

# France at Forefront Battling Political Islam – discussion with Nidra Poller

by Jerry Gordon



In this wide-ranging discussion with ex-pat journalist, and commentator Nidra Poller, we cover recent developments on the horizon of the April 2022 presidential election: the US withdrawal from Afghanistan; the controversial AUKUS deal and last minute cancellation of a the \$35.5 billion contract for purchase of French [diesel submarines](#), the ongoing [criminal trial](#) of sole survivor Salah Abdeslam and accomplices to the November 13, 2015 ISIS – inspired attack in Paris that killed 130 and wounded more than 416 civilians at the Stade de France, various cafés and the Bataclan concert hall. Nidra Poller gives us insight into the parliamentary [investigation](#) into the court decision on the Islamist antisemitic murder of Sarah Halimi. She provides background on the recent crackdown, by Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, on radical mosques, associations, and publications. France also [announced](#) a 50% reduction in visas granted to Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco after “they refused to take back nationals whose visa requests had been refused.”

The issues of political Islam, uncontrolled immigration, security and national identity have been brought to the forefront weeks before the official kickoff of the presidential campaign by the maverick candidate [Eric Zemmour](#), a Paris-born intellectual of Algerian Jewish Berber origin, nationally known as a journalist, best-selling author, and TV personality. Not yet officially declared as a candidate, Zemmour has [surged](#) to 15% in the polls as figures for Marine

Le Pen have plummeted.

We will follow these issues in monthly conversations with Nidra Poller, reporting from Paris in a democratic nation that has been thrust onto the frontlines in the confrontation with political Islam.

What follows is our discussion of these issues with Nidra Poller.



**Jerome Gordon:** I am Jerry Gordon, a senior editor at the New English Review and former producer and co-host for Israel News Talk – Radio Beyond the Matrix. I’m here with a very dear friend of long-standing, Nidra Poller, an accomplished author, journalist, writer, speaker, and an American expat living in an undisclosed location within the precincts of Paris. Nidra, there are a lot of things going on right now. I would like to start off with something that you are aware of, and I am as well, because there’s a personal connection. And that’s the Bataclan massacre trial.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** The reason for that is that in November of 2015, my oldest granddaughter was studying at Sci Po. She was away on a trip to Amsterdam that weekend when everything broke loose. I recall having written about it, you did as well. It was perhaps Paris’s 9/11 in many ways.

**Nidra Poller :** Oh, yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** Tell us a bit about what is going on currently and the rather strange outburst that occurred in French court by Salah Abdeslam, the leader of the Jihadi gang’s murderous attack that killed 130, wounding over 416 people.

**Nidra Poller :** Yes, there is a lot of coverage. The trial is being filmed, but we won’t be able to see it now. The only

people present in the courtroom and in the annexes are the families that are affected, and authorized journalists. Not someone like me. You must have special court reporter's accreditation. The media report on the trial at length. They invite survivors who give their memories of what happened. Of course, you can't forget the comparison with the 9/11 commemoration, and eyewitness reports from people that tell you what they experienced. You realize that this Islamist ideology is ready, willing, and eager to impose the most horribly cruel punishments on people in free countries or free people in their own countries. The presence of this trial is very strong, and it will continue for nine months, so there will be countless talk shows with survivors, families of victims, and lawyers discussing all the elements.

I would like to share with you something from a broadcast I saw, where journalists were discussing the difference between the way the Americans reacted to 9/11, and the French to the November 13, 2015, massacre. They were a bit too proud of themselves, saying that the Americans are bold, they went to war, you can understand that. Then they had Guantanamo and a military tribunal, and we have a democratic criminal trial. Unfortunately, you can't have a democratic trial of someone that is making war against you. Salah Abdeslam is the only living survivor of the team that came in and did those massacres and believe me, it comes alive again. It is terrifying. He is in jail at public expense. He has three cells, including a workout room. He receives visits from the family, letters from girls that are in love with him and so on. Now, they apparently don't cut off his mike, so he is free to expose his Islamic ideology in court. These jihadists will never atone for what they did, and they have nothing more to explain. We know already, you can read endless documents and recognize their motivation. But what I find to be a serious mistake is to consider their acts as criminal. It isn't crime, it's war.

This is the kind of confusion that prevails in our democracies, Afghanistan, the longest war, or the massacres of November 13, a war? And what about the "lone wolf attack?" We are constantly in a situation of mistaken vocabulary... out of focus. So that's the good and the bad side of the trial now underway. However, I can assure you of one thing: in the media I follow, there is no apology for Islam, no stuttering about "this isn't the real Islam." No, it's not hijacked Islam, it's a massacre in the name of Islam. Abdeslam's opening statement was the Shahada, the Islamic declaration of faith. He said it in French. I'll keep you informed because the trial will extend over a long period of time, and we'll see what develops.

**Jerry Gordon:** There is another trial that has begun, but it's in a military court setting in Guantanamo; it is with the architect of 9/11, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed that has been delayed for well over a year and a half, 506 days.

**Nidra Poller.** I can't justify everything, and I don't know all the details, but the point of Guantanamo is that you don't give a civilian trial to someone that made a military jihad attack on your country, because they don't have the same rights as a criminal and they don't have the same purpose. Criminals have evil in them, they commit evil harm, but they're not trying to exterminate your population. There is a difference. I find that it is extremely important for our democracies to understand clearly and make these distinctions and not get caught in the traps of our own democratic free systems where liberty is one of our highest values. This question of our high values is often raised. For instance, on the question of deporting criminals that are dual citizens. I say "No, our highest value is not refusing to deport criminals that are dual citizens, our highest value is protecting decent citizens." Someone who breaks the alliance with a country that gave him citizenship, he wasn't born into it, they gave it to him ... It should be taken away. We must stop confusing our

highest values with our terrible, most dangerous mistakes.

**Jerry Gordon:** Speaking of forever wars, what has been the French reaction to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan?

**Nidra Poller:** Moderate. We withdrew at the same time.

**Jerry Gordon:** Right.

**Nidra Poller:** It was underplayed. We don't have anything near the same coverage of the French withdrawal. You do know that of the 1300 Afghans that were evacuated, they found five Taliban. Maybe they were very quick about that. French security and intelligence services are pretty good. While underplayed, they showed people coming back, they reported human interest stories, the French are welcoming the refugees. There is not some kind of enormous campaign of hatred against the way that the US withdrew and of course, the French were involved, and they were just as helpless as the Americans under the circumstances.

**Jerry Gordon:** And this brings up the question of why there's a movement in the EU, whether it's Macron, or the Germans under Merkel who's leaving government, about possible formation of an EU Army, placing less reliance on the US?

**Nidra Poller:** Yes. One of the themes that's treated in coverage of the withdrawal is the idea of the end of American power. Ever since I've lived here, I've seen that the Europeans would like to be a great power militarily, not just economically and diplomatically. But I don't think you can't improvise the kind of military infrastructure that has been created by the United States. You can't throw it together quickly. You can't bring together independent nations each with its own history and suddenly make them one army, you can't. But each European nation, individually, is too small to be a military power. Aside from the French and the British, the other countries are practically non-existent militarily.

So, you have opinion pieces and policy statements saying we can't rely on the Americans. Behind it stands the reality: we have no choice. As a European, which I am now, I would say we have more to offer as an influence on American thinking than in trying to improvise a military might that the Americans have and that we cannot wield. The military might of the United States can be terribly misused, underused or not used. Europeans have a sense of history and a very vibrant intellectual activity that could be useful. There should be more exchange. As you know, when Trump was President, he alienated the Europeans and NATO. As soon as Biden took over, NATO and the European countries started consulting each other and working together much more. So, they'll talk about trying to make a European Army. But it won't happen

**Jerry Gordon:** You don't think that there is a reality behind that, other than what you just talked about, that the US still is a superpower that probably needs a complete remake of how it uses that power.

**Nidra Poller :** Absolutely, I agree. I think the Europeans know that.

**Jerry Gordon:** I listened recently on a webinar, to a famous Canadian Islamism analyst and friend of Israel and the Jewish people Dr. Salim Mansur. Mansur was suggesting that one of the implications of this withdrawal is the focus has changed from the Middle East to Asia and that means geopolitically dealing obviously with the rise of a powerful China.

**Nidra Poller :** I beg to differ. As expressed in the US Foreign Affairs Committee Hearings with Secretary of State Blinken on September 14, 2021, the focus must be everywhere. You can't be a great power and then look at a small part of the world, and it's never been more interrelated than it is today. This is fascinating to me because I never exercised that kind of power. The slightest shift, the slightest retreat of power from one side immediately calls in power from another side,

immediately. It's like shifting sands. Like if you make a hole in the wet sand on the ocean's edge, immediately it fills with water. Any responsible government... I think the European governments know that too, and they have their eyes everywhere, they must.

And if China and Russia think that they're going to have a playground in Afghanistan, I don't think that's the case. Nobody can have a playground there. I don't think that it marks a shift. That is what the Biden administration said, "We can't have boots on the ground anymore." Because after all, the United States is a democracy. Do you think American voters would like to send tens of thousands of troops to every single trouble spot? They wouldn't accept it. Any president who did that, would be out. They must have their eyes everywhere ... somehow. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, perhaps staying there forever would have been a good thing, but that was no longer possible. Look at who signed the Doha Agreement on February 4, 2020. I will wager that not many people have read it. In case any of our listeners haven't read it, here's the heading: "An Agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America." That is followed by the dateline. They give the date according to two Hijri calendars, the Lunar, and the Solar.

This statement about the "Emirate that is not recognized" is repeated. Andrew McCarthy counted 16 times in a three-page document. This document is incredible. You cannot believe that the State Department of a modern democratic civilized country drew up a document like this. You cannot believe it, and it's there. Once the document was signed by President Trump, and Biden was elected, having promised to pull out, how could he not do it? Those are the circumstances he had.

Let's take the case of Israel vs Gaza. People can say all kinds of things: Why don't they just go in and smash them? Or

why don't they just get out and leave them, don't discuss anything with them? Take away the money. No, you must give them money. Let them starve. Shoot them. These are inextricable situations.

**Jerry Gordon:** Before we began this discussion, you and I were talking about the US treatment of a truly valued ally, the Kurds.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** The contrast with Afghanistan, is the Kurds were willing to commit their lives and fight for what they perceive was their geopolitical legacy that was taken away from them after the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 with Turkey that ended the Ottoman empire. Yet when the Kurds were our valued ally fighting against the Islamic State, we rushed to the exit. We said we cannot depend on being there anymore and we left with a very small footprint in the area.

**Nidra Poller:** And terrible atrocities were immediately committed.

**Jerry Gordon:** Correct.

**Nidra Poller:** Look at the whole region. There is Israel, Lebanon as it used to be, and Kurdistan that doesn't exist. There are three non-failed states of civilized values and inclusive governments. All of that would have to be fabricated out of shoddy material to make the Palestinian state that they've been talking about for several decades. And it isn't happening. The question is how you can create healthy tissue in a region where you have mainly tyrannical failed states. Whenever you try to help them, as in the case of Afghanistan, you pour in money. Your soldiers die, their soldiers die, their civilians die, you prop up a government and you discover 20 years later that everything was so corrupt that it just falls apart at the first touch. Versus the Kurds, everybody



knows they're such brave fighters.

The Kurdish women are fighters, the Kurds are not ideological fanatics, and they don't get a shout. The people that are shouting now, trying to hang the Administration for the withdrawal from Afghanistan, didn't say a word about the Kurds. I talked to people that had been my anti-Jihad allies, asked them what was going on. You know the answers we got when the Kurds were abandoned, "Oh well, they were in it for their own reasons. We can't stay there forever." You must look at the present situation in that context.

**Jerry Gordon:** That also raises the question about what the position is of Israel in the wake of this Afghanistan withdrawal. The reality is, as Lee Smith and others have written about it recently, is that Israel continues to be a growing force in the Middle East, especially following the signing of the Abraham Accords. That is one major contribution of the Trump Administration. However, it was the culmination of Israel's leadership and particularly Mossad.

**Nidra Poller:** Over a 25-year period.

**Jerry Gordon:** That culminated with the signing of the Abraham Accords with majority Muslim Arab states in the Gulf and Africa.

**Nidra Poller:** But let's give credit to the Trump administration, because we can grant that it came together and yes, it was a good thing.

**Jerry Gordon:** That appears to be continued with the Bennett-Lapid government in Israel.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** Witness the recent trip by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to Cairo to sit with President Al-Sisi, which was strategic. Al-Sisi wants to do a makeover from being an

autocrat to someone who appears to be a democratic leader. It was confirmation that the two countries despite a so-called "cold peace" which I don't think is the case. Egypt contended with the Muslim Brotherhood, they've isolated Hamas in Gaza since 2014. Israel is in a rather unique position to be finally recognized. I credit Canadian Salim Mansur in a recent webinar about Afghanistan withdrawal saying that Israel is now part of the mosaic of the Middle East.

**Nidra Poller:** In an [article](#) published in French by *Menora*, I came to conclusion that we don't know how to defeat 21st century Jihad. When you read the history of the original Islamic conquest, the non-Arab countries in the region in the 7th Century C.E. didn't know how to defeat it. Those were very highly developed civilizations, destroyed by a band of marauders coming out of their tents on the Arabian Peninsula. Those developed nations were defeated, one after the other. We must contemplate that. We must learn. One of the things that must be done is to change the configuration and put Israel in its rightful place. The Abraham Accords are part of that, and the Kurds are part of that. We can't even lose patience with those that don't understand it.

I think today we can defend Israel much better by showing how it fits into that configuration. Because Israelis don't have the option of ending the longest war. They don't have the choice to say, "Well, we withdrew because it wasn't worth it anymore." They must fight. We know...our friends in Israel ... their sons and daughters go to war, and they have no choice. It has taken forever, but I can tell you that opinion... the vision of Israel in France ... has changed radically in the last 20 years. 9/11 and the massacres in 2015 are a very important part of that. Sometimes people continue to say the same things about something that has changed. Instead of saying, "Wait a minute, things are changing, how can we go with it?"

**Jerry Gordon:** Correct. Moving on, has President Biden apparently taken a leaf out of the book on how to deal with

the COVID-19 pandemic that, ironically, President Macron of France has been successful in implementing? It is a contrast with the welter of accusations, court cases saying that we cannot apply mandates for workers, we cannot apply mask mandates because it's taking away our freedom. The reality is that under Macron, something approximating 70% of the population has been inoculated at this point.

**Nidra Poller:** I'm terrible at numbers, but I know the vaccination rate is much higher than the United States, a bit lower than Israel, but very high. I'll tell you a few things about that. France is a small, centralized country, so the government has been able to manage COVID in a centralized way. The criticism is not as virulent, and you don't get the court cases. The whole pandemic is a subject that would take several books, analyzing it as a phenomenon of society. So, the criticism in France has gone a bit like this: "What is going on? They don't have masks. What is this? They're telling us we must wear masks. They said we didn't and now we do, is it any use?" The best argument I like, because of my age is, "Why can't we just put the old people away, keep them out of the path of the virus and let us go on with our lives?" Then what happened? The old people got vaccinated, the virus is hitting the young people, because apparently this Delta virus, said, "Well, I can't munch on old people anymore, let me get these young ones." What happens is that now with our "passe sanitaire", the old, vaccinated people like me, can go anywhere and the young unvaccinated can't sit on the cafe terrace, can't go to the restaurant, take the train or the plane.

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, the criticism in France was, "What? They don't have enough vaccines. This is a disgrace. How come they didn't take care of it?" Then the next thing you know, there is enough vaccine for everybody, and then you have the anti-vaxxers talking about their liberty. It's just comical as an argument. I said there were no court cases as in

the U.S. , but Agnès Buzyn, who was the Health Secretary when COVID-19 started to break out here, is being accused now of “non-assistance to people in danger.” I think that it’s a sign of the kind of craziness that comes with the pandemic. But it has gotten much better here. Our death rate is much lower. Much lower than in the U.S. For example, in France now, the worst figures of daily COVID fatalities is 100. How many are dying in the States? A thousand?

**Jerry Gordon:** Has France begun to inoculate children?

**Nidra Poller:** I think it just started ... from the age of 12. They kept the schools open in France. They had all kinds of ways of dealing with it, masks and then vaccination, and they kept the schools open. I have friends in other countries where the kids didn’t go to school for one year.

**Jerry Gordon:** I gather that Macron has popularity in France relative to the other candidates who are running for office there. At least that is what we read.

**Nidra Poller :** Yes. These polls and predictions are very worrying. I really don’t even pay attention because they keep saying, “Yes, it’s going to be Macron, Marine Le Pen.” Well, I can’t vote here, I’m not French. The 2022 Presidential election is in its early days. We must see what candidate the parliamentary Right will come up with. Now, there’s a lot of shifting and playing around. Marine Le Pen, as usual is trying to find some fantastic new project. Last time around it was, we should get out of the EU and go back to the French Franc. This time she wants to nationalize the highways and privatize the media.

**Jerry Gordon:** What are the Macron government relations like with Israel at this point?

**Nidra Poller:** Not bad at all. It’s nice to report that in France, with some exceptions—extreme left or the Greens—that obsession with Israel or against Israel or with the

Palestinians, all of that has dissipated. There is tremendous cooperation between France and Israel. ELNET, the organization I work with, took 40 French legislators to Israel last month. Some had never been there before. We don't get this situation where every time you say Israel, they say two-state solution. They're not invested in any way in the peace process, they're not trying to be the ones you go to solve the problem. They don't act anymore as if it is the big problem in the Middle East. Relations are good. The new Israeli government and the new American government have made good relations with the Europeans.

**Jerry Gordon:** Interesting. What has happened with the Sarah Halimi matter?

**Nidra Poller:** Those that are fighting for justice for Sarah never give up. At present there is a parliamentary investigation, which is rather unusual. It is not like the United States, where Congress has so much power and uses it. We have a lot of rubber stamp legislators here. Thanks to certain members of parliament who are fighting to defend this case, there is going to be an investigation. I'll let you know how that develops.

**Jerry Gordon:** What has been the pattern of anti-Semitic attacks against Jews in France recently?

**Nidra Poller:** I don't want to give a rosy picture, that's not the point, but these things are shifting. The focus of domestic terrorism or domestic Jihad shifts from country to country and from time to time. After the Israeli Guardians of the Wall Operation, the last operation in Gaza, there was a bit of a flare in opinion. And it went right down., You don't hear about it anymore, there's been no aftermath.

Whereas in the United States, in the UK, and many other countries, there are still relentless attacks on Jews. We have antisemitic slogans in those demonstrations by the French

Anti-vaxxers that are a sort of fruit salad of anti-this, anti-that confusion. The more you have confusion, the more there's a chance for antisemitism, resentment, ugliness ... The problem today is more centered on attacks on the police and elected officials. Attacks on Jews are way down, compared to earlier times. It is the obsession that has shifted a bit. Now it is the attack on the nation. Which was what we said would happen. You start to attack the Jews, you create an opening and little by little, you attack the French nation. There is more implicit solidarity with the Jews because the nation knows it's being attacked and is trying to find a way to defend itself.

**Jerry Gordon** What has been the reaction in France given Australian reneging the submarine deal with France that looks like it may have been orchestrated by the Biden Administration?

**Nidra Poller:** I would say three things. One type of reaction is: "There you go, we're nowhere, we're nobody, the French have just slipped back in world influence and people can treat us any old way." Another reaction is— this is the sign, among others, that we must get together and provide a European defense system, because this insult isn't only to France but to Europe. The other reaction is: "You don't treat allies that way." That was the reaction of Nicolas Sarkozy, the former president. This was because Australia had been secretly dealing with the other partners, hid that from the French, and announced it at the last minute.

For my recent weekly review— in French—of English-speaking media. I chose an article that gave inside information about the Australian aspect of this: on the Australian side there were many domestic considerations. For example, Australian deputies from the southern part of the country wanted to protect jobs in ship building; there were different Australian Prime Ministers over time, between the first negotiation and the "knife in the back". Perhaps the most interesting thing is

this: the Australians wanted diesel electric submarines, whereas the French are specialists in nuclear-powered submarines. The Australians said, "No, no, no, we can't handle that." So, the French did a special model for them. When they turned the French down at the last minute, they said, "Yes, we think that the diesel electric is not really up to par for our region." I think that there was a lot of shallow and domestic squabbling involved in this. But then, the French are selling some frigates to Greece, and I think they'll get over it and sales will pick up again. But there was a lot of browbeating and saying, "Well, no, we don't count for anything anymore." The reality is, I think, France is still one of the biggest arms exporters worldwide

**Jerry Gordon:** Contrast this with what Israel has done now for nearly two decades, building its own submarine fleet, as part of reparations from Germany, the so-called Dolphin subs. They are almost as quiet as nuclear subs and can remain loitering at the sea bottom for any length of time, and they can perform multi-missions.

**Nidra Poller:** Yes. You know some of the finest submarine construction is coming from Japan, but they can't sell arms. They have been in competitions where their submarines were the best. And now that the Australian submarines are going to be built in Adelaide in 2040 ... Can you believe it?

**Jerry Gordon:** It's not going to help them defend themselves against China.

**Nidra Poller:** To defend against China, maybe you need Japanese submarines.

**Jerry Gordon:** Another development in the 2022 Presidential race in France is Mr. Eric Zemmour, who is a Parisian-born Jew of North African Berber heritage. There are commentators who think that he could be the French version of former President Trump or, of someone I knew from being on the same weekly

media panel, Nigel Farage, who was the father of Brexit in the UK. We know how that turned out. Tell us about what the story is with Mr. Zemmour, because even though he hasn't declared, apparently, he's polling at 13%.

**Nidra Poller:** No, 15%.

**Jerry Gordon:** As high as 15.

**Nidra Poller:** I think it's as high as 15 percent now. He is right behind the conservative LR candidate who hasn't been declared yet. Marine Le Pen lost 10 points last month. That is one aspect of the Zemmour phenomenon: Marine Le Pen set out to de-demonize her party that bore the trademark of her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who was always making outrageous remarks against immigrants and against Jews. She said, "I'm going to show that we're a normal political party." Last time she ran for president, she campaigned on a platform of getting out of the EU and going back to the French Franc. She is not capable of running a presidential campaign, not capable of being president. Her party is not capable of governing. This has been shown to be the case repeatedly. Her original talking point was opposition to uncontrolled immigration and political Islam. But, to avoid being de-demonized, she dropped that. Her voters were disoriented. Eric Zemmour, who is a commentator, a journalist, author of books, is a very intelligent man. He doesn't put himself forward in public as Jewish., but people who know him personally say he keeps kosher, goes to the synagogue, etc. Zemmour puts forward his French identity.

Suddenly, there was a grassroots movement encouraging him to run for president. That brought him into the forefront and started to attract interest from voters that normally would be for Marine Le Pen but have lost interest in her. Because, first, they know she can't win. Second, she dropped the issues they like. Zemmour suddenly started to rise. Many commentators say they were tired of talking about COVID, now everyone's



talking about Eric Zemmour. I'll give you a funny sideline. Eric Zemmour comes out with strange off-the-wall projects. For example, the idea that immigrants, to show they really want to be French, shouldn't give their chi