

## **Towards the Endgame? The French Republic and its “Jewish question”**

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*Abstract.* One of the most disquieting aspects of these new forms of anti-Semitism is that they are not acknowledged as such. In France it took years for state authorities to recognise that attacks on Jewish communities were not a consequence of the conflict taking place in the Middle East, however hateful it may be, but the specific result of a new anti-Semitic deviation that unifies in one undifferentiated *unicum* hatred aimed at Western culture and democracy with hatred of Israel and Jews. In these new deviations of Islamist and no-global origin, anti-Semitism is at times even falsely presented as a form of “anti-racism”. In referring to the French case, the author analyses the serious cultural delay with which European culture addresses this new emergency, emphasising the limitations and ambiguities with which the problem has been analysed so far.

*Key words:* anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, *jihad*, Islam, Israel, France.

On the eve of the Bastille celebrations of 2014 (a national holiday in France), a pro-Palestinian mob unexpectedly laid siege to the Don Abravanel synagogue in the XI district of Paris. The building, located in the Rue de la Rocquette, was filled with about 200 congregants who had to barricade themselves within as an angry pro-Hamas crowd sought to force its way inside. The protesters, waving Palestinian flags, were mostly of North African Arab origin, supported by a small band of left-wing allies – Communists, militant anti-Zionist Trotskyists (belonging to the “New Anti-Capitalist Party,” NPA), ecologists, and trade unionists. They were incensed by the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in response to the relentless firing of rockets into Israel by the Hamas regime which controls the Strip. The protesters did not content themselves with the familiar shouts of “Free Palestine.” More sinister cries, like “Death to the Jews” (*Mort aux Juifs*), “*Allahu Akbar*” and “Hitler was right” could also be heard. The mob, some of them armed with chairs, clubs and knives, was resisted outside the building by a small group of policemen and Jewish Defence League activists along with members of the Jewish Community Protection Service. It took three hours for the siege to be lifted, after the belated arrival of special police reinforcements. For some witnesses, the event evoked memories of *Kristallnacht* – an exaggeration no doubt, but also testimony to the scale of the trauma.

During the next ten days there were no less than eight attempts to invade, damage or set fire to synagogues in the Parisian area. Already two days earlier, on 11 July 2014, during Friday night services, a synagogue in Aulney-sur-Bois had been firebombed. A week later, in the northern Parisian suburb of Sarcelles (popularly known as “Little Jerusalem”) with its 60,000-strong Jewish population, there was a failed effort by Arab rioters to set the synagogue aflame. The enraged crowd burned cars, attacked Jewish-owned shops, destroyed a pharmacy, a pizzeria and several stores. The police had to use water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets to subdue the attackers in scenes more than reminiscent of a Middle East intifada.

The escalation of anti-Jewish violence in the wake of the Gaza conflict was not confined to France alone, though its scale and intensity were felt most powerfully there. From London to Sydney, from Boston to Santiago the chorus of anti-Israel protest – often spilling over into anti-Jewish expressions – could be heard world-wide. In Great Britain, alone, during July over two

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hundred anti-Semitic incidents were registered (a record number for a single month) though they did not cause the same devastation as in France. In Germany the anti-Israel mood was particularly visceral. On 21 July, the leader of the German Jewish community Dieter Graumann declared his shock at the explosion of "evil and violent hatred of Jews" manifested by protesters at pro-Hamas demonstrations in several German cities. In Berlin a local Imam incited Muslims to slaughter the Zionist Jews, and demonstrators (many of them Turkish) were overheard screaming disgusting slogans like "Jew, Jew, cowardly pig, come out and fight!" Protesters in Antwerp, too, reportedly marched while chanting threats to "Kill the Jews." In Malmö (Sweden), the synagogue was vandalized for the third time in a year, swastikas were painted on Jewish-owned shops and Jews insulted on the streets. A woman in the Swedish city of Uppsala was badly beaten for wearing a star of David. Across Europe, Israeli flags were trampled upon and burned. This spectacle of menacing violence prompted the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Italy on 20 July to issue a strong statement from Brussels denouncing "the ugly anti-Semitic statements, demonstrations and attacks of the last few days." They added that "nothing, including the dramatic military confrontation in Gaza, justifies such actions in Europe." The United States, too, was by no means immune. There were violent assaults, anti-Semitic insults and threats directed at Jewish residents in New York, Los Angeles, Boston and other U.S. cities. A visiting rabbi was murdered on Shabbat in a heavily Jewish area of North Miami after a series of anti-Semitic incidents in the locality. Whether his murder was a racist act or a botched robbery remains unclear.

France nonetheless represents a special case given the size of its respective Jewish and Muslim populations. The Jewish community of 600,000 (some estimates place it today at only half a million) accounts for half of the Jews presently living in the European Union whose future now seems under a menacing cloud. The Muslim population in France (traditionally estimated at around six million) may already have reached the eight million mark. It is easily the largest such concentration in the EU, constituting around 12% of the total French population. Like most of France's Jews, since the 1950s, Muslims immigrated principally from the country's ex-colonies in the Maghreb – Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. This Muslim population has been reinforced by co-religionists from former West African French colonial possessions as well as from Turkey and Iran.

The Muslim immigrants have proven particularly susceptible, especially since the year 2000, to anti-Semitic as well as anti-Israeli propaganda and incitement. The most obvious explanation (favored by most of the mainstream French and West European media) is to see this response as a reaction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. The reigning pro-Palestinian *doxa* blames Israel for all of the confrontations since 2000, for using "disproportionate force," gratuitously killing Palestinian children, committing "war crimes" and even "genocide." None of these media accusations is either true, or in fact, new. Such claims were made during the First Lebanon War of 1982 before there was any massive Muslim presence in France or in Europe more generally. At that time left-of-centre newspapers like *Le Monde*, the left-wing *Libération*, the Communist daily *L'Humanité* and the Catholic-left *Témoignage Chrétien* shamelessly denounced an imaginary Israeli "genocide" in south Lebanon. In that respect their fabrications were indistinguishable from those of official Soviet propaganda.

It has largely been forgotten today but this earlier European anti-Semitic wave was linked to an epidemic of terrorist assaults between 1979 and 1983 by Palestinian groups and their allies. For example, on 3 October 1980 a bomb intended to murder the maximum number of worshippers at the Liberal Synagogue of Rue Copernic in Paris, exploded prematurely, killing one Israeli woman and three non-Jewish passers-by. French Jews, appalled by President Giscard d'Estaing's public indifference to the first such terrorist assault since the Shoah on Jewish targets in a Western democracy, voted overwhelmingly for the victorious socialist candidate, François Mitterrand which may have secured his election. The new French President, despite his past as a Vichy official (which was little known), marched in the huge protest demonstration against anti-Semitism and

fascism attended by some 300,000 people in May 1990 in response to the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the southern French town of Carpentras.

The French media at the time conveniently blamed the National Front (which had nothing to do with Carpentras), singling it out as the culprit and Public Enemy Number One. This was a period in which it first became evident how far anti-Semitism was being politically instrumentalized by the Left in France as a subcategory of racism. It was also a time during which anti-Arab xenophobia began to be equated with the Holocaust – despite the huge differences in their origins, scale and consequences. A singularly perverse "envy" of the *Shoah* emerged among blacks, Arabs, gay people and other minorities fighting for the institutional recognition of their suffering. The mythical "Jewish Lobby" in France soon found itself accused of seeking a "monopoly" over public compassion for the victims of genocide. This was especially evident after Gaullist President Jacques Chirac in 1995 chose to acknowledge France's co-responsibility for the wartime anti-Jewish persecutions on French soil.

It is no accident that since 2000, Holocaust memorialization and the "Jewish Lobby" have been so relentlessly attacked by M'bala-M'bala Dieudonné, the French-Cameroonian "ex-humorist" who stands at the forefront of the "new" anti-Semitism in France. Following in the footsteps of Louis Farrakhan, the notorious Afro-American leader of the Nation of Islam in the United States, he has repeatedly accused Jews of having been slave traders; and of building their fortunes in banking, business, and the entertainment industry, by manipulating blacks. Dieudonné claims that Jews themselves, since the days of the Patriarch Abraham, have been archetypal racists. At the heart of "Jewish racism" lies the Biblical concept of the "chosen people" – an obsession which Dieudonné shares with his close ally Alain Soral – a white pseudo-intellectual, ex-Communist, and ex-National Front activist who today proudly proclaims himself to be a National Socialist *à la française*. The anti-Semitic discourse of Dieudonné and Soral combines old and new anti-Semitic themes in a peculiarly toxic manner linked by the paranoid theory of a world "Zionist" conspiracy. Their videos portraying Jewish domination of the economy, politics, culture, and the media reach an audience of millions through the internet. Both Dieudonné and Soral are convinced Holocaust deniers and admirers of Iran, which financed the campaigns of their Anti-Zionist Party for the European elections ever since 2007. Seven years later, the Gaza War has served to reinforce their hatred of Israel, their contempt for the French Socialists, and especially for CRIF (the umbrella organization of French Jewry) which they love to execrate as "the Mafia that runs the Republic."

Dieudonné and Soral have learned to shrewdly exploit their notoriety in order to bridge the gulf between Nazi salute which went viral on the internet. It is both an anti-establishment ("screw the system") gesture and a mutual recognition sign for anti-Semites around the world. The many posts on websites of individuals gesticulating with their quenelle salutes whites, blacks and *beurs* (Arabs), middle-class youth and the impoverished drop-outs of the urban suburbs (*les banlieux*), between FN supporters and the far Left, openly racist anti-Semites of the old school and younger neo-French immigrants. Their eclectic, hybrid anti-Semitism, linked to a provocative "anti-system" stance, has been crucial to their success. So, too, has Dieudonné's invention of the *quenelle* – an inverted in front of Jewish memorial sites – whether in Paris, Berlin, or Auschwitz – symbolize the decomposition of this Gallic "anti-racism" into primitive gutter anti-Semitism.

The response to this hybrid anti-Semitism among European intellectuals and journalists has been ambivalent for a long time – especially if it is connected to Islam. For most French intellectuals, to designate any group of Muslims as "anti-Semites" is considered highly suspect, if not racist and "Islamophobic." In both Europe and America, it can lead to the accuser being stamped as an "agent of Israel" or a "neo-reactionary" seeking to cover up "Zionist crimes." During the Second Intifada (2000-04), when anti-Jewish violence soared to unprecedented heights in France, the media, intellectuals, and many politicians simply denied its existence or blamed it on the Jewish community and Israel. For at least three years they could take their lead from President Chirac.

In France, one of the most common reproaches against Jews who publicly declare their solidarity with Israel has been that of "*communitarisme*," which literally means "communalism." It may sound inoffensive enough, yet politically the implications of this charge are damaging. "Communalists" are seen as being tribal, selfish, and particularistic. They are supposedly concerned only with their own community and not with the general interest. Such particularism is considered in some circles as almost a violation of the "republican contract" of 1791 when France became the first European nation to emancipate its Jews. The price for full Jewish civic and political rights at the end of the 18th century had been the renunciation by French Jews of communal autonomy in all spheres except religion. French Jews by and large adhered meticulously to this unofficial pact until it was brutally sundered by the French State itself in 1940. Indeed, the race laws instituted by the Vichy regime, which abolished Jewish emancipation, paved the way for the deportation by French police of 76,000 Jews from the country and their murder in the Nazi death camps.

Nevertheless, since the Second Intifada, Jews who have defended Israel may find themselves consistently branded as tribal "communalists." One result has been to link any rise in anti-Semitism with so-called "inter-communal tensions." The appearance is created that Jew-hatred is the outcome of unresolved issues between French Jews and Muslims for which both parties may be equally to blame. Yet there has never been a single case of French Jews assaulting mosques, Muslim community centers, schools or individuals simply because they were Arab or Muslim. On the other hand, there have been countless incidents of this kind perpetrated by Muslims. In other words, the aggression been in *one* direction only. This is something that the official mantra simply covers up.

It is worth noting that no less than ten years ago, an officially commissioned report to the French Interior Ministry, had observed that radical Islam was closely connected to the rise in anti-Semitic violence in France. It noted that French schools were becoming the "lost territories of the Republic" – to borrow the title of a book edited by Emmanuel Brenner in 2002. All the trends manifested across Europe today were present already then in the schools of the French Republic. Jewish children, adolescents and teachers were systematically harassed, insulted, mocked and humiliated by Muslim pupils originating from North Africa. This virulent anti-Semitism was closely connected to the social reality of young Muslims from the Maghreb who had embraced a militant ethno-religious identity based on hatred of the West, France, and the Jews. This Islamist identity blended a Qu'ran-oriented hostility to infidels, with traditionalist contempt for "protected persons" (*dhimmi*) – both Christians and Jews – as well as anti-Semitic conspiracy theories derived from European sources like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Hence the current sympathy of militant French Muslims for the genocidally anti-Semitic, Holocaust-denying Palestinian Hamas movement in its war with Israel, should come as no surprise. The ground had been well prepared ever since 2001 throughout the West, not only by the Second Intifada but also by 9/11, the global jihad, the rise of Salafism, and the cult of Osama Bin-Laden.

Solidarity with the Hamas, despite its rabidly anti-Semitic "sacred Covenant" of 1988 and its call to Islamize Palestine "from the river to the sea," has raised remarkably few eyebrows in Europe. The death-cult of Hamas, its continually manifested will to kill Israeli civilians, its deliberate, wanton sacrifice of Palestinian women and children in order to inflate the Gazan body-count, are simply disregarded or given an incredibly low profile. There is even a markedly empathetic response to Hamas in some quarters – especially on those university campuses in the West determined to boycott Israel at all costs. This enthusiasm contrasts strikingly with the far cooler reaction to Hamas in large parts of the Arab world – especially in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Emirates – countries decidedly hostile towards the radical Islamist program for their own reasons.

In France, opposition to so-called creeping "Islamicization" has traditionally been led by the National Front. Under Marine Le Pen's leadership, the movement has, however, sought to distance itself from the more openly anti-Arab legacy of her father. Not only that, but the FN's spectacular success at the European elections of May 2014 (it came in first with 25% of the vote) has made it,

for the first time in its history, a possible future contender for power. Unlike the far Left and some socialist deputies, the FN took no part in the pro-Palestine marches of July 2014, and Marine Le Pen even made some overtures to the Jews of France. Despite its Catholic nationalist and strongly anti-European complexion, the FN has travelled a considerable distance since the days when Jean-Marie Le Pen dismissed Auschwitz as a "mere detail" in the history of World War II. The resistance of the FN to the threat posed by radical Islamists, along with the new emphasis on republican secularism (*laïcité*) is softening some of the traditional Jewish aversion to the far Right at the grassroots of the community. But suspicions remain in the light of the Vichy past, the links of the FN with other far-Right populist movements in Europe and its vehement rejection of Jewish communal representation. Moreover, when the then-Interior Minister Manuel Valls banned Dieudonné's antisemitic performances in January 2014, the FN remained critical of this step in the name of free speech. Many French Jews also recall with distaste Jean-Marie Le Pen's appreciation for the "provocations" of Dieudonné and the well publicized rapprochement between the two former opponents which began in 2005.

The embattled Hollande administration has been unexpectedly robust in its response to the increasingly violent manifestations of anti-Semitism in France. In January 2014, Manuel Valls denounced the *quenelle* and the mockery of the *Shoah* by Dieudonné. Six months later, on 16 July 2014 at a ceremony marking the 72nd anniversary of the Vel' d'Hiv roundup of Jews in Paris by the French police (many of the 7,000 victims were later transferred to Auschwitz and other death camps), he publicly defended his decision to forbid any provocative pro-Palestinian demonstrations. The Spanish-born Prime Minister warned against the abuse of anti-Zionist slogans. Unequivocally, he condemned any "anti-Semite who hides his hatred of the Jew behind an appearance of anti-Zionism and the hatred of Israel." He also castigated once more "infamous jokes about the Shoah," observing that "to insult the dead, to insult the survivors, is insulting France." This was sharper language than that adopted by his predecessors, including former President Sarkozy. It seems doubtful, however, if this will find much echo in an increasingly morose and indifferent French public. At a popular level, the specific ailments afflicting the Jews would appear to be a very low priority for a French population increasingly battered by the social malaise, political fragmentation, and economic stagnation of their country.

The anti-government demonstration of January 26, 2014, known as "*Le Jour de Colère*" (The Day of Anger) was already a wake-up call for Hollande and Valls, as well as for French Jewry. The 17,000-strong march (which I personally witnessed) included a very vocal and heterogeneous group of militants shouting repellent slogans like "Jew, Jew, France does not belong to you," "Jews, Get Out of France" and "The Gas Chambers are just a bluff." For many, this display recalled the 1930s with anti-Semitism merging into generalized anti-elitism, anti-parliamentarism, xenophobic racism, homophobia, hostility to the French State and its confiscatory taxes. As Manuel Valls rightly remarked, this is a dangerous cocktail – the symptom of a morbid, unhealthy climate of opinion linking both left and right extremes against the Republic.

In March 2014 President Hollande was equally firm at a dinner organized by CRIF (the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions) in Paris. There was no attempt on his part to deny the rise in anti-Semitic threats or what was happening in French society:

Jews are being attacked on the streets because they are wearing a *kippah*. Children in French schools are being insulted because they are Jewish. Synagogues are being desecrated with swastikas. This is the reality of anti-Semitism.

Hollande stressed that the rage manifested in January was not due to unemployment, poverty, or hard times. It was, he thought, the old hatred of Jews "searching for someone to take the blame." The anti-Semitic groups who came together "always need someone to blame to drive out their fears, their misfortunes and their resentments." Only now they had become more open about it – marching in the streets, using the internet to spread their lies and false rumors, performing in theatres, publishing books. Listening to Hollande in person (in June 2014) when I was invited to the Elysée

Palace, I do not doubt that he genuinely regards anti-Semitic acts as an attack on France and the fundamental values of the Republic. But even the best intentions will not be enough to ward off three decades of intolerance, indoctrination, insults and hatred especially when the President's own popularity is at such an all-time low.

In any case, by no means all mainstream opinion in France agrees with Hollande's view about the gravity of anti-Semitism or accepts the special ties binding French Jewry to Israel. When I arrived in Paris this August the centre-left magazine, *L'Express*, had just published a special dossier critical of the response of French Jews to the events of July 2014. The editorial written by its publisher Christophe Barbier, a prominent journalist and pundit, was entitled "*Les Nouveaux Baal-Zebub*" (the new Beelzebubs). I assume he was warning French Jews not to surrender to the demons of fear. Barbier began by vigorously attacking the Jewish Self-Defence League (a voluntary grouping), which he contemptuously dismissed as a "communitarian gang" that should be dissolved. He then claimed that any efforts to "defend the tribe" would in any case merely feed more violence by enemies of the Jews. Aliyah to Israel was even worse. Barbier condemned it as a vote of no confidence in the Republican order, a virtual desertion of the colors, a "betrayal" of France. Furthermore, it would be a flight to "nowhere," an "imposture," a reprehensible action in itself – an abandonment of those Jews who chose to remain in France. At the same time, Barbier accused French Jewry of self-asphyxiation, "bunkerizing" Judaism and retreating into a self-imposed ghetto.

Not content with these somewhat hysterical barbs, the editorialist then insinuated that if the Jews abandoned ship, no community might be able to resist the "barbarism" that would surely accompany the demise of French institutions. Jews must therefore stay to fight anti-Semitism in France both as a point of honor and in their own interests as well as those of Israel (!). Jews who "fled" the battlefield in such circumstances could not escape the damning charge of "cowardice." But that was not all. According to Barbier, for French Jews to support Israeli Premier Netanyahu (described as a "war-mongering" nationalist) would be as disastrous as their (imagined) support for Marine Le Pen. This could only encourage a "civil war" in France. If the Jews rejected such sage advice, they would run "great risks." Finally there was a heavy hint to French Jews that placing their Jewish identity first would play into the hands of those anti-Semites who had always believed that there was a "Jewish problem" in France.

These breathtaking admonitions effectively turn the victims of aggression into culprits. They completely fail to grapple with the central issue of Islamism – far more of a danger to the French Republic and Europe as a whole than the current projections of 5,000 French Jews arriving in Israel by the end of 2014. This Islamist threat takes many forms. Government ministers (like their counterparts in Great Britain) are especially concerned by the prospect of a thousand native-born jihadists returning to France from Iraq and Syria, after having trained with ISIS or with similarly murderous terrorist groups. No less than one third of the 3,000 Western jihadis fighting in Syria today are from France. For European Jews too, this is a major existential concern given the devastating implications of the Mohammed Merah Affair two years ago and of the jihadi-style execution which took place at the Brussels Jewish Museum in May 2014.

Tragedy struck the 20,000-strong Jewish community of Toulouse in March 2012 with the murder of a 30-year-old rabbi, his two small children, Gabriel and Aryeh Sandler, and eight-year-old Myriam Monsonego. The Ozar Hatorah school where this atrocity happened, was academically outstanding (reportedly "Orthodox," even though 90% of the teachers were non-Jews) and located in a region relatively free of so-called "inter-community" tensions or anti-Semitic disturbances. The point-blank killings of the three Jewish children (supposedly "in revenge for Palestine") had been preceded by equally cold-blooded assassinations in nearby Montauban and Toulouse of a number of *parachutistes* – three of whom were themselves of North African Muslim origin. The 23-year-old killer, Mohammed Merah, was a French citizen of Algerian descent, born in Toulouse and raised in a family in which Islamist views and a visceral anti-Semitism were an integral part of his

upbringing. A juvenile delinquent, Merah was further radicalized in prison (a breeding-ground for radical Islam in France) and by his jihadist training in Afghanistan. It appears that he chose to kill Jews and French Muslim officers in order to achieve the maximum possible publicity effect. His assumption proved to be amply justified.

Merah's chilling executions (which he recorded on camera) and his own death in a shoot-out with police, succeeded in turning him posthumously into a "hero" and an iconic figure for many of the alienated young Muslims living in France's urban slums. Following his murderous acts, incidents of anti-Semitic aggression by other Muslims – especially against Jewish adolescents – soared rather than diminished. Though there were messages of sympathy, the Jewish community in Toulouse was also bombarded with threats and insults *after* the killings. While his innocent victims were quickly forgotten by the general public in France, an unhealthy fascination with the killer manifested itself in the French media. From the outset of the Affair, most of the media had unrealistically assumed (and presumably hoped) that the murders would be the work of neo-Nazi or far-right extremists. The fact that anti-Semitic motifs and Islamist ideology were involved clearly upset the liberal mind-set. Six years earlier, when 23-year-old Ilan Halimi, a Sephardi Jewish salesman living in Paris, had been tortured to death on the outskirts of the city by a gang appropriately called "Les Barbares," there had been a similar reluctance by the media, the police, and public to see this exceptionally sadistic murder as an anti-Semitic act. Eventually it emerged that gang members had proffered openly anti-Semitic insults to Ilan's father during ransom negotiations. Moreover, the gang leader Youssef Fofana was a West African Muslim with Salafist connections who had already focused on Jewish targets in previous kidnap attempts, believing as he did that all Jews were wealthy.

French Jewry is undoubtedly experiencing the most difficult decade in his postwar history – one that reflects the increasingly rotten state of French and European society. The broader social causes range from urban anomie, a seemingly uncontrollable Muslim immigration, juvenile delinquency on a frightening scale, and economic depression to cultural nihilism and an ongoing crisis of French national identity. The spill-over effect of the Palestinian cause and its annexation by the Islamists have further exacerbated these factors; so, too, has resentment and social envy at Jewish success in France, joined to a seemingly endemic Muslim Jew-hatred (whether imbibed in the family, schools, mosques, the media, or on the internet) which has been increasingly envenomed by jihadi radicalism.

Are we then witnessing the slow death of De Gaulle's Fifth Republic and the beginning of the end of French Jewry – hitherto considered as one of the great Jewish success stories of the postwar era? This outcome cannot be excluded even if it may take another twenty or thirty years to come about. Since the turn of the new century, French Jews – like their compatriots – have witnessed the gradual fragmentation of the much vaunted and sanctified "republican synthesis." Between 2000 and 2003, during the high-point of the 2nd Intifada and of anti-Jewish violence on French soil, ordinary Jews felt increasingly abandoned by the French State. At that time, there were official insinuations that Israel's "aggression" against the Palestinians was the prime or perhaps even the sole cause of anti-Jewish incidents. Leading French officials, beginning with President Chirac, even denied that there was any anti-Semitism in France; or else they invented entirely misleading symmetries between Jewish and Muslim behavior.

Despite the shift for the better in the attitude of the currently fragile Socialist government towards anti-Semitism, and the radical Islamist danger, many Jews in France still feel themselves trapped. They have heard repeated declarations by government ministers ever since 2002 that an assault on the Jewish community is an "attack on France" and the values of the Republic." But the high number of violent incidents continues unabated. Legislation in France penalizing anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial remains severe yet it seems to have little effect in practice. Moreover, hostility towards Israel at a more grassroots level has grown dramatically even though recent French governments have tried to maintain a more balanced position on the Middle East.

Despite these efforts, it is clear that there remains a great reluctance to call out the Muslim perpetrators of anti-Semitic acts who are the main reason for the growing sense of insecurity.

The actions of 29-year-old Mehdi Nemmouche (like Merah, a French jihadist of Algerian origin) arrested for brutal killings perpetrated at the Brussels Jewish Museum in May 2014, underlines the grim reality of the present. Nemmouche's four victims included two middle-aged Israeli tourists from Tel Aviv, Emanuel and Miriam Riva, a 25-year-old employee, Alexander Strens (born of a Jewish mother and a Muslim Berber father) and a 65-year-old retired art publisher of Polish-Jewish descent, Dominique Sabrier. The bitter irony of her case was illustrated by the fact that Sabrier had arrived in Brussels only two months earlier, having left her home in France because of the increasingly pervasive anti-Semitic atmosphere. The Toulouse massacre and "the Day of Anger" in January 2014 had evidently triggered her departure to Belgium. But, tragically, instead of a hoped-for peaceful retirement in Brussels, she met her cruel death at the hands of a French-Algerian jihadist returning from his stint with ISIS in the killing fields of Syria. Born in the northeastern French industrial city of Roubaix (near the Belgian border) – today a Mecca of French Islam – Nemmouche was "inspired" by the actions of Merah and his own *jihadi* engagement. Whether he personally selected or was ordered to hit a high-profile Jewish target in Brussels, the capital of Europe, is not yet known.

The growing presence of such murderous *jihadi* elements in Europe has greatly accelerated the sense of eroding confidence in their future among Jews, whether in France, Belgium, Great Britain or other European countries. This is particularly true for less affluent Jews living in places like Sarcelles or other heavily Muslim-populated suburbs of Paris where their situation has been precarious for some time. Even before July 2014 they had little reason to believe that the toxic concentration of social evils in the *banlieux* (crime, drugs, rape, gang terror, family breakdown, or unemployment) would either decrease or cease to be displaced against themselves as the most convenient and proximate scapegoats in any future riots. It has by now become something of a truism for Jews in Europe living in any area largely populated by Muslims today, that to be seen with a *yarmulka* in public is to invite harassment, physical aggression, curses, and insults simply for being Jewish. This has been the case for at least a decade, not only in Paris but also in Amsterdam, Stockholm, Malmö, Copenhagen, Berlin, Brussels, Antwerp, Manchester, and London. This more than anything else sums up the somber truth concerning contemporary Europe and 21st-century anti-Semitism.

During the past 50 years, Judeophobia was often downplayed, partly because in its classical form it really had declined. Long-established prejudice against Jews in the West was rarely felt in spheres like housing, education, private economic life or public employment. There was also relatively little discrimination in culture, the media, or politics. On the contrary, Diaspora Jews in the West (especially in the United States, Britain, and France) had ample reason to feel empowered. Even more striking has been the unprecedented level of political sovereignty, civic freedom, cultural, scientific, technological, and military prowess achieved in the State of Israel. However, these successes have come at a price. The "new" anti-Semitism, full of envy and resentment at Jews who have "made it," lashes out with special vehemence at anything which reflects "Jewish power" and influence, all-too-often perceived through the lenses of classical conspiracy theories. In its insistence that this Jewish empowerment is intrinsically corrupt and illegitimate, such Jew-hatred, frequently directed at Israel, is really old wine in new bottles.

Since Israel's crushing victory in the Six-Day War, the "Palestinian Question" inescapably became the principal vector for expressing often unavowed and repressed anti-Semitic sentiments. The wrappings were nonetheless relatively new. Since the 1970s, Judeophobia adopted the radiantly seductive glow of a "liberation struggle" for human rights, dignity, and social justice for oppressed Palestinians. At the same time, especially on the political Left, Israeli Jews were shamelessly "Nazified," Israel found itself branded as an "apartheid State," and Zionism was all-too-frequently designated as racist. Between 1970 and 2000, the Palestinians, despite countless terrorist atrocities,



managed to clothe themselves in the mantle of totally blameless victims of a (fictitious) Israeli "genocide." This was a propaganda success of which Joseph Goebbels might have been truly envious. Ever since, the "resistance movements" – Hamas, Hezbollah, Fatah, and Islamic Jihad – have invariably enjoyed the halo of martyrdom and "heroic" opposition to Israeli fascism and Nazism. Such a mendacious discourse was not suddenly invented during the last Gaza war. In the past 30 years it has steadily infiltrated the Western media, the universities, the churches, much of educated opinion as well as seducing contemporary European political elites. It is, indeed this radical anti-Zionist hostility which has provided the indispensable respectability and legitimacy for the emergence of a post-modern anti-Semitism – impervious to all empirical evidence – and seamlessly expanding from the leftist margins into the social and political mainstream. Without the prestigious halo of support which it enjoys from academics, intellectuals, prominent journalists, artists, writers and scientists, movements like the BDS or the various Palestine Solidarity Campaigns would have had far less resonance or access to mainstream media.

Israel has become the litmus-test for any evaluation of the anti-Semitism which we have evoked, and its current impact. In the so-called "liberal" camp, dissociation from or even public revulsion at Israeli actions is already a *sine qua non* for membership in the "progressive" fraternity. Anti-Zionism has literally become an indispensable badge of recognition for any right-thinking individual (the French term *bien-pensant* fits nicely here). For Jews, in particular, joining the Israel-bashing circus, is now *the* "entrance-ticket" to Western (especially European) civilization – the secular equivalent of conversion to Christianity. This is the red line that distinguishes a "good" from a "bad" Jew. So visceral and Manichean is this hatred – especially among the "intellectuals" – that it completely blinds them to the true nature of the confrontation between Israel and Hamas during the recent Gaza War. On one side stands a fanatical Islamist movement – with its fundamentalist, terrorist, viscerally anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, homophobic, misogynist ideology, marked by a general loathing towards secular modernity and all its works; against it we find the vibrant modern democracy of Israel – open, pluralist, scientifically advanced, pro-Western, protective of gender equality, gay rights and of the Christian minority – the only nation in the Middle East of which such things could even be imagined. Yet which side have many "enlightened" intellectuals, journalists, liberals and leftists generally preferred – whether in France or other Western countries? Certainly not the cause of democratic Israel – pilloried for decades as being too "white," too "rich," colonialist, militarist, and (needless to say) too pro-American by far. An impartial observer might well ask how any genuine Western liberal or secular Leftist could possibly support the religious intoxication or the death-cult of Hamas, which refused to even consider building any air-raid shelters for its own population in Gaza. How, indeed, could any "progressive" person empathize with annihilationist anti-Semitism, hate-propaganda and the rigors of coercive *Sharia* law? The simple answer is by *not* mentioning it – by deliberately obfuscating such issues, silencing any discussion about political Islam and obsessively focusing all attention on an Israel supposedly "exterminating" the Palestinian people. By pure sleight-of-hand, the "holy war against Israel" has vanished into the more friendly catchphrase "Free Palestine" – a magic formula which has successfully whitewashed Palestinian terrorism for more than 40 years.

Does Israel bear any responsibility for this astounding spectacle? Clearly not in the sense of the conventional liberal wisdom which endlessly repeats that Israel has missed many opportunities for peace, blocked prospects for any agreement through "provocative" settlement policies or by failing to sufficiently encourage the hostile if hapless Mahmoud Abbas and the PA. In this respect, Israel has little to reproach itself for, whatever the present Obama administration in the US may choose to think. On the contrary, in the imploding Muslim-Arab Middle East with its decomposing nation-states, its mushrooming civil wars, its deadly Sunni-Shia confrontations, barbaric violence (the crucifixions and beheadings of ISIS being just the tip of the iceberg) and its totally corrupt governance, Israel sharply stands out as a shining beacon of liberty. But Israel can and should be faulted (and here I refer to successive Israeli governments) for its dismally ineffective and almost

non-existent efforts to explain itself better. Its true goals, its motivating aspirations, humanist values, cultural and scientific achievements rarely enter the public sphere of debate at all. In the battlefield of the mind, the Jewish State has failed the test for the past three decades, which has made it so much easier for its many enemies to demonize and delegitimize it.

The recent Gaza war exposed once again dereliction of Israel's public diplomacy (fortunately there are a few honorable exceptions) which endangers not only its national security but also that of Jewish communities in Europe and around the world. Israel cannot expect to escape justified criticism when it devotes such a minuscule budget to the task of winning over public opinion to its cause. One example will suffice. A few years ago an opinion survey across the EU found that more than 40% of all Europeans over 16 agreed that Israel was perpetrating "a war of extermination" against the Palestinians – an appalling falsehood. There was no serious Israeli response to this damaging libel and countless others of its kind. I have been dealing with such anti-Israel and anti-Jewish exercises in defamation for well over 30 years, but throughout that time I have never felt that a single Israeli government developed a strategy to stem the tide. For that, too, we are paying a heavy price.

My criticism of Israeli weaknesses on this point is not intended, in any way, to diminish the gravity of the European crisis in general or that of France in particular. The dynamics of contemporary anti-Semitism which I have analyzed, reveal the symptoms of a deep-rooted social malady which may prove difficult if not impossible to fully eradicate. This, along with talking to those who have just made their *aliyah* or are currently contemplating such a move, has led me to the following conclusions. Those who are leaving France – whether young, middle-aged or retired people – believe on the whole that Jews have no future in the French Republic. Though fond of the country, its beauty, culture and past greatness, they feel that something has definitively snapped in the republican model of integration. The French system simply does not work anymore – neither for the nominally Christian majority, the Muslims, or the Jews. Jews, however, have experienced a unique sense of personal insecurity, a feeling that they are no longer protected by a French State which has somehow lost control of things. They are living in a France that they no longer recognize. Despite sincere efforts, the present French government has ultimately failed in its effort to reassure such Jews. Even in an Israel at war, the new immigrants say that they feel far more secure than in France. Better to be protected by the Israeli army and free to give full expression to their Judaism in the public sphere than to worry every day whether their children will return home safely from school.

I have visited France countless times during recent decades and never before did I hear French Jews tell me so often that they consider Israel to be their homeland. This is new. Something has radically changed – a process that began to evolve after 2000 – and which has slowly gestated, finally arriving at its present point of rupture. Of course, one can hear contrary opinions from some French Jews who would categorically reject such impressions, attributing them to panic, fear or alarmism. I disagree with them. The resurgent tide of anti-Semitism is very real in France (as it is across much of Europe) and it will not disappear any time soon. This is certainly not the only reason for *aliyah* or emigration to other climes, but it is a major trigger. The disgust of many Jews at the consistent disinformation about Israel in the French media and genuine anxiety at the frightening pro-Palestinian levels of far left, populist, and especially Islamist hostility to both Israel and French Jewry, strikes me as an entirely healthy and normal reaction. Moreover, once it becomes unsafe for any Jew to wear a *kippa* in a public place in France, it probably is time to leave. The same is surely true for Germany, Austria, Britain, Holland, Belgium, Italy, and Scandinavia. In France, and much of Europe today, the freedom to fully live one's identity as a Jew has become much more limited and also far more dangerous.