



## The Current Refugee Crisis and the Arab States

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### **Introduction:**

When most of the countries in the Arab world are still soaked in the worst kind of bloodshed in its recent history with massacre, abduction, ethnic and sectarian cleansing and collateral damage as the order of the day, the image of a three year old drowned Kurdish Syrian boy, Allan Kurdi, lying face down on Turkey's beach, turned the trajectory of entire discourse about the crisis in West Asia. No doubt, the image had affected the global psyche much deeper than the news of 3,000 refugees, who had either gone missing or died while crossing the Mediterranean during the last three years.

The child belonged to a family, which had fled war-torn Syria in search of a safe destination in Europe, like millions others, but finally drowned in the high flowing tide of Mediterranean Sea and later found dead on a beach in Turkey. According to UNHCR report, Syrian refugee crisis is the worst in generations, when the number of exodus reached million, highest after 1992.<sup>1</sup>

This horrific image represents complete ignorance of the magnitude of this multifaceted crisis in the region. The image not only shook the conscience of world community, but also conveyed equally dangerous consequences of the bloodshed for those, who are fleeing their nations for a better future. Not long after the news of the boy hit global headlines, the discourse about the violence shifted to how to rescue those, who are fleeing the war-raged countries instead of how to end the violence itself.

The present crisis is not something, which erupted overnight, but rather it was in the offing and symbolizes the culmination of a prolonged conflict raging in the Arab world. What provided a cruel twist to the whole issue is the pace of the exodus of millions from Syria and Iraq and the mammoth rush of both refugees and immigrants on the border of different European countries.

Tragic exodus of people from the war-torn region defied all the past logic of international immigration laws, concept of nation-state boundary and sovereignty and, meanwhile, it has begun the

debate whether the world order should be ruled within the realm of real politics driven by their (countries') own security concerns and national interests or there is some space left for human compassion and sympathy.

Given the current chaos and the anarchy, people seem to be left with no option, but to flee the region as a whole. People are not sure if the brutality and the ethnic and sectarian cleansing will remain locked up in the confines of one nation or other and would not engulf the whole of the region in near future. According to a UNHCR report, the total number of people, who reached Europe through the sea, is 549,582 and out of it, 55 per cent of them are represented by Syrians alone.

This exercise of migration from Syria in particular and other parts of the region in general in the first six months of the present year has triggered a fresh debate within the camps of Liberals and Realists where the former preach free movement of the people while the latter adhere to the principles of close-boundaries to protect the jobs for their own nationalities, preserve the culture and social and norms and maintain a political cohesion in the western society.<sup>ii</sup>

Amidst all these developments, what has become an utter source of astonishment is the indifferent attitude of the Arab states and, particularly the Gulf nations, to the whole crisis. 'No-problem' attitude of the Gulf rulers has deepened the complexities of the issue and added a new discussion to the plethora of crisis the region is subjected to since the inception of the Arab Uprising. There have been many claims and counter-claims about the non-receptive attitude of the Gulf rulers. Some are saying that there have been no restrictions from the regimes themselves and people are fleeing to Europe because of their own preferred choice. While others are claiming that the Gulf is already home to millions of refugees, but of different kinds. It has also led to new legal debates and, meanwhile, raises the issue of human rights for which the Arab world has a very poor index.

This paper intends to look into different dynamics of the present refugee crisis in Europe. The paper will also attempt to explicate the subjectivity involved in defining the refugees and immigrants and what are the nuances complicating the issue further. Of course, there are other push and pull factors in the movement of people from one continent to another and the paper would also provide a snapshot of how Europe received the immigrants and why the Gulf nations failed miserably and why there was no policy announcement on the part of Arab countries to tackle the crisis, which, many say, they are equally responsible for creating. The last part of the paper will constitute the major component of the paper, which would highlight the responses of the Gulf nations.

### **Refugees or Immigrants:**

It is not for the first time that world has seen disquiet over the magnitude of the refugee crisis. In the past too, Asia, Europe and the continent of Africa have experienced similar kind of troubles. Europe itself was engulfed in the same situations what it is facing today because of the Balkan wars, which pushed thousands of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina to other parts of Europe. One cannot forget how India was subjected to the refugee crisis during the Bangladesh war of liberation in 1971 and Pakistan and India were affected after the incursion of erstwhile Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the late seventies of last century, whose resonance is still alive in the memory of world politics.

After the decolonization of Asian and African continents following World War II, large swaths of territories became filled with a number of nation-states in what is known today as the third world. To strengthen the concept of sovereign boundaries of its nation-state, each nation introduced its own set of laws in concurrence with the exiting socio-political and external situation to check immigration from across the national boundaries. It was the end of the Second World War, which left millions of people wandering across the ravaged countries when Poland, Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union deported 14 million German in the year after the German defeat. Six years on, 400,000 were stranded in “displaced persons” camps without any clear prospect of resettlement. To avoid similar situations in the future, the UN-mandated Geneva Conference came up with a convention that requires its signatories to assess the claim for refugee status made by anyone in their territory.

The United Nations’ Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (UNSCR) provided legal framework to the entire issue of immigrants and refugees. Seeking asylum and refuge have been the reality of the world politics today. The United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention, is well rooted in Article 14 of United Nations Human Rights Declaration of 1948, which allows people to seek asylum in the other country to escape political persecution in his or her own country.

The Refugee Convention adopted in 1951 came into force on April 22, 1954 and has been amended once in the form of the 1967 Protocol, which removed the geographical and temporal limits of the 1951 convention.<sup>iii</sup> The original convention of 1951 was limited in scope because it was designed to assist merely those, who had suffered in World War II and had fled their countries.

Earlier, it was only for the people within Europe and for those, who were subjected to suffering or prosecution before January 1951. But the 1967 protocol removed this geographical and temporal limitation and was widened in scope for people across the world. The new Refugee Convention provides the most comprehensive codification about the protection of the refugees. A refugee, according to the convention, is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to the country of origin owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, and nationality or having particular ideology.<sup>iv</sup>

The Convention’s provision is to be applied without any sort of discrimination and there should be no differentiation in treatment because of his or her cultural belonging or ethnic background. The Convention also stipulates that the refugees could not be penalized for illegal immigration or breaching the law of host nations with a few exceptions. The refugees are also entitled for some basic rights like education and employment and access to the court. The Office of the Commissioner for Refugees was created in 1992, which looks after the welfare of the refugees and works with the states signatory to the Refugee Convention.

There are other caveats also related to the Convention, which does not accord the status of refugees to those, who fail to satisfy their qualification to be refugees, like those who have committed a war crime or are involved in anti-national acts. It also does not apply to those, who are beneficiary of the welfare schemes under the UN, other than UNHCR, like Palestine who are covered under special programs of the UN.

While 'migrant' in contrast to 'refugee' is a term with no meaning in international laws, in common parlance, it is used to describe people seeking work opportunities or looking for a better future in an economically prosperous country or politically stable nation. States have no legal obligation to immigrants, who have other motivations in leaving the country of their origin and states are free to deny them entry or deport them. When a country lumps a group as immigrants, then they owe nothing to them.<sup>v</sup> In today's circumstances, the term "refugee" is commonly used to refer to people fleeing the war and violence in Syria. But the reality is that only 54 per cent of Syrians entering Europe 2014 were granted asylum and the rest can be sent back into the war zone any time in future.<sup>vi</sup>

In the light of above broad categorization of refugees as defined by the Refugee Convention, one is struck with a preliminary question whether those fleeing their countries today in the war-torn region of the Arab world are really qualified enough to be regarded as refugees or they are simply economic immigrants exploiting the volatile situation for their own economic benefits.

It has always been a nuance when it comes to decipher technicalities involved in defining and distinguishing between immigrants and refugees. One cannot ascertain with what motivation, he or she is leaving the country and whether one is deserting his or her own place of origin to improve the economic lot or to really escape the political persecution. It is also a fact that political persecution involves economic deprivation of a particular community as being witnessed in the case of Syria where 80 per cent of the nation's infrastructure has been destroyed. For instance, fleeing of large number of Jews from Eastern Europe at the end of nineteenth century and again in mid-twentieth century was not triggered merely by the political circumstances they had to face, but it was equally economic deprivation that engendered their escape.<sup>vii</sup> It is also true that in the case of asylum seekers, the numbers seeking economic immigration have always exceeded those, who are forced to flee because of political violence and targeted tortures or because of the looming danger over their life for resisting the regime. For instance, Hungary's Prime Minister says that overwhelming migrants in Europe are not refugees, but those seeking better lives.<sup>viii</sup> Asylum and refugees' laws are still incomplete even after several annexures have been added to the 1951 Refugee Convention. One of the critiques of the Refugee Convention says that the Convention has fostered simplistic and unfortunate characterization of asylum seeker as either political and thus genuine or economic and thus abusive and undeserving.<sup>ix</sup>

There is no universal mechanism to regulate the refugees, but each country has developed its own laws to tackle or check the arrival of refugees in the respective country. There are a few prominent organizations, like the International Organization for Refugees and High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs under the UN, which look after the welfare of refugees around the world and work in close coordination. For instance, Turkey has its own law, which allows one to stay in the country between two to nine years, depending upon the situation. This limited timeframe is perhaps the reason, which is pushing people today, who earlier had taken refuge in Turkey only, further across into Europe.<sup>x</sup> Unlike Turkey, Norway has very stringent laws and does not allow anyone to seek asylum unless he or she fulfils all the conditions laid down in its national laws.

In case of the present crisis of refugees from Syria and Iraq, these questions are acquiring a new dimension and have triggered fresh debates about the status of refugees flooding the land of Europe. No doubt, the present crisis is the manifestation of the disintegration of the state system and complete collapse of the governing institutions and prevalent state of anarchy in the region. Even the Prime Minister of Britain, Mr. Cameron, cautioned the global community in his address to House of

Commons when he said that one must distinguish between economic immigrants and the refugees while addressing the Syrian crisis.<sup>xi</sup> The statement of Cameron stands true when one sees the present pattern of immigration. There are already reports that some economic immigrants are offering fake documents to get asylum status in the host countries. It has been widely reported that some are trying to cross over to Europe with false documents to get better job opportunities. There are others who are pretending to be refugee after duping their own documents and several such cases have been reported on the border of Serbia.<sup>xii</sup> There are reported incidents when some Pakistani persons tried to cross over to Europe with fake documents to get better job opportunities. One of the Serbian Police officers told that some are faking their date of birth in their visa documents to enter Europe.

The Serbian border police claim that 90 per cent of around 300 people from Macedonia arriving every day claim to be Syrian, while they are not.<sup>xiii</sup> According to one report, there are people in Turkey, who are buying fake Syrian passports because they know that Syrians get the right to asylum in all the EU countries and those who use fake Syrian passports often speak Arabic language.<sup>xiv</sup>

Today, there are almost sixty million refugees, who are spread across the world in different countries. The international law protects a very narrow group of people and it is very difficult to enter other nations unless the host states are satisfied that refugee seekers have very specific fear of persecution. The UN refugee agency has classified 13.6 million people in the world as refugee and, as of now, more than 41.2 million other people are of “concern” to the Refugee Agency including the so called Mediterranean Migrants.<sup>xv</sup>

The crisis of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, conceived to be the worst after World War II, has further added to the number and plight of those suffering from a variety of obscurities. The size and pace of Syrian and other immigrants flying to European countries in the past one and a half year and sudden surge in the last few months have altogether changed the scale of the crisis.

While Germany, Austria and Sweden have been more generous in welcoming these refugees, but countries in Eastern Europe, like Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic have refused to accept their status as refugees and preferred to prefix them with ‘immigrants’ rather than refugees, which differs fundamentally from the latter, who are entitled for a preferred treatment under the obligation of international laws and other international treaties with regards to refugees. But several human rights organizations in Europe and around the world do not differentiate between immigrants and refugees because both the exercises are undertaken under duress and when they are left with no other option.

### **How It All Began:**

In recent past, it has been a well documented fact that the refugee crisis has mostly been a third-world phenomenon and, particularly, those nations have suffer large scale exodus, whose colonial system has been represented by autocratic and dictatorial regimes. There is no dearth of examples in countries like Iraq, Syria, Libya, Iran and Gulf nations where large number of intellectuals, political activists, political opponents, civil society members, artists and others, who seem to be potential threats to the regimes, have been forced to leave the country of their origin and lead the rest of their lives in exile. The refugee crisis is the natural outcome of prolonged civil wars or any other sort of conflicts. Any conflict, violence or civil war does not only cause death or large scale destruction of

national infrastructure, but it similarly engenders internal and external displacement and Syria aptly represents this situation where millions have been displaced both internally and externally. It is also a fact that 86 per cent of world refugees are living in the developing nations only.<sup>xvi</sup>

In case of what is being witnessed today in most of the nations in the Arab world, it stands true when one navigates through the existing political situation in Iraq, Syria, Yemen Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia and Sudan. Their politics is marked by deep tribal and sectarian strife and the state institutions are seemingly failing and the streets have been taken over by the non-state actors represented by tribal and religious zealots, who are running parallel states in their own countries.

Since this paper's purview is confined to the Arab world, it will briefly analyze the context and genealogy of the current mayhem in countries like Syria and Iraq, which are affected the most causing a large number of exodus in recent months from their respective countries.

One needs to look into the recent past in order to understand and fix the cause of what is happening. In West Asia, every day is new and each development propels other developments, which, in turn, create a new scenario. What is happening in the region in the wake of political uprising is well known to all of us. Some of the context and causes are isolated from each other while a few others are generically linked. The level of chaos and mayhem does not profess anything except uncertainty and seemingly wild instability. The problems that Syria encounters today have a far more recent pedigree. It all began with the Arab uprising, aspirant movements for a better future in other parts where people came on the street demanding political reform and freedom and a dignified life. Initially, they did not aspire for a regime change unlike in Egypt and Tunisia, but their demands were confined to the end of the intelligence and police states, which were working for the small oligarchy of the regime and its family members.

Regardless of the fate of Assad's regime in Syria, Syria has not been the one anymore the world has known for decades. The Arab uprising has put an end to forty years of relative stability Syria had witnessed in the region. The Arab Uprising unleashed the powerful and antagonistic forces contending to control and reign in the new Syria. The political, ethnic and sectarian diversity was kept in check by the military regime through oppression, tactical cooption and rhetoric of Pan-Arabism, but all seemed to have been overpowered by regional and global geostrategic calculations.

Since the uprising of 2010, the instrument of control and mentality of fear that had subdued the society started eroding and, as a result, a new phase of confrontation began between the regime and the people. It was not very long after the Syrian streets witnessed a peaceful revolution against the suppression, political deprivation, political brutalities, corruption and the decadence of state institutions and culture of oligarchy, the nation morphed into a civil war with growing sectarian undertones. There started an era of organized state violence and sectarian and communal mobilizations along sectarian and ethnic lines. The violence on the part of masses was augmented by the perceived necessity of self-defence and the street violence was coupled with ideological violence perpetuated by the adherents of Salafism and Jihadism.

Very soon, the protest movement in Syria rolled into a nightmare not for Syrians alone, but for all those who had dreamt of a new West Asia where democracy, political pluralism, political participation and dignified life and citizenry would dawn. More than 220,000 people have been killed

so far<sup>xvii</sup> and life expectancy has dwindled to 55 years. The Syrian economy has collapsed and around 80 per cent of Syrians live in poverty and half of the school-aged children have been deprived of the facility and only 17 per cent of people receive occasional electricity. All regional, global efforts and UN endeavours have failed badly to contain the violence and the killing of innocent civilians is continuing. The health and education sector has been completely demolished and the UN estimates that half of the population is in need of human aid.<sup>xviii</sup>

President Assad with his 'not so vast' base of legitimacy among the minority Alawite Shiite sect (constitutes around ten percent of around 22 million populations in the country) clamped down heavily on the protestors and designated the protestors a group of mercenaries and terrorists and refused to succumb to the pressure to depart. He has also refused so far to offer any major political package, which the protestors had demanded at the inception of the uprising. He maintained the true legacy of his father, who had committed the worst massacre in the past century when more than twenty thousand Muslim Brotherhood (MBH) members were butchered in the city of Homs in 1982 for raising voices against his rule.<sup>xix</sup>

Syria is at the intersection of all social, political, strategic and sectarian fault lines, which cross through the entire West Asia: The breakdown of central authority and collapse of the state institution; rivalry for dominance among key players in the region, like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey; Shiite-Sunni divide, which is very much dominant in the polity of Iraq and Lebanon and its impact is well resonated in Syria as well; the rise of political Islam where different shades of its ideologies are competing with each other to strategize the region in their own imagination and fight for balance between ethnic minority and majority in multi-sectarian Levant region whereas the minority is trying to assert against those, who had marginalized them for a long period of time.<sup>xx</sup>

Like the failure of the state institutions in Libya and Yemen, Syria too has witnessed major erosion of state institutions in the span of the last five years. In a few months' time, Assad created many enemies in the region and the Arab League suspended Syria and imposed economic sanction.<sup>xxi</sup> Turkey and United States along with Western allies demanded the resignation of President Assad, while Turkey and France hosted anti-Assad groups in their countries. The army has seen large scale defection and those who defected have either created their forces or have allied with other rebel groups and are assisting the anti-Assad forces. A few were the part of Assad's regime earlier like the Free Syrian Army, National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, who had defected and launched a movement for the ouster of President Assad.<sup>xxii</sup> The Free Syrian Army is one such group, which has been fighting Assad's forces on the street and they are also collaborating with other groups, like the Syrian National Coalition. The national Coalition of Syria was recognized by the GCC nations, US, France and Turkey as the legitimate representative of Syrian people. Prior to the revolution in Syria, the opposition forces were completely divided, which comprised largely of aging Islamist, liberal, left, socialist and nationalist and other factions, which had merely maintained a public profile without delivering much.

The other fault line, which has aggravated the situation in Syria, is the Shiite-Sunni divide. The sectarian politics has been the hallmark of the West Asian politics and it has always proved a catalyst at the time of instability and political crisis. The sectarian identity in steady and stable political situations has rarely been allowed to surface, but amidst political crises, it is the sectarian narrative that is enforced to define the conflict and, subsequently, emerge as the biggest political tool – which

was seen during the Iranian revolution, Iran-Iraq war, Lebanese crisis, Iraq in post-Saddam era and, subsequently, other minor issues where the regime of the time tried to ply one against the other.

The same proved true of Syria where a peaceful revolution began with political demands, but very soon morphed into sectarian conflict and both the regime and the revolutionaries conceived each other through the prism of sectarianism, which was similarly the case in the crisis of Bahrain.<sup>xxiii</sup> In Syria, it did not take long to turn a protest movement into a bloody conflict and unlike the protest movements of Egypt and Tunisia, Syria became a battle ground between two major sects of the Arab region. Immediately after the uprising, Syria began experiencing the after effects of the sectarian strife that Iraq was suffering from for more than a decade. The Majority Sunnis in Syria claim that Assad has no legitimacy because he hails from a sect, which is in minority in Syria, which was the claim of the Shiite majority in Iraq before the departure of Saddam. The regime of Assad is being protected by a large number of Shiite groups within Syria along with Hezbollah of Lebanon, which are reported to be sending mercenaries to shield the Shiite minority.

In several towns, like Homs, there are several Shiite militias, who are fighting along with the Syrian army to protect the regime of Assad. One such militia group is *Quwat-al-Ridha*, which is in Homs and it is reportedly created by Hezbollah.<sup>xxiv</sup> Similarly, there are several Sunni-led groups, who are fighting against the army of Assad in the towns of Raqqa, Idlib and Latakia and other coastal towns of Syria. Assad is clearly looking to exploit the sectarian fault lines in his favour and it gives an impression of the ways that are reminiscent of Iraq. By the end of 2012, GCC nations closed down their embassies in Syria as the security situation kept on deteriorating amidst large-scale violence in prominent cities of Syria.

It is not the internal division of Shiite-Sunni alone, which characterized the current civil war in Syria, but it is the involvement of regional players: Saudi Arabia and Iran, which are equally responsible for augmenting the conflict. The regional rivalry between the two has been very instrumental in dragging the conflict where it is today: A full-fledged sectarian war. The foreign intervention gradually turned Syria into a proxy of two regional rivals representing two different ideologies, divergence of interests and exclusive political ambitions. The growing involvement of regional powers and militias from across the border, like the Hezbollah of Lebanon kept on growing that further deepened the differences among different warring factions on the soil. So many groups have emerged that Syria has turned into a blood bath, where it has become obscure to distinguish who is fighting whom. The Saudi regime has been repeatedly asserting that they would continue to support anti-Assad forces and the only solution in Syria lies in the departure of President Assad.<sup>xxv</sup> Likewise, Turkey also plunged into the conflict and has been one of the major critics of Assad. It has been employing all diplomatic and strategic means to remove the regime of Assad

The emergence of series of political and obscure religious miscreant groups and other non-state actors is another fault line in Syria that has complicated the situation further. These organizations with divergent political objectives and diverse ideological baggage emerged in the country. Most prominent among them are groups like *Jubhat-al-Nusrah* (Victory Front), which announced itself to be Al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria in addition to *Jeshul-Islam* (Force of Islam) and *Jeshul-Fatah* (Force of Victory). All these groups, in one way or the other, enjoy the support of regional players. For instance, Saudi Arabia created the *Jeshul-Islam* and later they created *Jeshul-Fatah* as well.<sup>xxvi</sup> Gradually, Syria became a hub of warring factions not among Islamic radical groups



alone, but it has also turned into a battleground for those forces, which failed to unite in their opposition to President Assad.

Another major fault line that has equally influenced the trajectory of Syrian politics in last four-five years is the fight for balance between ethnic minority and majority in multi-sectarian Levant region. Kurds are supposed to be the biggest minority in the world without their own state.<sup>xxvii</sup> Since the inception of civil war, it was truly felt that three million Kurds in Syria would be the biggest benefactors in case of the fall of Assad regime. There were some protests by the Kurdish Youth Movement against the Assad regime and there were apprehensions on the part of the regime that opposition could exploit the Kurdish sentiment in their own favour. Initially, the Kurds sought an alliance with Free Syria Army as both had become staunch enemies of Assad.<sup>xxviii</sup> Assad's regime left no stone unturned to win the support of Kurdish in his fight against other groups. Reversing his past policies, he accorded citizenship through a decree to the Kurds of Hassaka, who have been deprived of it for decades.<sup>xxix</sup> He also withdrew forces from some of the Kurdish regions, which had been deployed for a long time. Given the intense engagement of the regime of the day to take on the opposition, Kurds created a renaissance of Kurdish culture by reviving their language and issuing vehicle number plates in the name of their own municipality and setting up their own security and police stations in the region.<sup>xxx</sup>

In the wake of the war, the Kurds as a minority has gained some ground across the Middle East and have revived hopes of improving their lot. The resurgence within the Kurd community in the wake of conflict in Syria is not likely to remain confined within the confines of Syria, but its echoes are being felt well across the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey and Iran as well. But there are some reluctance also on the part of Kurdish minority in Syria to join anti-Assad forces because they are not aware of their fate in post-Assad era and, moreover, they do not want to be squeezed between pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism

Amidst all these, it was the announcement of Caliphate by the Islamic States in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) with Baghdadi as its head in June 2014 that changed the course of not only Iraq and Syria, but of regional politics in West Asia as a whole. A lot is being written and debated about its origin, its ideology and real objective and there are different sets of explanations for its rise. One of the Special Operation Commander of the US said, "We have not defeated the idea and even we do not understand the idea."<sup>xxxi</sup> ISIS's variety of Islam is completely different from other Islamist movements the world has come across so far. It has attracted psychopaths from both the Middle East and Europe. Thousands of youth from across the continent of Europe have joined the dreaded group. The group shot in fame when they took Mosul in Iraq and large swath of territories both in Iraq and Syria. Though largely based in Syria and Iraq, its origin lies in Jordan and Afghanistan in 1999 and in the evolution of fifteen years, it has seen many ups and downs. It has various predecessors and has undergone various phases of operational and organizational learning. Its attempt to create an Islamic Caliphate failed during 2006-2008 when Iraq was amidst the worst sectarian war.<sup>xxxii</sup>

But it succeeded relatively after 2013 when the civil war in Syria was at its peak and Iraq was facing all sorts of political instability and sectarian division. In 1999, the mastermind of his time, Zarqawi moved to Afghanistan after being released from Jordanian jail to create his own organization, *Jamaat al-Tawhid Dawa-al Jihad* (JTJW). He later moved to Iraq after the US started bombing Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attack.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Zarqawi there too established small outfits of (JTJW) in

Kurdish region of Sulimaniya. Immediately after the US's attack against Iraq, in 2003, Zarqawi's group started asserting and was involved in many suicidal attacks across Iraq. At this stage, his main objective was to resist the occupying forces and inflame the sectarian conflict in the country and his writing and appeals were riddled with anti-Shiite rhetoric.

After a year in Iraq, Zarqawi announced his allegiance to Al-Qaeda and now [JTW], known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. But there were many differences between Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaeda in Iraq because of its anti-Shiite brutality and immediately after the death of Zarqawi in 2006, this group, with alliance of others, renamed itself "Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) under the leadership of Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Later, at the behest of United States, an Awakening (Sunni group) was formed to combat the ISI in 2007, but of no avail. ISIS kept on expanding its bases in the country and, moreover, the exclusive policy of the erstwhile regime in Iraq also helped in widening its appeal among the Sunni majority.

When the Arab uprising was in full sway in the region, ISIS was consolidating itself in northern and southern parts of Iraq and reaching a new scale in violence against their contemplated enemies. For instance, only on August 15, 2011, it conducted 22 coordinated bombings in the city of Baghdad and twelve other locations.<sup>xxxv</sup> Initially, their tasks were confined to the release of their inmates from the prisons of Iraq and, gradually, they had achieved mastery over intelligence gathering.

The current civil war in Syria was fully exploited by the ISIS, which helped it in making inroads in the battle field very soon and establish itself as a major factor in the politics of the country. The ISIS had started expanding in Syria by the end of mid of 2013 and had become a big threat to main opposition forces, like the Free Syrian Army and other opposition forces. Though ISIS had faced much resistance from other groups, but their expansion continued. Its wealth and revenue capacity, professionalism of information gathering, territorial control and global recruitment kept on increasing.

This body claimed the territories between Aleppo town of Syria and large swath of territories in eastern part of Iraq. It became very difficult for an already crumbling regime to check the march of ISIS, who kept on grabbing more and more territories. There are reports of thousands joining the ISIS in its fight against the regime in Syria and thousands of blue-eyed youth from western countries joined the ISIS. According to one report, ISIS and other terrorist organizations have been joined by around 25,000 youth from more than 100 nations in the recent past.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The ISIS has emerged as the most terrifying entity in recent past, which is not only involved in killing and cleansing, but is bent upon destroying the antiques of the past. The destruction of Arch of Triumph in the city of Palmyra is a living example, which was condemned worldwide.

The Director-General of UNESCO said that the destruction shows how terrified the extremists are of history and culture because understanding the past undermines and delegitimizes the pretext they use to justify their crimes.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Even the coalition forces led by the United States have failed to check the expansion of ISIS as President Obama himself has been reported saying that ISIS is a long term phenomenon.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Today, around 60 per cent of territories in Syria are under the control of ISIS and one does not know what is in offing in the country because it does not acknowledge any opposition groups in Syria and they stand for eliminating anyone they deem to be heretic. The latest involvement of Russia in air strikes has further added complexities to the already entangled crisis. The Syrian problem goes beyond the

removal of Assad and merely removing him would not harmonize the interests of many, embedded in the country's patchwork quilt of ethnic and sectarian identities.

The Political trajectory in Syria has been shaped and moved under the impact of these internal, regional and global fault lines, which have not only added to the intricacy of the situation, but also transformed these into global issues where both Russia and the USA have major strategic stakes in the future of Syria. The US, having not achieved the desired success in Iraq and Afghanistan, does not seem much enthusiastic to intervene in Syria, but has always maintained that Assad must depart. On the other hand, Russia along with Iran has always stated that Assad's fate must be decided by Syrian people alone and, at present, the global community should join Assad in his fight against the menace of ISIS.

Because of the stakes of so many regional and global players involved in Syria, the issue as a whole acquired a global dimension. China and Russia vetoed the UNSC resolution twice seeking Assad to step down. President Putin has announced on many occasions that there needs to be a new global platform for international relations.<sup>xxxix</sup> Amidst all efforts to bring the warring factions on table through Geneva 1 and 2, and other organizational efforts, the bombardment of opposition bases by the regime has continued and the regime is alleged to have used chemical weapons against the civilians.

The quagmire in Syria and subsequent involvement of regional and global powers are seen by many as a replica of the Cold War era. The anti-Assad policy of west and, particularly, of the US can be explained under the rubric of changing regional scenarios, where US's traditional rival in the form of Russia and political rival in the form of Iran are extending all diplomatic and military supports to sustain Assad in power. The US no more sees President Assad alone or mere as an ally of Iran, but it has been an integral player to the move of Russia in the region, which is seeking to carve out a much larger sphere of influence in the region. Moreover, Iran, fresh out of its seemingly successful nuclear deal with the West with a lot of ambition, is likely to embrace Syria and Russia with different vigour and warmth.<sup>xl</sup> At present, the seemingly new direction of alliance would have adverse impact on the strategic interests of the US and the West.

Though President Assad has never been an ally of the US like Jordan and Egypt in the region, but the involvement of power like Russia has further estranged them. Of late, there has been revival of US-Russian open conflict in countries like Ukraine and Crimea and its implication is well reflected in West's stubbornness against Assad, who has full support of Russia and Iran. Moreover, the US and its western allies do not want to see the presence of pro-Assad power in long term in the region, which is likely to impact adversely US's long term strategies in the region.

In addition, confronting Iran has been the major plank of US foreign policy and Syria can be a bulwark against Iran. The departure of Assad will further isolate Iran and the US sees it as the biggest strategic necessity to break the unshakeable Iran-Syria alliance in the region. There are other factors as well, which have impelled West to enhance its campaign for the removal of Assad. The growing proximity between China and Russia in economic and defence fields is a major source of concern, whereas the US has dominated the region strategically. The US is not happy to see Russia or any other power as a contender for its arm market. The Government of Iraq is reported to have cancelled an arm deal with Russia worth \$4.2 billion under pressure from the US government.<sup>xli</sup>

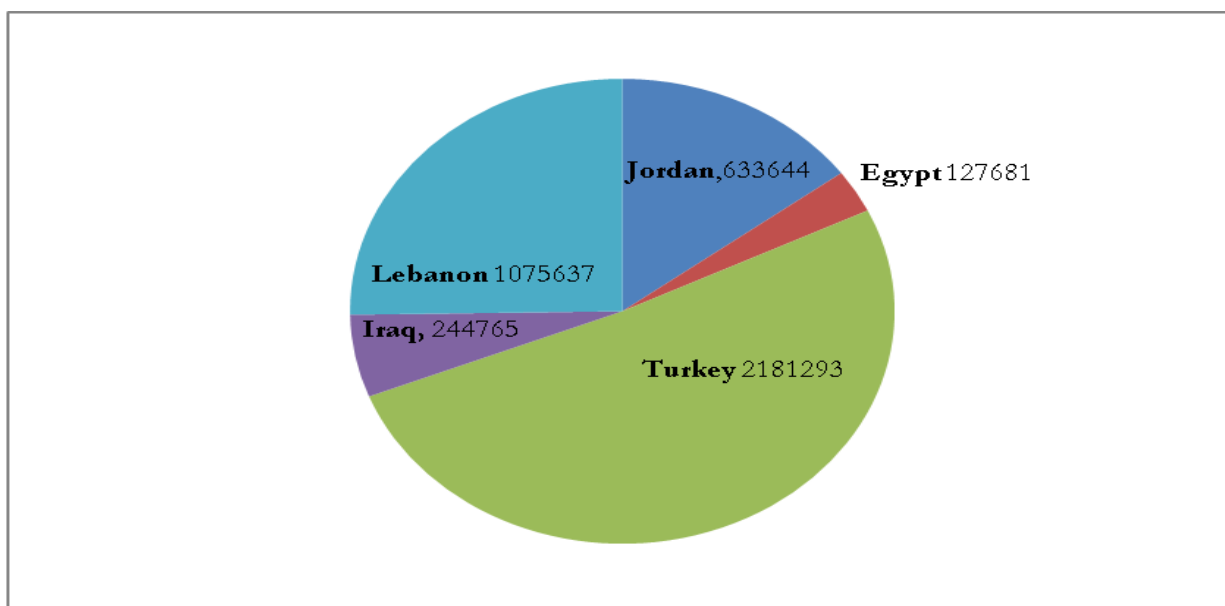
It was not only in Syria where the political scenario was changing very fast but, meanwhile, Iraq was also subjected to a different set of crisis, which was, of course, different from Syria, but the magnitude and the after effects was very much similar. One does not need to explicate the chronology of the event of what is happening in Iraq for the last two decades. It was the departure of President Saddam from the political scene in Iraq in 2003, which changed the entire political and security architecture not of the country alone, but of the whole region.

What followed in the domestic politics was the revival of Shiite-Sunni conflict and, moreover, the Kurdish question in Iraq also received a boost and the region dominated by Kurds has almost become an autonomous state after the US intervened in Iraq, known as Kurdistan Regional Government.<sup>xlii</sup> The Syrian conflict has affected largely the Kurdish issue in Turkey as well and, particularly, the rise of ISIS has brought to the core the issue of Kurds in the entire region. The ISIS has brought different warring factions of the Kurds across the region together and they temporarily tend to unite to confront the menace of ISIS. The crisis of Kobani at the Syria-Turkey border in 2014 is well known when the ISIS encircled the Kurdish town of Kobani. The prompt reaction from the US forces and KRG forces (*Peshmarga*) saved the Kurds from the assault of ISIS.<sup>xliii</sup> The Kurds in Iraq have always been associated with the Kurds of Syria after the crisis erupted there. The Kurds are bearing the brunt of the regime and the ISIS cadres in Syria fled to the Kurdish region of Iraq (KRI). The issue of Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey in the wake of the uprising has equally inflamed the situations in addition to sectarian conflict and it would be seen later that a substantial number of immigrants from Iraq and Syria are constituted by Kurds also.

The political trajectory in the region was marked by a sectarian clout. It was not only Iraqi polity, which was affected by the sectarian outlook, but the politics of the whole region was conducted and steered in a way either to harm one sect to benefit the other, but all that was happening at the cost of each other. The US-led intervention in Iraq failed to achieve the desired result and divisive politics in the country led to deepening of the sectarian and ethnic identity. The policy of disbanding of the Iraqi army and purging of the Bath elements from future security forces by the US did not go well with the national spirit of Iraq and led to unprecedented level of violence in the polity of the country. Very soon, Iraq became a fertile ground for radical Islamic and sectarian forces and militias carved out different influential zones for themselves. The ruling regime of Iraq itself was coloured into sectarian hues and the policy of successive regimes in the country was centred on vendetta and exclusion of Sunni masses, which gradually turned into militia forces and joined both fanatic Islamic groups and tribal and sectarian entities to counter the Shiite regime in Baghdad.

The sectarian division has further deepened in the last one decade after Shiite-dominated party has ruled the country and different political and radical factionalism have been permeating the political domain. In this backdrop, Iraq also saw unprecedented level of emigration. The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration has cautioned against the trend and the statement said that what is more worrisome is the age groups of those, who are leaving the country because they are very young. This statement of the Ministry said that the adverse situation in the country is forcing the youth to flee the nations, which would destroy the fabric of the Iraqi social demography.<sup>xliv</sup> Like Syria, Iraq too witnessed internal displacement. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre in Geneva reported that a number of internally displaced Iraqis reached four million in June 2015. While the total number of applications seeking asylum in Europe from Iraq was 68,700 in 2014, which was double of what was witnessed in 2013.<sup>xlv</sup>

The war in Syria is intensifying every day and only the number of armed incidents rose from 4,000 in January 2015 to 6,000 in August 2015. According to a report of Syrian Human Rights network, only in the month of July, regimes conducted thirty-one massacres and the opposition forces and ISIS were involved in eight and two massacres, respectively, leaving total 467 dead including 130 children and 62 women.<sup>xlvi</sup> Given this level of violence and conflict, people are fleeing in large numbers. While some are fleeing from the fear of the ISIS, some are fearful of rebel-held areas and most are fleeing from the oppression of the regime of Assad.<sup>xlvii</sup> Many are leaving for safe destinations in anticipation that crisis would engulf them very soon and many are deserting the peripheries, which are falling in the conflict zone. A middle income country has reached to the point where 80 per cent of masses need humanitarian assistance.<sup>xlviii</sup> According to the latest report of UNHCR, more than half of the Syrian population has been displaced and around four millions fled the country as refugees and 7.6 million have been displaced internally.<sup>xlix</sup> Around 95 per cent of them are scattered between Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey.



Source: UNHCR Emergency Report

The Syrian population has shrunk to just 16.6 million from pre-war 22 millions. There are four million UN registered refugees abroad in addition to nearly one million unregistered and seven million internally displaced people. The politics and massacre and organized pogroms of opposition forces, kidnappings and sexual violence, compulsory military services after the government decree of 2011<sup>1</sup> and forced armament of civilian population, bombardment of civilian zones, schools and hospitals, large scale imprisonment of innocent opposition, collateral damages, absence of basic immunities and a series of other reasons forced almost half the country population to move internally and externally.<sup>li</sup>

Now Syrians and others, who had settled in neighbouring nations, are flying to Europe because of a series of visible and invisible reasons. The foremost among them is the limitation of the absorption capacity of nations, like Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq and Egypt. The presence of such a large number of foreigners on their soil has adversely affected their economic resources because there has been no concurrence between the numbers and the economic capability.

Even people from Turkey, whose economy is the most stable in the region, are fleeing. Same is true of Jordan, which is the most water-starved nation in the world and has no infrastructure to bear the brunt of exodus. In Jordan, where the population because of the immigration has increased by eight percent,<sup>lii</sup> water has become the main source of conflict among the refugees themselves. There are reports that some refugees left the country just because of water scarcity. A country, which is itself water-starved, how can it bear the additional burden of 6,00,000 refugees in its northern border, who entered the country because of the Syrian conflict.<sup>liii</sup> Increased rent, price hike and strain on public service have left locals feeling disenfranchised and neglected by their own government and international donors and, moreover, people find themselves vulnerable.<sup>liv</sup> There is fear that local resentment against the refugees would increase if the present trend continues.

Worsening economic conditions in Jordan and Lebanon, where they sought shelters earlier, has further pushed them to look for an alternate destination in Europe, according to a member of UNHCR, host nations are encouraging the refugees and the newcomers to leave the country.

The UN has cut its assistance by 37 per cent of the total \$4.55 billion it needed this year. It has dropped thousands from its food assistance program; the food aid program in Lebanon fell by half in July to \$13.5 per head per month. The *kafala* (sponsorship) system introduced at the beginning of 2015, for example, made residency and mobility for Syrian refugees in Lebanon extremely difficult.<sup>lv</sup> Syrian refugees in Lebanon, who have been depending on paltry assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), are experiencing extremely harsh living conditions. As their residencies expire, they need a Lebanese sponsor to avoid getting arrested or deported. They have to tiptoe around curfews and endure being overworked and underpaid in order to survive from one day to the next. In addition, most of the poorest Syrian refugees took shelter among the most wretched and marginalized communities in Lebanon.

What has surprised many is not only the pace of immigration from Syria but, moreover, the social and economic background of those Syrians, who are fleeing the country. Unlike the refugees of other war-torn nations from Africa, a substantial number of refugee hail from good educational and economic background. A large number of them are reported to be businessmen, but they found the country without any future and so they are looking for better a place to survive. One of the refugees narrates his story in the following words, "I used to work in British Council as a project coordinator and in 2012, I fled for Cairo when I was called for compulsory army service. Later from Cairo, I headed for Turkey where I am working on my thesis."<sup>lvi</sup> He also blamed the neighbouring power for the current mess and said that no one understands the real cause of the crisis in Syria.

Another refugee tells that most people think that refugees are different from them, but the reality is that they are decent people, think of their future and they are educated also.<sup>lvii</sup> There are several others, who, when interviewed, came out to be engineers and running huge business of tourism. A good number of those fleeing are students, who are forced to leave their education in their country. Prior to the conflict in Syria, there were 100,000 male and female students registered in universities, but now most of them have left their education midway and moved to Lebanon and Jordan to complete the education. According to a report, the Education Ministry of Syria sponsored some for higher education in western universities.<sup>lviii</sup>

Syrian refugees and refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq too are leaving the country in search of jobs. According to Swedish sources, around 40 per cent of Syrians reaching Europe belong to those groups, who have received secondary education and hail from a wealthy family because they are capable of paying hefty amounts to the smugglers. There are Afghans, who are heading for Europe after leaving their flats and jobs behind.<sup>lix</sup> The pace of the refugee entering Europe is driven by the concern for approaching winter season, because they want to settle down before the winter dawns in Europe. Libya is beset with similar violence and tribal conflict for the last four years after the death of Colonel Gaddafi. Yemen is very much on the path of becoming another Syria or Libya where UNO has already announced that more than 80 per cent of Yemenis are in pressing need of humanitarian assistance.

### **Refugee Crisis and Europe**

It is not something very alien to Europe or that Europe has never experienced the refugee crisis in the past. They had faced similar situation following World War Two and of late during the Balkan Wars that lasted for almost a decade. Germany and Austria had received huge numbers of refugees from war-torn Balkan region in the last decade of previous century. What has added a distinctive hue to this present crisis is that immigration is taking place from across the continent. What is being witnessed today is the opposite of what was seen in Europe in the 1940s when Jews fled Europe for Asia in the wake of large scale persecution during and after the Second World War. Today, people are risking their lives to land up in Europe and are not looking towards their own neighbouring countries for a series of tangible and intangible reasons. The arrival of populace on such a mammoth scale has enunciated a new debate around the concept of “Burden of Space” and “Burden of Sharing”. The burden of sharing is the question about how the cost of common initiative for the provision of international public good should be shared between the states. These concerns have been made whenever a collective body is engaged in some regional or global initiative. It has been a major question for bodies like, the UNO, NATO, EU and other regional platforms. In recent years, the concern has gone beyond budgetary concerns and has taken into account less quantifiable costs in the form of social and cultural impact.<sup>lx</sup> There are two basic approaches attached to the whole proposition of burden sharing: motivation and pattern. What should be the motivating forces to call for burden sharing and what should be the pattern of burden sharing? These questions resurfaced in the wake of the refugee crisis and have emerged as the trigger point among the policy makers of EU and showing clear divisions amongst the member-states. The burden sharing issue is quite complex in nature where some proponents have asked the bigger states to contribute more for what is being witnessed in case of the present scenarios in EU vis-à-vis the refugees.

It is not only the pace or socio-economic class of refugees, which raised the concern, but equally enraging for many is the direction of immigration of people from Syria and Iraq, and from Somalia and Libya in the African continent towards Europe instead of their own wealthier neighbouring countries in the Arab world, particularly, the wealthy Gulf nations. No doubt, these people, particularly from Syria, first moved to the neighbouring countries, like Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon and stayed there. Majority of Syrians who fled the country chose those nations which border Syria, like Turkey, which housed around 1.9 million and 2.1 million in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt combined in addition to those eight millions, who were displaced internally.<sup>lxi</sup> These immigrants in their neighbouring countries are facing the hardships, which were not different from their own country of origin. They had no job prospects in the host countries in near future. Majority of those,

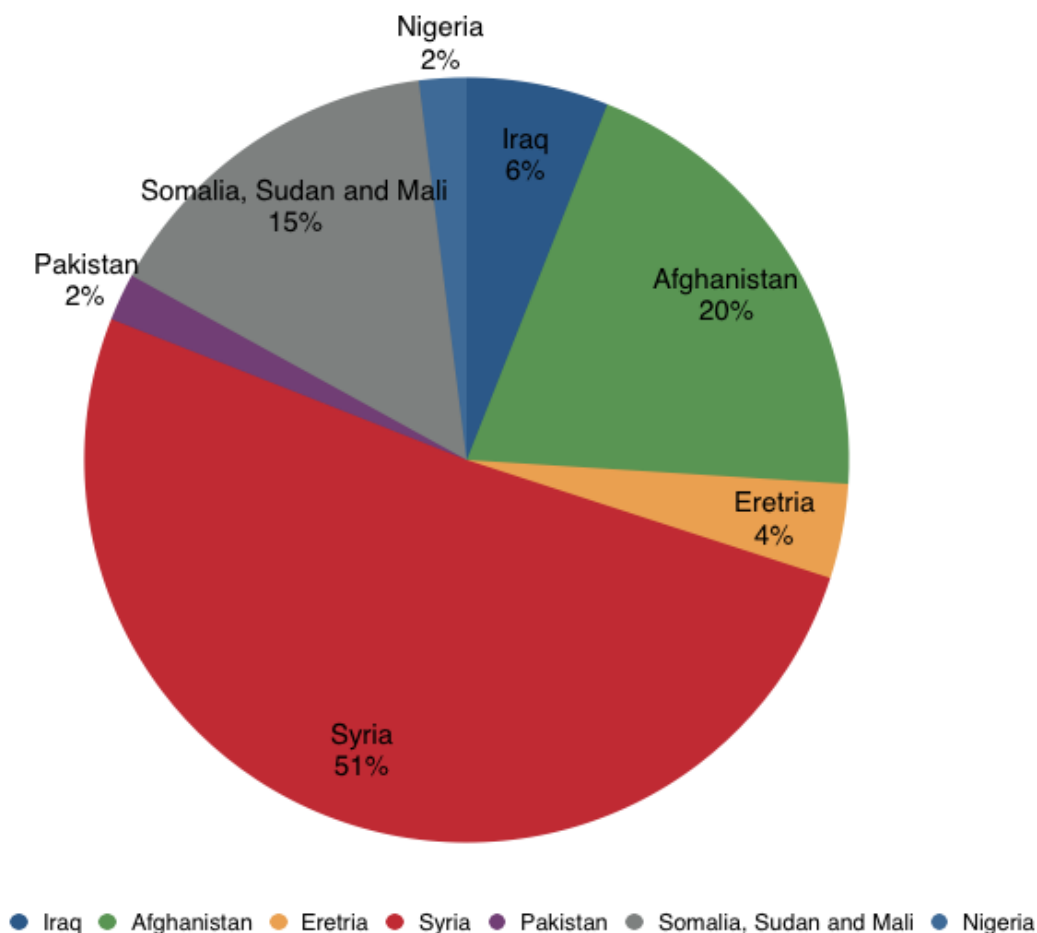
who left Syria, had nothing to eat because they had already been ruined and their businesses collapsed. There are reports that most of the affected in Syria are surviving on the income of one dollar per day and more than eighty people are forced to share the space not exceeding more than twenty meters.<sup>lxii</sup>

One of the immigrants to Europe, who earlier moved to Jordan, expressed his plight in the following words, “My all hopes to return to Syria have vanished with the times and now it is time to think not for me alone, but for my children because I want them to study and live a dignified life, so I decided to move to Europe.”<sup>lxiii</sup> He further added that people do not want war or become refugees, but need basic citizenship rights and, of course, seeking refuge is not the solution. What I need is a place where I could protect myself and my family and I hope that European laws would protect me, irrespective of my nationality and my religion.

In the words of UN High Commissioner for Refugees, there are primarily seven reasons pushing the people, particularly Syrians to Europe: large-scale pogrom and massacre of the people at the hand of state and non-state actors; forced arming of civilian people; constant bombardment of their houses and the shelters; disenchantment with the existing situations; high cost of living; deepening poverty in neighbouring Arab nations; no future for education, unemployment and moreover dwindling budget of various global and regional welfare schemes in the host countries, which had hitherto supported their survival.<sup>lxiv</sup> The situation is not that favourable in countries like Lebanon as well where they migrated first. Lebanon is legislating new laws to check the migration, which is making it difficult to remain there.<sup>lxv</sup> Monthly amount of US \$19 for food assistance that a refugee in Lebanon received earlier has been reduced by 30 per cent from 2014 due to funding shortages.<sup>lxvi</sup>

According to a UNHCR report, total number of people, who reached Europe only through sea in 2015, is 866484 and majority of them are represented by Syrians (51%), followed by Afghanistan and Iraq. Following figure explains the exact proportion of people from different countries, who reached Europe through the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 so far.





Similar reports mention that 62 per cent of total refugees crossing the sea are men, while 16 per cent and 22 per cent are represented by women and children, respectively. This huge number from across the continent has created a tremor among the European nations, who are grappling with the evolution of new mechanisms to confront the crisis. What is worrying Europe is the growing size of refugees because in the first eight months of present year, the number has doubled in comparison to that in previous year in the same span of eight months. In the month of July this year only, 107,500 Syrians reached Europe and those Palestinian refugees living in Syrian camps for decades were uprooted from their hometowns in the wake of Arab-Israel wars. It is worth mentioning here that there are around 500,000 Palestinians living in different camps erected in the towns of Syria. These Palestinians are also bearing the brunt of ISIS as well as the torturous regime of President Assad.<sup>lxvii</sup>

There are four basic transit points through which these refugees are permeating the continent of Europe to land in the desired countries. These are: Spain, Italy, Hungary and Greece. Only in the month of August, nearly 50,000 refugees crossed Greece through the eastern part of Mediterranean to reach Europe, which was equivalent to the number that was experienced in one year alone in 2014.

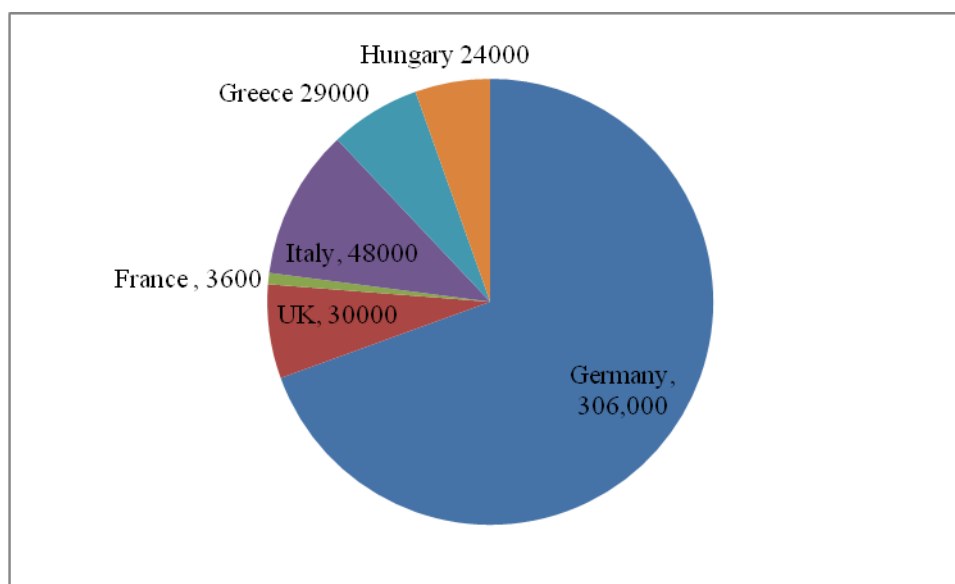
Only in the first eight months of current year, total number of refugees crossing Greece reached to 180,000 which was six times more than what was seen last year. Majority of those reaching EU are Syrians (60%) followed by Palestinians, Afghans (25%) and Pakistani (5%).<sup>lxviii</sup> What has been more revealing is that it is Afghans and not the Iraqis, who are followed by Syrians in their quest for reaching Europe.

With regard to the refugees taking the western Mediterranean routes for Spain to reach EU nations, here again, Syria constitutes the heights proportion (57%) of those flooding the nations, like Germany and Austria. In the case of those, who are opting for Italy to cross over to Europe are mostly from the African continent, like Nigeria and Eritrea where Eritrea alone constitutes around 25 per cent of those coming to Italy and Nigeria represents 12 per cent. Only in August, around 22,000 reached Italy. The rest come from Arab nations where, once again, Syrians are the highest and nine out of ten come through Libya.

Hungary is another transit point after Greece where large numbers of refugees are thronging to cross over to Europe. So far, this year only, Hungary has seen 137,000 refugees crossing or landing in their territories and majority are represented by Afghans (29%), followed by Syrians, Kosovos and only in the month of August, Hungary witnessed the arrival of around 35,000 refugees in the country.

It is not only the flood of refugees into the territories of Europe that has created a mess, but a large number of refugees have no plans to come back to their native homes because a large number of application for asylum are lying in different European nations.

According to the *Financial Times* of September 4, 2015, pending asylum applications for EU amount to 568,000 and their distribution is reflected in the graph below:



Source: International Policy Council

Mr. Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, called for the distribution of Refugees fleeing Iraq and Syria among all the 28-member EU nations. Germany has shown a very generous stance when it's Chancellor, Ms. Merkel asserted "fundamental rights to asylum for politically prosecuted with no upper limits; and those go for refuge who come from hell of the civil war."<sup>lxix</sup> It was the first country to respond and immediately allocated six billion Euros to tackle the refugee crisis. In a meeting of Foreign Ministers of EU in Brussels on September 14, it was decided that EU nations would receive officially 120,000 refugees in addition to 40,000 they had agreed upon in the month of July. The refugees would be allocated across the member EU states, depending upon their capacity where

Germany, France and Spain would receive 31,443, 240,31 and 14,931 respectively while the rest would be distributed according to their given economic condition and employment status of host countries.<sup>lxx</sup>

Reacting to the EU's decision, Vice Chancellor and Finance Minister of Germany, Sigmar Gabriel termed this allocation of refugees as a salt in ocean, particularly when the numbers are certain to increase in the coming months.<sup>lxxi</sup>

The generosity of German government may be judged by the announcement of its Chancellor Merkel to welcome 500,000 refugees this year alone and similar number of people would be accommodated next year. On September 8, Mr. Sigmar Gabriel, the German Deputy Chancellor said that he had no doubt that Germany could cope with an annual intake of more than 500,000 over the next few years. By that time – say, five years – the numbers of refugees could well have grown to double or more than the current figures. Germany has gone to the extent of ceasing the Dublin Regulation. It is not merely a socio-political threat being felt in EU in the wake of influx of refugees, but it also raises the question about its legal mechanism to contain the new comers. The Dublin Regulation was one of the major political achievements of EU in recent years. Closely related to the Dublin Agreement is the issue of Schengen visa. This is a provision established in 1985 and later in 1997, it became the part of EU. Under this provision, any person of the country belonging to the Schengen group can travel to another Schengen nation without showing the passport or visa.<sup>lxxii</sup> On the other hand, the Dublin Regulation is a law managing the movement of refugees in the EU nations and, moreover, it also stipulates, which nation-state in EU is responsible for processing the request of asylum seekers. Under the law, a country where the asylum seeker enters first is responsible to register the application for asylum. After getting registered in the entrant country, the concerned person can move to other nations of the EU.<sup>lxxiii</sup> But the destined nation is authorized to send him or her back to the responsible nation to be processed. Several nations like Greece and Hungary, which are swamped by the refugees, have stopped taking in more refugees. Germany, for time being, has decided to suspend the agreement in case of Syrian refugees because it is a hurdle in the way of receiving the refugees.

This generous response to the crisis on the part of Germany stands alone because Germany, unlike its counterparts in the EU, has always maintained equidistance from its own involvement in the crisis. Sweden, lesser visible nation on the strategic global horizon, has extended substantial supports to the refugee crisis and shown greater concern than east European nations, like Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary. Its Foreign Minister said that everyone should be sensitive to the issue, to this human catastrophe and seeking refuge is the right of every individual.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

While Britain, on its part, announced to accept 20,000 refugees in the next five years. Prime Minister Cameron told the House of Common that UK would live up its moral responsibility towards people forced out from their homes in Syria by the forces of Assad.<sup>lxxv</sup> Only in September, Prime Minister Cameron told the house that Britain had provided protections to five hundred Syrians as a normal asylum procedure and 216 have been relocated under Syrian Vulnerable Person Scheme run by UK. Mr. Cameron announced one million pound aid, taking the total to over one billion pound since 2012.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

In comparison to EU nations, the US and Canada's reluctance has been very visible in accepting the refugees. Many blame the US for this mess and hold the military involvement of the US in the region largely responsible for uprooting of populations in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen and even then US is not welcoming refugees from these countries. After a lot of pressure, the most recent decision of Barack Obama to admit 10,000 Syrians over the next year falls short. Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the United States has accepted only 1,700 Syrians. The Canadian government had agreed to admit 1,300 Syrian refugees by the end of 2017, but public pressure after the death of Aylan forced the government to increase that number by another 10,000.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

The landing of refugees in Europe is not merely from Syria, but many of them are from Afghanistan, Iraq, Ukraine, and northern and western parts of the African continent. Unlike Syria where the conflict and violence broke out merely after the Arab uprising, the people of Iraq and Afghanistan were subjected to external intervention and subsequent brutality and hostility among different warring factions.

The exodus of Syrian people across Europe received the attention of global media merely because of the magnitude and the level of crisis. In addition to Syria, there are around other two million refugees, who are fleeing the persecution from Iraq, Somalia, Libya and Afghanistan. The plight of immigration of Iraqis and Afghans is not less severe in nature or low in scale. The situation in Iraq and Afghanistan is quite comparable to the existing situation in Syria in terms of rising conflict, sectarian and ethnic civil war, level of death and carnage, rise of terrorism in both Iraq and Afghanistan and fragmentation of socio-political and economic structures and near collapse of state institutions. The landing of refugees in Europe is not merely from Syria, but the number is followed by Afghanistan and Iraq. Like the civil war in Syria, the US war against Iraq and Afghanistan and subsequent sectarian and ethnic conflicts were largely responsible for uprooting millions from Iraq and Afghanistan.

According to a UNHCR report, 14 per cent and six per cent of the total number of people, who reached Europe this year, are represented by Afghanistan and Iraq respectively.<sup>lxxviii</sup> It is worth mentioning here that before ISIS reached Syria, it was active in Iraq and had captured large swath of territories and, similarly, it was Afghanistan, which has borne the brunt of terrorism in a much naked form than what is being witnessed in West Asia. The pattern of slow immigration from Iraq started not long after the US attacks against Iraq in 2003. Initially, it was a short term voyage to neighbouring states very much similar to Syrians, who first moved to contiguous regions of Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. Before the onslaught of the ISIS in Iraq, 1.5 million Iraqis were displaced internally and externally and that was merely because of sectarian conflict and collapse of the state institutions. The United Nations estimated that most of the displaced persons are sheltered in the construction sites, makeshift shelters scattered around the cities in 1634 locations.<sup>lxxix</sup> According to the latest report of International Migration Organization, the total number of internally displaced persons is 318176 spread cross 3452 locations. Around fifty per cent internally displaced have been housed in Kurdistan region of Iraq.<sup>lxxx</sup> One unique feature of Iraqi immigration is that people of Iraqi origin, who had fled the country for Syria a few years ago, are again returning back to Iraq after Syria turned into another Iraq for them and this exercise is adding another complex dynamics to the whole issue.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

According to UN Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator, around ten million people were expected to be in the need of humanitarian aid by the end of the year where 3.2 million are already displaced. The situation is likely to worsen further if Iraqi army attacks Mosul as that will require the evacuation of 500,000 Iraqis from the region.<sup>lxxxii</sup> The reasons for migrating to Europe do not seem to vary much from what is being seen in the case of Syria. It is security, job opportunity, better future, dignified life, which are narrated by most of the immigrants to be the reasons for their fleeing the home country.

According to International Organization of Migration, 6000 Iraqis arrived this year in Greece or Italy on boats, but some experts view that the number is far less because of the absence of enthusiasm on the part of refugees for adopting official channels and the fear of being deported. Since August, 250 Iraqis are landing in Greece every day. They are also enthused by the generosity of a few of the European nations, like Germany and, moreover, they are swayed by the stories of their friends about the peaceful life in Europe.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

The refugees or asylum seekers are not fleeing from those countries only, which are amidst armed conflicts or humanitarian crisis. According to the UN report, out of total refugees, who hail from the war-torn zone, 25 per cent are coming from other regions that include Afghanistan and other African nations.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Afghan refugees constitute the second largest population, who are entering Europe and people are largely leaving Afghanistan because around eighty per cent of the country is not safe and in one or the other way, it is affected by the presence of groups like Taliban or the new dreaded group called ISIS. According to the latest UN estimate, nearly 800,000 Afghan refugees crossed the Mediterranean in 2015 and around 218,000 only in October, which is higher than the overall number of refugees, who crossed in the year 2014.<sup>lxxxv</sup> They take the route either via Pakistan or via Iran to Turkey and then advance for the European territory. In the recent wave of refugee influx, they constitute around 13 per cent of the total refugees, who are crossing into Europe.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

There are several suggestions from the Interior Ministry of Germany to deter the Afghan refugees to cross into Europe. For example, preventing Afghans from having access to learning of German language, which makes integration possible. In Germany, around 46 per cent of the asylum seekers in 2014 were granted refugee status and other forms of protection and in 2015, the acceptance rate is 49.9 per cent.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> There are several countries including Germany that have plans to deport those refugees, whose applications have been rejected. Like Iraq, Afghanistan is also facing the influx of returnee refugees, who are coming back to their host nation from where they had fled earlier after the situation worsened. According to UNTRC, since 2002, 5.8 million refugees have returned home and majority of them were assisted by UNHRC.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

The scale of migration to Western Europe has opened new economic, political and legal challenges to the EU because there seems to be lack of cohesion among the members-states of EU. There seems to be visible differences between the nations of Western Europe and Eastern Europe when it comes to the treatment of the refugee from across the continent. "In a way, Europe has been divided between compassionate West and the evil East."<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The multiple characters of refugees have engendered different responses from Eastern Europe. There are countries in Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia), which have refused to accept the stance of EU. Romania and Denmark have also shown reluctance to accept the

allocation policies of Europe. If German Chancellor calls on Europe to demonstrate its human values and universal civility by accepting the refugees, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban wrote that his country must defend the borders from those, who were raised in another religion, and represent a radically different culture.<sup>xc</sup> The Hungarian Prime Minister sees the refugees as threat to the values of Europe and said that if migration is not checked, Christianity will become minority very soon.<sup>xcii</sup>

In the same tone, Slovakia has promised to welcome Christian refugees alone, which received a lot of condemnations by EU nations. Only on September 15, which was a decisive day in Europe for refugees, Budapest passed a legislation imposing a sentence of three years of imprisonment if one enters the country illegally.<sup>xciii</sup> They are not showing merely indifferent stance to the migrants but are erecting walls and wire fences to stop the tide of people crossing into their countries. Hungary and Bulgaria are sealing borders with walls and fences; Estonia, Macedonia and Ukraine have similar plans. The attitude of some is quite racial also as Zoran Milanovic, Prime Minister of Croatia, refused to open its southern borders for those coming from the Balkan region. There are several reasons, which explain this reluctance on the part of Eastern Europe towards the refugee crisis. No doubt, there are several economic and political factors, which are affecting the response of these nations. Like Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech, in a way, are already suffering from the refugees of Ukraine and the lingering crisis of refugees that occurred in the wake of Yugoslavia's war is yet to be resolved. These Ukrainians are sharing the job markets with Poles and others in foreign companies. Moreover, Eastern Europe sees the generosity on the part of Chancellor Merkel as a counter-productive, which they view as further cause of refugee influx in the region.

Eastern Europe has not experienced this scale of immigration, unlike UK and Germany, which have huge Diasporas from across the continent. Eastern Europe has no clue on how to handle, particularly the non-European refugees, who will require health care, education, and language training. The problem of integration and assimilation would be a bigger challenge for the Eastern Europe. The experience of the past has shown that large immigrant communities have failed to assimilate, like the people of Pakistani origin in Britain, Turkish in Germany and people of African origin in France. Moreover, in Eastern Europe, they lack the kind of infrastructure that Western Europe has.<sup>xciii</sup>

The Pope has condemned those nations, who shut their borders. The biggest departure from the EU foreign policy stance was seen in the policy announcement of Austria, which asked the EU to work for creating a secure zone in the conflict zone of West Asia. This stance is similar to what Turkey has been asking for a long time.<sup>xciv</sup>

Europe seems to be grappling between prospective exploitation of refugees in their job market and preserving the classical enlightened value in the form of multi-culturalism. There are already talks of creating a joint European force to nab the human traffickers on the coast of Mediterranean sea. In a latest mover, UNSC has given a go ahead to the EU to use the forces and raid the ships suspected of carrying illegal immigrants from Libya to Europe. EU has already asked the commission to submit a detailed report by the end of the year laying down the plan to return those refugees, who have entered the countries illegally and are not qualified to get the refugee status.<sup>xcv</sup> One cannot deny the fact that worry of EU in receiving such a large number of refugees is quite genuine and it has become a puzzling issue for them – how to confront the crisis. It has not only challenged the classical concept of nation-states, but raised the issue of immigration afresh, which has always remained a major political plank

for many in European nations. In countries like Sweden, an anti-immigrant party, Sweden Democrats, have overtaken the Social Democrats as the country's most popular party.<sup>xvii</sup> The refugee issue became a contesting point for liberals and conservatives, where for the left liberals, it was a moralist cause, but for the conservatives, it was an issue of protecting their own way of life. The conservatives are trying to transform the whole debate of values into an economic issue and propagating how can one support the other when one is itself in severe economic crisis.

Most of the EU countries lack fiscal transfer mechanisms to reduce the transfer of fiscal burden from one region to another. The disparity in economic prosperity among the European nations has created a new dilemma within the EU itself about the migration laws. There has been a prominent trend when the workers from poor nations land up in other countries with better economic graph and do not come back, restraining immigration within EU itself because in EU, there is no difference between Parisians working in Marseilles Greeks working in Germany. When the management of refugee crisis is compared to what the Arab states are doing, one can say that European nations are far ahead in delivering their duty, of course, there is no doubt that their actions are backed by well-defined laws and international obligation.

The next section of the paper will focus on how Arab states, particularly the Gulf nations have responded and see if they have really failed in their responsibility as reported globally. The next section will also explore if the lukewarm response of the Arab world was because of the absence of any laws in these countries or whether they were part of deliberate policies for known and unknown reasons.

### **Where are the Arabs?**

This is not for the first time that the Arab world has come across with the refugee problem as Palestinian refugees constitute one of the most entangled issues in the resolution of Israel-Arab conflict. There are various phases in Arab history when refugee issues have posed many challenges to the Arab world.

In the past century, there were issues of Armenian, Palestinians, Jews, Kurds, Iraqis, Lebanese, Kuwaitis, Syrians as well as Iranians of which many are still unresolved. One of the biggest refugee crises was seen in the wake of the first Arab-Israel conflict in 1948, followed by war of 1967, Lebanese civil war (1975-90), Iranian revolution (1979). Kuwait invasion of 1991 and Saddam's ouster in 2003 created a substantial amount of refugees in the region. Several nations in the region have been affected by the refugee crisis and Syria, itself, which is the hub of exodus today, offered refuge to one million Iraqis and 560,000 Palestinian in its own territory in the past.

It is a cruel but universal fact that the Syrian crisis alone has created more than four million refugees in the span of last four years, ever since the country slipped into the hell of enduring civil war. The crisis has reached a point where no amount of European generosity can resolve the crisis. According to the latest UNHCR report, these four million figures are made up of 1,805,255 Syrian refugees in Turkey, 24,726 in Iraq, 629,128 in Jordan, 132,375 in Egypt, 1,172,753 in Lebanon and 24,055 elsewhere in North Africa. There are thousands of applications lying already seeking asylum in different European nations. The *Financial Times* has charted asylum applications between January 2009 and June 2015 and gives the figures for Italy, Greece and Hungary, the three countries currently

bearing the brunt of the refugee tide. Hungary alone has had 54,170 applications from Kosovo, 19,095 from Syria, 4,015 from Iraq, 7,245 from Pakistan, and 32,470 from Afghanistan.<sup>xcvii</sup>

While some European nations are evolving new mechanisms to accommodate the flood of refugees, while others are erecting walls to stop the tide of the refugees. The Arab world is still involved in settling its old political score among itself. One needs also to understand that it is not only the refuge Arabs are seeking, but there are many who are the least interested in moving out of the country for Europe and they are more interested in staying back in their own country and want an immediate end to the war in Syria. The most profound statement in recent days came from a 13 year old Arab refugee, who said, "He did not want asylum or a hand out. He simply asked that the war in Syria be stopped."<sup>xcviii</sup> The Arab refugee seekers must understand that fleeing the country is not the solution as no nation can accommodate such a large number of refugees, irrespective of laws, norms and regulations that European nations have evolved with the passage of time. What is likely to create further impediment in accepting them is the apathy of the neighbouring rich states, particularly GCC nations, which have never been generous to accommodate the refugees. They always invoke the Palestinian refugee crisis because they hold the view that if they take the refugees from Palestine, the Palestinian liberation movement and the issue of return of the refugees will be adversely affected. But the present crisis is completely different from the past and none in Europe is going to welcome them when their own neighbours, who are never tired of invoking *Ummah* and Pan Arabism, don't welcome them.

The deafening silence in the Arab world, particularly among the GCC nations, has raised many questions about their responsibilities and accountabilities for being members of the international community. It is not the entire Arab nations, but the GCC alone, which has come under attack and most of the complaints and criticism have been levelled against one of the wealthiest entity in the world. None of the refugees have been in the nearby Gulf nations, who all rank in the world's top 50 GDP and have combined military budget of more than 65 billion pounds.<sup>xcix</sup> According to an Arab expert, Sultan Sooud al-Qassemi, "The Gulf must realize that now is the time to change their policy regarding accepting refugees from the Syrian crisis. It is moral, ethical and responsible step to take."<sup>c</sup> The voices of criticism seem to be legitimate given the attitude of GCC nations towards the whole crisis. The question arises as to why the EU should bear the brunt of the refugee crisis alone and having a law or being a signatory to a particular treaty does not bind one to share every burden and, meanwhile, does not allow others to behave indifferent to the crisis. The issue becomes more pertinent when one sees the level of involvement in augmenting the crisis. For instance, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia cannot plead innocence in instigating or dragging the crisis to its present level and, likewise, UAE and Qatar, who not only financed the anti-Assad rebel forces, but created all sorts of mess in one way or the other.

Expressing the same feeling about the apathetic stances of the Gulf nations, the Editor of London based Arab online newspaper, *Rai al-Youm* (Today Opinion) attacked the Gulf states for not absorbing the refugees in the following worlds, "The paradox is that nations [the Gulf States] who called for the liberation of Syrian people from the tyranny of Assad and have invested billions of dollars to assist the rebel forces there, have not absorbed any refugee while the poor Arab nations like Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt have recorded millions of refugees when these countries have no water for their own citizens."<sup>ci</sup> One of the well-known Syrian actors, who has remained a staunch supporter of Assad, has twitted mourning the situations of refugees, "Arabs, lower your flag to half mast. We have been offered up for sale today."<sup>cii</sup>



Critics have blasted the silence of wealthy nations, like Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar, who, so far, have made no policy announcement to intake the refugees. Some Gulf nations left no stone unturned when it came to their campaign for the removal of Assad from power. They did not bother about the financial burden when they fixed the salaries from their own exchequer for those, who were defecting from Assad's army and joining rebel forces against President Assad. One of the writers associated with the rebel movement wrote on a site, "When the Syrian boy has sent tremors through the world, but the silence is deafening in the Arab world."<sup>ciii</sup> The total donation amount of the GCC to Syrian refugees does not exceed one billion, which is four times lesser than what US has donated.<sup>civ</sup> Saudi Arabia and UAE alone have invested more in the war in Yemen than what they have done for the Syrian refugees.

Most of the criticism has been directed against the GCC nations regarding why they failed to receive the refugees while they are wealthy, already hosting expatriate workers in millions, have developed mechanisms to deal with the outsiders and, of course, not to mention their roles in bringing countries like Iraq and Syria to a situation where they are today. In Qatar alone, with a tiny population of 2,194,817, only 12 per cent of these are native Qataris. The vast majority are foreign workers from across the globe, especially Nepal (17%) and India (24%). In Saudi Arabia, one in every three persons is a migrant, while this tally in UAE is much higher where out of every ten, eight are from abroad.

According to Bobby Ghosh, the Editor of the Quartz, the Gulf nations have far greater ability to deal with the arrival of the Syrians than its immediate and poor neighbouring countries. In his words, "The region has the capacity to quickly build houses for the Syrian refugees. The giant construction companies should be contracted to build shelters for the new influx. Saudi Arabia has plenty of experience to deal with such huge arrivals as it receives millions of pilgrims in the season of Haj."<sup>cv</sup>

One of the sites in the Arab world, "Arab Conscience", says that the Arab world is refusing the same Arabs, who were looking for the solution in West Asia." While another tweet reads, "Welcoming Syria's Refugees is Gulf duty."<sup>cvi</sup> Steve Symonds of Amnesty International, UK and an expert on the issue of refugees told *Express Sunday* that Gulf States failed miserably. While Nadim Houry of Human Rights Watch (MENA Chapter) said, "It was shameful that Gulf States were not doing more."<sup>cvi</sup> Fadil-al Qadi, one of the experts on refugees from Jordan says that the missing link in this tragic drama is the role of the Arab countries, specifically the Gulf countries. He told the *Time Magazine* that these countries are not telling, logistically and technically, these people that your destination could be the Gulf. They have to make it clear, they have to announce it.<sup>cviii</sup>

According to reports of Amnesty International, there is completely unbalanced distribution of refugees in the region. Out of total four million refugees from Syria in neighbouring nations, almost 95 per cent are located in the poorest nations of the region, like Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt, except Turkey, which has relatively much stable economy in the region. Lebanon hosts approximately 1.2 million refugees from Syria, which amounts to around one in five people in the country. Jordan hosts about 650,000 refugees from Syria, which amounts to about ten per cent of the population. Turkey hosts 1.9 million refugees, more than any other country worldwide; Iraq itself, where four million people have been internally displaced in the last 18 months, hosts around 249,463 Syrian refugees. Egypt, which is itself grappling with internal crisis, hosts 132,375 refugees. Reports further add that six Gulf nations have offered zero settlement.<sup>cix</sup>

What was more shocking to hear from one of the members of a Think Tank in Kuwait, Mr. Fahed al-Shelaimi, who heads a Gulf Forum on Peace and Security, “The Gulf States are very expensive and aside from being labourers, these people are not suitable for life here. In addition to that, those fleeing the region are from a different environment, who suffer from emotional problems and cannot be received in our society. Moreover, the cost of living in Kuwait is very high, while the same is low and cheap in countries like Lebanon and Turkey.”<sup>cx</sup>

On a similar note, one of the Kuwaiti political commentators observed that Kuwait and its counterparts in the Gulf region cannot receive the refugees on such a large scale because they are newly independent states, unlike Europe, which has a diversified economy where they can employ these refugees in various economic sectors. Moreover, there is the demographic issue where ninety per cent of total population in some of the Gulf nations are constituted by expatriate workers and foreigners. One can also not ignore the political and security aspects of the exodus, which are equally important.”<sup>cxii</sup>

But these arguments could not be justified here because a nation like Saudi Arabia is much older and became independent way back in 1932. Sudan got independence much later and is much poorer, but it received thousands of refugees. Likewise, Egypt, which is not wealthy like the GCC, has received thousands of refugees during the first Gulf war of 1990 and the same is true of Jordan and Syria, which have received millions from Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon in the past.<sup>cxiii</sup>

Refuting the charges, Saudi Arabia has said that it has accommodated 500,000 Syrians since 2011,<sup>cxiii</sup> but they have been given worker status and not categorized as refugees. There have been no comprehensive policies to allow them to settle there permanently. These accommodations are not different from millions from South and South East Asia, who are expatriate workers without permanent status and with work permit only. After the crisis, even the renewal of work permit has become difficult for the Syrians and other refugee-producing countries. Kuwait, a trailblazer among the Gulf nations in terms of human rights, has granted 120,000 Syrians long term residencies only; it means that they will not be sent back if their permit expires.

There is another side of the story about this seemingly silence of the GCC nations and their apparent “No Care” attitude. All the GCC nations have shown apathies towards the crisis and remained adherent to their old stance of not welcoming anyone as refugee into their countries, particularly reflecting the old stance towards Palestinian refugees. But there are other Gulf-dominated bodies, like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which has shown its concern for the crisis. Its Secretary General, Iyad Amin Madani, appealed to the international community to address the escalating Syrian refugees’ crisis that left thousands of victims dying from drowning and suffocation. In his appeal, Madani said: “The little Alan’s motionless body reminds us of the great humanitarian tragedy, which he and hundreds of thousands of Syrian children, men and women, youth and elderly have suffered and continue to suffer from.”<sup>cxiv</sup>

He called on all the OIC member states and the international community to put aside their differences and mobilize their efforts to help the Syrian people and refugees. This is neither Syrian nor Middle Eastern, nor European nor Muslim crisis. This is an international humanitarian crisis in which precious lives are perishing. He pointed out that many OIC member states, most notably, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt have been carrying the extreme burden of the influx of the Syrian

refugees, and they have all allocated huge amount of resources to host more than four million of them in their respective countries.<sup>cxv</sup>

The absence of any legal framework within the GCC might have deterred them, perhaps, from receiving Syrian and other refugees in their countries. None of the GCC nations are signatories to Refugee Convention, for instance, Saudi Arabia has no such laws of immigration or refugees and the most they offer is the work permit. There are people, who have been living in Saudi Arabia for decades, but they still have the status of migrant workers. Saudi Arabia hosts thousands in the country as refugees, but does not give them refugee status, except to those, who have work permit in advance. According to a world refugee survey, Saudi Arabia hosts 291,000 people in the country as refugees, but accepts the refugee status of only those, who have work permit and except 1000 out of those numbers, all are former Palestinians. In 1993, Saudi Arabia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the government agreed to “provide protection to refugees present in the Kingdom” and grant refugees temporary permission to stay.<sup>cxvi</sup>

In 2004, Saudi Arabia revised its naturalization laws to allow qualified foreigners to apply for Saudi citizenship, provided they were fluent in Arabic, had lived in Saudi Arabia for ten or more years, had a clean criminal record, and were financially self-supporting. They included the stateless Bedouin, but not Palestinians. Applicants also had to meet religious requirements, and Saudi Arabia reserved the right to revoke the citizenship of naturalized citizens within ten years if they committed a crime. Despite all these flexibilities introduced in the last decade or so, there is no such law on refugees in Saudi Arabia, which could tackle the problems.

The situation is similar in Kuwait, which is another member of GCC. Kuwait does not allow even citizenship to those, who have entered the region after 1920 according to its nationality laws of 1959, when it became independent in 1961. Even one third of its own people are categorized as refugees and internally displaced persons in complete violation of definition norms of UNHCR category of refugees. Between 80,000 and 140,000 people in Kuwait are stateless and many of the foreigners from the region itself has been surviving without any status for themselves. Like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait too rejects the category of refugee or asylum seekers and many of the Palestinians, who fled Palestine after 1948, are considered as expatriates under the laws of Kuwait.<sup>cxvii</sup>

Similarly, UAE is not bound by any laws, which govern its relationship with UNHRC and Refugee Convention of 1951. There is no legal framework between the UAE and the UNHRC and the office of UNHRC in Kuwait is run under the UNDP program.<sup>cxviii</sup> But despite being non-signatory to the Refugee convention, UAE is the most lenient among all the GCC nations when it comes to the refugee crisis. UAE has eased its law of acquiring nationality for the foreigners and participates in many of the programs of UNHCR. All non-citizens of the UAE including refugees and asylum seekers come under the category of expatriates and are covered by national immigration laws (Expatriates Law).<sup>cxix</sup>

Moreover, these countries are already burdened with a lot of expatriate workers, which itself has become a source of concern for them. GCC countries are also host to many of the refugee producing nations and they are home to many illegal workers, who sneak into Saudi Arabia via Yemen.

Many of the GCC have cracked down on illegal migrants and are trying to regulate the work market for providing job to their own nationals. Of late, they have started a policy of naturalization. Kuwait has the plan to expel one million out of total 1.8 million foreign workers in the next ten years.<sup>cxx</sup>

As far as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq are concerned, there are other factors, which made them host such big numbers. These nations hosted the highest number of Syrian refugees in their territories and that is because of territorial proximity between the two. The first Syrian refugees entered in Turkey in April 2011.<sup>cxxi</sup> Gradually, the number kept on rising and Turkey was challenged with a set of different policy issues. Moreover Turkey is the signatory to the Refugee Convention and a member of NATO and is economically stable. But now, even for Turkey, it will be difficult to host more refugees because of growing pressure of EU to contain and check the exodus into Europe. Moreover, it was in Turkey's interest to host the refugees in order to highlight the magnitude of the crisis. Even the President of Turkey refused to erect any particular camps for welcoming the refugees, calling it an inhumane and unacceptable act. President Erdogan had earlier refused any financial aid from Europe to feed the refugees. Turkey is more interested in establishing a secure zone on Syria-Turkey border that would help Turkey make three new cities, which may host 100,000 each.<sup>cxxii</sup>

Jordan has hosted the most number of refugees in the world history and the most important of them have been the Palestinians, who landed in the country after the first Israel-Arab war in 1948. The second wave of refugees was witnessed during the first Gulf war in 1991 and it has also borne the brunt of forced migration from Lebanon, when it was engulfed in civil war for fifteen years.<sup>cxxiii</sup> Like Turkey, Jordan is the neighbouring nation of Syria and it was easy for refugees to reach there. Moreover, the Jordanian government was running a UNO program for Syrian refugees that attracted refugees in great numbers from there. When there was a cut in the food program of the UN for the refugees, some refugees started fleeing towards Europe.

There are other causes, which deter Syrians entering the Gulf nations, because the visa procedure for these countries is complicated and the visa fees are very hefty. Syrians require visa to enter in all Arab nations except Algeria, Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen. Moreover, travelling through the desert of UAE and other nations is a very tedious exercise and the countries are very far away from each other in comparison to Turkey and Jordan from where they can use the sea route for Europe. The terrains towards GCC nations are very dangerous and these are inhabited by the ISIS forces and other radical groups. The fear of radicalization in their respective societies may have also deterred the Gulf rulers from welcoming refugees because these refugees might carry the bogies of terror along with them.

It would not be correct to assume that Gulf nations have been very apathetic to the crisis and have done nothing when compared to what the EU has done. Of course, they are far away in terms of policy announcements, but in terms of economic packages, the figure is not so negative. In evolving its policies towards refugees of Syria or Iraq, GCC nations are more guided and driven by their own domestic situation and long term strategic and economic interests. Of late, these nations have enunciated the policies of naturalization, entailing to give jobs to their own citizens, so how can they offer refuge to people from other countries. Moreover, offering refuge does not merely require giving shelter, but also makes it obligatory to provide, education, health care and other civic necessities, which these nations are afraid of. This is not about merely sharing of burden in economic terms, like in

the past, but in the present scenario, what has become more worrisome is the sharing of the cultural burden and social norms, which are more risky than economic sharing.

Jordan has funded entire UN camps for refugees in Jordan. Qatar and Saudi governments have funded food and shelter to the Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. In total, the GCC has given US \$ 900 million as donations to the refugees of Syria.<sup>cxxiv</sup>

Kuwait has given US \$121 to UNHRC to tackle the Syrian refugee crisis and to deal with the dire humanitarian crisis in the region arising out of the refugee crisis.<sup>cxxv</sup> This donation of Kuwait was applauded by the agency, which said that the fund would ease the burden on the agency in tackling the crisis in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. Kuwait also organized three donor conferences for the Syrian refugees and raised US \$ 7.7 billion for the refugees.<sup>cxxvi</sup>

The total Aid from UAE to Syrian refugee crisis has reached DH seven millions, which would reach 98,710 Syrians living in Jordan refugee camps. The fund is part of total DH 18 million package for the Syrian refugees. According to UNHCR, the aid covers more than 200,000 health care consultations in Jordan.<sup>cxxvii</sup> The Minister of UAE for International Cooperation and Development said that his country is working with UNHCR to see that UAE fund delivers positive results. In January, the UAE pledged \$100 million in support of Syrian refugees, and \$44 million of that has already been dispersed. Part of that aid goes to fund one of three refugee camps in Jordan, which is sheltering more than 500,000 refugees.

Meanwhile, like Kuwait, UAE has also eased the residency law in its country where those, who have fled Syria and come to UAE have no need of passport renewal. Residency visas are extended and other documentation facilities have been offered.

The claims of the Gulf nations that they are doing a lot for these refugees by making exorbitant donations to tackle the crisis cannot be taken on face value. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees' account shows that Saudi Arabia offered merely 11 million pounds while Kuwait has given the commitment of offering merely 194 million pounds, so the total Gulf amount does not exceed 600 million pounds whereas Britain and US alone have donated 370 million and 700 million pounds respectively for the same cause.<sup>cxxviii</sup> Making the announcement of huge donations would not suffice to ease the burden. What is required at the moment is to provide physical security to the refugees because those, who are fleeing the country, are not doing so because of any economic plight, but because of threat to their lives and concern for their future. As far as donation is concerned, GCC nations have been making all sorts of charitable donations in different parts of world including India but, at the moment, what is required is the evolution of a comprehensive plan, like the one EU has, to accommodate those, who are fleeing the country. The GCC cannot absolve itself of the responsibility by invoking or referring to the refugees of Palestinian crisis because the present crisis has no relation with what is happening in the region today.

The donation of Saudi Arabia seems meagre when compared to \$100 billion spent on exporting fanatic Wahabism to various much poorer Muslim nations worldwide over the past three decades. There are reports that Saudi has financed the construction of 200 mosques in Germany alone and has paid lip service to the refugee crisis, which shows the priority of one of the wealthiest nations in the Arab world.<sup>cxxix</sup>

**Conclusion:**

There are no doubts that the crisis would further accentuate in the forthcoming months and years because the region is on boil and new fault lines are emerging every day, pushing the region deeper into chaos. One could imagine what would happen if similar pace of exodus begins from Yemen and Libya, given the level of conflict being witnessed there and where more than 80 per cent of populace are already in dire need of humanitarian aids.

What further makes the situation gloomy is that the UN humanitarian appeal is responded by less than 40 per cent when it comes to funding and this shortage has already led to the vulnerability of Syrian refugees, for example, Lebanon receives just US \$13.50 per month or less than half a dollar a day for food assistance.<sup>xxxx</sup> As the crisis accentuates, the debate is likely to aggravate about who is to be blamed for the present mess in the region, which has transcended national and regional boundaries and become an equally bigger threat for Europe and beyond.

The crisis demands not only the solution of the immigration issue, but also raises the fundamental question about the nature and dynamics of Arab leadership. After the image of the dead Kurdish Turk boy hit global headlines, the world did not only direct its attention towards the refugee crisis in Europe, but also looked keenly at how the Arab world is responding. This keenness on the part of the global community was not misplaced in its approach because the rulers of Gulf nations were equally responsible in instigating the anarchy in the region, which compelled the people to flee, not from the country alone, but the region itself, in search of a secured and dignified life.

As the violence is likely to grow with the passage of time in the region, Amnesty International has called other countries in the region to take five per cent of the refugees in their own nations by the end of 2015 and next year another five percent, i. e., around 38,0000 refugees. A new international law is needed and Europe cannot take in all the refugees and it has no incentive because it is already facing a lot of backlash. Gradually, the pressure will mount over the Gulf nations to amend its immigration laws and evolve new mechanisms, but it is unlikely that there would be any change because so far, they have not offered any citizenship or asylum status even to any Palestinian refugee, which is historically the most lingering issue in the region, so how can they succumb to pressure over the refugees of Syria or any other countries.

In the absence of any immigrant or asylum laws within their own nations, Arab has no moral right to criticize the policies of Hungary or Serbia for stemming the tide of refugees because they are themselves subjected to internal crisis and no country would want to compound its crisis for the sake of others and this is what the Arab nations wants from Europe.

The Mediterranean exodus is only part of the crisis, which is the cause and effect of global disorder and instability. There needs to be uniformity and clarity in asylum laws. North and South cooperation is a must to address the crisis to ensure safe zone for the immigrants.

Moreover, Arab should also equally work hard in protecting the status-quo because the Arab had been the beneficiary of Sykes-Picot agreement and that is very much under threat. The issue of social demography being disrupted could not be justified because Europe has already welcomed

thousands while they are equally threatened by uncertainty involved in opening their gates to such a large number of influx in their continent, which has remained relatively peaceful.

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Disclaimer: Views expressed are of author and do not reflect the views of the Council.

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