

## **Population Dynamics and Radicalization in the CENTCOM AOR: Post-Brexit EU2 + 1 and the UN vs. a US-led Coalition of the Willing**

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### **Introduction**

In 2020, the States of the European Union (EU), as well as NATO's European members and those States not enjoying membership of one or both organizations (e.g. the United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland, and others), confront a serious multi-faceted challenge. This challenge takes the form of popular radicalization and mass migration (PRMM) of both refugees and non-refugee migrants originating in the portion of US Central Command's Area of Responsibility (CENTCOM AOR) located in the Middle East and Central Asia and by extension into North Africa within the AFRICOM AOR.

This analysis examined specifically the concerns of the States of the EU2 + 1 (the United Kingdom, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany) and the other States of German-speaking and East Central Europe (GS-ECE). The latter include German-speaking Austria and Switzerland but also Hungary, the Czech Republic/Czechia, Slovakia, and Poland.

In varying degrees, but nonetheless consistently, these States view PRMM as posing: 1) a serious potential (or actual) Islamist terrorist threat to their national security (despite the fact that not all refugees or migrants are Muslim), and 2) an increasing likelihood for generating potential (or actual) socio-political instability in their domestic affairs.

To the degree to which PRMM is exacerbated by Russia's military action in support of Syria in the latter's civil war (the term is used generically), PRMM may be viewed as fostering Russia's larger geo-strategic objectives of causing the greatest possible weakening of both the EU and NATO. Further, to the degree to which current Russo-Turkish cooperation continues—and Turkish-EU/NATO estrangement lasts—Turkey may well continue to serve as the principal corridor through which PRMM may be “exported” into Europe via Greece and the Balkans.

### **Key Findings**

- **Historically conditioned attitudes in the EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE complicate effective and rapid responses, whether national or collective, to PRMM.**
- Barring major “Black Swan” events, **EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE will continue to stress the importance of an international rules-based, preferably UN-led, effort to mitigate PRMM insofar as it threatens Europe directly.** This would include on-site de-radicalization efforts in MENA itself and anti-mass migration efforts both on the EU's borders and within individual States.

- **EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE participation in a US-led “coalition of the willing” to mitigate PRMM is unlikely.** Of the States in question—based upon the examples of the Sahel, the Mediterranean, Iraq and Afghanistan—exceptions might be found in the United Kingdom, France, and Poland. German participation in any large-scale combat role or safe-zone protective function is unlikely given both the current “lame duck” status of Chancellor Angela Merkel in the run-up to national elections currently scheduled for 2021 and other domestic concerns.

### **Historically Conditioned European Attitudes**

As PRMM’s challenge confronts the EU2 + 1 and the States of GS-ECE, one should not dismiss historical memory as a factor helping shape attitudes about it. Notwithstanding all the normal exceptions, Europeans tend to have very long historical consciousness. They therefore more readily view contemporary international relations from much longer perspectives than do Americans. Thus, for example in Austria, Poland, or Hungary, it would not be unusual to find political responses to PRMM conditioned by open reference to the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683 or even that of 1529. Such views are most widespread among, though not exclusive to, Right-wing populist and extremist politicians and organizations. In the UK, France, and Germany the references might well be to the troubled legacy of those countries’ imperial conquests and resulting spheres of influence in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries whether in MENA or elsewhere. In this case, such views are most widespread among traditional political parties, academia, and Left-wing populist and extremist politicians and organizations. Though causing reluctance in those States to intervene directly against PRMM, that legacy might yet be overridden in France and the UK for reasons discussed below.

None of which is to say that the governments of the EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE fall prey to historical determinism. Rather, the point is that the long historical consciousness of long historical contact, often for ill rather than for good, makes all the States in question reluctant to be involved in attempting actively (i.e. physically, kinetically) to solve the regional conflicts in MENA that generate PRMM, especially when such conflicts are overlaid as they are in 2020 by Great Power competition among the United States, Russia, and China, as well as lingering, bitter disagreement over the JCPOA with Iran. These States’ reluctance is seriously exacerbated both by the EU’s current inability to forge a genuinely common foreign policy reaching beyond admittedly noble rhetoric and by the UK’s search for a new international role following the country’s recent exit from Brussels.

Note also that PRMM provides fertile soil in which primarily Right-wing populist and extremist political parties and their leaders throughout Europe grow their anti-democratic propaganda. Many of these parties and individuals serve as Trojan Horses for, or are open fellow travelers with, Russia. The analysis suggests strongly that these organizations and individuals pose a not insignificant threat to political stability in the EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE. Once again, any instability resulting from their actions favors the larger geo-strategic objectives in Europe of Vladimir Putin’s Russia.

### **Preference for Collective Action**

In varying degrees, the States of the EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE all stress the necessity for collective international action within the framework of a rules-based system to mitigate PRMM. Ideally, the United Nations would serve as the vehicle. By contrast, these States do not generally favor *ad hoc* “coalitions of the willing” led by the United States. While such sentiment finds its most consistent and emphatic expression in Germany, it is common to all the States in question *mutatis mutandis*.

Nonetheless, numerous factors seriously complicate this commonly expressed preference and impede effective joint efforts among the EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE. These factors include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **The UK no longer enjoys membership of the EU.**  
Despite whatever treaties of cooperation London eventually negotiates with Brussels, the UK will not be in a position directly or substantially to influence whatever EU action might be taken to reduce or eliminate PRMM either in MENA or within/against the EU’s borders. At best, some form of coordination between the UK and the EU may be possible in this policy-area.
- **The German government is currently hampered by the “lame duck” status of Chancellor Angela Merkel.**  
National elections are scheduled to be held no later than the end of 2021, though earlier “snap” elections cannot be ruled out. Merkel’s governing coalition, an uneasy arrangement between her Christian Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party, is hampered by a leadership succession in the former and generally very weak electoral performances in the latter. Further, both parties are beset and distracted, as is the entire German body politic, by a recent upsurge in Right-wing extremist violence and the baneful influence of the Right-wing—in some respects openly neo-fascist—party called the Alternative for Germany (AfD). This party catalyzes the generation of significant public pressure upon Berlin to avoid even the appearance of allowing large numbers of refugees or migrants into the Federal Republic as occurred in 2015.
- **The EU2 (France and Germany) exhibit significantly different approaches to dealing with problems of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and their effects in MENA.**  
France, now the EU’s lone possessor of an independent nuclear arsenal, demonstrates a much greater willingness than Germany to conduct kinetic military operations against VEOs as sources of PRMM (e.g. in Mali and despite active German support of that operation). By contrast, Germany emphasizes the efficacy of soft power, in part due to Germany’s experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but also in response to a still force-averse public opinion.
- **The governments of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland all regard PRMM as a direct civilizational threat to Europe on the grounds of both a putative European ethno-linguistic homogeneity and Islamist terrorism.**

As seen by leaders and political parties in the capitals of Budapest, Prague, Bratislava, and Warsaw, such a threat is best dealt with at long distance, on the ground, in MENA, and by someone other than themselves.

- **Were any collective international action to come before the UN Security Council, it would almost certainly have to confront the threat of a Russian veto, at least until such time as Moscow's geo-strategic objectives in Syria and elsewhere in MENA were sufficiently satisfied.**

### **Potential Outlier Participants in a US-led "Coalition of the Willing"**

Notwithstanding the strong preference for international collective action (preferably with a UN mandate) among the States of the EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE to deal with PRMM, several of these States might be viewed as potential participants in a US-led, kinetic "coalition of the willing."

Based upon their history since 1991 in the Sahel (e.g. Mali, Chad), MENA, and/or Afghanistan, these States would potentially include France, the United Kingdom, and Poland. The following considerations address the political benefits that might accrue from these States' participation:

- **France could use such participation as leverage to increase its influence in the counsels of the EU and NATO.** Paris might also make the case to French popular opinion that the government was dealing with the problem of PRMM at its source. This argument is already employed in respect of the French Army's ongoing Operation BARKHANE in Mali. Such participation would also be in keeping with France's long-standing historical tradition, deriving from its colonial and commercial past, of direct interest in Francophone Africa. Paris, however, cannot allow itself to be painted as a neo-colonial power in the region.
- **The United Kingdom can also call upon long-standing historical presence, both colonial and commercial, in MENA and the Mediterranean as potential justification for adhering to a "coalition of the willing" against PRMM.** Like Paris, however, London would have to be very careful to avoid being tarred with the neo-colonial brush. And while a post-Brexit British government might well seek to use such participation to build trans-Atlantic political capital, the budgetary turmoil surrounding the UK's departure from the EU remains to be sorted out before defense expenditures might once again reasonably permit large-scale British military participation beyond what has already been undertaken in the form of operations such as anti-piracy tasking off the Horn of Africa, the escorting of British (and other) shipping in the Persian Gulf, etc.
- **Perhaps most interestingly, of the States in the EU2 + 1 and GS-ECE, Poland might also be willing to join a US-led "coalition of the willing."** The country is not threatened by PRMM except as described above. However, Warsaw places very great emphasis on solidarity in its alliances and does what it can to "punch above its weight." This it does primarily because only by so doing can the government then rightly expect assistance in return against that threat which does seem existential, and that is Russia.

### Selected Further Reading

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<https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/80715>

Keylor, William L. *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond: An International History Since 1900*. 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

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Pennetier, Marine and Michael Rose. “Macron takes swipe at halting NATO reaction to Turkey’s Syria incursion.” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-turkey-macron/macron-takes-swipe-at-halting-nato-reaction-to-turkeys-syria-incursion-idUSKBN1WX1QX>