

# The Brussels Ultimatum

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The attacks in Brussels and in Paris earlier have jolted Europe. There has been another ultimatum from the IS warning that there would be more such attacks in other cities of Europe as well, for example, Rome and London. Europe seems to have become one of the primary targets of terrorism and from the recent threat it appears that this phenomenon would continue and expand further.

Most of the countries in Europe and analysts are trying to find the reasons behind this European expansion. There have already been adequate explanations looking into the emergence of the IS and its new focus on Europe. But is this explanation sufficient to explain the growing radicalism within Europe, which is considered well developed, moderate, democratic and secular?

Are there larger questions beyond simplifications? While it is easy to blame the recent attacks on the IS, there are also some disturbing questions beyond the problem in Syria and Iraq. For example, consider the following: What explains the large number of Belgian, Swedish, Danish and French nationals fighting for the IS? Why is it that some of the highest rates of radicalisation are amongst first and second generation immigrants? Despite being known for their free and liberal values, why is there a sharp increase in radicalisation in Europe?

The EU's role in the ongoing war against the IS is the most commonly sighted reason for Europe to become a target. This explains why the first of the two deadly attacks took place in Paris. Along with the US the French are also one of the leading contributors to the war against the ISIS. Brussels was targeted, as Belgium is also a significant contributor to the war. Additionally, Brussels is home to the EU and NATO. Therefore, it was an ideal target.

Is participating in the war against the ISIS the sole reason why Europe has become a target? While the international community has focused on defeating the IS in Syria and Iraq, the attacks in Paris and Belgium were led by individuals originating from the North African countries (Algeria and Morocco). These individuals were also the first or second-generation migrants who were born and brought up in Europe. Hence, there must be a much deeper reason why the IS ideology is becoming attractive to the youth across Europe. The answer to this question lies in various social and economic challenges the Muslim communities across Europe face.

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BELGIUM is quickly emerging as Europe's biggest challenge in fighting terrorism. Of all the European nations, Belgium has seen the largest number of people going to fight for the IS. Individuals living in Belgium carried out the attacks in Paris last year. A member of Belgium's counter-terror task force, Alain Grignard, mentioned that the fight was not against 'Radicalised Islam' but rather against 'Islamised radicals'. The IS' extremist ideology is not what is pulling these youth towards violence. Rather, there has previously been a violent tendency amongst these youth and the rise of the IS and its extremist ideology is providing a religious justification to these violent means.

The nexus between radicalisation and the propensity towards violence is closely linked to the economic and social factors. The Molenbeek neighborhood in Brussels is where a majority of the radicalised youth come from. While abject poverty is not an issue, there is a visible income disparity between these communities and the traditional Belgian population. This disparity plays out in access to education and employment. These economic and social

challenges lead to disillusionment amongst the members of the community, and this then makes violence and radical thoughts very attractive. The impact of these economic and social factors is evident in the fact that a majority of the radicalised youth were not religiously oriented. Radicalisation in many cases did not take place in religious centres but rather in social spaces. The challenge is that the lack of opportunities and economic hardships pushed these youth to become violent extremists. Similar economic factors also play out in France.

The first and second-generation migrant youth face a crisis of identity. While legally they may be citizens of a European country, socially they face the challenge of identity. Within Europe, they are viewed as Moroccan migrants or Algerian migrants. In their home countries they are viewed as French, Belgian, Dutch or German. Many of the youth, therefore, are searching for an identity. While they are viewed as outsiders in Europe, they are also viewed as outsiders in their countries of origin. The IS' ideology is suddenly providing these youth with an ideology they can identify with. Hence travelling to Iraq and Syria to fight for the IS becomes an attractive prospect as they will be glorified as fighters for the IS and not viewed as outsiders.

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EUROPE over the past few years has seen an increase in support for the Right-wing and a growing Islamophobia. In France the rise of Front National, in UK the emergence of the UKIP and similar groups in Germany and Belgium have added to the tensions between religious groups. Right-wing parties have been openly hostile to migrant groups. They have also recommended strict measures to control the spread of radicalisation. The presence of the Right-wing has made several minority communities fall prey to xenophobic violence. This has ultimately led to the souring of relations between various religious and ethnic groups. It has also led to Muslims being looked at with suspicion. In order to fight extremism, laws like making Muslim immigrants take language tests and banning of hijabs in public have been adopted. In the light of the growing Islamophobia, rise of the Right-wing and these laws, there is a growing feeling of victimisation amongst the Muslims. While the rise of the Right-wing, Islamophobia and restrictive laws are a natural reaction to the growing levels of radicalisation, they are part of a vicious cycle. These very factors make radical Islamic ideology more attractive.

Ultimately the open borders amongst EU member-countries plays an important role. It enables terror groups to operate freely between countries. It is not a surprise that the open border between France and Belgium allowed extremists in Belgium to travel freely to France. The challenge of extremism is something that all European nations are facing. After France and Belgium, the UK, Denmark, Sweden and Norway have seen a significant number of citizens travelling to Iraq and Syria. A recent study of the IS' radicalisation programme showed that they are sending back foreign fighters to their home countries to carry out attacks like the recent ones in Brussels and Paris. Fighters from European nations find it relatively easy to return to their respective countries, as there is no restriction on movement of people across EU borders. A radicalised French national can travel between the EU states without any hassle. Therefore the open border is not only enabling terror cells to operate between countries, it is also making it that much easier for radical fighters to return home. The challenges posed by this are significant. Radicals in France or Belgium can pose a significant threat across Europe.

The events in Brussels and Paris are a matter of concern to countries across Europe. Several European countries, including Germany, France, UK and Belgium, are on the IS' hit-list. While the IS claims that these attacks are a revenge for participating in the international coalition against them, there are much deeper social, economic and political issues that contribute to Europe's problem of terrorism. The economic plight of communities, the crisis of identity and the growing Islamophobia are contributing to the rise in radicalisation. Europe's open borders mean that radical elements can move freely across international borders, putting the security of the entire continent at risk. The recent attacks in Brussels did not come as a surprise to many. Today, cities across Europe are tightening their security apparatus. While defeating the IS might solve a part of the problem, the need of the hour is to address the various social, economic and political challenges that is making the radical ideology attractive.

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