



PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Israel and Europe After Brussels: What Insights Can We Share?

by Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman

BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 337, March 30, 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israel, which unfortunately has had a great deal of experience with terrorist violence, has much to offer Europe in its own confrontation with Islamist terror. Once Europe has internalized the reality that it is fighting a war, Israel can advise it regarding strategies like effective intelligence collection, disruption of enemy money supply, and interference with enemy access to the internet.

Can Israel be a source of advice to Europe in the next stages of the war on terror? The answer is an emphatic yes, if a basic condition is met.

Israel must be circumspect before offering advice to others. We have, after all, made our share of mistakes in this war. In a burst of optimism in the early 1990s, for example, some of our best and brightest were convinced that a notoriously two-faced fence-sitter like Yasser Arafat could be relied upon to stand up to Hamas. We have learned a great deal since then, but that does not entitle us to talk down to Europeans who are finding it understandably difficult to shed their own hopes, and some of their norms, in order to adjust to more brutal realities. To be of help, we must be sensitive to European needs and constraints.

(In this context, "Europe" refers to the relevant establishments in individual EU member states and, to some extent, at NATO Headquarters. EU bodies as such have almost no institutional capacity when it comes to intelligence work and its application to counter-terrorist operations).

If Europe is to win the war on terror, it will have no alternative but to abandon its persistent post-Cold-War mindset and recognize that there is, in fact, a war to fight. The terror campaign it faces is the work not of criminals but of an enemy, a term the happy post-1990 continent has almost forgotten.

This enemy is not Islam or the Arabs *per se*. It is a modern revolutionary version (or perversion) of the religion of Islam, politically molded in a template largely borrowed from European twentieth century totalitarianism. Such an understanding requires changes in legal attitudes, in educational perspectives, in political dynamics, and above all, in the accumulation of (and expenditure on) enhanced intelligence and operational capabilities.

In Israel, we have learned—the hard way, through battle—several ways of approaching the problem of violent, maximalist Islamism. The lessons we have learned can be adjusted to be of use to Europe, despite the obvious differences. There are, in particular, important conceptual lessons that can and must be shared.

First among these is the need for pervasive, versatile and penetrating intelligence collection. This requires a combination of several elements. Above all, there must be effective Sigint (signal intelligence), which in today's world means primarily the monitoring of communications on the internet, as well as more traditional eavesdropping.

Second, there needs to be extensive but discerning and intelligent data-mining in open source material, a method that can be remarkably useful if the right questions are asked and work is closely aligned with other "all source" material.

Third, there must be a strong Humint element (human intelligence; i.e., running agents and penetrating terror rings). Humint is a difficult but vital component on intelligence work; and to judge by recent experience, quite possible, even within the secretive Islamic State organization.

Fourth, there needs to be close cross-national cooperation among relevant agencies that hold different pieces of the puzzle.

Fifth, a strong and dedicated corps of analysts is required; people who are not afraid to speak truth to power.

It is true that to a certain degree, some of this involves the carefully monitored and legally sanctioned infringement of individual rights. But therein lies an important point. We can and should help each other recognize that all basic

human rights—including the right to come home in one piece; to walk unafraid in your own town; and to fly safely to your destinations—need to be respected. This can only be accomplished if the authorities know what they are doing.

Good intelligence services are expensive, and they demand high-quality manpower. Yet it is precisely their capabilities that enable free societies not only to live safely, but to do so without descending into wholesale discrimination and suspicion toward every Muslim among them. Israel contains a significantly larger proportion of Muslims than does Belgium or France, but Israel's security measures have kept the incidence of terror attacks by Israeli Muslims rather low. Israelis are thus able, despite many challenges, to live relatively normal lives.

Liberals, who traditionally harbor a deep suspicion of powerful and secretive intelligence agencies, often confuse the notion of close surveillance with the danger of "racist" profiling. But as Israel's experience shows, it works the other way around. Once you trust your security services to monitor and foil the plans of a deadly minority, it becomes easier to avoid tarring all Arab or Muslim communities with the same brush. They need not automatically come under suspicion. Fear breeds hate; knowledge builds confidence and cooperation.

Intelligence, moreover, needs to be shared and to be made available in a timely manner for effective counter-terror action to be taken. Translating bits of data into "actionable intelligence" has never been easy. Serious problems in this regard had to be overcome for Israel to turn the tide during the 2002-03 anti-terror campaign, and there remained some failures of dissemination during the 2006 fighting in Lebanon. Israel's learning curve has been steep. Some of the deepest insights obtained over those years might be communicable to those in Europe now facing the similar challenge of large-scale terror attacks.

Such attacks require careful planning and preparatory work. They are likely, therefore, to "emit" warning signals. For those signals to become useful intelligence, information must be shared on time. Traditional barriers of secrecy that were relevant during the Cold War era are irrelevant against an ever-dynamic terror threat that has to be fought and defeated, not simply deterred.

Another critical aspect in the war on terror is the cutting off of the money supply to terror networks. Despite organizational difficulties in recent years, Israel has gained broad knowledge in this field, and the formal announcement

this past February of Israel's accession to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) reflects a belated but still welcome recognition of our unique contribution. However, for this strategic tool to have an effect, European powers—backed by the US and the NATO alliance—must secure systemic and focused support from Turkey, which still harbors a dangerous Hamas network and is only now waking up to the full danger of IS.

The challenge of achieving Turkish cooperation, which should be handled as part of the broader European-Turkish engagement (with all its attendant economic rewards for Erdogan's regime), ties in with the delicate question of how to monitor the flow of migrants into Europe in such a way as to filter out enemy agents abusing Europe's welcome. Again, to do such monitoring effectively and systematically is not "racial profiling." It is the only intelligent way the doors of Europe can be left open for genuine refugees, many of whom are fleeing the Islamists and abhor their rule.

On another front of the battle, like-minded nations can and should work together to make headway in curbing the ability of the terror organizations to utilize the internet. Israel has been vocal in making this case. By now it should be manifest that it is patently absurd for IS and al-Qaeda to have "webzines" ("Dabbiq" and "Inspire", respectively) and online services available to them. The efforts that have been made, effectively and justifiably, to eradicate child pornography can surely be applied to deny child murderers and the rapists of Yazidi girls the online celebration of the pornography of violent death that they use as a political tool.

Israel can be of great help on all these issues by offering serious, consistent and respectful engagement. Embittered invective takes us nowhere (– even if such is driven by the many cases in which Europeans saw fit to unfairly judge Israel for the way it confronts its enemies). A cooperative stance can make a real difference. The internal dynamics of European policy-making are swiftly changing. In fact, the cognitive community of military, security and intelligence officers and experts, too long marginalized in internal debates, is being listened to once again.

Israel's frayed relations with Europe have benefited from Israeli high-tech and cyber prowess; Israeli contributions to Eastern Mediterranean stability; elements of common heritage (particularly evident in the "new Europe"); and the persistence of historical memory, which remains strong in Germany and elsewhere. The common battle against terror can become one more constructive element in rebuilding and strengthening The European-Israeli relationship.

Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman is a senior research associate at the BESA Center, and former deputy for foreign policy and international affairs at the Israel National Security Council. He served for two decades in Israeli military intelligence.

BESA Center Perspectives Papers are published through the generosity of the Greg Rosshandler Family