individual agencies, private agencies and academic experts have developed dozens of definitions in order to define the phenomenon. It follows that, due to the lack of definitional guidelines, perspective is a central consideration in defining terrorism. Once again, we do consider this as a key problem when formulating counter-terrorist policies, as policy makers are challenged by the problem of defining terrorism and the problem of labelling individual suspects. That said, it is our intention to highlight how in the particular case of France, the debate of the Foreign Fighters phenomenon has become a paradox in terms of labelling a particular group as terrorist and therefore defining counter-terrorism policies to face the threat that these groups on the rise. Applying the paradigm “one Person’s Terrorist is Another Person’s Freedom Fighter” to our case, we expect that Foreign Fighters travelling to Syria to overthrow the Assad regime cannot be labelled in negative terms in their struggle for what one would define as freedom.

But it’s not as simple as it sounds. This is not “merely” a case of definition and labelling. We are not only going to focus our analyses on who these supposed terrorists are and if and how they represent a threat for the security of France (and Europe), although these issues are going to bring an important framework for our study. We argue instead that this is a case grounded on a realist perspective, namely – France’s - policy concerns. In particular, this is a case of how France, a sovereign European state, is conducting its own foreign policy towards Syria, attempting to oust Bashar Al-Assad, while simultaneously trying to further its own interests, with its fellow EU members by garnering support for its Syrian policy. France has fully embraced the opposition leadership by recognizing the coalition as Syria’s de facto government in exile, a line that is not supported neither by the US nor the UK. Although the EU has expressed similar vocal support, it failed to extend full recognition to the new Syrian opposition collective. Our intent is to show how the strong interests that France has

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4 Martin, G. Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues (2013), p.41
5 Martin, G. Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues (2013), p.41
developed towards Syria, began in 1799 when Napoleon invaded the country and that since then, France is been deeply involved in Syria which has proved useful in advancing French interests in the Middle East. Additionally, we are going to show how this relationship changed after the Arab Spring. In 2008 Assad was welcomed in Paris by President Nicolas Sarkozy, hailing Syria’s return to the international community. Some years later, as violent repression of protests turned deadly in Syria, Sarkozy turned on Assad and called for his removal—a line Francois Hollande maintains.

In the specific, the escalation of the Foreign Fighters phenomenon in France is a case related to the French interests and consequently, to the policy that France has conducted and continues to conduct in Syria. Specifically, France is now struggling to deal with a phenomenon largely created by historical French policy towards the region. That said, the main scope of this study is to analyse the Foreign Fighters phenomenon in France. Our aim is to find out if this phenomenon could be explained as an internal consequence of the French politic towards Syria, which means in other words, to investigate if the exodus of French citizens to Syria can find its root causes in the specific policy and interests that France have driven and still it’s driving in the region. In other words, we will analyse if the exodus of French citizens to Syria can find its root causes in the specific French interests and policies in the region. Our intention is to highlight the specific characteristics of the French situation regarding the Foreign Fighters phenomenon, as well as the historical, sociocultural and political roots causes which might also explain the high rate of French citizens joining the rebel forces in Syria. Finally, our intent is to clarify if France is really intent on stopping this flow, and if it is, why it has had limited success on that front.

1.1 Thesis statement

According to what we previously wrote, our thesis statement is the following: France has its own interests in Syria as evidenced by its foreign policies towards the country both historically and currently. Because France is acting as a dominant state, it is attempting to further its own interests and values in the international system. While the phenomenon of the Foreign Fighters in Syria seems to be a common issue for many other countries in Europe, the France provides the highest rates of citizens travelling to Syria. This thesis makes an arguable, definite claim: that the French interests towards Syria are the causes of some main national
security issues. French foreign policy towards Syria weakens the French government’s ability to put in place effective security measures to the issue of Foreign Fighters.

1.1 Research problem

Our research questions will be the following:

- *Is the French policy towards Syria a main reason for explaining the high number of French Foreign Fighters in Syria?*

- *Can France really stop the flow of French Foreign Fighters?*

- *Is France acting like a dominant state, therefore proceeding a national, EU- distinct policy in Syria?*

1.2 Structure of the study

The first chapter of this paper illustrates our thesis statement and research questions. In chapter two we move further to the description of the method used for our analysis, highlighting why we chose a single study and the process-tracing process as a method of analysis. Chapter three provides the readers with a conceptual framework, giving definition of terrorism and counter-terrorism, illustrating the EU counter-terrorism policy, describing the phenomenon of the Foreign Fighters and the measures that the EU has addressed to the phenomenon. Chapter five gives the readers an overview about the situation in Syria from the events of the Syrian uprising (2011) to the current situation in the country. In chapter six we present the realism theory and we explain the possible connection between realism and terrorism. In chapter seven we illustrate the EU’s policy on the Syria. Chapters eight, nine and ten will give more focus to France, our case study, presenting the characteristics of the French policy on the Syria under three presidential mandates: Jacques Chirac, Nicola Sarkozy, and Francois Hollande; illustrating the developing and characteristics of the French FF phenomenon and finally, describing the French counter-terrorism policy with particular regard to the FF’s issue. In chapter eleven we proceed with our analyses. The last chapter of this paper presents our reflections and conclusions, in accordance to the results that we reached with this work.
2 Method

This work is a qualitative case study based on the process-tracing method. The case study approach is one of the many possible approaches that can be used within social research. The method of comparison is central in social research studies since it offers the opportunity to help us to understand the larger political world\textsuperscript{6}. According to Landman, there are four main reasons for comparative studies: contextual description, classification, hypothesis-testing and prediction\textsuperscript{7}.

2.1 Single country study

The comparison of countries is based on the concept that groups of countries can be seen as units and certain information about those groups can be assembled and compared. There are many different strategies of comparative research in political science, including comparing many countries, comparing few countries and single country studies. In general, the main distinction between these different comparative methods is grounded on the key trade-off between the level of abstraction and the scope of the countries that represent the subject of a study\textsuperscript{8}. It follows that, according to Landman, “the higher the level of conceptual abstraction, the more potential there is for the inclusion of a large number of countries in a study, where political science concepts ‘travel’ across different contests”\textsuperscript{9}. Successively, in single country studies and few countries studies, less abstract concepts are used since these kinds of studies are more grounded in the specific contexts under scrutiny\textsuperscript{10}. Single country studies serve many different goals. As we previously outlined, contextual description and classification are two of the main functions in the comparison method, and they can as well be applied in single country studies. Beyond those two functions, single country studies offer numerous others, including hypothesis generation, theory-informing and theory-confirming, the analysis of deviant and outlier cases, and process tracing and the elaboration of causal mechanisms\textsuperscript{11}.

\textsuperscript{6} Landman, T. “Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics” (2003), p.4
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8} Landman, T. “Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics” (2003), p.24
\textsuperscript{9} Landman, T. “Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics” (2003), p.25
\textsuperscript{10} Landman, T. “Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics” (2003), p.87
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
2.2 Case selection

This work does not analyse a random sample from the kaleidoscopic universe of possible cases related to terrorism, nor does it analyse a certain phenomenon in a group of many or few countries. Instead, this is a single country study where the specific phenomenon of the French Foreign Fighters is analysed in depth as a specific case of terrorism inspired exodus strictly related to the French foreign policy towards Syria. There are some important practical reasons why this phenomenon rather than others was chosen for analysis. The first one is a strategic reason, which means that this phenomenon is considered a serious threat for the security of Western countries and it poses several challenges in terms of security and governance\textsuperscript{12}. Second, as we previously pointed out, we consider this phenomenon not only to be a merely case of terrorism, but also to be a significant outcome of the foreign policy of France, which is facing major issues regarding this phenomenon. Although Foreign Fighters have become a common issue for many countries in the world, our choice of France was led by particular factors. Our interest was not to analyse the phenomenon within the Muslim countries group, even if, as statistics show, the great majority of these fighters are from the Arab world, i.e. the Middle East and North Africa\textsuperscript{13}.

From the fact that Muslims living in Muslims countries may feel an obligation to help Muslim communities under is no great leap of faith. Nor do we want to look at the phenomenon from a broader Western perspective and lose salient points in generalities. Instead we will focus on one country: France. As we previously wrote, single country studies are another method for carrying out comparative research and their effectiveness lies in the fact that they can be used, under particular conditions, to draw inferences about significant research questions and help advance knowledge in ways that other comparative methods cannot. Within this framework, single country studies tend to be more intensive, have a lower level of abstraction, and are less extensive and hence more focused as they examine only one country, and that allows it “to focus on the particular features of a country while at the same time relating those features to broader sets of research questions in the field of comparative politics”\textsuperscript{14}.

\textsuperscript{12}See Bakker, E., Paulussen, C. and Entenmann, E. “Dealing with European Foreign Fighters in Syria: Governance Challenges and Legal Implications” pp.3-4 ICCT Research Paper, December 2013
\textsuperscript{14}Landman, T. “Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics” (2003), p.86
That said, the choice of France is motivated by several factors: France is the European state that has the highest number of citizens travelling to Syria with the purpose to overthrowing the Assad regime\textsuperscript{15}. Furthermore, according to one recent study of jihadist messaging, France is now the number two Western target of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), second only to the United States\textsuperscript{16}. Notably, the country has experienced increase violence in recent months. These considerations eliminate many complexities that would be raised through analysis of other European countries. Stronger reasons than these, however, are needed to explain why France has been selected for intensive study and why it may consider a \textit{sui generis} case. France is the European state with the strongest connections with Syria. The specific and intense interests that France has shown in Syria for a long time are the main factors that have strictly shaped French foreign policy towards the country. As we previously argued, the foreign policy that France is following in Syria has to be seen as one of the main causal mechanisms for the specific outcomes of the Foreign Fighters phenomenon in the country. Furthermore, the condition of Muslim groups within the French society is aggravated by some specific endogenous factors (poverty, exclusion and religious extremism), which may be considered, together with the foreign policy factor, as causal mechanisms to explain the high rate of French Muslims travelling to Syria. How then, is the phenomenon of Foreign Fighters to be explained?

2.3 Process-tracing

In our view, this analysis has to be drawn on different levels due to the complexity of the issue. First of all, it is vital to define the theoretical framework that will help us in our analysis. We have previously claimed that French policy shows how France is acting as a dominant state and that its foreign policy represents traditional French aspirations to play a prominent role in the international arena in general and in the Middle East in particular. We therefore consider realism the most workable tool for highlighting these aspects of the French policy, since our purpose is to show how France’s aim to increase influence and promote French interests in the Middle East, and in Syria in the specific case, by strengthening the European Union’s global role and by advancing initiatives such as the Common European


Foreign. This case study is not outcome-oriented, which means that it does not focus on explaining variance in a possible dependent variable. With this study we want to assess the causal power of some particular factors—such as independent variables—since our interest is to explore the contingent conditions under which the independent variables leads to the outcome, namely the Foreign Fighters phenomenon in France.

We identify the process-tracing method as the most valid to achieve our goals. Process-tracing is considered an effective research method for those who are interested in theorizing about categories of cases, as well as explaining single cases. Process-tracing is a useful method for generating and analysing data on causal mechanisms, it can point out variables that were otherwise left out of the initial model and it can lead inductively to the explanation of deviant cases and consequently, to the derivation of new hypotheses. Causal mechanisms are studied “to increase confidence in assertions that one variable or event (X) exerts a causal effect on another (Y)”\(^{19}\). The determination of causal mechanisms is based on correlation; however it is important to remember that correlation *per se* is not causal\(^ {20}\). This means that in order to determine whether some correlations are causal or not, it is necessary to apply process-tracing of the sequence in the causal chain. According to George, Bennet and Roberts, each step in such causal sequence should be supported by the practice of ‘microcorrelation’ or ‘macrocorrelation.’ The first term refers to “the minute tracing of the explanatory narrative”, while the second term is used to explain complex events.\(^ {21}\) An important component to robust process tracing is creating justifiable grounds for when to start and stop the assessment. As the roots of the relationship between France and Syria can be traced back to 1799 and this relationship remains ongoing, it is important to determinate a specific period of time for the purposes of this study and to justify why we selected only that particular time period. We have decided to select the 2000-2015 period for several reasons. First, 2000 marked the date when Bashar Al-Assad came into power, with France protecting its privileged position in Syria. Second, this period enabled us to follow the development of the French foreign policy in relation to the events of the Arab uprisings in Syria. Third, this time period enabled us to trace the developing of the Foreign Fighters phenomenon in France as a serious threat for national and international security.


\(^{18}\)Ibid.

\(^{19}\)Hall, P. “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics” in Mahoney, J. and Rueschemeyer, D. (eds) *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Science* (2003), p. 43


As our main goal is to focus on the correlation between French foreign policy towards Syria and the specific outcome of the FF phenomenon, this means that our analysis will be conducted on what scholars within terrorism research call *macro-level* of analysis. This level investigates the role of governments’ policy at home and abroad, as decisive push factor for mobilisation and radicalisation of individuals, some of which might take the form of terrorism.

2.4 The limits of Process-Tracing

According to George and Bennet, the main limit of case studies is represented by the deficiency of external validity, hence the representativeness of the outcome and the possibility of alternative explanations. Researchers have identified some potential problems when conducting a study with the help of process-tracing. The first one is that “there may be more than one hypothesized causal mechanism consistent with any given set of process-tracing evidence.” This means that the researcher has to assess whether alternative explanations are complementary in the case, or whether it might be possible to exclude some explanations and thereby to draw interferences that are useful for the scope of the study. The difficulty raised in this phase of process-tracing is empathized by the fact that competing explanations could be equally consistent with the available evidence, making it hard to determinate whether one variable is causal and the others are spurious. Another problem is that competing explanations may point out different characteristics of the case, and therefore they may not be commensurate. Since process-tracing requires large amounts of information, it can be weakened when data are limited or when the researcher has not provided a careful evaluation of the sources for these data. There is another limit of process-tracing which concerns operational re-productivity. This implicates that same conclusion should be reached if other researchers conduct the same study with the same material. To strengthen operational re-productivity, researchers must describe historical events explicitly and clearly, without imposing additional meanings or structure of events.

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24 Ibid.
2.5 Operationalization

Now, let us assume then that with this work we want to explain the Foreign Fighters phenomenon in France-the outcome (Y) as flowing from the convergence of some certain conditions, independent variables, or causal chains. We decided to depict reliance on microcorrelation to explain the complexity of the phenomenon, and therefore to provide a casual explanation for it. In order to do that, we identified and worked with one independent variable: the French foreign policy towards Syria. To show how this variable is causally related to the phenomenon of French Foreign Fighters, we employ microcorrelation. We use the process-tracing procedure to identify a sequence of events to depict how this independent variable set into motion a complex causal chain. There are eight different forms of process-tracing, and the one that we chose is convergent colligation, according to which, the outcome is explained as flowing from the convergence of several conditions, independent variables, or causal chains. The choice of our independent variable can be explained by different reasons. The French foreign policy towards Syria (X) is used to show from a realist point of view how France is deeply involved in the external and internal happenings of Syria, and that has consequently put France in a confrontational position vis-à-vis with the adversary, which may have offered a hospitable climate for French fighters travelling to Syria, while at the same time making France a more sensitive target for terrorist attacks. Furthermore, the French decision to recognise the Syrian National Council as the legitimate Syrian interlocutor and to officially support the effort to overthrow the Assad regime, has legitimated the French fighters actions. Since our analysis is conducted at the macro-level, which includes, according to Schmid, the role played by governments’ foreign policy in individuals’ radicalization’s process, we identify five workable sub-categories within this macro-level that we use in order to highlight the correlation between the French foreign policy towards Syria and the phenomenon of FF. These sub-categories are: the French support for Assad’s regime vs democracy, the French double-standard foreign policy towards Syria, the incoherence of the French foreign policy towards Syria, the lack of international support for this policy, and finally the French legitimization of terrorist groups.

26Roberts, C. “The Logic of Historical Explanation” (1996), pp. 87-88
2.6 Collection of data

Official documents regarding the subject analysed in this paper are at large available. A part of the data comes from databases recognized at international level such as the European Union official website, the CIA official website and national governments websites. Different reports that illustrate the phenomenon of the Foreign Fighters are also been used. In this case, we consulted the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism website. We also decided to use the Soufan Group’s report about Foreign Fighters in Syria. This group provides strategic security intelligence services to governments and multinational organizations, verifying the validity of this source. Trusted newspaper articles from The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal have also been used, as well trusted online information from France24, CBS News, and BBC News. Due to the constant evolution of the international framework, we preferred to use recent works regarding the issue of Foreign Fighters. Relevant literature about terrorism and counter-terrorism has been used, so has literature about realism. This literature has been previously used during our studies in Political Science, which guarantees its validity.

2.7 Validity

Validity basically indicates how well the research measures the object that he/she wants to measure or describes the phenomenon that he/she wants to describe. Case studies allow the researcher to achieve high levels of conceptual validity, or to measure the indicators that give a best representation of the theoretical concepts the researcher want to measure or describe. When conducting qualitative research validity is of greater concern than reliability unless the qualitative research entails measurement of some sort. However, since the method chosen includes selecting and presenting data within some theoretical frameworks, it is important that we justify and declare the available data. Case studies can achieve validity by using different approaches: construct validity, internal validity/credibility, external validity/transferability, confirmability and confirmability. For this study the challenge with construct validity lay in the ability to ensure that the results obtained from the use of the measure, fit the theory around which we designed our research. Construct validity is achieved in this case, by developing its constructs through a literature review, establishing a historical chain of evidence, and using

29 Yin, R.K. “Case Study in Research Design and Methods” (1989)
multiple sources of evidence. Regarding internal validity, we consider that being of minor importance in this particular case, as this study is based on an inductive approach, in order to establish the phenomenon of FF in a credible manner that is ‘causal powers’.

The external validity is more of concern as this study tests some hypotheses within a specific theoretical framework, therefore the preciseness of data concerning the French foreign policy on Syria, and data regarding the French Foreign Fighters, is a major factor for external validity. Focus is to gather empirical data within a theoretical framework in order to test hypotheses while highlighting underlining causal mechanisms from the evidences of the case of this study. External validity is defined as the process through which the results of the research can be replicated or generalized\textsuperscript{30}. Even if there is much existing research regarding the phenomenon of FF, during our research we discovered that there is a lack of research focusing in the specific case of this work. Therefore we consider that our paper and its results may contribute to new knowledge in the analysed field. Finally, we consider the reliability of this study. Reliability test implicates that similar results will be achieved if other researchers carry out the same study\textsuperscript{31}. Certainly, this process is more difficult to meet in case study research, but according to George and Bennet case researchers “can often do more to at least approximate them”\textsuperscript{32}. In order to achieve transparency, replicability and therefore validity in this study, we strongly followed the admonition of King, Keohane and Verba, according to which “the most important rule for all data collection is to report how the data were created and how we came to possess them”\textsuperscript{33}. For this reason we have provided as much details as possible about the way in which variables have been scored.

\textsuperscript{30} Yin, R.K. “Case Study in Research Design and Methods” (1989)
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
3 Conceptual frameworks

3.1 Terrorism

After 9/11, the concept of terrorism has become a major concern not only in domestic and international policy, but in the mainstream news media as well. We have witnessed a rapid growth of terrorism as a “cultural subject,” as a central theme in television shows, books, films and public debates. According to Jackson and Sinclair, two main consequences have been observed from the increasing of this phenomenon. On one side, governments have found themselves confronted with the need to implement protective policies against attacks. These anti-terrorism measures have affected and still affect millions of people’s life in different areas like “air travel, health care systems, and political decision- making (…), economic systems, internet usage, immigration (…) and great many other areas of social and political life.”\(^{34}\) On the other side, in formulating an effective counter-terrorist strategy, it remains necessary to find a common definition of terrorism. This last issue is very important for both analytical and normative reasons, since definitions find their use in application. In other words, the definition of terrorism is vital as a means of fighting the terrorist threat, as well as serving as a guideline in the understanding the motivations and the methods used by groups, and their likely targets\(^{35}\). The difficulty in providing a truly comprehensive definition to terrorism stems from three main factors- the need for specificity of motives, the variation of targets and methods from case- to-case, and the overlaps within each of these categories.

The key point here is to understand if the term "terrorism" is still a useful analytical term or if we may consider it, as Bryan writes, “a broken paradigm.”\(^{36}\). The point is that terrorism is a generic concept, which has been used to encompass a wide range of phenomena during history. Schmid warns of the risks of using a simplified and standard meaning of the term, arguing that “the broader the concept of terrorism is made, the greater the chance that different people will be talking about different things when they use the term ‘terrorism.’”\(^{37}\) Nowadays, whenever an act of political violence happens, the general tendency is to label it as an act of terror. By using the labels terrorism and terrorist, we immediately make assumptions about the act of violence and differentiate between those acts of violence labelled terrorism.

\(^{34}\) Jackson, R., and Sinclair, S.J. *Contemporary debates on Terrorism* (2012) p.1


from those acts of violence that are not given that label. In doing so, we risk not seeing the meanings, motivations and relationships of power in which the acts of violence take place.

As a result, and as Bryan points out, “the act of violence is defined as terrorist not because of an analysis of the act, but because a particular group are labelled as terrorist.”38 In these cases labelling becomes a pernicious act since it allows to repressive policies to quickly become numerous and encourages wars that have little or no relationship to the original act.39 This leads to the reality that the term terrorism can and is used, according to Bryan, as a moral valuation and that “a waste range of acts of violence are reduced to one moral category, and no matter what the justification of the violence, it gains a pejorative label.”40 Some governments are prone to label all violent acts committed by their political opponents as terrorism, while anti-government extremists frequently claim to be the victims of government terror. What is called terrorism thus seems in other words, to depend on one’s point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgment and if one party can successfully attach the label terrorist to its opponent, then it has also indirectly convinced others to adopt its moral viewpoint. Furthermore, this provides the justification for states to use laws and other “legal” mechanisms which have introduced significant restrictions of personal freedoms and that have legitimized, in the name of war on terror, imprisonment and torture. In order to give more validity to the term of terrorism, we must therefore explore more deeply the use of political violence by non-state actors, including, as Bryan suggests, the motivations of those conducting and threatening violence. This must be done within the context of power relationships predominantly provided by the State.

3.1.1 The Concept of Terrorism

If we take a look to the large range of definitions of terrorism, there are according to Bryan, five basic elements which seem to be common: violence, symbolism, and civilians as targets, a legally designated war, and non-state actors as perpetrators.41 Yet, even by using these key terms, it appears that that “terrorism” still remains a difficult workable category. Developing a

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38 Wilkinson, P. and Bryan, D. “Is terrorism still a useful analytical term or should it be abandoned?” p.20 in Jackson, R., Sinclair, S. J. (eds.) Contemporary debates on terrorism (2012)
41 Wilkinson, P. and Bryan, D. “Is terrorism still a useful analytical term or should it be abandoned?” p.21 in Jackson, R., Sinclair, S. J. (eds.) Contemporary debates on terrorism (2012)
definition by using these terms requires us to identify and solve some important dilemmas. For example, what kind of acts count as acts of terrorism? Should we then include only acts that kill or cause serious injury or should we use a broader definition, as Bryan asks himself, and include even acts of violence that relate simply to the person? In relation to this issue, Schmid seems to embrace a broader definition when he argues that terrorist violence includes the demonstrative and deliberate application of extreme force to inflict death or serious injury either indiscriminate or selective, specifying that the victims of terrorist attacks are not the armed forces, but all those “civilians, non-combatants or other innocent and defenceless persons who bear no direct responsibility for the conflict that gave rise to acts of terrorism.”

Another dilemma regards the terrorism purpose. Is terrorism restricted to the pursuit of political goals? Are non-political goals sufficient for a terrorist purpose? The idea that it is always wrong to pursue political goals by violent means is obviously false. On the other hand, it may always be wrong to do so if the violence targets civilians.

So we could maybe summarize this dilemma by saying that the fact that a person kills with a political purpose may aggravate the wrongness of his/her behaviour or it may justify attacking others depending on the quality of the purpose or the quality of the act done in service of it. In referring to the terrorist purpose in the definition of terrorism, but without specifying what that purpose is, terrorism almost inevitably includes legitimate freedom fighters. The problem raised here is how one could distinguish between good and bad purposes. This leads to another dilemma about terrorist targets. Bryan and Schmid argue that targeting civilians, non-combatants or those who are innocent is a part of the symbolic communication of terror. However this leads to further questions such as if terrorist acts should be restricted just to attacks on non-combatants, or if combatants in an armed conflict can be terrorist targets. Not surprisingly, there is no common convergence of opinions between academics, regarding this issue. Thus, as Schmid reports, “some authors stretch the concept of terrorism to include attacks on the military, while at the same time excluding certain activities by the military,” others instead “include attacks on the military outside zones of combat and outside wartime.” One of the most problematic issues in defining terrorism concerns how to distinguish terrorism from other acts of violence, for instance acts

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44 Wilkinson, P. and Bryan, D. “Is terrorism still a useful analytical term or should it be abandoned?” p.22 in Jackson, R., Sinclair, S. J. (eds.) Contemporary debates on terrorism (2012)
46 Ibid.
of violence committed during a conflict/war. One way to make this it may be to distinguish between acts that are perpetrated under the orders of a state and acts that are committed by non-state actors. But once again, we have to face the fact that legitimate freedom fighters do not always act unjustly because they lack state authority for their actions. So another way to distinguish between terrorism and “legitimate violence” is to distinguish acts that are against combatants and acts that are against non-combatants. According to this view, terrorism is committed only when non-combatants are targeted. In contrast, soldiers may be liable to be killed in the course of war. On the other hand, there have been some wrongful acts of war that many people have interpreted as acts of terrorism.

The difficulties of defining terrorism has led to the aphorism that “one person´s terrorist is another person´s freedom fighter”. This meaning can lead to different considerations. On one side it might suggest that there can be no objective definitions of terrorism and that perspective is a central consideration in defining terrorism. On the other side, however, it can show the attempt to justify acts of terrorism by using “national liberation” arguments or as Ganor writes “an attempt to justify the “means” (terrorism), by basing it on the “end” (national liberation)”.47 This approach is often used by terrorist organizations to support their goals to portray freedom fighters with positive characteristics and values. In this meaning, freedom fighters become those who are acting in order to eliminate foreign occupiers, which can lead to false assumption that freedom fighters are not or cannot be terrorists.48 However, this is a trap. In fact, as Ganor writes, there is no contradiction between the concepts of “terrorist” and “freedom fighter”49. As a matter of fact, it is completely possible that a terrorist organization which perpetrate acts of terrorism, murder or killing in order to reach its goals, can also be a national liberation movement fighting to liberate their (or others’) homeland from what is considered to be an illegitimate regime or the yoke of a foreign conqueror.50

In other cases, fighters within movements, don’t accept to be classified within Western perspectives and use their one cultural/ideological view to define themselves and their action. For instance, as Ryley and Hoffman point out, many radical Islamists call themselves as mujahedeen (holy warriors) or shaheed (martyrs), which connects their fight to obedience to

49 Ibid.
50 Ganor, B. “The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle” (2005), p.15
God’s will rather than Western ideal of freedom. To understand the definitional problem of the term terrorism, Martin suggests that we consider four perspectives that illustrate different views and moral considerations for this phenomenon. The first is “the four quotations” perspective, previously mentioned above. The others are the following: “one man willing to throw away is life is enough to terrorize a thousand”, “extremism in defence of liberty is no vice” and “it became necessary to destroy the down to save it”. All these sentences seem to underline that there is among both terrorists and those who fight them an uncompromising belief in the absolute righteousness of a cause. The nature of the cause can be ideological, racial, religious or national and it is so vital that it justifies imposing hardship not only on the enemy but also on their own championed group. People participating a terrorist attack offer different perspectives and interpretations of it depending on their role in the same.

When we talk about participants we mean, according to Martin six typologies of actors: the terrorist, the supporter, the victim, the target, the onlooker and the analyst. What is interesting is that the same event can be interpreted in many different ways depending on political associations, emotional responses and type of participation. Furthermore participants can make different value judgments based on the symbolism of the target. The third perspective one can use to interpret terrorism is asking whether the participant is a “terrorist or a freedom fighter?” Rarely members of terrorist groups call themselves terrorists. They instead call themselves champions fighting for liberation (like Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland), nation identity or religion (like Hamas). Finally, the forth perspective considers political violence as a result of a rational choice. According to our prior considerations, terrorists believe that in order to acquire certain goals there is no alternative other than to using violence, which then becomes not only necessary but highly justifiable. In the next discussion, we are going to present factors that explain why individuals and groups choose to engage in terrorist behaviour.

3.2 The EU´s definition of Terrorism

“Terrorism is a threat to all States and to all people. It poses a serious threat to our security, to the values of our democratic societies and to the rights and freedom of our citizens, especially through the

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52Martin, G. “Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues” (2013), pp.41-43
indiscriminate targeting of innocent people. Terrorism is criminal and unjustifiable under any circumstance.”  

With these words, expressed in the European Union Counterterrorism Strategy, terrorism is clearly identified as a serious threat for the security of the European citizens and their values. The European Strategy was adopted in 2005 following the 2001 EU Action Plan on combating terrorism as a response to the 9/11 attacks on the US and the bombings in Madrid and London. One of main innovations taken by the EU on its fight against terrorism was agreeing on adopting new legislative measures - including a common definition of terrorism - in order to harmonize the definition of terrorist offences in all EU countries. Other agreements were also reached that introduced a common list of terrorist organizations, an EU-wide arrest warrant and rules for coordinating operations between national police forces. The common European definition of terrorism is a combination of two elements: an objective element and a subjective element. The first one includes a list of instances of serious criminal acts that should be deemed to be terrorist offences:

(a) attacks upon a person's life which may cause death;
(b) attacks upon the physical integrity of a person;
(c) kidnapping or hostage taking;
(d) causing extensive destruction to a Government or public facility, a transport system, an infrastructure facility, including an information system, a fixed platform located on the continental shelf, a public place or private property likely to endanger human life or result in major economic loss;
(e) seizure of aircraft, ships or other means of public or goods transport;
(f) manufacture, possession, acquisition, transport, supply or use of weapons, explosives or of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, as well as research into, and development of, biological and chemical weapons;
(g) release of dangerous substances, or causing fires, floods or explosions the effect of which is to endanger human life;

(h) interfering with or disrupting the supply of water, power or any other fundamental natural resource the effect of which is to endanger human life 59

The subjective elements are described as offences that may seriously damage countries or international organizations when these acts are committed with the purpose of

- seriously intimidating a population, or
- unduly compelling a Government or international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act, or
- seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization, 60

Furthermore, EU countries must ensure that certain intentional acts are punishable as offences linked to terrorist activities even if no terrorist offence is actually committed. This is for example the case of recruiting and training for terrorism61, or of intentionally leading or participating in a terrorist group or its activities, which includes “supplying information or material resources […] with knowledge of the fact that such participation will contribute to the criminal activities of the terrorist group”62. Finally, the member states have also adopted a common definition of what terrorist group as “a structured group of more than two persons, established over a period of time and acting in concert to commit terrorist offences”63.

3.3 The causes of Terrorism

Academics and researchers have found hard to agree on the root causes of terrorism in general. According to the Routledge Handbook of Terrorism, there are more than 50 different alleged ‘causes’. Some of these are: political discontent; culture of alienation and humiliation

60 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
which can accelerate the process of radicalisation and virulent extremism; collective or individual desire for revenge against acts of repression; failure to mobilize popular support for a radical political program; modern circumstances that can make terrorist methods exceptionally easy; and finally, the choice of terrorism can represent the outcome of a learning process from own experiences and the experiences of others. According to Schmid, none of these explanations has a fully explaining power about the real root causes of terrorism, and he claims instead that causes for terrorism have to be identified in individuals’ radicalization which ought to be investigated on various levels of analysis: the micro-level (involving individuals’ issues such as alienation, marginalisation and discrimination), the meso-level (the wider, radical social surround) and finally the macro-level (including the role of government and society at home and abroad, which leads to mobilisation and radicalisation of the discontented, some of which might take the form of terrorism).

While the first and the second level stresses more the psychological and social conditions of individuals becoming terrorists, the third level “deals inter alia with governments’ actions at home and abroad and with society’s relationship with members of minorities”. However, the common feature of the three levels radicalisation of individuals is generated by determinate push factors. With particular regard to the FF phenomenon, it is necessary to specify that Islamic radicalisation of jihadist terrorist groups, identifies according to Vidino, the adoption of the belief that Muslims must follow the ultraconservative interpretation of Islam and that they have to participate to the jihad -the struggle against the enemies of Islam. Hence, since radicalisation appears to be the key factor for explain why individuals or groups choose to commit themselves to terrorist activities; it is important to identify which mechanisms play a role for their radicalisation. Some scholars Gupta (2012), and Sambanis (2004), identify in poverty one possible explanation for terrorism at micro- and macro-level. Poverty is seen in this case as a factor causing social structural imbalances, “which create a widespread feeling of frustration and anger”. To sustain that, Gupta claims that according to cross-national terrorism data, it is the poorer countries that experience

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66 Schmid, A.P. “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review” March 2013 p.4
69 Gupta, K.D. “Is Terrorism the result of root causes such as poverty and exclusion?” pp. 110-111 in Jackson, R., Sinclair, S. J. (eds.) Contemporary debates on terrorism (2012)
widespread violence, and that there are significant statistic correlations between terrorism and per capita income and unequal distribution of income\textsuperscript{70}. However, even if in some countries the economy factor has been a motive for young men to join terrorist groups, Schmid considers poverty as a ‘myth’.

As a confirmation of that Schmid explains, referring to Staun and Veldhuis, that even if in countries with very weak economy, like Somalia- Jihad can be one of the few job options available, “the demographic profiles of radical Muslims in the Western world show that they are generally not poor, religiously fanatic, or desperate due to suffering from extreme poverty, political oppression, or other deprived circumstances”\textsuperscript{71}. Grievance is also considered to be a mobilising instrument; hence the sense of injustice is very powerful motivating factor which can make individuals join militant groups. However, as Schmid argues, grievance alone cannot be considered a sufficient factor for becoming a terrorist, and other factors as negative social, cultural, and political features of one’s societal environment (such as such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and political/economical marginalization) can aid and push individuals onto the terrorist path\textsuperscript{72}. Other mechanisms that often play an important role in explaining radicalisation are ideology and religion. It is however important to make some distinctions in order to avoid misunderstanding between religion and violence. As Goodwin writes, even if religion may be central to the goals of states and organizations, it cannot be automatically inferred that religion accounts for the use of violence\textsuperscript{73}. Ideology and religion can however become, under some circumstances, factors that may contribute to the acceptance of violence as a method to bring about political change and also lead to the creation of a subculture of violence. They can also be used to reduce potential moral inhibitors and to justify the use extreme methods\textsuperscript{74}.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Schmid, A.P. “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review” March 2013 p.25
\textsuperscript{72} Schmid, A.P. “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review” March 2013 p.26
\textsuperscript{74} Schmid, A.P. “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review” March 2013 p.28
3.4 The Phenomenon of Foreign Fighters in Syria

The number of European foreign fighters participating in the Syrian civil war has increased exponentially and consequently this has become an ever-growing concern for the European Union policy makers. The phenomenon of European Foreign Fighter it’s not new in modern history. There are many previous examples of groups and individuals that, for different reasons and with different ideological backgrounds, have decided to join a violent struggle in the different side of the world. A recent example of this participation is the civil conflict in Bosnia, in which a (little) number of the Muslims from across Europe took part. Others example are the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The estimated number of fighters on each side of Syria’s civil war, national or non-national, varies from 5,000 to 11,000, with little breakdown between those who may be fighting for more ‘moderate’ groups and those who are fighting with extremists. According to the U.S. intelligence, the numbers of Foreign Fighters who have joined the Islamic State or Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or other extremist groups includes at least 3,400 from Western nations among 20,000 from around the world. Recent studies show that most foreign militants in Syria and Iraq are Arabs; the largest groups of fighters are thought to be Saudis, Lebanese, Libyans, Iraqis and Tunisians. While the largest group of foreign fighters in Syria comes from neighbouring countries and North Africa, the war also attracted people living in the European Union Member States. Over 12,000 fighters from 81 countries have joined the civil war in Syria.

Approximately 2,500 are citizens from Western countries, including most members of the European Union, the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation assessed in April 2013 that more than 450 sources in the Western and Arab media as well as martyrdom notices have been posted in jihadist online forums. This showed that by winter of 2013 between 1,100 and 1,700 individuals were

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estimated to have gone from Europe to Syria. Most of these fighters are from Western European countries, such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK). With over 700 fighters, France has provided the highest number or estimates of their citizens or residents to have gone to Syria to fight, some of which have now returned or died (Official figure, April 2014, 275 still in Syria). The UK has provided about 400, followed by Germany, with 270 fighters, and Belgium, with about 250 fighters.

The majority of European FF has joined Syrian or international jihad groups, including the Jabhat al-Nusra or al-Nusra Front, a Syrian jihadist group fighting against the regime with the aim of establishing an Islamist state in Syria. This group has been described as one of the most effective rebel fighting groups in Syria. Its core members include old veterans’ Syrian jihadists who have fought in Iraq under the al-Qaeda forces Islamic State of Iraq, which was formerly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq. The group of FF includes a large range of groups and individuals, many of them young or even teenagers, including the foreigners who joined the Free Syrian Army, Iranian troops, Hezbollah militants and those who joined different jihadi groups. In other words, Syria appears to have become in less than two years the centre for foreign fighters in search of gaining battlefield experience, especially for those in the jihadist-terrorist group. Arguably one reason why the majority of the FF joins extremist groups is the chronic failure of mainstream rebel forces to fight effectively and work together. This has led to a multiplicity of small groups operating locally and participating in different kind of alliances to maintain their influence rather than building a force capable of taking on the Syrian army.

Extremist groups also tend to have more of an impact on the battlefield, and so to enjoy greater local standing, something that seems to make them more attractive to foreign fighters.

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82 Ibid.
83 A person who engages in this type of jihad is called a mujahid (in plural mujahidin), a jihadi or jihadi terrorist – the latter depending on the kind of activities in which they are involved. Their actions are claimed to be in furtherance of the goals of Islam. These goals may include the establishment of a (pan) Islamic theocracy and their restoration of the caliphate. For further readings about this topic, see Bakker, E. “Characteristics of Jihadi Terrorists in Europe (2001-2009)”, in Coolsaet, R.(ed.) “Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge: European and American Experiences “ (2011), p. 2. See also Burke, J. and Norton, J. “Q&A: Islamic Fundamentalism: A World-Renowned Scholar Explains Key Points of Islam”. Christian Science Monitor, 4 October, 2001. See also Esposito, J.L. “What Everyone needs toknow about Islam” (2011), pp. 133-134.
looking to make their own impact. The more extreme groups, especially those with a high number of foreign fighters, are better resourced, more disciplined and better motivated, and also more inclusive, better organized and better financed than moderate groups. This is something that gives them an advantage, both against governmental forces and when competing for recruits or territory with other rebel groups. A further reason is that the extremist groups can better include foreigners who may not speak Arabic and may generally don’t have any military training. On a practical level, since the most extremist groups are concentrated in the North of Syria, they are the firsts that most foreigners meet when they cross the Turkish border. This strategic position allows extremists to exploit the enthusiasm of new fighters, feeding the belief that fighting for the ‘jihad’ means doing God’s work. And often once caught in a group’s dynamic, it’s very unlikely that the foreign fighter leaves it to join a rival one.

3.4.1 The potential threat

The returning FF and what risk it could pose to society is something that has not yet been addressed at length by the international organisation. Governments and counter-terrorism agencies, on both domestic and regional levels, have expressed the concern that individuals who travelled to Syria could become further radicalised and receive combat training. The French Minister of Interior, Manuel Valls, has described the return to France of hardened jihadists as “the biggest threat the country faces in the coming years”.

It the 2012 Terrorism Situation and Trend Report Europol warned that returning foreign fighters “have the potential to utilize their training, combat experience, knowledge and

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87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
contract for terrorist activities inside the EU. The terrorist threat in the EU remains accurate and diverse. In Europol’s report from 2012, the director of Europol states that the threat from terrorism within the European Union remains strong and could manifest itself in various ways. According to Europol, the phenomenon of EU citizens who travel to conflict zones in order to participate in terrorist activities and then returning to the EU with the intention to commit acts of terrorism adds a new dimension to the already existing threat situation in the European Union, since it provides new groups within member states with both terrorist intentions and capabilities, which can result in terrorist attacks with both unexpected targets and timing.

Returning Foreign Fighters pose a potential threat towards the European Union in numerous ways. At least they will probably have had experienced psychological trauma associated with the war and will therefore require health care, rehabilitation and some type of reintegration. While abroad, foreign fighters can potentially recruit others to join the fight. Another threat is that they can acquire more advanced terrorist and fighting skills and expand their global extremist network. One more extreme possibility is that some of these fighters will have joined Islamic extremist groups whilst fighting abroad and may therefore seek to attack their home countries on return to export their violent ideology of global jihad. Research shows that they are more likely to succeed, and that they are more determined and likely to use deadly force, if they have been abroad for terrorist training or in conflict zones. As the pressure on governments to address foreign fighters phenomenon grows, and amidst the increasing numbers of those returning to their home countries, states are searching for ways to deal with the potential threat posed by Foreign Fighters.

\[\text{See Europol, “TE-SAT 2014: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report”,}\]
\[\text{See Wainwright, R. Director of Europol, “TE-SAT 2014: The EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Rapport”,}\]
\[\text{See International Centre for Counter-Terrorism “The RAN Declaration of Good Practices for Engagement with Foreign Fighters for Prevention, Outreach, Rehabilitation and Reintegration” (2015),}\]
4 Dealing with Terrorism: Counter-terrorism

According to our prior considerations, non-state terrorism poses a threat to several things: security, lives, values, freedom and democracy. Regarding the concept of security, Baldwin argues that security is not a positive status but it can be described as an absence of threats to important values in people’s life. Furthermore, security is never absolute and it can only exist as a relative state. The definition of security, as well as the definition of terrorism, is difficult: there are numerous ways in which national and individual security can be threatened and consequently, there are many different means for confronting these threats. When thinking about responding to terrorism and the threat that it poses, it is therefore important to assess the nature of the threat itself, its extent, and the best means to avert or minimize it.

Martin defines responding to terrorism “as any action taken by a targeted interest in reply to a terrorist incident or a terrorist environment”. These actions can range in scale from very passive to very intensive and active responses. More specifically, when we talk about counter-terrorism, the term refers to “proactive policies that specifically seek to eliminate terrorist environments and groups” to prevent terrorist attacks and therefore to save lives.

Before we start presenting the different categories of responses that counter-terrorism offer, we want to point out, as Bolanos, Laqueur and Ganor do, that in the aftermath of 9/11 we have been assisting to new developing trends in the area of international terrorism. We consider this an important consideration, since as we saw before and as Beyer and Bauer argue, appropriate counter-measures should be developed in order to adapt to the changing nature of the threats that the new terrorism is posing. This means that the main issue that states have to face nowadays when dealing with counter-terrorism is managing the risk and uncertainty rather than the act of the threat posed by a collective actor like a nation state.

Bolanos identifies three main trends or elements that make terrorism new. The first is the increasing lethality of the terroristic attacks, which can be explained by the availability of, and the proclivity to use, methods of mass destruction and disruption. The second is the growing

96 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
importance of religious motivation among terrorist groups. However, with regards to the latter it is important to specify that religion per se is not the motivator for terroristic attacks, but it is its radical interpretation that drives these groups to violence. Finally, the third aspect is the lack of central oversight and the decentralized organizational architecture of terror groups. This means that these new groups have adopted networked and diffuse structures not observant of the top-bottom and hierarchical approach of previous terroristic organizations. These terrorist networks can operate in several continents and still maintain a dynamic communication among each other and can reach greater audiences using the communicative power of the information revolution. In terms of counter-terrorism, this means according to Bauer and Beyer that terrorists cannot be clearly identified; since they are not part of a defined hierarchical structure, they are able to operate in small cells which arises their power and their potential to create damages.

Much of the discussion about counter-terrorism focuses on the categories of available responses which can be organized into several policy classifications. As pointed out by Martin, it is important to understand that there cannot be exact theories or methods of responses due to the multiplicity of terrorist groups and environments; this means that some methods can be successful in only some cases, whereas others can be adaptable to other cases. Furthermore it is also important to keep in mind that the war on terror can be effective only if we have previously defined what we are going to fight against. In other words, defining terrorism aims to help creating a basis for more effective counter-terrorism measures.

Martin classifies counter-terrorism options in four main categories and each of these categories is successively divided into subcategories. These categories are: use of force such as suppression campaigns, coercive covert operations and special operations force. The second category includes operations other than war (repressive operations) such as nonviolent covert operations, intelligence, enhanced security and economic sanctions. The third

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105 Ganor, B. “The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle” (2005), pp.4-5.
category is represented by operations other than war (conciliatory operations) such as
diplomatic options, social reform and concessionary options. Finally the fourth category is
resorting to legalistic options which aim to protect to the general public and the interests of
the state, and to criminalize the acts of the terrorists. These responses include law
enforcement, of both domestic laws and international law. Ganor uses similar categories to
describe the levels of attempts to contend with terrorism, but he starts from the perspective
that the need to define terrorism must be reflected at almost all these levels. In the sphere of
legislative action, as well as in the sphere of punitive action, laws, regulations and penalties
must be specifically related to terrorism, in order to distinguish terrorism from other criminal
activities. Even international cooperation and offensive actions must rely on a wide
acceptance of a common international definition of terrorism which is needed for the
formulation and ratification of international counter-terrorism treaties. Additionally,
defining terrorism is needed for supporting actions directed towards terrorism-supporting
populations and public relations activity. In order to undermine the legitimacy that terrorist
activity enjoys, and to eliminate the organizations ability to gain support and aid from the
population, terrorism must be differentiated from other types of violence, and not be given
legitimization under any circumstances.

Schmid, referring to his micro-, meso- and macro level of radicalization, claims that
counter-terrorism strategies should be applied to states domestic and foreign policy, in
accordance with UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2006. In particular, regarding
the first level, Schmid recommends to propagate and demonstrate good governance and
develop inclusive institutions that can provide for peaceful, reformist social and political
flexibility. Moreover, governments should stimulate dialogue and cooperation with
responsible and mainstream representatives of immigrant communities and neutralise
extremist indoctrination efforts by preventing extremist propaganda in the public sphere and
on the Internet. Regarding states’ foreign policy, Schmid recommends a prudent foreign
policy based on ‘soft power’ approach, credibility and international legitimization for military
measures and armed interventions as well as support for democracy, human rights and peace.

110 Ganor, B. “The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle” (2005), pp.3-4
111 Ibid.
112 Ganor, B. “The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle” (2005), p.4
113 Schmid, A.P. “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and
Literature Review” March 2013 p.58
114 Schmid, A.P. “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and
Literature Review” March 2013 pp. 56-57
In his conclusion, Schmid emphasises the importance of governments credibility, which means that governments have “to do what they say and say what they do” without showing any gap between declaratory policy and actual policy; also double standards must be avoided at all costs if policies want to retain credibility\textsuperscript{115}.

Finally, an important part of the discussion about counter-terrorism regards the effectiveness of the measures adopted to respond, decrease or prevent the phenomenon. It is not our intention to go deeper into this argument; however we would like to shortly present some considerations in the ongoing debate about the effectiveness or not of counter-terrorism measures. Between those who see positive trends in the efforts to respond to terrorism (Breen Smyth 2007, Cochrane 2012 and English 2009), there is the conviction that the creation of counter-terrorism strategies has made possible for states to step in the public arena and to obtain acknowledgement of the danger to be faced. Moreover, they helped recognizing the importance of a multilevel response, which includes law enforcement, coordination of national intelligence agencies and financial and technological preventive measures, as effective worldwide counter-terrorism strategies\textsuperscript{116}. On the other side, there are those, including Monaghan, that express scepticism about the effectiveness of the global efforts to reduce terrorism, to dismantle the terrorist environment or the groups using political violence. For instance Monaghan argues that, “hard lines” approaches involving the military and treatment of detainees “have inadvertently provided al-Qaeda with propaganda coups, boosted their recruitment and inspired others to undertake terrorism”\textsuperscript{117}.

4.1 The EU’s common counter-terrorism strategy

Since the attacks in Madrid in March 2004, EU politicians have argued strongly in favour of a greater European co-operation in fighting terrorism. They believe that EU should take on a greater role in helping the member states to monitor and prevent cross-border terrorist activities in Europe and beyond, as international terrorism is no longer the only security

\textsuperscript{115} Schmid, A.P. “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review” March 2013 p.58

\textsuperscript{116} Cochrane, M. “Have global efforts to reduce terrorism and political violence been effective in the past decade?” pp.181-194 in Jackson, R., Sinclair, S. J. (eds.) Contemporary debates on terrorism (2012)

\textsuperscript{117} Monaghan, R. “Have global efforts to reduce terrorism and political violence been effective in the past decade?” pp.181-194 in Jackson, R., Sinclair, S. J. (eds.) Contemporary debates on terrorism (2012)
challenge EU governments are facing\textsuperscript{118}. The institutional complexity of the EU often presents a challenge to understand the context and significance of its external policies. In order to play a more active role in global affairs, the EU developed a Common Foreign and Security Policy and a Common Security and Defence Policy. On many foreign policy and security issues, the 27 EU member states exert a powerful collective influence. On the other hand they are those who criticise the EU for only being an economic power arguing that its foreign and security policy has little global impact\textsuperscript{119}. The European and Defence Policy (ESDP) have emerged in the past decades as one of the spearheads of the EU’s foreign policy and the main asset in the EU’s foreign policy toolbox. The ESDP has become one of the rare recent success stories of European integration, coming at a time when the integration process seemed to be in disarray, with growing divergences between the twenty-seven member states and a weakened institutional framework and European leadership\textsuperscript{120}. The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) became one of the main areas of the constitutional process in the European Union between 2002 and 2007 and the Lisbon Treaty introduces important CFSP innovations\textsuperscript{121}. The Common Foreign and Security Policy is based in fact on unanimous consensus among the member states. CFSP works as a mechanism for adopting common principles and guidelines on political and security issues, and for committing to common diplomatic approaches and joint actions. The Lisbon Treaty, the EU reform that took effect in December 2009 introduced changes designed to improve the coherence and effectiveness of EU external policies\textsuperscript{122}. Therefore, The Lisbon Treaty can be described as a milestone in the development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy and specifically of a Common Defence and Security Policy. In December 2007, the European Union signed in Lisbon the new Reform Treaty amending the already existing European treaties.

The treaty did not enter into force until two years later in 2009. The Lisbon Treaty abolished the former pillar structure of the EU, which separated community matters in the hands of the European Commission (first pillar) from intergovernmental matters related to

\textsuperscript{118} Keohane, D. “\textit{The EU and Counter-Terrorism\textquotedblright}, (May 2005) , p.1

\textsuperscript{119} See Mix, E.D., “\textit{The European Union: Foreign and Security Policy}” 8 April 2013,

\textsuperscript{120} See Keukeleire, S. “\textit{European Security and Defence Policy: From Taboo to a Spearhead of EU Foreign Policy}?”

\textsuperscript{121} See Verola, N. “\textit{The New EU Foreign Policy under the Treaty of Lisbon}” pp.41-51, in Bindi, F. (ed.) “\textit{The Foreign Policy of the European Union. Assessing Europe’s role in the World}” (2010)

\textsuperscript{122} See Mix, E.D., “\textit{The European Union: Foreign and Security Policy}” 8 April 2013,
foreign policy (second pillar) and justice and home affairs (third pillar). Now the competence is instead shared between the EU and its member states, and this has had three important consequences. First the EU now plays a greater role in internal security matters, and the decision making process is more simplified and flexible as decisions are taken according to the so called community method, a qualified majority vote (QMV) among the member states as opposed to the unanimity rule that was used before. The Lisbon Treaty also gave the European Parliament a greater oversight role on these matters, as well as full co-decisional power. National parliaments also gained greater powers, for instance, with scrutiny over Europol activities as well as over the Common Security and Defence Policy.

The Lisbon Treaty has not fundamentally changed the EU’s instruments for assistance, nor does it bring a single solution to the posing challenges. Yet it opens some opportunities for improvement through the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which was intended to make European policies - including counterterrorism measures - more coherent and consistent. While in practice, the Lisbon Treaty does little to bridge the gap between internal and external security policies, the abolition of the former pillarized structure of the EU has been positive for crafting more coherent policies at a EU level. In practice this de-pillarization has only been partial, and the shadow of the pillars still exists between internal and external policies since the CFSP/CSDP policies maintain separate structures and decision making process. Therefore the Lisbon Treaty is more of an evolution than a revolution for European foreign, security and defence policies. In other terms, the EU remains a marginal actor in counterterrorism activities, as the member states remain in charge of the majority of European powers and levers within this field. Yet however marginal, the EU has acquired new tools and legitimacy to play a greater role in counterterrorism activities. The EU Counter terrorism action plan is the main point of references in this sense as it defines the guidelines, which are the operational, structural and legislative cornerstones for the member states. These constitute the base on which member states later can build counter-terrorism models within their national parliaments. In response to the current terrorist threat, the European Union together with the United Nations has established a global strategy to contribute to global security. The strategy adopted at the EU level promotes democracy, dialogue and good governance in order to tackle the root of the causes of radicalisation. In the EU common counterterrorism strategy, in order to combat terrorism effectively, the EU proposes its actions around four objectives: prevention, protection, pursuit

4.2 The four key pillars of the EU’s common counterterrorism strategy

As previously noted, this framework came into being following two very serious terrorist attacks in Europe, the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings. The strategic commitment of the strategy was “to combat terrorism globally while respecting human rights, and make Europe safer, allowing its citizens to live in an area of freedom, security and justice“125. In the document, it is specified that the European Counter-Terrorism Strategy shall be considered as a convergence of different levels of cooperation between the EU and the member states and “requires work at national, European and international levels to reduce the threat from terrorism126” and EU’s vulnerability to the terroristic attacks. While Member States still have the lead role and the primary responsibility for providing the tools for countering terrorism, and for implementing the response, the European Union plays a key role by strengthening the national capabilities, developing the collective capability, facilitating the cooperation between member states; and promoting international partnership127.

The EU’s 2005 strategy proposed four pillars to combat terrorism: "prevent", "protect", "pursue" and "respond". The aim of the first pillar is to prevent people from turning to terrorism by tackling the factors or root causes which can lead to radicalization and recruitment, in Europe and worldwide128. According to this view, there is a range of social conditions that may favour the development of environments in which radicalization proliferates. Within the EU these conditions may have different forms, such as social and economic inequalities, discrimination, and lack of integration and of inter-cultural dialogue129. The purpose of the second pillar is to protect citizens and infrastructures, and to reduce EU’s vulnerability to attacks through, among other, improved security of borders, transport and critical infrastructures. In order to achieve these goals, EU and the member states should, for

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example, carry out and develop EU’s passports’ security measures, such as introducing biometrics checks, establish the Visa Information System and implement agreed common standards on civil aviation, port and maritime security\(^{130}\).

The third pillar consists in *pursuing* and investigating terrorists across the European borders and internationally, which means to impede planning, travel and communications, to disrupt support networks, to cut off funding and access to attack materials, and bring terrorists to justice. Valid instruments to achieve these goals are the European Arrest Warrant, the practical of cooperation and information exchange between police and judicial authorities, in particular through Europol and Eurojust, and furthermore, the implementation of agreed European measures to ensure a common and appropriate response to the threat\(^{131}\).

Finally, the fourth pillar is to *respond*, manage and minimize the consequences of a terrorist attack, by improving the ability to deal with the aftermath, the coordination of the response, and the needs of the victims. In 2010, five years after the EU Counter-Terrorism strategy was initiated, the Commission attempted to address the need for an updated summary and evaluation of EU counter-terrorism policy in its August 2010 Communication (COM(2010)386) ‘The EU Counter-Terrorism Policy: main achievements and future challenges’ which specifically took stock of EU-level legislative and policy developments\(^{132}\).

### 4.3 The European counter-terrorism response to the phenomenon of Foreign Fighters

As the hostilities in Syria and Iraq continue and terrorism activities worldwide seem to be on the rise, EU Member States are increasingly confronted with the problem of returning Foreign Fighters. While the phenomenon is not new, its scale is what explains the wide perception of these individuals as a serious threat to the security of both individual Member States, and towards the EU as a whole. The problem has been addressed within international fora, including the United Nations, who in 2014 adopted a resolution, specifically addressing the issue of foreign fighters. The phenomenon of Foreign Fighters, individuals who join

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insurgencies abroad and whose primary motivation is ideological or religious rather than financial, is not something new. According to Hegghamer, it is estimated that from 1980s to mid-2010 between 10,000 to 30,000 fighters took part in an armed conflict in the Muslim world. While the primarily responsibility for addressing any form of terrorist activities lies with the Member States, the EU has played a both supportive and coordinating role that it also intends to strengthen.

According to the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator (CTC), Gilles de Kerchove, the Foreign Fighter issue has been on the EU’s top priority on counter-terrorism since mid-2013. In 2013, the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator proposed 22 measures to address the problem in six areas; a better understanding of the phenomenon, prevention of radicalisation, detection of suspicious travel, investigation and prosecution, returnees and cooperation with third countries. These measures were developed by the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council of June 2013. The European Council requested also a report to monitor the ongoing anti-terrorism activities within the EU by Member States and the supporting EU institutions, and to also monitor the implementation of the EU Action Plan on combating terrorism. One year later in June 2014 the European Council defined strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning for the coming years in the area of freedom, security and justice. The guidelines addressed the importance to mobilise all instruments for judicial and police cooperation by also reinforcing the role of Europol and Eurotex, including action to address the phenomenon of Foreign Fighters. New paths for EU actions were being explored, including the revived EU Passenger Name Records (PNR) proposal.

The rules underpinning the EU’s passport-free Schengen zone, which removes border controls among most of EU member states, could be used to empower guards on external borders to undertake systematic checks of EU citizens arriving from third countries in order to stop suspected jihadist militants. In its Conclusion on 30th of August 2014, the European

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Council called for accelerated implementation of the 22 measures. These measures covered four main aspects in the fight of foreign fighters: an urgent need for a common assessment of the phenomenon of young Europeans going to Syria, measures to prevent young from going to Syria or to offer assistance on their return, detection of different travel movements, and criminal justice response and cooperation with third countries.

The European Council agreed on that determined actions are required in order to stem the flow of foreign fighters and it has called for an accelerated implementation of the package of EU measures in support of the Member States’ efforts, as agreed by the Council in June 2013. Specifically in order to prevent radicalisation and extremism it was considered important to more effectively share information with key third world countries. Finally it stressed the important to dissuade, detect and disrupt suspicious travelling, and to investigate and prosecute Foreign Fighters.138 In the aftermath of the attacks in Paris in January 2015, the European Union yet again decided to reinforce the response and to accelerate the implementation of previously agreed measures. On the 12th of February, EU leaders held a debate and agreed on a statement to guide the work of the EU and its member states. The statement focused on three main areas of actions: ensuring the security of citizens, preventing radicalization and safeguarding values, and cooperating with international partners. Counter terrorism doesn’t work if separated from wider political actions. Thus it is important that it’s woven in the international community’s agenda as part of a comprehensive approach to establish internal lines of action against the growing threat of the return of Foreign Fighters.

5 Syria: an overview from the events of the Syrian uprising to the current situation

“So, I think it is about desperation. Whenever you have an uprising, it is self-evident that to say that you have anger, but this anger feeds on desperation. Desperation has two factors: internal and external. The internal is that we are to blame, as states and as officials, and the external is that you are to blame, as great powers or what you call in the West 'the international community'." \(^{139}\)

With these words, President Bashar al-Assad commented in 2011 the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt during a rare interview with the Wall Street Journal. Later on the interview, Assad specified that the situation in Syria was stable because there was no divergence between the government’s policy and the people's interests since the Syrian government was very closely linked to the beliefs of the people.\(^{140}\) But just couple of months after these statements, in March 2011, the situation in Syria became to deteriorate, after fifteen children had been arrested in the southern city of Daraa and reportedly tortured for writing on a wall a well-known slogan of the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia.\(^{141}\) Citizens carried out a peaceful protest asking for the liberation of the children and called for democracy, but their dissent was violently sedated by the government. The same day, protests erupted in the city of Banias and soon spread to other cities, including Latakia, Homs and Hasaka.\(^{142}\) The situation in Daraa escalated when crowds reacted to the military brutality, burning the offices of the ruling Ba’th Party and calling for end to the Emergency Law, imposed 1963, that restricted Syrians’ political and human rights.\(^{143}\) Assad promised reforms and released the fifteen children that were arrested in Daraa. He also offered concessions to various constituencies with the aim of splitting the opposition. However, this didn’t calm the masses. Syrian citizens began instead to protest even laughter when it became clear that the children had been victims of torture during the time they seated in jail.\(^{144}\)

By summer, the protests had reached the city of Hama, while some cities including Damascus and Syria’s second largest city, Aleppo, remain relatively quiet. At this point Assad’s reaction became even crueler. He sent the army to Daraa and ordered it to respond

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\(^{140}\) Ibid.

\(^{141}\) Buckley, C.A. “Learning from Libya, acting in Syria” (2012), p.87, Journal of Strategic Security, Henley- Putman University

\(^{142}\) King, S.J. “The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa” (2009), p.104

\(^{143}\) Rogan, E. “The Arabs, a History” (2011), p.510

\(^{144}\) Ibid.
the protest with increased repression. The government’s forces surrounded the rebellious city with tanks, cut off water and electricity, and prevented anyone from entering or leaving. This didn’t stop the opposition. On the contrary, the size of the protests multiplied. The situation in Syria has rapidly deteriorated since February 2012, and according to a UN report the estimated death toll often exceeds 100 a day while the number of displaced civilians is millions. The number of the civilians which has been arrested is more than 16,000 and according to monitoring groups; they have been victims of torture, killings and rape.

From the outset of the Syria uprising, the vast majority of the army has remained loyal to the regime and it has proved its willingness to fire on its own citizens several times. The oppositional forces have been forced abroad, mainly to Turkey, but they have no managed to liberate any part of the country from the Assad’s rule. After four violent years of civil war, there are still no signs for a resolution of the conflict. The international pressure on the Assad regime has intensified since late 2011, as the Arab League, EU, United States and Turkey have expanded economic sanctions against the regime. In October 2012, the current Joint Special Representative of the United Nations, Lakhdar Brahimi together with the League of Arab States on the Syrian crisis, met regional heads of state to assist in brokering a cease-fire. Later that year, more than 130 countries have recognized the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian People.

On 12 November the member states of the Gulf recognized the coalition as "the legitimate representative" of the Syrian people, ceasing recognition of the government led by Bashar al-Assad. They were followed shortly afterwards by the Arab League (with the exception of Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon) who recognized the coalition as "the legitimate representative and main interlocutor with the Arab League" but stopped short of giving the group full recognition as the sole representative of the Syrian people. The same year, also France, Turkey, Spain and the UK recognized the National Coalition as the sole representative of the Syrian people. France has not only recognized the newly formed coalition of Syrian opposition groups as the "only representative of the Syrian people" but it has also given the

National Coalition, the status of "future interim government of democratic Syria"\(^{148}\). Although the President of the United States, Barack Obama has recognized the coalition as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian people, he stopped short of recognizing the Coalition as a “government in exile” despite having spearheaded efforts to unite the opposition.\(^ {149}\) The European Union's ministerial Council for foreign affairs said it had recognized the opposition coalition as a legal representative of the interests of the Syrian people but held back from extending it diplomatic recognition, leaving that to be decided by individual EU member states\(^ {150}\). Peace talks between the Syrian Opposition and the Assad regime continued 2014 at the UN sponsored Geneva II conference. However, the talks failed to produce any progress toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In September 2014, a US-led coalition launched air strikes inside Syria in an effort to "degrade and ultimately destroy" IS, Islamic State, ultimately helping the Kurds repel a major assault on the northern town of Kobane\(^ {151}\).

5.1 The Nature of the oppositional Forces in Syria

The Syrian armed rebellion has evolved significantly since its inception. Secular moderates are now outnumbered by Islamists and jihadists, whose brutal tactics have caused widespread concern and triggered rebel infighting. The most prominent moderate force is National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which includes members from within Syria and abroad. The National Coalition has been unable, so far, to assert overall command over Syria's rebel forces, particularly jihadist groups\(^ {152}\).

Another actor in the Syrian conflict is SNC, Syrian National Council. This is a coalition of opposition groups formed in October 2011 and dominated by the Syria’s majority Sunni Muslin community\(^ {153}\). The Council's primacy has been challenged by the NCC, National Coordination Committee, an opposition bloc formed by an alliance of 16 left-leaning political parties, three Kurdish political parties, and independent political and youth activists. The NCC


\(^{153}\) Ibid.
functions within Syria and is led by longstanding dissidents, some of whom are wary of the Islamists within the SNC\textsuperscript{154}. Another moderate group is represented by the Kurdish Supreme Committee, an alliance of 13 Kurdish parties formed in July 2012\textsuperscript{155}. Capitalizing on the chaos in the region IS - the extremist group that grew out of al-Qaeda in Iraq - has taken control of huge swathes of territory across northern and eastern Syria, as well as neighboring Iraq. Its many foreign fighters in Syria are now involved in a "war within a war", battling rebels and jihadis from the al-Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front, who object to their tactics, as well as Kurdish and government forces\textsuperscript{156}.


6. Theoretical Framework

6.1 Realism

Realism is often seen as the dominant theory of international relations, mostly because it provides the most powerful explanations of the condition of the state. Realism offers a state-centric analysis of the nature of the international system. The realist perspective identifies the nation-states as the primary actors within an anarchic system, whose only stabilising factor is balance of power that most states seek to maintain, but also occasionally seek to overthrow. There is a lack of consensus within the realistic perspective, as it was possible to speak about realism as a single coherent theory. Some argue that there are good reasons for delineating different types of realism, such as classical realism and structural realism. The classic realism is based on the drive for power and will to dominate which are seen as a fundamental aspect of the human nature.

The states behaviour as a self-seeking egoist is seen as a reflection of the characteristics of the people that constitute the state. In other words, it is the human nature that can be used to explain why international politics are necessarily power politics. The classic realism is based fundamentally on the struggle for possession, a struggle that often is synonymous for violence. Although some states may fight for peace and goodness, the state must always guard against any aggression, in order to defend itself against other states that possess less ethical motives. Classic realists argue that the essential features of international politics, such as competition, fear and war can find an explanation in the human nature itself. And that politics, as society in general, are governed by objective laws that all have their roots in human nature.

Despite the differences between classic and structural realism, both variations maintain the same assumption regarding the nature of international relations. As we have mentioned above, each of these variations is based on the idea that the state is the most important actor in international relations. From the realist view the state is a unitary and rational actor. Realists recognize that states are not, literally, unitary, but composed of individuals, groups and different governmental actors such as legislatures. Structural realists often refer to structural or systemic structures, factors that contribute to international conflict and the condition of the behaviour of states. According to the structural view, the international system is, shaped by anarchy and by the balance of power. Kenneth Waltz one of the leading realist theorists,

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argues that anarchy is a permissive cause of war, since there is no higher authority or world government to prevent aggression\textsuperscript{158}.

According to the structural view, the relative distribution of power in the international system is one of the key independent variables to understand important international outcomes, such as war and peace, alliances, politics and the balance of power. Structural realism focuses on states rank-ordering, in order to differentiate and count the number of great powers. States and particularly, the great powers must be sensitive to the capabilities of other states. It is the distribution of capabilities that affects the power calculation of the states. For the realist, order and stability mean the absence of war and this is only achieved through a relatively equal distribution of power\textsuperscript{159}. Since there is the possibility that any state may use force in order to advance in the international system, this results that all states being worried about their survival. However in situation of crisis, the ultimate concern of the states is not power but security. Therefore rather than being power maximizers states should be security maximizers, since the power maximization often proves to be dysfunctional and only triggers a counter-balancing coalition between states\textsuperscript{160}. Despite the quantity of denominations within the realistic perspective, there are three core elements that can be identified; statism, survival and self-help, which are present both in the classic and structural realism.

As mentioned above, realists consider the sovereign state as the principal actor in international politics, something that is often referred to as the state-centric theory of realism. Statism is the term given to the state as form of legitimate representation of the collective will of the people. It is later the legitimacy of the state that enables the state itself to exercise authority within its domestic borders. Realists argue that outside the boundaries of the state there is a condition of anarchy, meaning that international politics develop in a context where there is no overarching central authority above the individual collection of sovereign states. Within the realist view the concept of anarchy is used to emphasize the argument that the international realm is distinguished by the lack of central authority, consequently the concept of anarchy does not necessarily implicate a condition of chaos and lawlessness. Furthermore, realists draw a sharp distinction between domestic and international politics\textsuperscript{161}.

The second main assumption is the assertion that in international politics, the major goal is survival. Realists argue that the survival of the state cannot be guaranteed under anarchy. Survival is seen as a condition in order to maintain all other goals, whether these

\textsuperscript{158}Pease, K.K. S. “International Organizations” (2012), pp.48-49
\textsuperscript{159}Pease, K.K. S. “International Organizations” (2012), p.49
involve conquest or solely independence. The third one is the principle of self-help, being the action in an anarchical system where there exists no global government. According to the realistic perspective, each state actor is responsible for ensuring its own well-being and survival. In other words, realists do not believe for a state to entrust its safety and survival on another actor or international institution, for example the United Nations. States must therefore resort to self-help, in order to secure their own survival and their national interests. However, since the distribution of capabilities in the international system is not static, there is a risk that international stability can be threatened by shifts with the power’s balance.

6.1.1 Realist views of European foreign policy

As we have mentioned before, realism is based on three main assumptions. The first one involves the state as a dominant actor on the international arena and its capability to act as a coherent, unitary and rational unit. And since states do not recognize any authority above them, all international relations exists in a state of anarchy or lack hierarchy, which forces states into a state of self-help. War is a constant possibility. As a matter of fact, realism expresses a strong scepticism about any possibility of international cooperation. Moreover, most realist theories argue that survival and the maintenance of sovereignty are the states’ primal instincts. This may be a reason why explaining political integration and European foreign policy through a realist perspective, is just as interesting as complex. The realistic perspective denies any form of collective will or personality for the international system and regards international organisations as the tool of the national governments, as subordinated in order to maximise their own interest. According to this perspective, the EU as international actor is weak and its foreign policy is under a constant control of the member states, particularly the powerful ones, which retain ultimate control. In the realist view, international organizations are tools that powerful states can use in order to control weaker states. It follows that international organizations are seen as large extensions of great powers, mainly driven by the great powers’ interests. Realists admit the importance of international

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164 Pease, K.K. S. “International Organizations” (2012), p.50
organizations, but only as reflections of the great powers values and norms regarding what is seen as appropriate behaviour in international relations. Realists argue that when the security interests of the great powers conflicts, the international organisations are either ignored or marginalized by the states that created them from the start. According to the sceptical view of the realistic perspective it is naive to expect institutions to overcome national rivalries. According to realism, the absence of breakthroughs during intergovernmental conferences confirms the weakness of the present common foreign and security policy of the European Union. Realists also argue that one of the reasons why integration has been more successful within some policies, as economic and trade policy; it is because member states have identified clear benefits from close co-operation and “surrender” of sovereignty. The realist view argues that there is no such consensus on foreign and defence policy, especially among power states as France or Germany.

The national interests and the concept of balance of power are the pillars that are shaping the European Union’s common foreign policy. In a realistic perspective, the inability and lack of efficiency of the European foreign policy are a direct consequence of the negative impact of the integration, which imposes a direct need for consensus in decision making. This assumption is proved by the lack of shared foreign policy goals among member states. Creating a common foreign policy and a counter terrorism strategy is complex for any state, filled with both hidden obligations as opportunities. The realist view generally focuses on states as the primary actors in international affairs and it largely neglects sub-state actors. It further predicts a constant state of war between these actors and therefore recommends power politics in order to secure states’ survival. According to the realist view the most important instrument to ensure national security is military force, and that leaves little optimism about peaceful interaction or cooperation. The ‘offensive’ realism takes even a step further arguing that under no circumstances should a state be satisfied with the status quo, but it must instead actively seek hegemony in order to secure survival.

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6.2 Realism and Terrorism

As we saw, realism mainly focuses on states as the primary actors at international level and largely neglects sub-state actors. It therefore predicts a general state of war between these actors and recommends power politics in order to secure survival. According to the realist view, the most important instrument to insure national security is military power, as a consequence of that, there is very little optimism regarding peaceful interaction or any form of cooperation between states. The ‘offensive’ realism takes this argument a step further, arguing that under no circumstances should a state be satisfied with status quo and it must instead actively seek hegemony in order to secure its own survival. The literature on international terrorism seems to confirm states hegemony-seeking attitude by looking at terrorism as a potential tool for states to achieve own interests and politics at international level. In these terms, the root cases of terrorism can be identified according to Kengley in the character of the international system, including states foreign policies, which may offer contributive circumstances for the development of terrorist groups or activities.

For instance, Wilkinson argues that terrorism acts revealed to be a useful tool for superpowers struggling during the Cold War period, when these superpowers played an important role giving sponsorship to violent opposition groups and therefore sustaining high levels of international terrorism. Experts and scholars have designed “the State Terrorism Paradigm” and identified distinctive patterns of state-sponsored terrorist behaviour. According to Martin, there are several models of state involvement in terrorism, one particular describes state-level participants in a security environment as including: sponsors of terrorism (meaning those states that actively promote terrorism), enablers of terrorism (meaning those states that by own actions are enabling terrorism to occur), and co-operators (meaning those states that co-operate with other states in counter-terrorism efforts, despite significant disagreements on other subjects).

States’ sponsorship on terrorism provides material and financial support, as well as propaganda assistance to terrorist groups. At this regard, Martin writes that when the US-
supported Nicaraguan regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle was overthrown in 1979 by the Sandinistas, a Marxist insurgent group, the Reagan administration began a campaign of destabilization against the Sandinistas regime. The most important component of this campaign was US support for counterrevolutionaries, specially trained and financed by the CIA\textsuperscript{176}.

According to Martin powerful states also can give indirect assistance for terrorism (arming, training or justifying the terrorist acts) in the foreign policy domain when a government champions a politically violent proxy that is operating beyond its borders\textsuperscript{177}. In this case, the state may or may not continue its sponsorship if the movement becomes known to commit terrorist acts. When this occurs, the supporting state may act in different ways. It can deny the existence of a linkage between the state and the politically violent movement, or it can admit that some support exists, but also argue that violent acts that might have occurred, were outside the parameters of the relationship. The supporting state also can label the alleged-perpetrators as freedom fighters, or finally it can blame the movement’s adversaries for creating an environment that is pro-active for police violence\textsuperscript{178}.

Other studies on international terrorism seem also to empower the link between realism and terrorism and in particular, they highlight the characteristics of the international system as a significant effect for terrorism frequency\textsuperscript{179}. In the study, “Structural Determinants of International Terrorism: the Effects of Hegemony and Polarity on Terrorist Activity” (1997) Volgy, Imwalle and Corntassel point out that the hegemonic share of the world’s military and economic capabilities, demonstrate a strong effect on terrorism activity\textsuperscript{180}. These results led their research to the conclusion that states struggle for hegemonic control over the international system is important in accounting for the frequency of the terroristic activities, and as a corollary of this, that international states co-operation at institutional level reduce the states sponsorship of terrorism, and therefore, it might eventually decrease the level of international terrorism\textsuperscript{181}. In confirmation of that, and as Martin clearly points out, in the latter quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, many powerful governments as the US, has been using terrorism as an instrument that allowed these governments to pursue an aggressive foreign policy. This

\textsuperscript{176} Martin, G. Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues (2013), p.98
\textsuperscript{177} Martin, G. Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues (2013), p.99
\textsuperscript{178} Martin, G. Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues (2013), pp.99-100
\textsuperscript{180} Volgy, T.J. and Imwalle, E. L. and Corntassel, J.J. “Structural Determinants of International Terrorism: the Effects of Hegemony and Polarity on Terrorist Activity” (1997) p.219
practise has been offering several advantages: “as a policy option, state-sponsored terrorism is a logical option because states cannot always deploy conventional armed forces to achieve strategic objectives. As a practical matter for many governments it is often logistically, politically, or militarily infeasible to directly confront an adversary”. However international terrorism does only find assistance in the hegemonic states playground. According to some studies, Hoffman (1998) and Zartman (1995), when states become weak and lose control on their territory (because of war, for instance), they become an attraction for international terrorist organisations, which use them as training ground and safe haven. The rise of terrorist groups as Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan och Iraq, and IS in Syria and Iraq, seems to confirm this theory.

Finally, some considerations about Realism and the concept of ‘War on Terror’. As we mentioned above, Realism highlights states as the relevant actors in world politics and neglects other kinds of actors. So the necessity in dealing with terrorism arises, in order to trace transnational terrorism back to the state. The state-centric approach on terrorism can be discerned in the interpretation of terrorism as an external phenomenon located in haven states. In the line with the state-centric perspective, terrorism is not understood as an act of crime but interpreted as ‘war’. This interpretation is dominant in the current US administration. This form of definition was internationally agreed in the aftermath of 9/11, though this consensus has been reduced among states in the last couple of years. Therefore, from a state-centric perspective, a fundamentally transnational phenomenon as terrorism is projected back onto the state level. By focusing on the states instead of sub-state actors and by defining terrorism as an act of war and not as a criminal activity, it makes it possible to conduct the Global War on Terror in a manner similar to conventional inter-state warfare. If terrorism is to be seen as a predominantly transnational, sub-state phenomenon, it makes military interventions as the best approach to solve the problem indirectly; moreover it justifies and aggravates the use of violence as a form of support for terrorism. Finally the realist model provides many insights into the formation of alliances, explaining the reasons why the groups’ divergent interests may sometimes drag them away from cooperation.

183 Hoffman, B. “Inside Terrorism” (1998)
7. The EU’s policy on the Syria

The European Union has responded decisively to the violent repression of the anti-government protests in Syria, which began in March 2011. The EU decided to call for an end to the deteriorating situation in Syria and the unacceptable levels of violence. The legal basis for relations between Syria and the EU is the Cooperation Agreement signed in 1977. Before the popular uprising, the EU sought to develop a closer relationship with Syria, centred around political dialogue, mutually beneficial trades and investment relations, and cooperation on economic, social and democratic reform. The Commission and Syria initialled a draft EU-Syria Association Agreement in October 2004, but the Agreement has yet to be signed and ratified. In the late 2008 the European Commission and the Syrian government updated a 2004 draft EU-Syria Association Agreement to take into account the reform of the Syrian customs tariff and EU enlargement. They initialled the revised version of the agreement in December 2008, but it was never signed. The priorities EU co-operation with Syria was defined in the Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme. In May 2011, the EU froze the draft of Association Agreement and suspended bilateral cooperation programmes between the EU and the Syrian government under the European Neighbourhood Policy. In response to the conflict in Syria and its consequences both in Syria and its neighbouring countries, a communication mapping out a comprehensive EU approach to the Syrian crisis was adopted in June 2013. Syria is a signatory of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration and a member of the Union for the Mediterranean. A jointly-agreed National Indicative Programme (NIP), between 2008 and 2010, outlines the priorities of EU cooperation with Syria. The main aim with this co-operation was to support Syria’s domestic reform in line with the Paris Declaration and EU commitments on aid effectiveness. Later a revised NIP detailing the contents of operation for 2011-2013, was in place at the time of the Arab Spring, but has since been suspended.

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189 Ibid.
7.1 The EU’s policy on the Syria before Arab uprising

From the initial idea launched by French President Nicolas Sarkozy during his 2007 presidential electoral campaign, to the Marseille Euro-Mediterranean foreign minister conference in November 2008, the Union of the Mediterranean (UfM) has gone through significant changes that have substantially modified its aspect and scaled down its political significance\textsuperscript{191}. For more than two decades, the EU has played a vital role in the Mediterranean and North Africa. Although it never quite generated the hard power of the United States, the EU’s soft power and its deep social, political and economic ties with the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean have provided it with considerable sway in Mediterranean affairs. Through its Europe-Mediterranean Partnership, first launched in 1995, the EU promoted the vision of an open and integrated Mediterranean region that was originally tied to and politically oriented towards the EU. In order to pursue this vision, the EU has relied on a number of tools and measures, appropriated from its enlargement policies. With time, the EU has refined these tools and repeatedly adjusted the shape and content of its Mediterranean policies. In the process the EU dropped some of the more intrusive normative goals of its original Mediterranean policies for a close relationship with the region’s autocratic, yet Western oriented, Arab regimes. Not only did these regimes make the promise to act as a bulwark against the rise of radical Islam and provide measure of regional stability, but they also endorsed the EU’s vision of a Euro-Mediterranean community. The result was a stability partnership, that both served EU’s interest in a stable and western oriented and Mediterranean and also the need of Arab regimes to garner external rents and legitimacy. By removing some of the region's’ long standing dictatorship and forcing others to pursue an agenda of domestic reforms, the Arab spring uprising of 2011 effectively draw an end to this relationship\textsuperscript{192}.

What started out as a democratic movement against a dictatorship, quickly turned into a war spilled over to its neighbours. Therefore to only focus on the departure of President Bashar al-Assad is a strategy doomed to failure since it will not solve the conflict. Though the humanitarian stakes are high, the European Union, with France at the forefront, have chosen


their alliance and continue to defend geostrategic and economic interests by pushing for the fall of the Syrian regime. However, from a realistic point of view, the conflict can be viewed as a broader power struggle between mainly Russia and the Western countries which attempts to advance their national interests. For the Western states these interest consists for example to isolate Iran and bolstering their strategic and economic alliance with Arab alliance like Qatar, which invests in Europe and therefore offers an alternative to the Russian gas. Following the line of the realistic perspective one can argue that the EU should avoid an intervention and leave the conflict in the hands of the Syrian. Since according to the modern realism theory, the ordering principle of the international system is anarchy, meaning that is there is no central authority to govern interactions between states, each state must act as a self-help unit in order to secure its own survival and secure its interest. Realism is related with rationality and therefore sees political actors and their preferences as they are rational. Realists also tend to focus more on military power than any other form of power as economical or moral. Even though not interfering would be within the framework of the realist view, it seems unlikely to happen and contradicts the European Union’s need to secure its own interest and survival in the conflict.

7.2 The EU’s policy on the Syria after the Arab uprising

“Our response [...] is built on the need to acknowledge past mistakes and listen without imposing. We are doing exactly that and it requires perseverance and sustained commitment. Success should translate into what I have called ‘deep democracy’.”

The EU’s initial reaction to the Arab Spring uprisings needs to be understood as a combination of the EU’s long term preference for regional stability and its more short term institutional shortcomings and divisions in this context. Realist concepts such as state primacy, self-interest, and drive for power, balance of power and security can be used as effectively in the analysis of the case of the Syria. The realist perspective would argue that it lies in the interest of the EU, after the Arab spring, to promote democracy, human rights and

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economic development in the southern Mediterranean in order to protect its own security and control migration. In the case of Syria, it happens that the EU’s self-interest and drive for power coincide with its values. Respect for human rights and democracy in the southern Mediterranean could be a way in order to reduce the risk of terrorism. Despite the continuing intra-European differences over the exact details of EU’s policies, a broad consensus emerged in favour in supporting the democratic transition process in the southern Mediterranean region. This was made possible as member states realised that their interests in a stable neighbourhood could not be guaranteed by authoritarian Arab regimes, instead had the regimes become a part of the problem. Meanwhile the EU has struggled with its policies to a more democratic and independent Middle East, it also had problems adjusting to the emerging geopolitical context of the MENA-region.

The Arab Spring had also broken the prevailing Middle East balance of power, that before had divided the region between a coalition of western leading status quo powers and an axis of revisionist states and organisations. In this confusing situation, what could be described a state of anarchy, the EU now has to find a new place as an actor in the changing Middle East chessboard in order to secure its interests and security and maintain its role as a global actor. EU’s policies in the Middle East and North African region have in the recent years been characterised by a number of trends. EU’s foreign policy in the region has become ‘securitised’, from counter-terrorism to migration, energy to trade, the various strands of the EU’s external action are now seen through an increasingly narrow security lenses. Recent academic debates have suggested that, alongside its military and civilian power, the European Union's’ identity as an international actor was characterised by its post-modern normative power, projecting its norms abroad and shaping its external actions according to these principles. Liberal views and democracy, human rights and pluralism are among the EU’s founding principles and have, at least nominally, been at the heart of the EU major foreign policy frameworks towards its neighbourhood. However, current trends in EU external action in the Middle East and North African region seem to suggest that the idea of normative power as a main driver of foreign policy was but an illusion. From a realist point of view, the EU’s intervention in the Syria was not only in order to secure its own interest or


survival, the EU, both in terms of individual states and collectively seek to play an active role in the Middle East peace process. First, the EU has a major economic interest in the region, both as a consumer of Middle Eastern petroleum and gas. Meanwhile the Southern European states, such as Spain, France, Italy and Portugal, are concerned about the impact of the instability in the area and in North Africa. Given the changing geopolitical and regional context, the EU’s southern neighbourhood is much likely to develop into an even more complex region in the near future, where the EU also would have to increasingly compete with other actors in order to maintain some measure of regional influence. As a consequence of this development, the EU’s policies will come to lose some of their regional character and focus ever more narrowly on bilateral relations with those countries that are eager to pursue a deeper and closer relationship with the European Union.

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8. The French policy on the Syria

Syria has had a particular importance on the French foreign policy most notably from the historical links between the two countries. France long has sought after Greater Syria, that piece of land mass in the Middle East embracing the modern states of Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon, for its empire in the Arab world. The French ties on the Syria started in 1799 when Napoleon invaded the country, and they deepened during the First World War when France and its Entente allies, engaged war with the Ottoman Empire. When First World War was over, France obtained mandate on Syria, which was established following the share of the Ottoman Empire territories by France and Great Britain as a result of the Sykes-Picot Agreement conforming to the League of Nations mandate system between 1923 and 1943. The Great Syria was divided into six states according to sectarian divisions. The Syrians did never accept the French mandate and the relations between the two countries remained tense until the termination of the French mandate in 1941 with the Free French declaration of the independence of Syria. In 1944 Syria gained international status and by declaring war on Germany in 1945, the country was invited to the conference founding the United Nations. It was only after Syria brought UN pressure to bear that France withdrew its troops from the Syrian territory in April 1946. After that, Syria could claim full independence.

8.1 The French policy on the Syria between 2000 and 2006

When the French President Jacques Chirac came to power in 1995, one of his main aims in the French foreign policy was to renew the French politique arabe, a French political approach that followed the decolonization process in the Middle East. In the intentions of President Charles, de Gaulle, who brought up this policy, this new approach was meant to give an international leading role to France within the context of the Cold War, by creating close ties with some strategic countries in the Middle East, independently from Soviet Union

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201 See Hollis, R. “Europe in the Middle East” in Fawcett, L. (ed.) International Relations of the Middle East (2013), pp.344-358
202 See Rogan, L. E. “The Emergence of the Middle East into Modern State System” in Fawcett, L. (ed.) International Relations of the Middle East (2013), p.53
203 Ibid.
and the US. In relation with the renewing of the *politique arabe*, President Jacques Chirac engaged France’s independent Middle East policy at the beginning of 2000. This policy outlined France’s intention of becoming a leading power in the Middle East and North Africa, fully convinced that some countries in the region lay within its natural sphere of influence by virtue of the French historical presence in the area. President Jacques Chirac worked to create deeper bonds between France and Syria. He was the only Western head of state to attend Hafez al-Assad’s funeral in 2000. Bashar al-Assad’s first official trip outside the Middle East was to Paris in June 2001 although Chirac had cultivated his relationship with the young Assad, receiving him at Élysée Palace in November 1999 prior to his accession to power.

Chirac’s support for Assad’s regime was not only limited to public gestures, as his government has reportedly sold weapons systems such as self-propelled howitzers equipped with night vision gear to Syria.

Moreover under Chirac’s administration, France developed important economic ties with Syria, becoming the second biggest commercial partner of the country. The friendly relation between France and Syria started to change in 2005 when the former Lebanon Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri was murdered and suspicion of the support of the Syrian government to the assassins, was raised. Al-Hariri was a Lebanese billionaire, close friend to Chirac. The close friendship between the two helped the Lebanese government avert bankruptcy. In November 2002, Chirac organized the Paris II conference during which representatives from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, European leaders, and Saudi officials took the decision to extend international credits to Lebanon for $4.4 billion.

France had also created close ties with Lebanon since the colonial time. The French mandate in Lebanon supported the creation of the ‘Grand Liban’ or Greater Lebanon at the beginning of 1900. With the support of their Maronite allies, France managed to create the

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204 Müller, P. “The Europeanization of France’s foreign policy towards the Middle East conflict – from leadership to EU-accommodation”, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09662839.2012.698266#.UzGRqjkh_uj
largest territorial expanse, while preserving the Christian majority. After six years under French governors the Lebanese Republic was founded in 1926, but it was only after Lebanon had brought UN pressure to bear that France withdrew its troops from Lebanon, and Lebanon could finally get full independence. The assassination of al-Hariri took Chirac at a crossroad, since both Lebanon and Syria represented vital French interests in the Middle East. France supported the set-up of an international court that investigated the ones responsible for the assassination of al-Hariri.

Chirac’s efforts to bolster French prestige in Syria and in the Middle East in general, included also uncritical support of rogues regardless of their rejectionism or support for terror. A clear example of that it’s the French support on Hezbollah that Chirac showed during his mandate. Despite the American and Israeli concerns, in October 2002, Chirac invited Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general, to attend the Francophone summit in Beirut. This meeting bestowed legitimacy upon the group which France refused to label as a terrorist organization, asserting instead that “Hezbollah is an important component of Lebanese society.”

By supporting Hezbollah, Chirac could manage to gain sympathies in Lebanon (and with its allies during the Lebanon war) and to undercut the US objectives in the Middle East as France´s prestige in the area was blooming. This new French prestige seemed to get confirmation in the words of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s secretary general, when he declared that “Lebanese do not like to see France held hostage to the savage and aggressive American hegemony.” Moreover, France’s support for Hezbollah showed that the relation with Syria even if frozen, was not totally closed. As a matter of fact, it was just Syria (and Iran) that during the Lebanon war (2006) worked jointly to unify the Shia that in the

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209 See Rogan, L. E. “The Emergence of the Middle East into Modern State System” in Fawcett, L. (ed.) International Relations of the Middle East (2013), chapter 2 p.53
210 See Rogan, L. E. “The Emergence of the Middle East into Modern State System” in Fawcett, L. (ed.) International Relations of the Middle East (2013), p.54
214 Muslims are split into main groups, the Sunni and the Shia. The split originates in a dispute after the death of the Prophet Muhammad over who should lead the Muslim community. The Sunni represent the great majority of the Muslims and regard themselves as the orthodox and traditionalist branch of Islam. Shia Muslims are in the majority in Iran, Iraq, and Yemen. There are also large Shia communities in Syria, Iran and Lebanon where they struggled to achieve greater social and economic opportunities during the 1970s and 1980s. Shia’s interpretation of Islam has a particularly powerful martyrdom tradition, expressed by the term of jihad which
early 1980s was divided between Amal and Hezbollah\textsuperscript{215}. The Syrian government not only gave the group the opportunity to thrive under the Syrian occupation of Beirut during the war, but it also supplied Hezbollah with weapons.

8.2 The French policy on the Syria between 2007 and 2011

In 2007 Nicolas Sarkozy, was elected as France´s new president. Sarkozy had previously had the role of Minister of Internal Affair under the Chirac´s administration. One of Sarkozy´s aim in foreign policy was to re-create the French-Syrian relation after the al-Hariri affair\textsuperscript{216}. An important step in this direction was taken in 2008 when Assad was officially invited in Paris for the Bastille Day celebrations\textsuperscript{217}. The reconciliation brought new economic relations between the two countries which signed some important commercial contracts, including a 1, 2 billion dollars contract for the French industrial group Lafarge, and other economic contracts for several French companies such as aircraft manufacturing companies, and oil and gas production companies\textsuperscript{218}. Nevertheless, the US did not approve the French-Syrian reconciliation, while Washington preferring keep distance from Damascus\textsuperscript{219}.

Once again France was showing its interests on the Syria making no secret about its aim to get a leadership status in the area. In 2008, France organized the Union for the Mediterranean meeting. During the meeting which not surprisingly was held in Paris, leaders of 43 nations met to discuss practical projects dealing with the environment, climate, transportation, immigration and policing\textsuperscript{220}. The meeting revealed to be also a perfect opportunity for Sarkozy to exercise some highly public Middle East diplomacy by bringing Assad out of isolation as he played host to a session between Israel´s Prime Minister and Palestine´s President\textsuperscript{221}. In 2008 when France held the EU presidency, Sarkozy visited Syria

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indicates all struggles in defence of Muslim territory. See Esposito, J.E. "What everyone needs to know about Islam" (2011), pp.48-50 and 151-153
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{218} Haddad, S. “France-Liban-Syrie”, Outre-Terre 3, no23, (2009) p.177, doi:10.3917/ouote.023.0173,
\textsuperscript{220} See New York Times ”Sarkozy helps to bring Syria Out of Isolation” 14 July 2008,
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/world/europe/14france.html
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
to heal a rift between the two countries, assessing that "peace in the Middle East passes through France and Syria" and that his visit to Syria, and claiming furthermore that Syria could "present a significant help in solving issues in the Middle East".

The events of the Arab Uprising gave Sarkozy and France a new opportunity to show France’s regained leadership status in the North Africa and Middle East region. At the beginning of March 2011, France took the leading of the UN air force intervention in Libya that marked the beginning of Gaddafi’s collapse. The success that followed the intervention in Libya, gave France the opportunity to play a prominent part in solving another crisis generated by the Arab Uprising: namely the Syrian situation. However, just unsurprisingly, Sarkozy chose to embrace the EU and the US point of view not showing the same intentions of military intervention in Syria as he did for Libya and limiting himself to tame statements affirming Bashar al-Assad’s ‘loss of legitimacy’.

On March 2009, EU’s Foreign Ministers met in Copenhagen to speak against military intervention in Syria, and Alain Juppe, French Foreign Minister, announced France’s opposition to outside military intervention in the country. Probably, having invested so much in bringing Assad in from isolation, Sarkozy remained concerned that a vacuum of power might have profoundly destabilising effects if the Syrian regime were to fall precipitously. However, a year later Sarkozy seemed to slowly change direction when during an annual meeting with French diplomats, he pledged that France and its allies would do everything legally possible to help the Syrian people achieve freedom and democracy, saying that “Bashar al-Assad had committed ‘irreparable’ damage in his government’s crackdown on anti-government protests in recent months.”

In 2011 Sarkozy took a step forward, making a proposal for a “secured zone to protect civilians” which consisted in EU-backed humanitarian corridors that would allow aid groups and observers into Syria. This was the first time that a major Western country suggested international intervention in the Syria, since the conflict had exploded in the country. Later

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222 See DW “EU’s Sarkozy Heads to Syria for Mideast Peace Talks” 3 September 2008 http://www.dw.de/eus-sarkozy-heads-to-syria-for-mideast-peace-talks/a-3615477
that year speaking on the French radio, Foreign Minister Alain Juppé said he had been speaking with partners in the United Nations, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and the Arab League about the humanitarian corridors and that he hoped to secure a UN resolution "to protect civilians and let observers enter Syria for the sake of stopping the killing". Despite the French enthusiasm, the EU stopped the humanitarian corridors proposal.

8.3 The French policy on the Syria between 2012 and 2015

In 2012 François Hollande succeeded Sarkozy in President´s post. One of Hollande´s first international acts was to recognize the Syrian National Coalition as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian people. On November 2012, during the first major press conference of his presidency, Hollande saluted the united opposition formed in Qatar Nov. 11 as the future provisional government of a democratic Syria, saying that “I announce today that France recognizes the Syrian National Council as the sole representative of the Syrian people, and as the future government of a democratic Syria bringing an end to Bashar Assad’s regime”. The Syrian Coalition had not gained the same support among other Western countries as it gained with France, Although both the US and the UK saw the Coalition as an important actor for an eventual political solution, they did not give it the same legitimacy, and stopped short of recognizing the coalition as Syria’s de facto government in exile. Similar vocal support was expressed by the Arab League and European Union Tuesday but they failed to extend full recognition to the new Syrian opposition collective. Prior to Hollande’s announcement, only six Gulf nations had undertaken formal recognition. However, as France got closer the Syrian oppositional forces, the relation with the Assad´s regime became tenser, and escalated to the closing of the French embassy in Syria and with the Syria ambassador being expelled from France.

As the suspects of chemical attacks used by Assad´s forces grew, France built an international coalition with the US and the UK in order to intervene against Assad, deciding not to wait for the issue of the UN report that was supposed to prove the responsibility of

228 Ibid.
231 See The Huffington Post "Hollande: Syria Ambassador To France being expelled” 29 May 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/29/syria-ambassador-france-expelled-hollande_n_1552035.html
Assad from these chemical attacks\textsuperscript{232}. Hollande was so deeply convinced about the inevitability of the military intervention that he did not consider it necessary to wait that the truth about the chemical attacks was authenticated by the UN report. Nevertheless, this strategy met negative response at domestic level, as French poll showed that 64 per cent of the French citizens were extreme negative to taking part on the military intervention, and 58 per cent did not trust Hollande to conduct any operation\textsuperscript{233}. Nonetheless, Hollande was so determinate to launch the military strike, that he did not seek the French Parliament’s consent in order to proceed with the attack, since according to the French constitution the French President, as supreme commander of France’s armed forces, is empowered to go to war without parliamentary approval\textsuperscript{234}\textsuperscript{234}.

However, Hollande was in the minority on whether to intervene in Syria not only among his countrymen, but also among the E.U.’s 28 leaders. Almost all opposed launching bombing strikes without approval from the U.N. Security Council — which complicated the situation since Assad’s close ally Russia has veto power there. Also, German Chancellor Angela Merkel had made it clear she was against sending her military to support a U.S.-led bombing campaign. Hollande found also little open support elsewhere in Europe\textsuperscript{235}. All things considered, France has been working actively to promote its leading role in the Syrian situation. At international level, Hollande attempted to take the leadership of a possible military intervention in Syria, and at national level, he tries to convince the French people and authorities about the need of his efforts. But these efforts did not stop here. In August 2104 Hollande admitted during an interview with the French press, that France had delivered the Syrian rebels with weapons since those had to face both the armies of Assad and the terrorist group of the Islamic State\textsuperscript{236}. In the interview Hollande claimed also that the deterioration of the Syrian situation had to be blamed on the Western countries and that “if, one year ago [2012], the major powers had reacted to the use of chemical weapons, we wouldn’t have had

this terrible choice between a dictator and a terrorist group,” adding that the rebels “deserve all our support”\(^{237}\).

As IS rapid advanced in Iraq and Syria taking control of big parts in the Northeast of the country and escalated in uncontrolled violence, the US President Barack Obama set up a coalition of partner countries to fight against the terrorist group. The coalition was made up by a list of 62 countries. Since the bar of inclusion is fairly low, different countries have contributed in different ways to the global coalition to defeat IS. Some of these countries have simply condemned IS’s actions, others like the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and France has pledged military or humanitarian support\(^{238}\). The government of Hollande has provided planes which since September 2014 have been taken part in airstrikes against IS in Iraq, it has also contributed ammunition to Kurdish fighters and made more than 65 tons of humanitarian drops over the nation\(^{239}\). Laurent Fabius, French Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development, said during an interview in January 2015, that “one of the \textit{raisons d’être} of France’s foreign policy is to combat terrorism”\(^{240}\).

\(^{237}\) Ibid.
9 The situation in France

On Wednesday 7 January morning time, two masked gunmen drove up a car to building in Rue Nicolas-Appert, Paris. The two men, which later were identified as brothers Cherif and Said Kouachi, went inside the building and stepped up to the second floor in the Charlie Hebdo’s office. Once inside, the men opened fire and killed the editor's police bodyguard, and other four cartoonists, along with three other editorial staff and a guest attending a meeting with them. Police, was alerted to a shooting incident and arrived at the scene as the gunmen were leaving the building. A police car blocked the gunmen's escape and the gunmen opened fire. One of the attackers then walked up to the injured officer on the pavement and shot him dead at close range. The gunman returned to the car and drove away with his accomplice. The day after, a lone gunman shot two people in the southern Paris suburb of Montrouge. The gunman, armed with a machine-gun and a pistol, shot dead a policewoman and injured a man before fleeing. On Friday 9 January, while the Kouachi brothers were located and surrounded by French police at a printworks outside Paris, a gunman took several people hostage at a kosher supermarket in the east of Paris after a shootout. Minutes after the printworks siege came to an end, elite commandos stormed the supermarket, shooting the gunman dead and freeing 15 hostages from the store. They found the bodies of four hostages. The hostage-taker in the supermarket was identified in a man called Amedy Coulibaly. In an appeal for witnesses to the shooting in Montrouge, the French police identified Coulibaly and his partner, Hayat Boumeddiene, as the responsible of the shooting in Montrouge. Mr Coulibaly was taken alive and arrested by the French police, Mrs Boumeddiene managed to flee France and she is believed to have travelled to Syria from Turkey241.

9.1 The French Foreign Fighters

“I am going to die in Syria – surely quite soon. I would say I have only about seven more months on this earth. Jihad is a way of living – and dying – that not everyone understands. But before joining Allah, I would like to leave a mark of my short time on earth. […]”. Before

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that, I used to go to nightclubs, I drank alcohol, I was a man of this world – only interested in possessions. Now, jihad has become an obligation”.

The French authorities have estimated that by mid-2014, over 700 French citizens have left France and travelled to Syria to fight. During the second half of 2013, France assisted to a sharp rise in FF243. According to Barret, these French volunteers are mainly young (18-28), they mainly live in city-areas, have no previous record of involvement with extremism, and no significant record of criminal or other anti-social behaviour. About 25% are converts to Islam but they have no cultural or ethnic links to Syria244. Stories of home-grown jihadists have become more and more tragically familiar in France, where not only adults but teenagers as well, continue to leave the country towards Turkey, and easily cross the border with Syria245. According to Sylvie Kaufmann, who refers to Gilles Kepel, professor at Sciences Po in Paris and expert on political Islam, “the days of Al Qaeda cells, of groups formed in radical mosques, easily monitored by police, are gone. This is the era of “lone wolves” — self-radicalized or radicalized in prison, brainwashed with videos of violence and martyrdom circulated on the Internet”.

These recruiters, continues Kepel, “have been very shrewd at using the language of social networks,” which have become a powerful toll for Jihadist recruitment and propaganda. According to collected data, France has also the highest number of female jihadi recruits, with 63 in the area of conflict – about 25% of the total – and at least with another 60 believed to be considering the move. In most cases, women and girls, as young as 14 and 15, appear to have left home to marry Jihadists, drawn to the idea of supporting the fighters and having “jihadist children to continue the spread of Islam”, said Louis Caprioli, former head of the French security agency Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire. “If their husband dies,

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243 The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism information Centre “Foreign Fighters from Western countries in the ranks of the rebel organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global Jihad in Syria” January 2014, p.29 http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20616/E_208_13_409304481.pdf
247 Ibid.
they will be given adulation as the wife of a martyr.” Although many of the French jihadists come from the banlieues, the segregated suburban housing projects of big cities, this does not necessarily mean that radicalization of the French Foreign Fighters is strictly connected to social marginalization or poverty, as a matter of fact, statistic data show that radical Islam in France also recruits among middle-class families.

9.2 The roots causes of the Phenomenon of the French Foreign Fighters:

9.2.1 Poverty and exclusion

France is the home to Europe’s largest Muslim population, unofficial estimates of the number of Muslims in France range from 3.5 million to more than 6 million, out of total French population of over 60 million. The French approach to integration and assimilation is rooted in the French Revolution of 1789, and the resulting republican ideal that guaranteed religious freedom but also built a wall between religion and the state. There is a widely held view in France that many Muslims are not well-assimilated. Significant socio-economic disparities between “native” French and those of North African and/or Muslim descent have led to many questions and discussions of the effectiveness of traditional French models of assimilations rooted in the republican ideal of equality. These disparities often manifest themselves in sharp differences in employment rates, access to housing, education levels. The unemployment rate among immigrant groups, is estimated to be double the unemployment rate of the overall population and even higher among those with roots in North Africa. There are few Muslims visible in the top levels of French politics, media, business or the civil service.

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249 Ibid.
252 Ibid.
A large number of France’s Muslims, and particularly Muslim youth, live in public housing projects located in the outskirts of urban centres. These areas, known as banlieues, are marked by poverty and high figures of unemployment. It also shows that the percentage of Muslims who fail to finish secondary school appears to be considerably higher than that of non-Muslims. Recent opinion polls indicate that while a clear majority of French citizens believes that Muslims are not well integrated into French society, a growing number may be attributing the failure to integrate to Muslims themselves as opposed to inadequate French integration policies. In 2010, a survey found that 68% of French people believe that Muslims are not well integrated into the French society, and with 61% of these citing Muslims refusal to do so as the primary factor.

Over the past 10 years the French government has adopted new measures to help better assimilate Muslims and to address potential security threats emanating from Muslims communities. The measures place a high value on preserving the ideals of republicanism, and also reflect an institutional approach in keeping with a long tradition of using a highly centralized government apparatus in order to ensure public order. In 2003, the creation of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) was considered one of the most significant efforts to improve ties between French Muslims and the state. Some observers argued the government-led founding of the CFCM as an attempt to reduce foreign influence on France’s Muslim population and to thereby promote a sort of French brand of Islam that is not in conflict with the values of the republic. The CFCM represents above all the Muslim religion, but it is not meant in any way to represent all Muslims in France. Muslim integration has become one of the most contentious issues in the immigration debate within the EU, showing that the process of getting the balance right has not been easy.

9.2.2 Religious extremism

As it has been noted, radicalisation is a complex matter that has not yet been defined uniformly. The causes of radicalisation in Europe are complex and draw from the continuing conflicts in the Middle East, to the disconnectedness of large Muslim communities living in

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255 Ibid.
Western societies and their search for an identity. Radicalisation and religious extremism has become serious threats for EU’s security, by bringing new counter-terrorism challenges including home-grown radicalisation, radical Islamic groups, and recruitment of young Muslims using propaganda on the Internet.256

France has a long experience of combating terrorism, aided by a tightly centralized system of law enforcement, and a far-reaching intelligence network that works in gathering information on extremist groups. Different forms of violent groups have been active in France for many decades. Going back to the 1960’s, Algerian, Basque and Corsican terrorists have struck French target.

Since the 1995 bomb attack in Paris257, French counter-terrorist policies and anti-terror legislation have been reinforced, improved and extended, in the response to the emergence of novel terrorist modes of action, as well as the appearance of new terrorist threats. French legislators have attempted to find a balance between strong legislation that effectively addresses the peculiar law-enforcement challenges posed by terrorism, while simultaneously working to guarantee individuals’ and public freedom. With this carefully balanced approach, France has managed to avoid adopting exceptional legislation, keeping its anti-terror legislation within the sphere of criminal law’s ordinary regulation. This might be an explanation why France, unlike other European countries, did not implement a complete modernization of its legislation following the attacks of 9/11, but it has instead reinforced and extended the existing regulation.258

In order to better understand the implications of the French foreign policy in international conflicts and in connection with the increased security threat towards French national security, recent studies and observers have analysed the 2013 French intervention in Mali and its consequences. The French Intervention in Mali aimed to push back Islamist extremists who at the time had progressively gained a foothold in the northern part of the country. The military intervention aimed primarily to protect global and French security in the long term, by targeting jihadis who were building a haven in the hinterland of Western

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257 In September 1995, a bomb exploded in the subway in Paris. The author of the attack was Algerian militants belonging to the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). See Laurence, J. Laurence,J. “Interview on National Public Radio, The Dianne Rehm Show” 13 July 2010. The details of this operation are not in the public domain. Elements of the GIA are now reportedly linked to Al Qaeda.
Africa. Nevertheless the outcome turned out more complex than calculated, since the conflict has only generated more animosity from Islamist militants. 

In 2012, France experienced another terrorist attack, carried out by an Islamist extremist who killed eight people in multiple attacks with separate days. The suspect was later killed in a shootout with police, but it was reported that the person in question had been traveling to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and had contacts with radical organizations. The French Foreign Minister afterwards said that the suspect motivation was to avenge the Palestinian children and take revenge on the French army due to its foreign interventions.

The French counter-terrorism response to the phenomenon of Foreign Fighters

Close after the Madrid and London bombings France has improved its counter-terrorism capacity introducing a new anti-terrorism legislation. The core of this legislation is Act 2006-64 of 23 January 2006 on action against terrorism and it contains various provisions on security and border checks\(^{260}\). According to this legislation, all acts of terrorism are considered autonomous offences liable to increased penalties (Article 421-1 of the French Penal Code). Terrorist activity is defined as the perpetration of one of a limitative list of criminal offences “in connection with an individual or collective undertaking, the purpose of which is seriously to disturb public order through intimidation or terror”\(^{261}\). However, some offences such as conspiracy to commit a terrorist offence and the financing of terrorism are now considered as specific offences. On 21 December 2012, the French Parliament adopted a new counter-terrorism law, Act 2012-1432 on security and action against terrorism.

The Act allows French authorities to prosecute terrorist acts committed abroad by French nationals or by persons habitually residing in France, including the participation to terrorist training camps outside France even though no misdeed has been committed on French territory. The Act also allows authorities to carry on legal proceedings against persons who incite to terrorism\(^{262}\). Nevertheless, as we previously pointed out, the prosecution of French FF is still difficult, because the participation in war is not a crime according to French law. So while France has enacted legislation to prosecute citizens who return to the country after having committed an act of terrorism abroad, the French legislation does not offer any legal basis to arrest individuals simply for leaving to or returning from combat in Syria, or to prohibit them to travel to Syria\(^{263}\).

Besides law enforcement, the French government has strengthened cooperation and intelligence capacity both on national and international level, in order to prevent, coordinate police forces and evaluate the terrorist threat. The primary actor is the counter-terrorism unit at the Directorate General of External Security (DGSE – Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure). With decree of 27 June 2008 the French government has also created the Central

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\(^{260}\) See Legislationline “France: Counter-Terrorism” w.d.
http://www.legislationline.org/topics/country/30/topic/5

\(^{261}\) See France Diplomatie “Counter-terrorism in France” March 2013,

\(^{262}\) See Vidino, L. “Foreign Fighters: An Overview of Responses in Eleven Countries” p. 10 March 2014

Domestic Intelligence Directorate (DCRI - Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur) by integrating the counter-intelligence service (DST - Direction de la sécurité du territoire) with the Central Directorate for General Intelligence (DCRG – Direction centrale des renseignements généraux). The Anti-Terrorist Coordination Unit (UCLAT – Unité de coordination de la lutte anti-terroriste) was set up to coordinate the police and the national gendarmerie, which has its own anti-terrorist brigade (BLAT- brigade de lutte anti-terroriste). The National Intelligence Council (CNR – Conseil national du renseignement) was created in order to evaluate the terrorism threat. At operational level, two police units the National Gendarmerie Action Group (GIGN – Groupe d’intervention de la gendarmerie nationale) and the RAID (Research, Assistance, Intervention and Deterrence), has been given more effective instruments to counter terrorist threats to public security.

As IS’s drastically expanded its presence in Syria and Iraq, and after the attack in Paris, France has adopted even more antiterrorism measures and upped security in the country. Jean-Yves Le Drian, France’s defence minister has vowed that Isis must be “wiped out” adding that “the response is inside and outside France, [since] IS is a terrorist army with fighters from everywhere”. In March 2014 France adopted a plan to confront the issue of FF leaving to Syria and their possible return into French territory. In September and October 2014 the National Assembly and the Senate adopted of a bill which includes new measures relating to the official ban on leaving the country, the justification of terrorism, and the expansion of the definition of terrorism to include isolated terrorist acts. Additionally the French government has communicated that France should from now on refer to the Islamic State organization as “Daesh”, since according to Laurent Fabius, French Foreign Minister,

265 Ibid.
266 See The Independent “ France prepares to fight back: Defence minister says Isis’ international army must be wiped out” 17 May 2015
268 Daesh is a loose acronym of the Arabic for “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham). First used in April 2013 by Arabic and Iranian media hostile to the jihadist movement, Daesh became a name commonly used by the enemies of IS, notably forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as well as activists and less fanatical rebel groups also fighting the Damascus regime. Beyond the acronym, “Daesh” sounds lie the Arabic “Daes”, meaning “one who crushes something underfoot” as well as “Dahes”, which means “one who sows discord”. “Daesh” therefore has considerably negative undertones. There can be little political ambiguity behind the French government’s decision to deploy Daesh as a linguistic weapon. See France24 “France govt to use Arabic ‘Daesh’ for Islamic State group” 17 September 2014 http://www.france24.com/en/20140917-france-switches-arabic-daesh-acronym-islamic-state/
IS “is a terrorist group and not a state. I do not recommend using the term Islamic State because it blurs the lines between Islam, Muslims and Islamists. The Arabs call it ‘Daesh’ and I will be calling them the ‘Daesh cutthroats’\textsuperscript{269}. The action plan adopted by the National Assembly and the Senate is based on the adoption of UNSCR 2178 whose aim is to strengthen the coherence of international action against the phenomenon of FF by helping Iraqi and Syrian fighters to combat Daesh through air strikes and military training and equipping, and by combating the influx of foreign terrorist fighters to Syria and Iraq\textsuperscript{270}. In particular the bill enables the French authorities to ban their citizens from leaving the country in case of serious reason to believe that these individuals are going abroad with the purpose of participating in terrorist activities or if the authorities suspect that they are going to the theatre of operations of terrorist groups under conditions liable to lead them to endanger public security on their return to France. The ban includes also the confiscation of the suspect’s passport in order to make him or her unable to leave the country\textsuperscript{271}. Moreover, the bill allows the State to block Internet sites if the authorities suspect these for advocating terrorism.

The new French anti-terrorism legislation also imposes sentences up to 10 years on anyone who has been found in possession of dangerous objects such as weapons and explosives, or on those who have been consulting terrorist websites or receiving terrorist training\textsuperscript{272}. The 2014 bill includes also some (controversial) laws that allow authorities to monitor the digital and mobile communications of anyone suspected of terrorist activities, without any prior authorization from a judge. Intelligence services have also legal permission to place cameras and microphones in private homes and install "key-logger" devices to record real-time key strokes on targeted computers.\textsuperscript{273} In order to prevent young French men and women from travelling to Syria or Iraq, France has implemented a comprehensive plan to combat terrorist networks and violent radicalization since April 2014. This plan includes several strategic and complementary priorities: anticipating and preventing the departure of legal adults and minors, dismantling the recruitment networks acting in France, supporting


\textsuperscript{272} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{273} See DW “French lawmakers vote for sweeping powers to spy on citizens” 5 May 2015 http://www.dw.de/french-lawmakers-vote-for-sweeping-powers-to-spy-on-citizens/a-18430523
and guiding families, reinforcing international cooperation in the fight against terrorism. The French government has also started several campaigns aimed at the general public in order to raise citizens’ awareness of terrorism and to prevent Jihadist radicalization and recruitment, especially among young people. The campaigns include for instance the creation of an educational website aimed to educate citizens about the issues and the means to combat terrorism. The website also provides practical tools which aim to help citizens in understanding the terrorist threat and propaganda, and acting against it. It also offers information about how to behave in a threatening situation and in citizens’ day-to-day lives. The French government has also developed a plan to combat radicalization in prison, which notably includes placing violent radicalized detainees in a confinement or disciplinary block.

At social level, the French government has been seeking to reinforce the principle of secularism, and beyond that, it has supported the idea that Islam is fully compatible with the values of the French Republic. In order to achieve these goals, the government has initiated different types of actions which include: an open dialogue between the prefects in each department and the local representatives of the Muslim faiths, more control over Muslim religious private schools in order to ensure that education is developed in accordance with the principles of the Republic, and finally measures to ensure the safety of mosques, as well as the prevention and repression of anti-Muslim acts as a part of the anti-racism and anti-Semitism policy.


276 Ibid.


11 Analysis

The majority of studies about the FF phenomenon have been focusing on the micro-and meso-levels, highlighting individuals´ issues such as alienation, marginalisation and discrimination, or focusing on the wider radical social surround as root causes for radicalisation and terrorism. Many studies and reports have also been looking at the phenomenon in general, not exploring more deeply the reality beyond the single national states. National data reporting the number of fighters within each country, the procedures of travelling to Syria, propaganda and recruitment on the Internet, have also became typical topics of the FF literature. However, very little attention has been given to the macro-level which includes, according to Schmid, the role played by governments´ foreign policy in individuals´ radicalization´s process. Indeed, if this foreign policy does not support democracy, peace, human rights, is double standard-sized, and shows propensity for military interventions, it can potentially become a decisive push factor for mobilisation, radicalisation of the discontented, and eventually violence and terrorism. The lack of terrorism studies at macro-level has consequently brought very few knowledge about the link between states´ foreign policy and terrorism. In this chapter we will conduct our analysis with help of microcorrelation in order to see to what extent and how the French policy towards Syria between 2005 and 2015 may have influenced the sharp rise of the FF phenomenon in France. Since one of our aims is also to support the theory that France, according to realism, has been acting as a dominant state in order to follow own interests towards Syria, we will conduct microcorrelation in the framework of the realist perspective.

11.1 How French national interests has been prioritized before democracy

Syria has had a particular importance on the French foreign policy most notably from the historical links between the two countries. One of the central concepts in realism is that powerful states are constantly seeking power and once this power is reached, they act to maintain it by creating alliances and politics on the international level. During the presidency of Jacques Chirac, France´s geostrategic goals became very clear. France sought up a new international leading role by creating close ties with some strategic countries in the Middle East, independently from the US and the EU. This policy was grounded in a fully belief that some countries in the region lied within France´s natural sphere of influence by virtue of the French historical presence in the area. According to that, France has also pursued a pro-active
policy towards the neighbouring Lebanon, in order to establish a major influence in the Middle Eastern region. The rule of realism says that states’ behaviour is self-seeking and self-centred and that each state is responsible for ensuring its own well-being and survival. The French policy in Syria has been shaped in accordance with this rule. France has been driving its interests towards the country, according to one key factor: its own economic interests.

President Jacques Chirac worked hard to create deeper economic and political bonds between France and Syria, showing no support for democracy in Syria and despite the oppressive nature of Assad’s authoritarian regime. As a matter of fact, when Assad came to power, he managed to create a corrupted absolute presidency, infiltrating his authority in all the government’s institutions and activities including for instance, the 2000 presidential elections that affirmed him with 99 percent of the votes and ensured the maintenance of the Baath Party’s domination. To maintain his power, Assad has also created a repressive apparatus with the help security forces and the military, to which France has reportedly sold weapons systems.

### 11.2 Why French policy on the Syria is double standard

There are several other reasons to consider the French policy towards Syria as a serious threat for radicalization and therefore as a key driver for the phenomenon of French Foreign Fighters. Overall, France has showed a double standard policy expressing its opposition to an eventual military intervention at the beginning of the Syrian conflict. At that time France chose to prioritise its geopolitical interests over human rights even in the face of Assad’s violent reaction against the civilians.

As a matter of fact during Sarkozy’s mandate, France worked hard to restore the relationship with Syria after the al-Hariri affair. Indeed in this occasion, President Sarkozy’s foreign policy on the Syria showed once again France’s determination to promote French interests in the country and increase France’s influence in the international arena. However unlike his predecessor Chirac, Sarkozy did not let France act alone this time. Following rationally the realist rules, according to which strong national governments can subordinate and use international organisations as political tools to maximise their own interests, Sarkozy’s policy managed to restore French power in the Middle East through the EU. By promoting at European level initiatives such as the CFDP, the Common European Foreign Policy, and the MU, Mediterranean Union, Sarkozy could push forward France’s interests in
the Middle East, strengthening EU´s global role and consequently France´s leading role within the EU.

11.3 How France has showed lack of incoherence towards Syria

The gaps between states´ declaratory foreign policy and actual foreign policy, as well as political incoherence are also significant push factors for radicalisation and terrorism. France has not showed significant coherence in its foreign policy towards the Syrian situation, which perhaps may be seen as a symptom of France ability to adopt policies linking its permanent interests on Syria with reasonable effectiveness to the international environment. One of realism´s first rules is that states do not follow policies mindlessly, but they modified or discharge them if they don´t get the desired results or if the circumstances that produced them have changed. During Sarkozy and Hollande´s mandates, France made two significant foreign policy shifts towards Syria. After Sarkozy expressed his opposition against any kind of military intervention, he tried to play again a leading role in the international arena, and promoted international intervention in Syria, launching this time the idea of humanitarian assistance in form of secured corridors to protect civilians. Nevertheless, the EU stopped the French humanitarian corridors proposal. The second shift regards France´s attitude on the Syrian oppositional forces. When it became clear that neither the EU nor the U.S would approve any military intervention, France started to show its full support for the rebel oppositional forces in Syria, legitimizing their fight against Assad. Later, when the opposition groups showed their double nature (jihadists on one side, and non-jihadists on the other), the French government came out and said that it did not support those who are fighting the war, and that go to Syria and fight Assad in the name of jihad was not right.

11.4 How France is been acting without international consensus

France´s strategy on Syria has not only bypassed the principle of democracy, but also the principle of legality, taking the country a step forward towards the threat of radicalization. During his regime, Hollande hoped to reconfirm the 2011 French leadership status in North Africa and Middle East region. At that time, France took the leading of the UN air force intervention in Libya that marked the beginning of Gaddafi´s collapse. The success that followed from the intervention in Libya, gave France new confidence in its effort to be
recognized as a global power. This explains why France has taken the initiative to promote a military strike against the Syrian regime, showing France’s priority to guarantee its independence from the EU and the US, in decision-making. But this strategy has created several boomerang effects. Overall, the principles of legality and democracy were harmed by Hollande’s intention to launch the military strike without the French Parliament’s approval—even if in respect with the French constitution, and without the support of the majority of the French population. Moreover, the 2013 French proposal of military strike did not get the support of the EU and President Obama, in contrast to Hollande, had to wait for the approval of the American Congress. Furthermore, Hollande’s military activism met criticism at European and UN level confirming the fact that France was driven its own self-made policy towards the Syrian situation.

11.5 How France’s foreign policy has legitimate terrorists

According to realism, the character of the international system, including states foreign policies, may offer contributive circumstances for the development of terrorist groups or activities. As a matter of fact, states can use terrorism as an instrument that allows governments to pursue an aggressive foreign policy when they are not be able to deploy conventional armed forces to achieve strategic objectives. There have been some significant examples of that in France’s foreign policy. The most interesting is maybe France’s support to the EU terrorist-banned group Hezbollah. Supporting Hezbollah served France’s goal to achieve a privileged position in the Middle East. Indeed, on one side by supporting Hezbollah, and refusing to label them as terrorists, President Chirac could manage to gain sympathies in Lebanon (and with its allies during the Lebanon war). On the other side, since France has been the only super power that gave Hezbollah international political status, it managed on this way to undercut the US objectives in the Middle East, as France’s prestige in the area bloomed. As a corollary of this, France’s support on Hezbollah has reinforced the idea that terrorist groups can be used as legitimate tolls for states’ foreign policy. Many years later, France has followed a similar path in Syria, by arming and politically supporting the rebel forces that are fighting against Assad. In this case, since a part of the oppositional movement (IS- which includes remarkable enough Hezbollah militants) has become known to commit terrorist acts, France had to partly back up its sponsorship, supporting the US-led military strikes in Iraq and Syria, and clarifying its support for solely the SNC in relation to the international community.
12 Conclusions

We began this paper with a statement: that the French policy towards Syria is one of the main root causes for explaining the phenomenon of French Foreign Fighters travelling to Syria. Secondly we argued that France has been acting as a dominant state, attempting to take the leading role of the international action towards Syria, in order to further its own interests in the EU. Consequently, we claimed that the French interests towards Syria are the causes of some main national security issues because the 2005-2015 foreign policy that France has been following in order to achieve these interests, weakens the French government’s ability to put in place effective security measures to the issue of Foreign Fighters. France has not applied a big stick foreign policy in several occasions, which resulted e.g. in supporting Hezbollah during Chirac’s administration or in the 2013 intervention in Mali, which turned to be a double-edged sword in terms of security against the jihadist terrorism. The conducted process-tracing indicates that France’s imprudent and offensive foreign policy has activated decisive push factors for individuals’ mobilisation, radicalisation of the discontented, and eventually violence and terrorism, through this offensive foreign policy.

On the other hand, one might argue that the French foreign policy cannot be considered the only root cause for the FF phenomenon, as factors like poverty and exclusion have been identified by researchers and scholars as situational causes that can trigger terrorist actions. However, despite the fact that some categories of the French Muslim community present negative trends in employment rates, access to housing and education levels, poverty and exclusion cannot be considered per se as causes of radicalization and for the high number of French Foreign Fighters. A clear indication against poverty and exclusion as main root causes for the FF phenomenon is the demographic profiles of radical Muslims in the Western world, which shows that these individuals are generally not poor, religiously fanatic, or desperate due to suffering from extreme poverty, political oppression, or other deprived circumstances. With particular regard to the French fighters, the picture shows that although many of the French jihadists come from segregated suburban housing projects of big cities, a large part of them are well-educated individuals, recruited among middle-class families.

The close historical bonds between France and Syria have been of particular importance for the French foreign policy agenda. In several different occasions France has shown its determination to cultivate and revive the relationship with Syria in order to re-confirm the French influence in the Middle Eastern region. During the period 2005-2015, this policy has
developed in three directions: 1) creating important economic and political ties with Syria, especially during Chirac and Sarkozy’s administrations- which has intensified the privilege French-Syrian relationship and strengthened France’s presence in the country. 2) Working independently from the EU’s line of policy. While the EU has been showing a soft power approach towards Syria, promoting cooperation on economic, social and democratic reform, and political dialogue in order to solve the Syrian crisis, France has instead followed an aggressive policy, arming the rebellions forces and enjoying the US-led military strikes against IS in Iraq and Syria. France has also zealously defended its independent international status, promoting itself as the patron among EU countries of the Syrian case. 3) Laying down alliances with the US and the EU to strengthen French foreign policy towards Syria. First, France has thus tried to take the leading role on the European foreign policy towards Syria, making considerable efforts to promote closer cooperation on EU level in order to give broader support to France’s Syrian policy. Afterwards, France has dealt with the United States as a partner in this policy, enhancing the French international leadership role. President Francois Hollande has been spoken with conviction to the EU member states about the necessity of peace and democracy in Syria and has urged the West to confront these issues, and the violence and threats to which they give rise. In this way, France has ranged itself in favour of increasing military aid from Europe to Syria. In doing so, France has not merely showed to be high-principled, but also revealed its underlain search for a privilege position in the power system.

Like most of the EU member states, France has quickly and largely responded to the potential threat posed by the phenomenon of FF, in accordance to the EU anti-terrorism directives. France has adopted a new counter-terrorism law, enacted legislation to prosecute citizens who return to the country after having committed acts of terrorism abroad, and promoted several initiatives in order to stop the wave of increasing jihadist radicalization in the country. But is this enough? Can France really stop the French Foreign Fighters? Probably not. While many of these measures are surely considered effective, according to countering-terrorism literature, there are still some unsolved issues. The prosecution of French Foreign Fighters still remains difficult since it is very complicated to qualify whenever their time in Syria can be classified as acts of terrorism or as merely leaving to or returning from combat in the Syrian rebellion as a legitimate soldier, which is not considered as a crime pursuant to French law. Because of this, the French government is still unable to charge those French citizens that are going to fight against Assad’s bloody regime, no matter how notorious or dangerous their allies are in that effort.
Overall, the main obstacle in the struggle against French Foreign Fighters is France’s foreign policy itself. France was the first western country to recognise the Syrian National Council as the legitimate Syrian interlocutor and it continues to support the revolutionaries’ ambitions. Because France officially supports the effort to overthrow the Assad regime, it is difficult for the French government now to come out and say that it does not support those who are fighting the war. Moreover as the results of our work show, French policy on the Syria has activated dangerous radicalisation mechanisms that are not only affecting the French national security but also the lives of thousands Syrian citizens.
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