



PERSPECTIVES

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Contradictions in France's Fight Against Antisemitic Violence

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: France's aspiration to fight the rise in antisemitic violence on French soil, which has reached levels not seen since WWII, has not produced the desired results. Despite its awareness that the perpetrators of this violence are mainly radicalized members of the Muslim community, France frames its fight against antisemitism within the wider struggle against racism and homophobia, which dilutes its effectiveness. And while France is keenly aware of the correlation between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, it either joins or abstains on biased, discriminatory international resolutions that aim at isolating and delegitimizing the Jewish state.

On the occasion of Holocaust International Remembrance Day, which this year marked the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, French president Emmanuel Macron repeated his commitment and determination to fight the "dark shadow" of antisemitism. He defined it as a concern not only for Jews, but also of all "others." He warned that a surge in antisemitism always occurs when democracies are weakened, including in France. In previous addresses on the issue, Macron expressed his deep concern over the unprecedented increase in antisemitic incidents in France since WWII (an increase of 79% in the first half of 2019 over the previous year). Macron, like his predecessors, presented antisemitism as endangering the basic values of the French Republic.

France was the first country to grant equal rights to its Jewish community. For many years, it was a haven for thousands of grateful Jewish refugees who had fled persecution in other European countries and subsequently were integrated into all spheres of French life. However, France also experienced extremely severe antisemitic incidents and periods, including the Dreyfus Affair and the collaboration of the French Vichy regime with the Germans in the "final solution" of the Jews of

France during WWII. About one-quarter of French Jews perished in the Holocaust, though there were French “righteous” individuals who rescued Jews in cooperation with autonomous Jewish resistance groups.

After WWII, the French Jewish community recovered and its numbers increased following the arrival of many thousands of North African Jews who fled to France due to persecution in their countries of origin. They fully integrated into the French republic. The 600,000-strong French Jewish community ultimately became the third-largest Jewish Diaspora community in the world after the American and Soviet/Russian Jewish communities.

From time to time, the French Jewish community has experienced violent antisemitism, such as the bombing of the Kupernik synagogue in 1980 and the shooting attack at the legendary Jewish restaurant, Goldenberg, in 1982. Both acts were perpetrated by Palestinian terrorists.

The most significant wave of antisemitic violence started in the autumn of 2000 following the so-called “al-Aqsa Intifada” conducted by Yasser Arafat. This wave of violence against French Jews was perpetrated primarily by Muslims of North African origin. Ever since then, as Muslims in France have grown increasingly radicalized, French Jews have been the targets of increasingly violent antisemitic attacks.

The French public has been shocked in recent years by a series of murders of Jewish victims perpetrated by Muslims, such as the attack on the Toulouse Jewish school in April 2011; the attack on the Parisian Jewish “Hyper Cacher” Supermarket in January 2015; the murder of Sarah Halimi, a 65-year-old Jewish physician, in April 2017; and the murder of Mireille Knoll, an 85-year-old Holocaust survivor, in March 2018.

These extreme acts of antisemitic violence prompted condemnations and mass demonstrations that were attended by representatives from across the political spectrum. At these demonstrations, participants called on the government to initiate firm measures in order to stop the violence. In November 2018, PM Edouard Philippe announced the creation of a new task force to deal with antisemitism in schools and vowed to step up the fight against online “antisemitism, racism, and homophobia”. France also expanded the teaching of Holocaust-related curricula in its republican schools, including those in suburban areas with large Muslim populations.

France’s embarrassment and concern over growing antisemitic violence is sincere, as is its desire to fight it. However, this desire clashes with French apprehension about singling out the large Muslim population, which might prompt accusations of “Islamophobia.”

These contradictory concerns were seemingly reflected in Philippe's November 2018 announcement, in which he included the struggle against antisemitism in the broader framework of the fight against racism and xenophobia, thus reducing its effectiveness. Francis Kalifat, the president of CRIF (Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions), in reaction to Philippe's statement, underlined the need to tackle antisemitism as a unique problem.

President Macron, addressing Jewish leaders in February 2019 at the CRIF annual meeting, attributed the surge in antisemitic incidents to far-left and far-right groups operating within the mass demonstrations of the "Yellow Vests" (Gilets Jaunes). He also repeated what he had said in July 2017: that anti-Zionism is a modern form of antisemitism, and that France would formally adopt this definition.

Sure enough, in December 3, 2019, the French parliament adopted the definition of the Holocaust Memorial Council [IHRA] guidelines by which anti-Zionism is deemed an expression of antisemitism. The decision rightly notes that not all criticism of Israel constitutes an expression of antisemitism, but rather only those expressions of hate which, for example, deny the right of the Jewish people to self-determination, "partly through the claim that the existence of the State of Israel is a racist initiative."

Despite this acknowledgement of the correlation between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, France either joins, or does not oppose, biased and discriminatory resolutions promoted by antisemitic states and organizations that single out Israel and draw a moral equivalence between its fight against terror and the actions of Iran's terrorist antisemitic proxies such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

For instance, in July 2019 France voted in favor of a UN Economic and Social Council resolution that singled out Israel for allegedly being the "major obstacle for the advancement, self-reliance, and integration of Palestinian women in the development of their society." In this vote, France not only supported a falsified report, composed by a biased Lebanese member of the UNSCC committee, but also joined a majority made up of undemocratic states (such as Iran) that are serial human rights abusers and declare their intention to destroy the Jewish state. Unlike France, other western democratic states, such as the US, Canada, and Germany, opposed the resolution.

Furthermore, on September 6, 2019, France initiated a statement at the UN Security Council condemning Israel's (supposed) violations of its border with Lebanon and calling on all parties to honor the cessation of hostilities. The initiative reflected France's concern over growing tensions following Israel's attempts to prevent Hezbollah from getting improved precision missiles and the terror group's reprisals. The US vetoed France's proposal, stressing that it was impossible to put Israel, a country defending itself, on equal footing with Hezbollah, a designated terrorist

organization. France and the EU states designated only Hezbollah's "military wing" as a terrorist organization despite the intractable link between the organization's "political" and "military" wings. Macron justified France's refusal to designate Hezbollah's "political wing" as a terror organization, despite its threats to destroy the State of Israel and harm its residents, on the questionable grounds that Hezbollah is part of Lebanon's democratic regime and contributes to its democratic stability.

The same paradoxical attitudes are evident in French statements regarding terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad that target the civilian Israeli population with missiles. Those groups openly pronounce their intention to destroy the state of Israel entirely, as does their Iranian patron, which provides them with advanced arms and military training. France condemned the shooting of missiles toward Israel but watered down its condemnation by expressing concern for the loss of human life on both sides, urging mutual restraint, and calling on Israel to stop the blockade of Gaza. By putting the terrorist organizations and Israel on a par, France exposed its double standard regarding its own fight against terror and Israel's justified acts of self-defense against terrorist organizations and entities.

On December 2, 2019, the UN General Assembly passed anti-Israel resolutions that focused only on Israel and its alleged violation of Palestinian rights, including on the Golan Heights. The resolutions were passed by a majority of serial human rights abusers, including Syria and Iran. France abstained and did not join other European states, such as Germany, in voting against the resolutions and declaring them to be biased and discriminatory toward Israel.

At the end of the day, France's fight against antisemitism is undermined by contradictions and discrepancies between its own determined efforts to curb antisemitism within France and its traditionally appeasing approach to the same issue in the Middle East. France recognizes the urgency of the fight against antisemitism—a scourge that challenges republican law and public order, undermines its fundamental values, jeopardizes its social stability, and is detrimental to its moral image. France also recognizes the correlation between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. However, its joining, or failing to oppose, biased, discriminatory resolutions promoted by antisemitic states and organizations that openly aspire to eliminate the Jewish state is detrimental to France's fight against antisemitism on the local front, as it encourages antisemitic perpetrators to continue their crimes.

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