Security preparedness in European cities

IS IT REALLY TIME TO LEARN FROM ISRAEL?

As part of European policy debates on counter-terrorism, there have been increasing calls to draw on Israeli expertise in protecting European cities. While transnational collaboration is, in essence, neither positive nor negative, European policymakers need to consider the full range of costs and consequences it is likely to have.

In light of the recent terror attacks in Paris and Brussels, there have been increasing calls to adopt an 'Israeli-style' approach to managing terrorist violence. These are based on the premise that Israel has experienced similar threats and developed effective policies to address them. Most recently, after the 2016

RECOMMENDATIONS

- As 'militarized' policing approaches are under increasing public scrutiny, counter-terror policy must consider its broad range of consequences for civil liberties and human rights.
- If proposals to adopt any global policing or security 'models' are to be taken seriously, their specific potential contributions and downsides need to be spelled out explicitly.
- The potential merits and pitfalls of seeking any external counter-terror expertise (including Israel's) must be debated in public forums rather than decided on behind closed doors.

The success of Israeli counter-terror policies is a site of ongoing debate rather than a settled professional consensus

Even proponents of Israeli counter-terror policies frequently note their failures as well as their fundamental inability to redress the structural underpinnings of ongoing violence in Israel/Palestine.

Nice attack, where a commercial vehicle was used to kill 86 people celebrating Bastille Day, commentators suggested that Israel not only has faced vehicular attacks but also developed effective counter-measures to effectively manage this threat.

These suggestions to learn from Israel are hardly surprising. Although its exact size is unknown, Israel has emerged as a major player in the field of homeland security since 9/11. The country is home to hundreds of private companies that service a growing international clientele ranging from private firms to police forces, governments and militaries. Based on Israel's longstanding record of conducting para/military operations in urban settings in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israeli homeland security firms leverage this claim to real-world 'experience' through the branding of their products and services as 'combat proven'.

However, while proposals to adopt an Israeli approach may appear as an intuitive solution to addressing the threat of terrorism confronting Europe, there are a number of reasons why proposals to learn from Israel are far less straightforward than they appear at first sight.

Recurring attacks spark new policy debate

European leaders are currently under public pressure to take decisive counter-terror measures in order to protect vulnerable populations and infrastructure. These new demands for security represent fertile ground for fruitful debates about how contemporary cities can and should be governed. But they also call for a more frank discussion about the extent to which any policy intervention (including learning from Israel) can help to prevent or mitigate violence yet to come. They also demand a fuller accounting of the long-term consequences any such measures are likely to have, beyond a narrow view of threat management. While proposals to learn from Israel represent only one part of these discussions, they illuminate a wider set of policy questions that demand urgent attention.

Some of the main issues to consider include:

- The success of Israeli counter-terror policies is a site of ongoing debate rather than a settled

EXISTING SECURITY AND DEFENSE TIES BETWEEN EUROPE AND ISRAEL

Israel's sometimes tense relationship to Europe poses some obstacles in selling security products and services to European states. This does not mean that Israeli companies do not sell to Europe but rather that these interactions are often concealed from public view. Beyond the ongoing transfers of conventional weapons and other forms of security technology between European countries and Israel (which go back to the state of Israel's founding), recent media reports suggest that European police officers from a range of EU member states have begun receiving training over the last few years. Israeli academics, companies and research institutes also receive considerable financial support from the European Union, which has already facilitated joint projects on new security technologies, among other initiatives. Most recently, the EU and Israel signed the Horizon 2020 association agreement in 2014, which will make €80 billion of research and innovation funding available to Israeli scholars, companies and research institutes over 7 years covering a wide range of subjects including, but not limited to, issues of defense and security.

professional consensus. Israeli policing and counter-terror strategies remain highly controversial, both within Israel/Palestine and globally. Even proponents of Israeli counter-terror policies frequently note their failures as well as their fundamental inability to redress the structural underpinnings of ongoing violence in Israel/Palestine. Media representations of Israeli urban security expertise as a global model often problematically obscure these complexities.

- Calls for Europe to learn lessons from Israel's experience with fighting terrorism, though often made directly following particular attacks like those in Paris, Brussels or Nice, have little to do with the specificities of these events themselves. Proposals to learn from Israel occur with predictable regularity following terrorist attacks in a wide range of countries around the world.

- Suggestions that Europe should learn from Israel have been notably short on details. They fail to define what exactly an 'Israeli approach' is (in general) and what it would look like if adopted by European cities. Here it would be worthwhile to consider the experience of the United States, where security and law enforcement agencies have engaged extensively with Israeli counter-terror trainers and security experts since 9/11.

- Recommendations to learn from Israel are often voiced by representatives with vested interests (ideological and material) in the growth of Israel's homeland security industry. The interests of Israeli leaders in promoting Israeli homeland security products abroad are, of course, quite transparent. Yet some of the other current promoters of Israeli

ISRAELI TRAINING OF US DOMESTIC SECURITY PERSONNEL

The implications of Israel's ties to US domestic policing and security agencies have not been studied in depth, but a number of scholars , journalists , human rights groups and activists have voiced concern about the role of Israeli counter-terror strategies in contributing to pre-existing forms of police violance and ethnic/racial discrimination in American cities.

A visitor touches a display at the international homeland security exhibition in Tel Aviv, Israel © AP Photo/Ariel Schalit

'solutions' to Europe and elsewhere work in cooperation with this industry and also have close ties to the Israeli state.

- Assessing the 'applicability' of Israeli counter-terror strategies and technologies to Europe means addressing questions about protecting civil liberties, human rights and access to public space in European cities. Here it is important to note that there are ongoing charges that extra-judicial killing is being used routinely by Israeli police and security forces against Palestinians. This raises questions about whether European policymakers are, in fact, seriously considering replicating this specific tactic in the European context and if so, how this would change policing practices on the ground. If certain Israeli counter-terror approaches are deemed to be inappropriate to Europe (which is likely to be the case) this raises questions about the extent to which it is possible to selectively appropriate some aspects of Israeli approaches whilst leaving others behind.

- Calls for Europe to learn from Israel conceal the ways that Israel and Europe are already enmeshed in forms of collaboration on issues of defence and security. These existing ties raise important questions about transparency and accountability. But they also ask questions about how additional or intensified forms of collaboration would change the existing status quo. Given news reports that officials from cities like Paris and London have already received some degree of Israeli training, how would more intense or sustained levels of cooperation change the current reality on the ground?

Further Reading

Private Security Companies and the Israeli Occupation – report by Who Profits Research Center, January 2016:
http://www.whoprofits.org/sites/default/files/private_security_companies_final_for_web.pdf

Crowd Control Weapons in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – report by Who Profits Research Center, April 2014:
http://whoprofits.org/sites/default/files/weapons_report-8.pdf

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Cover photo: Israeli police officers detain a Palestinian man during clashes in East Jerusalem © AP Photo/Mahmoud Illean