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In last year's absorbing spy thriller *A Most Wanted Man*, Philip Seymour Hoffman plays Günter Bachmann, a wheezing German counterterrorism agent determined to worm his way to the top of a Middle Eastern terror group.

"It takes a minnow, to catch a barracuda," he says, "a barracuda to catch a shark."

"We're not policemen—" adds his sidekick, played by Rachel Adams. Hoffman finishes the thought: "We're spies."

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Based on a John le Carré novel, the film's *betes noires*, of course, are security bureaucrats who are desperate, in more ways than one, to make headline-harvesting busts. When they push Hoffman to roll up a suspected terrorist money launderer instead of letting a mark lead him to the Beirut-based brains of the organization, he counsels patience.

"Our sources don't come to us," he says. "We find them. When they're ours, we direct them at bigger targets."

And that's the counterterrorism dilemma in a nutshell: How much rope do you give lower-level terrorists, in the hopes of turning them, knowing they can always give you the slip and carry out a major attack?

In Europe today, the answer seems to be: not much. Anti-terror police in Paris, Berlin, Belgium and Austria carried out major sweeps Thursday night and Friday. After a dozen raids around Brussels and in the eastern Belgian town of Verviers—where a gun battle with police left two suspected Syria jihad veterans dead—the authorities reportedly rounded up 15 suspects on Friday.

A big plot was in the offing, Belgian authorities claimed. "This group was on the point of carrying out terrorist attacks aiming to kill police officers in the streets and in police stations," state prosecutor Eric Van Der Sypt told a news conference. They were set to act "in the next hours or days." In France, the authorities arrested two men but said they "still had no evidence of a link between the Belgians and Islamists" who attacked a Jewish supermarket and the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 17 people.

Robert Baer, a former CIA operative who pursued terrorists in France in the 1980s, says European attitudes toward Islamic extremists have clearly hardened in the wake of the Paris attacks.

"In those days there was a steady hand on the tiller," he told *Newsweek*. "Europeans understood they [could] put up with a little political violence and still keep an open society. Today, I sense genuine panic—the barbarians are inside the gate."

Moreover, Baer says, the Islamist violence unshackled traditional French racism toward Arab immigrants. "As the French would say, 'It's time to put the [derogatory term for Arabs] in the woodchippers.'"

Frank Wuco, who had several assignments in Europe with the Defense HUMINT [human intelligence] Service in the 1980s and 1990s, emphatically agreed.

"For the near term, the Europeans, they will unapologetically do whatever they have to to get rid of the problem now that it's become violent," he said in a telephone interview.

The battle between jihadis and counterterror forces in Europe, he predicted, would be "brutal, even feudal," he added, as European security police "are not nearly as concerned with people's perceptions of them as we are."

Across European airports and train stations, he said, security forces have no hesitation to "profile" travelers, a police tactic of singling people out by their appearance that is controversial in the U.S.

"You fly into Rome lately? You see heavily armed *carabinieri*, they're checking people out," he said. "You have a Middle Eastern passport, forget about it. You'll be pulled aside or turned around. And you don't hear complaints about it, because Europeans don't give a shit. The police make a lot of arrests, and there's not a lot of explaining or apologizing about it."

Richard J. Chasdi, a political science professor at the Center for Complex and Strategic Decisions at Walsh College in Troy, Michigan, has the numbers to back up the idea that French police tactics have radically changed in 20 years. Chasdi is the author of *Counterterror Offensives for the Ghost War World*, which has a chapter on French terrorism and the various responses of the authorities to it.

In the mid-1990s, French security agencies showed “a strong preference for non-forceful action,” with police and military force used in only 10 percent of “preemption” events (when an plot is in the planning stage), even though “disruption events,” (when an attack is believed imminent) used military and police efforts 76 percent of the time, his research of over 200 cases found.

The big sweeps and gun battles erupting now suggest those numbers may be dramatically eclipsed in short order, he added.

“I would agree that there is a strong likelihood the Paris attacks will increase this shift in disruption-style counterterrorism efforts from ‘softer-line’ to ‘hard-line’ tactics—if that has not already happened,” Chasdi said. “The irony of all this is that French counterterrorism policy was designed to be balanced—to keep France out of those political entanglements that generate terrorism in the first place.”

But France has been and continues to be entangled abroad. Paris has supported Christian Maronites in Lebanon, the military backed government in Algeria, and now, with its involvement counterinsurgency operations in Mali, along with France's commitment to the U.S. in Iraq, “all that has changed,” he said. Add to that, “its own legislative and police crackdowns in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, [and] that shift will probably intensify even more.”

Not everyone is convinced that the robust response of security forces in the past few days marks a permanent change.

“First, people in the EU are panicked right now, and understandably so, so a swift government response is appropriate and probably necessary to calm the public’s nerves,” said Philip Lohaus, a decorated former U.S. intelligence operative and analyst in the Middle East, in an email. “Second, it could be that the attacks have led European terror officials to take other threats more seriously.”

Lohaus, now a research fellow in intelligence at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., compared the European response to the Paris attacks to how Washington woke up after September 11, 2001. Only days before the 9/11 attacks, many key officials in the George W. Bush administration showed little interest in counterterrorism, despite “the system blinking red,” as the 9/11 Commission report put it, about an imminent attack.

“Before the attacks, there was evidence that they would occur, but the threats simply didn’t seem credible enough to warrant pre-emptive action,” Lohaus said. “But after the attacks, the government would have been irresponsible to not treat similar information with the utmost seriousness.”

Many things changed after 9/11, but not everything—not the human dimension. There were several more terrorist near-disasters, despite the complete reorganization of the government around homeland security.

“The further we get away from the Paris attacks,” Lohaus said, “the more that old habits and inclinations will prevail.”

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