



Can Europe learn from Israel's experience?

Meir Elran suggests that robust intelligence, strong resistance and protection measures, along with enhanced societal resilience, are key lessons that Europe can take from Israel's counter-terrorism experience

A new wave of terrorism has affected Europe. Learning from the experience of other nations is one way to deal with the threat. However, there are two important caveats: Israelis, who are indeed vastly experienced with protracted, violent terror, are advised to be humble in their attempts to 'teach' other nations. Although we are experienced, and by and large have been quite successful in limiting terrorism and mitigating its effects, Israel still faces this hazard and needs to expand its own readiness to be better prepared for future events.

Even though terrorism represents a universal phenomenon, designed to disrupt civilian life by violent means to achieve the political goals of the perpetrators, its modus operandi are diverse. For example, side by side with handling 'individual knifers', Israel is preparing itself for another round of rockets and missiles. Additionally, Israel still remembers and learns the lessons of the massive suicide bomber attacks (130 cases in 48 continuous months over 2000–2004, leading to more than 480 civilian fatalities), to be prepared if this threat re-emerges.

I shall divide the specific lessons of dealing with terrorism into three main categories: Robust intelligence; strong resistance and protection measures; and enhanced resilience. Only a combined and relentless effort in these three domains stands a real chance of curbing terrorism and significantly mitigating its damage.

It might sound like a cliché, but the first imperative of any successful campaign against terrorism is: "Know your enemy." Behind this stands a long list of necessary means

At the scene of a stabbing attack in Jerusalem. The modus operandi of attacks can vary and societies themselves must foster resilience to overcome disruptions

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that require investment – financially, organisationally, and mostly in human ingenuity. In the Israeli case, several important components have been essential in constructing a robust intelligence counter-terror system.

The first is the recognition by decision-makers that intelligence is indeed a critical, if not the primary, source of strength in combating terror. But intelligence comes with a high price tag. Political leaders should realise that if they wish to minimise terror, they must recalculate their budgetary structure and raise the allocation for intelligence build-up.

Second, the numerous intelligence agencies in any country should close ranks and work together in strict collaboration – something that they usually find hard to do. Interagency co-operation is vital. Different agencies must construct a joint framework of action, giving individual organisations priority in accordance with their advantages. They also need joint leadership that can take tough decisions before and during terrorist incidents. Furthermore, unity of intelligence action should be carefully practised, not only within the local national intelligence communities, but also with foreign allies. Terrorism requires intimate interstate intelligence collaboration.

Thirdly, intelligence has to be tightly connected with the operational units that conduct the search and pursuit of terrorists. This took Israel a long time to learn, adopt, and successfully implement operationally. It is not only an organisational challenge, but also a deep cultural issue: intelligence agencies often have their own codes of ethics and modalities of action,