

# Today in France

## *Interview with Nidra Poller*

by [Jerry Gordon](#) (April 2021)



*At the Café, Edgar Degas, 1875-77*

**France is embroiled with protests** over the court decision not to try the Muslim killer of the Orthodox Jewish retired teacher, Sarah Halimi, for alleged mental incapacity to stand trial. The decision gave rise to protests in France, Canada, UK, and Israel seeking justice. *The Jerusalem Post* reported in late May 2021, “Leaders and officials from France, Canada, Israel and the United Nations held a special digital rally demanding justice for [Sarah Halimi](#), a



French Jewish grandmother murdered by Kobili Traore.” France hosts Europe’s largest Jewish and Muslim Communities.

This news came shortly after the cease fire ending the 11 day Fourth Israel-Hamas war during which more than 4,000 rockets and missiles were launched by the Gaza Muslim Brotherhood extremists and Iran-backed Palestinian Islamic Jihad. That reign of terror was thwarted by Israel’s Iron Dome rocket defense system in a nightly ‘Star Wars’ display with a 90 percent downing of incoming rockets fired indiscriminately by these Islamist extremists. Hamas aroused sectarian protests in the West Bank, Temple Mount, Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah section—originally a Jewish area seized by Jordan during the 1948—over legal evictions of Arabs who lacked deeds of ownership. Add to the outbreak pogroms in joint Arab-Jewish towns in Israel like Lod, Jaffa, Acre, and others. Israel made ‘precision’ attacks on Hamas tunnels, command structures sparing as much as possible Gazan civilians. That was, admitted by the UNWRA director before being forced to recant by Hamas. Because the US and international media provocatively

portrayed Israel's defense as "excessive" the Jewish nation's usual Democratic supporters in Congress were riven given calls by so-called progressives of "apartheid" and "occupation" insinuating a racist anti-Semitic toxic meme. That led to an outburst of Palestinian protesters attacking Jews in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles spiking anti-Semitic incidents. Concerns over existential threats to Israel and the American Jewish community were expressed by the Biden White House, major Jewish communal leaders, and condemned by the leaders of the Democratic majority and Republican opposition in Congress.

France by contrast banned Palestinian protests given nightly protests and burnings during Ramadan among the Muslim banlieues suburbs. The French National Assembly had introduction legislation against "separatism" –a euphemism for dealing Islamic extremism. In late April, a French policewoman was killed by a Tunisian émigré. Those illegal Palestinian protests that did occur through France were relatively smaller than in prior outbursts. The National Police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse protesters in Paris and other major French cities. The separatism issue was the subject of an open letter from 1,000 French Servicemen, including 20 former generals raising the threat of insurrection, especially in the predominantly Muslim banlieues. The separatism issue will figure prominently in the upcoming 2022 Presidential election in France pitting President Macron against Marine Le Pen of the National Rally. There is also concerns about France commitment to combatting rising Islamist extremist threats to the G-5 countries in former French Equatorial Africa region of Sahel.

Against this background we brought back very dear friend, Nidra Poller, long-term American expat in Paris, talented writer, author, and activist for her views. Nidra (*right*) has written extensively on Islamic Antisemitism, murders of French Jews, terrorist events in France and elsewhere. She is most noted for being one of the earliest investigators in the Muhammad al-



Dura affair that involved a 12-year-old Palestinian boy who was allegedly killed by Israeli gunfire on September 30th, 2000, at the start of the second Intifada. That was a piece of classic Palestinian propaganda. It was made up. Unfortunately, it involved a French, Jewish producer for France 2 tv whose 54-second film clip triggered this entire investigation. I met Nidra Poller nearly 18 years ago in Boston to go over some of the original findings in that groundbreaking effort. Much of that has been captured in a book that she wrote, published in 2014, called *Al Dura: Long-Range Ballistic Myth*. Poller contributes commentary on English-speaking media for [ELNET](#) which is a strong international organization defending Israel and defending democracy.

**Jerome Gordon:** This is Jerry Gordon. I am a Senior Editor at *The New English Review*, and Producer and Co-host for *Israel News Talk Radio – Beyond the Matrix*. Nidra, I would like to open this discussion about this current fourth war between Israel and the terrorist groups, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Nidra, what can you tell us about the reactions in France and other places in the 'The West' whether it be London, Germany, and especially here in the United States?

**Nidra Poller:** Apparently, a total of 22,000 people demonstrated last Saturday in all of France. Maybe 2,000 or

3,000 in Paris. That demonstration was prohibited, and I think the hallmark of that demonstration is the image of one of the protesters standing in front of the stream of water from the water cannon, holding a Palestinian flag upside down and sideways. I do not know if that has been captured but upside down and sideways, and that sums it up. That is what I expected. Because between 2014 and 2021, we had massive Jihad attacks in France. The victims were not only Jews. and the population is aware of that. Sometimes you feel that even if the media has not caught on, the population has caught on, including, I would say, a majority of the Muslim population in France that is no longer ready to get mobilized for Hamas. There were other demonstrations in other cities that were not prohibited. They are described as calm, with no incidents. Of course, the message that they carried was defense of Hamas. For us it is not that innocuous. But the important thing is that you did not get massive mobilization.

Even in the media, you get the usual...what I call lethal narrative. The whole story of the Mid-East conflict, the occupation Netanyahu is extreme right, or they violated the Al-Aqsa Mosque, or they are doing ethnic cleansing in Sheikh Jarrah. However, you do not have the passion and the obsession with the Israel-Palestine conflict as in the past. You do not have that now, and that is a good sign. I think in France, where we have the biggest Muslim population in Europe and the biggest Jewish population in Europe, the third biggest in the world, it matters. It matters more than what happens elsewhere. I have noticed that there are many more serious incidents in the UK than here. Of course, we are bracing, still more things can happen. This is an important element to observe and to follow through on. Because we should not ourselves be captured in the past and think that it is going to happen the same way as before. The reaction of the United States government is very encouraging for those of us who defend Israel, and it is not the total support of the Palestinians that, in some quarters in the United States, was

expected from this Administration.

It has not happened. That is important too. Also, all over the world, and especially leaders of European countries have come out much more against the attacks by Hamas rockets than the old story of Israel's disproportionate response. I would say our media, as much as I have been able to observe, are much less virulent against Israel than for example, *CNN International*.

**Jerry Gordon:** There was an interesting report from the Mayor of Nice in France, Mr. Christian Estrosi, who [displayed](#) Israeli and French flags and backed the ban against Palestinian protests in France. He had very enlightening comments, one of which was to the effect that these people allegedly protesting for Palestinians were really supporting Hamas.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** That was one thing. However, he also said something about the intellectual development in the educational system in France. You had a rather insightful comment about how France is significantly different from the cancel-culture movement here in the States. I wonder if you could talk about that.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes. Cancel culture is not absent. But there is a much stronger counterforce in France. Many French intellectuals and academics are aware of the danger. They are fighting it off with all they can. The government is helping: the Assistant Minister of education in charge of higher education has precisely and specifically set out to root out this useful idiot left-wing sympathizing with the terrorists with the Jihad. This is important because I do not see the same balance in the United States. There is lamentation from academics, especially retired academics. They lament what is happening, but I do not see that they have any ground to stand

on or chance to root this out in the American academic world. I would like to say that in a very general way, there is a rich intellectual life in France and in Europe, and I think it is not appreciated in the United States.

Especially what comes from France: there is a language barrier. However, the level of French thought on these questions that are besieging all of us, is remarkably high. This intellectual reflection is going to come forward with strategies to fight back against the Jihad destruction of western civilization. Since it is not translated, people seem to think it does not exist. They are very dismissive. I can cite an article by Melanie Phillips, about the French reaction to the murder of Sarah Halimi. Phillips, who is usually well-informed, when she wrote about this in an article published by *JNS* Syndicate, she just did not know a tenth of what has been going on here. I can explain something that would help people to understand the case of the murder of a French Jewish woman, Sarah Halimi. It is not the French government that did not want to bring the killer to trial, it is the investigating judge. That is how the French judicial system works. The investigating judge is the first step, and he looks at all the evidence and then decides what to do next. . This investigating judge has stubbornly and perversely prevented every single effort to bring Sarah Halimi's killer to trial.

The government has pleaded for him to be brought to trial. The only thing the government could have done, beyond that, would have been to take the case out of her hands. But they did not. . Aside from that, the government has been outspoken about the need to bring him to trial. The other thing is, we have brilliant and extremely competent lawyers working on this case. They have not given up and they will not give up, and something will come of their efforts. It is a mistake to think that this is an example of the French government wanting to push this anti-Semitic murder under the carpet.

Many people in France have come to understand that when Jews

have been attacked, the next thing you know, people in a cafe are attacked, and French people in a concert hall are attacked, the police are attacked. We have had riots every night during the month of Ramadan in what I can call "mixed cities "in France, where you have Muslim and non-Muslim populations. They have been burning cars, attacking the police, and in the worst cases, killing the police. Perhaps it is going to take a little more time to make that connection. We have been experiencing for one month during Ramadan what Israel has been experiencing. Now, if Morocco or Algeria decided to protect the poor Muslim residents of France who are not being given their rights, and shot 3000 rockets at France, well, I do not even have to ask what France would do. You know very well; they would defend themselves.

**Jerry Gordon:** Nidra, in late April there was an interesting open letter that was signed by over 1000 ex-French servicemen including 20 generals, which talked about seven deadly dangerous scenarios with the possibility that these banlieues (working class suburbs) in major French cities would erupt in insurrections. There was a peculiar aspect to the date in the release of the letter. It was on April the 21st of this year, but it also reflects an event that occurred 60 years ago in French history.

**Nidra Poller:** Except that it was released before then. First, my present assignment is covering English-speaking media for [ELNET](#) which is a strong international organization defending Israel and defending democracy. I must concentrate on following English-language media, and then summarizing articles in French. So there are things I have not followed closely in France. I have mixed feelings about this letter. I have mixed feelings about the currents that could pick it up and carry it forward. I do not think the salvation of our democracy will come from that direction. It is not the level of thinking that we need, and it is going to be picked up by people that have not the best interest of the entire society



at heart. On the other hand, of course many people are warning of the danger, so that is nothing new. I would rather listen to the police who are in touch with this problem every day. We have new legislation coming out against separatism—it is really against Islamism, but they call it “separatism”—to try to deal with urban violence.

**Jerry Gordon:** Yes.

**Nidra Poller:** That is the direction we will go. The coming presidential election in 2022 will concentrate on that issue. That is the subject that matters the most today.

**Jerry Gordon:** Speaking about the national election coming up next year, one of the supporters of the letter of 1000 was Marine Le Pen from the Rassemblement National. Was that opportunistic on her part? Purposeful?

**Nidra Poller:** Oh, well, she is always opportunistic. [chuckle].

**Jerry Gordon:** I guess we knew that.

**Nidra Poller:** That’s how she operates. I do not know how we can continue to have this choice between Marine Le Pen and one other candidate. I do not know why that party keeps gaining support, based on the unrealistic notion that because they are sort of loudmouth on these issues of security, and a bit turbulent, it means they could govern this country. Don’t people see what happens when you choose a president who does not want to govern? It is disastrous. Usually, at the last minute, the French people say, “No, finally, we can’t have her as president,” and so Macron will win. The normal right-wing conservative party is in trouble. If you see the Republican Party in the United States, it is similar. You say, “How are they going to put themselves back together again?” They will eventually.

Marine Le Pen is a dead end. If you look at her program, the

last time she wanted to pull out of the European Union and the euro-zone . . . what was it based on and where did it disappear to? She is truly incoherent. You remember that Steve Bannon came here, thinking he was going to organize the new alt-right in Europe. He went back home where, excuse me, he can talk nonsense. So, yes, the forces that can defend democracy do not come from an undemocratic political party. And the Rassemblement National is not democratic and there is no way that they can solve the problems that are facing us.

**Jerry Gordon:** So, what does that say about Macron's chances next year? And is it too early to even address those?

**Nidra Poller:** Well, something I never like to do is guess how an election would turn out. Especially because, most often, the population does not agree with me. I think Macron's chances are rather good because he is going in the right direction on the burning issues. If he did not, if he took the position that to beat Marine Le Pen he had to show that he is in favor of diversity and equal opportunity, not stigmatizing delinquents and so on, then he would have no chance. But I think he is smart and that he will not go that way. So, I think he has a good chance.

**Jerry Gordon:** There is a report out that France is going to be releasing upwards of several hundred Jihadists from prison. How is it going to deal with it?

**Nidra Poller:** Well, as in all the world, they will deal with it partially. They are very much aware of the problem. No democratic country has enough people to follow all these Islamists. While they are following the ones that got out of prison, the new ones coming up will start to do their thing. It is a huge problem. It is a problem of war on civilization. So, each time you look at one aspect of it you say, "Oh, how are they going to deal with it." Well, they will try. They are not naive . You know they used to have very harsh words for Guantanamo, but in a way, that is the kind of set up you need

for Jihadists. If you are going to negotiate with Iran, if you are going to make a ceasefire with Hamas, if you are going to let Jihadists out of prison, obviously you are going to let the fire that wants to burn you up smolder. Little by little, I think, democracies are learning what they are dealing with. I remain confident that democracies will get smart enough soon enough and will not be destroyed. But it is a tough fight anyway and anywhere you look at it.

There is no place to be smug, no place to say, "All those stupid Europeans, they don't know, we know." Because that is not true. We all must think together, to come with a new strategy. I'm in favor of that, and when we're faced with a crisis as occurring today, that is the occasion to say, "Oh, we have to be sharper about it, we have to think better about it. Israel must be more forceful. You can feel that today. Israeli forces are not going to bend to phony international pressure. That is an important positive development. Later, those of us who are not on the front lines will analyze that and will use that to develop better strategies, both for everyday domestic and for international situations. There is more solidarity with Israel today. I saw something interesting—that the United Arab Emirates said to Hamas, "If you don't stop shooting rockets, we won't invest anymore." That is a beautiful outcome from the Abraham Accords. It only shifts slightly, but every shift is important.

**Jerry Gordon:** Speaking about Israel, there was a contretemps this past weekend about the Israelis taking out a building, flattening it, that had the press quarters for *Al Jazeera*, the *BBC*, and the *US AP*.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** There was an interesting comment made by Jonathan Spyer in Israel.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** Spyer brought to my attention and a lot of others who saw his *Facebook* [post](#), the fact that these news organizations must make what I call, "A pact with the devil," to position themselves in hotspots, whether it is Gaza, or Syria, or some other locale in the news these days. There is a question about whether they have made a Faustian bargain for freedom of the press.

**Nidra Poller:** I must say that I enjoyed that. First, their argument is, "But we are here to tell you what's going on." "Oh, but you were in the building, but you didn't know what was going on in the building where you worked every day?" The message is exactly that, if you are willing to snuggle up to Hamas in the same building, in the same governing structure, you are not there as an opposition press. You are not there as the press that says, "Now we're going to tell the truth about what's going on here." We have been following this for years. Are they telling the truth about what goes on in Gaza? Absolutely not. including telling us that buildings in Gaza are just hovels, refugees living in hovels, in dirt, mud. Suddenly we discovered all these noticeably big luxurious buildings. To my mind, this was one of the best strikes by Israel. Say whatever they want, the position of the foreign press in Gaza is unjustifiable. The fact is they were in that building and the building was destroyed, so now let them find another place to set up their tents.

**Jerry Gordon:** Someone who I think you respect, I certainly do, is Colonel Richard Kemp.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** A *Sky News* [report](#) came out with an interesting observation by him. He said, "Israel has delivered a body blow to Hamas and its partner Palestinian Islamic Jihad." To use a ruse, which is a good word, I think, of French origin, or a feint, as someone else recorded it, was appropriate to destabilize and degrade Jihadist leadership in these massive

attacks that occurred early Friday morning last week. He should know. In 2014 he was a quasi-personal consultant to Prime Minister Netanyahu during the 2014 Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, and reported factually what was occurring on the ground and Israel's military doctrine. He subsequently provided testimony on that before the UN "Human Rights" Council in Geneva. The credibility of his latest comments on 2021 Operation Guardian of the Walls stems from having fought Jihadists in Afghanistan as a British commander of forces there and having personally been on the scene during Operation Protective Edge back in 2014. He knows what he is talking about.

**Nidra Poller:** I found that all so enlightening. Really, it gives you strength ,if I can say it that way. In a recent issue of my press review for *ELNET*, I gave a summary of an earlier, brilliant article by Kemp, about how to fight this kind of war. It helps you to understand what is going on. The concept of endless wars is so childish and so ignorant. Kemp explains what kind of war we are facing today and why you must fight it in a different way.

You watch the news and you go on to something else, you go back to the news, you read it in the press you are on the computer, you look at TV and suddenly they are talking about a ground invasion. I immediately think of my friends whose children or grandchildren are in the Israeli army and were poised for a ground invasion. Then the next day, you realize that it was a trick. That was beautifully done. I have heard that the chief of staff of the Israeli Army is very sharp in strategy. It is not just a question of having a lot of weapons. That is why I continue to be optimistic, because I think democracies learn. I hearken back to the imagery of this protester in Paris going to be pushed over by a water cannon, standing there with a Palestinian flag upside down and sideways. He is not going to get anywhere. It really matters for us to know that, because if you lose heart, you cannot

defend yourself. That is why I constantly try in my writing and speaking to people to say, "No, don't lose heart. Keep your mind sharp and look clearly at what's happening and adapt to each step."

There is such a strong temptation to constantly go back to the past and talk about the present as if it were the past. As Jews, we are not in the position of victims as we used to be, and it is important to know that. We have a message to the democracies. The message is not one of the canaries in the mine. The message is, we must help you to defend yourself, because if the democracies fall, we as Jews cannot defend ourselves alone. If you do not heed what is happening to us and the way that we are able to overcome it by our intellectual efforts, then you will not be able to defend yourself. I do feel, despite what the common beliefs in the United States, this is the direction we are going ... especially in France. I do not deny the falling back to the old habits and all this perverse condemnation of Israel that exists. However, that is not the thrust of the future and it is that thrust we must follow. Take the movement that is going in the right direction and encourage it, and not be obsessed with all the backslidings.

**Jerry Gordon:** Two final questions. Macron showed up at the funeral of Chad's heroic president Idriss Déby. It raises a question about France's support for combating Jihadism across the whole continent in what is called the Sahel, what used to be called French Equatorial Africa. The question is, how successful has that been and what kind of support should the US consider bring to the table? I raise this for a reason. USA has something called the AFRICOM, the African Command. Guess where it is headquartered?

**Nidra Poller:** Wait a minute, Djibouti? No, it is not that. Tell me...

**Jerry Gordon:** Stuttgart, Germany. There has been a request

made by the current head of the Nigerian government, a former senior military officer, about maybe it is time for the US to establish a real command center in Africa, to deal with the question of the Jihadism threat in the region.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes. Let us try to break it down: The French stepped up in Mali, because they saw that the Jihadis were going to reach Bamako. That is a step away from North African countries, a skip across the Mediterranean to France. Talk about endless wars. Mali would fall under the category as an endless war. The French could not go in, wipe them out and come home. An interesting thing is, the French, in the recent past, did not much like the military. They have changed but, they do not have much taste for battlefield scenes. The soldiers are over there fighting so hard, and they are incredibly good, However, you do not see it in the news, as if it were not happening. It is a hopeless situation, but they are doing their best. They try to get other European countries to pitch in. Up to now, it is almost impossible. The United States cannot be the world leader and then just pull out every time things get tough, or you cannot win, right? We are in a situation where you cannot win. All we can do right now is fight. So, of course United States must get involved. Daesh, the Islamic State is reconstituting. You see what is happening in Afghanistan.

Every time you turn your back, they are building up in some other lost corner of Africa. I had close contact with Burkina Faso. When I went there, it was such a beautiful, quiet place, lovely experience of Africa. Today they are beset with every kind of terrorist attack. The Muslims are fighting the Christians in Burkina Faso and elsewhere. Of course, you must deal with all those things. I do not know at what stage, but somewhere along the way the US will must get involved.

**Jerry Gordon:** The legacy of the late President of Chad, Déby indicated he did the right thing. He trained his senior commanders, one of whom I know, in the United States to deal

with this. Chad formed a unit of about the same size as the French that has ranged across all the Sahel, to attack the Jihadists in places like Mali, Burkina Faso, and others. It is an indication that if there is the commitment on the part of the leadership in these countries threatened to be overrun by Jihadism in Africa, that the resources of both the French and the Americans, could be used to train effective native forces and commanders to combat this threat in the Sahel.

**Nidra Poller:** Perhaps with a greater success than what they are trying to do in Afghanistan.

**Jerry Gordon:** That's another potential explosive problem.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** Last question, before we end this interesting conversation.

**Nidra Poller:** Since we are deep into reality.

**Jerry Gordon:** What is happening with the third lockdown in France for COVID?

**Nidra Poller:** Now we are going to be unlocked. We are going to be unlocked Wednesday, this week. Yes, it is fun to see what happens. The Parisians are going to run to the cafes. We have the most dreadful weather you can imagine, nothing like spring. It is very cold . . . most days, it is about 14 degrees Celsius. We have wind every day, horrible wind. But I can tell you, the Parisians will be on those cafe terraces, even if it rains, they will be there.

**Jerry Gordon:** Nidra this has been a wonderful extremely informative discussion. I thank you for holding this important conversation.

**Nidra Poller:** It is my pleasure to share my thoughts with you. Call me any time.



**Jerry Gordon:** *Lehitraot* – see you in Hebrew.

[Watch](#) this NetivOnline YouTube video of the interview with Nidra Poller.

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**Jerry Gordon** is a Senior Editor at *New English Review* and Producer and co-host of *Israel News Talk Radio – Beyond the Matrix*.

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