



Brussels attacks demonstrate Paris was just the beginning

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With [ISIS now claiming responsibility](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-claims-responsibility-for-brussels-attacks-explosions-bombings-at-airport-and-maalbeek-maelbeek-a6946136.html) (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-claims-responsibility-for-brussels-attacks-explosions-bombings-at-airport-and-maalbeek-maelbeek-a6946136.html>) for the Brussels attacks earlier this morning, there are a few quick lessons we need to take away from what appears to be a coordinated attack at two soft target locations in Brussels. Any notion that [Paris was a one-off attack](https://www.aei.org/publication/what-we-do-and-still-dont-know-about-the-paris-attack/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/what-we-do-and-still-dont-know-about-the-paris-attack/>) should be firmly put to rest. ISIS clearly has infiltrated Europe.

First, ISIS and its deadly foot soldiers remain fully capable of hitting soft targets in Europe despite the security enhancements after Paris. Considering how aggressive security forces in Europe reacted to the Paris attacks, the fact that another coordinated attack could occur within four months and just days after the arrest of Paris attacker Salah Abdeslam in Brussels is stunning. The Brussels and Paris attacks may signify that ISIS terrorists remain concentrated in the Brussels-Paris corridor and not spread more broadly throughout Europe. If that is the case, it will be easier for security forces to find them.



(http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RTSBPMS_brussels_attack-e1458666080724.jpg)

Police man a security checkpoint outside the Midi train station following bomb attacks in Brussels, Belgium, March 22, 2016.

REUTERS/Christian Hartmann.

Next, today's attacks demonstrate three unsettling realities:

- The capture of Salah Abdeslam, while important, did not incapacitate ISIS operations;
- ISIS's ability to rapidly coordinate new attacks remains high; and,
- most problematic, a high-quality bomb maker (or makers) remains at large who can supply suicide bombers and produce packaged bombs with deadly explosive power.

The last bullet point is the most troublesome. So long as a bomb maker remains free in Europe and able to assemble bombs in an undetected facility, the next attack is only missing another foot soldier willing to die for radical Islam. It is imperative that European security forces find the bomb maker and his hideout. This [failure has security implications](http://www.aei.org/publication/crucial-loopholes-in-visa-programs-must-be-closed/) (<http://www.aei.org/publication/crucial-loopholes-in-visa-programs-must-be-closed/>) for America.

Another key lesson is that law enforcement alone won't be able to stop these attacks. It will require citizens and immigrants living near those planning these attacks to share what they know or suspect with police proactively. The fact that Abdeslam was arrested so close to his parents' home indicates that those in the community were shielding him. If Muslims in Europe don't get involved in the apprehension of terrorists, law enforcement will be operating at an enormous disadvantage and innocent people will die. It is time for them to choose whose side they are on.

Finally, the Brussels attack will further weaken German Chancellor Angela Merkel, as Europeans blame the refugee crisis for Paris and Brussels. Just over a week after her party suffered defeats in regional elections in Germany, Merkel's refugee policy will come under even greater attack by opponents. The terrorist attacks in Brussels may spell the end of Merkel's chancellorship and, therefore, weaken the European Union.

Learn more: [What we do and still don't know about the Paris attack](http://www.aei.org/publication/what-we-do-and-still-dont-know-about-the-paris-attack/) (<http://www.aei.org/publication/what-we-do-and-still-dont-know-about-the-paris-attack/>) | [Our dangerous reality](http://www.aei.org/publication/our-dangerous-reality/) (<http://www.aei.org/publication/our-dangerous-reality/>) | [National commission on terrorists' use of technology is needed](http://www.aei.org/publication/national-commission-on-terrorists-use-of-technology-is-needed/) (<http://www.aei.org/publication/national-commission-on-terrorists-use-of-technology-is-needed/>)

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