



After Paris: Securing Cities in the Age of Uncertainty

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Background

Barbaric terrorist attacks committed on 13 Nov. in Paris sent shockwaves throughout Europe and the world. Multiple sites in the center of the French capital were simultaneously attacked with assault rifles and explosives, leaving more than 120 innocent people dead and hundreds more injured. The attacks were attributed to and claimed by ISIL, planned and carried out by its operatives living in France and Belgium. The French government reacted by immediately declaring a state of emergency and employing all available resources for a rapid response. In days following the attacks, hundreds of raids and home searches took place in different neighborhoods of Paris, elsewhere in the country and in Belgium, making arrests, seizing weapons, explosives and cash. In the meantime, far from the homeland, the French conducted intensive airstrikes against ISIL targets in the group's stronghold in Raqqa, Syria.

What perhaps resonated most regarding the attacks is how and when they were committed, specifically in terms of the targets' selection. Unlike the morning rush-hour targeting of public transport systems in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005, or more recent and essentially isolated attacks against Jewish targets in Western Europe, past Friday's targets were crowded urban spaces of leisure –

restaurants, a rock concert and a stadium. This reflects ISIL's quest to attack the way of life that the extremists see as immoral and impure while, like in Madrid or London, killing as many people as possible to spread the message of terror globally.

Multiple analyses regarding Islamist radicalization in Europe and a geopolitical context of the Paris attacks have appeared elsewhere. This brief, for its part, attempts to answer questions about what can be done by European cities and their inhabitants to counter this form of terrorist threat. Urban centers where all levels of government, infrastructure and populations are clustered continue to be prime terrorist targets. The extent to which policy makers and law enforcement authorities can effectively deal with radicalized individuals is crucial for citizens' perception of security and justice, and thus conditions a quality of urban life. Several principles of a possible resilience strategy to be considered to that end, which are based on the character of threat posed by ISIL and the specifics of urban security, can be defined as follows.

Analysis

Adopt resilience thinking in governing urban security. As soon as we accept the fact that a bullet-proof prevention of all possible contingencies is not attainable, we may

start operating with the principle of resilience. Urban systems are complex and thus not susceptible to total control or total security. A possibility of a terrorist attack can never be reduced to zero. At the same time, resilient cities and their elements (physical and social) are adaptive, dynamic, flexible and redundant. When (not if) a disaster occurs, the system 'bends' but does not 'break'. Ultimately, it is able to get back on track thanks to actions and interactions between its "nodes" such as local government, rescue services, law enforcement, private sector and, crucially, its citizens. Cities whose governance networks are diverse, scalable and participatory tend to deal with contingencies more effectively. This is the cornerstone of city resilience, as they are not only governments or law enforcement agencies who have vested interests in putting their city back on track.

Design specific contingency plans for cities. Most European capitals and major cities have developed their own urban contingency plans and tailor-made risk assessments. This is understandable due to the fact that each city is highly specific given its natural terrain, infrastructure, local governance, population and social fabric, mobility and communications patterns, as well as external elements and flows that affect its urban system. This leads to different risks and threats on various temporal and spatial scales. Despite an undeniable standardization of many anti-terrorist measures globally, each city simply has a different topography of risk. Contingency plans and strategies focus on *disaster response networks* in cities, typically composed of state and local governments and their crisis committees, law enforcement (in some cases, its 'militarized' units or the military itself), search and rescue services, CBRN experts, medical aid professionals and others. These networks are activated and their representatives brought together in emergency control rooms to coordinate *immediate response*. Further attention should be paid to developing urban contingency plans which are lacking in smaller cities because the latter are not seen as primary terrorist targets. Urban centers of this kind tend to have less rapid response capabilities and less security measures in place and thus can be more vulnerable to unprecedented events.

Maintain psychological resilience for immediate response.

As has been mentioned, the possibility of a recurrence of tragedies such as the recent Paris attacks cannot be entirely ruled out. When all security measures in place fail to deter a terrorist from carrying out their acts, the only thing that matters is an *immediate reaction on site*. Crucially, during seconds and minutes before a terrorist is neutralized, key aspects are physical (material) constellation, immediate psychosomatic reaction of individuals and crowd behavior as well as, however banal that might sound, pure luck. Indeed, no universal blueprint of response can be adopted given the unpredictability of the above-mentioned aspects. Still, where possible, certain situational awareness and the ability to rapidly alert the authorities can lead to reducing loss of life, although it might not completely prevent it. Also, knowledge of physical surroundings, including existing exit routes and possible security elements in a given time and space is very important. The degree of psychological terror in similar cases is beyond description, as evidenced by witness accounts from the Paris attacks. In this regard, the ability to react immediately in such extreme situations is related to psychological resilience of any given individual. In a broader sense, psychological resilience as an ability to withstand severe trauma also applies to communities, cities and societies as a whole, related to the notion of long-term recovery.

Pursue resilience by design in urban planning as one of the widely used physical tools to improve security in cities. Physical resilience of important buildings, transportation corridors and critical urban infrastructure is the key to protect high-value targets. However, there seems to be a tendency on the side of terrorists to choose targets which are quite the opposite: seemingly random, unprotected, crowded and open-access sites. In this case, arguments about physical resilience of buildings and barricades are simply irrelevant. Long-term physical lockdown security tactics is unfeasible and counterproductive given the dynamic nature of cities. However, in minutes and hours after an attack is committed, parts of a city or an entire urban system can be effectively locked down in a sense of blocking all existing entry and exit routes, which allows authorities to carry out search operations while the perpetrators are still within the secured area. On a systemic level, urban resilience is based on *networks* of communication and transportation robust enough to enable law

enforcement agencies to react to a wide set of security events. The ability to deploy and coordinate police units and rescue services in affected areas with all equipment and resources necessary can prove to be difficult in a context of blocked streets, collapsed buildings, rubble or limited visibility. This can be partially encountered by employing GPS-based navigation in combination to what (in military terms) is known as strategic airlift capability, possibly including helicopters in urban context.

There is a number of technological instruments which can be (and increasingly are) employed to secure today's cities. Surveillance tools such as biometric scanners and security cameras employed in urban spaces and systematic tracking of digital communications are widely used. In hours and days following the Paris attacks, CCTV footage proved highly useful for investigators. Regarding general surveillance, there are obvious trade-offs in balancing public security against individual liberties. In any case, the public opinion tends to shift towards the former in a post-crisis state of trauma and fear.

Support long-term and city-specific public awareness. Cities are as resilient as the communities and individuals they are composed of. The need of public awareness about specific threats, including terrorism, does not necessarily imply living in a society of constant fear. As mentioned above, the risk cannot be completely eliminated. Some cities, communities or particular sites are more vulnerable than others, given their symbolic importance, location, density patterns or simply a lack of security measures in place. These aspects are specific for each city in the world and are a matter of common or instinctive knowledge to people who live in them. While terrorists have come to use their local knowledge (familiarity with the environment in the sense of density, flows of people, public venues,

etc.) to plan and commit horrific acts, citizens can use this type of knowledge to reduce existing risks based on awareness and common sense where possible. Sometimes security is a matter of simply keeping one's eyes and ears open to their surroundings. Bearing this in mind when navigating urban public spaces can lead to more informed and responsible decisions on an individual level. Sometimes, it can save other people's lives, as evidenced by the foiled terrorist plot on the French commuter train last August. The awareness refers to family community levels as well, where the first indications of radicalization tend to appear. Last but not least, more effort can be made on the side of landlords and property managers to make sure that true identities and backgrounds of their tenants are known.

Bottom Line

- Cities' symbolic importance and a concentration of soft targets make them prime targets of political violence inspired by the violent utopia of radical Islamism. The ability of governments, cities and citizens to deal with this threat from within, while at the same time safeguarding civil liberties, is a crucial challenge of our time.
- Designing resilient cities should therefore be a part of a comprehensive urban security strategy, particularly through adopting resilience thinking in governing urban security; designing specific contingency plans for cities; maintaining psychological resilience for immediate response; pursuing resilience by design in urban planning; and supporting long-term and city-specific public awareness.