

France Must Survive

by Michael Curtis

On August 7, 2014 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a French television program transmitted a timely warning to his French audience. The fight against terrorism he said was not "Israel's battle...It's your battle, it's the battle of France." His words were prescient, "if you don't stand together, then this terror plague will come to you. It's just a matter of time."

Unfortunately, the plague has come to France on too many occasions. It is sad to recount the instances of evil. On August 9, 1982 members of the Abu Nidal Organization threw grenades into the Jewish Restaurant Goldenberg in Paris, killing six, including 2 Americans. On December 24, 1994, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) hijacked an Air France plane in Algeria, killing 3 passengers and threatening to blow up the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The GIA was also responsible for attacks in July 1999 on the Paris Saint-Michel metro station, and in August 1995 attempts were made on the Arc de Triomphe, metro and rail stations.

Terrorism became more outrageous and deadly with the attacks on the offices of Charlie Hebdo in November 2011 and then again on January 7, 2015, followed by an attack on a Jewish supermarket, because of publication of satirical cartoons of Prophet Mohammed that many Muslims found insulting,. On June 13, 2016 terrorist Larossi Aballa stabbed a married couple, 2 police officers, in their home in Magnanville, and held their 3 year old son hostage.

The most dramatic incidents have been the attacks on November 13, 2015 and July 2016. In 2015, nine terrorists carried out the worst attack since the end of World War II. They included a number of attacks on the Bataclan concert hall, football

stadium, and cafes in Paris, killing 130 people and wounding more than 350. President Hollande regarded this as an act of war and set up a 3 month state of emergency that was extended to July 26, 2016. In 2016, a lone gunman on Bastille Day, July 14, driving a truck along the famous promenade in Nice killed at least 84 and wounded several hundred.

At this point it remains unclear whether the murders committed by Mohammed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, the 31 year old terrorist, father of 3, drinker, womanizer, petty thief, unstable volatile personality, possibly mentally ill with psychological problems, acted as a loner or with Islamist help.

Bouhlel was Tunisian in origin and the Magreb has always been a problem for France, although in the 2012 parliamentary election 5 individuals of Magreb origin were elected. He fits the pattern of the Islamist terrorist, 18-36 in age, a petty criminal, from a poor background, and a life of insecure jobs.

Interestingly, both French official and ISIS agree on his Islamist connection. The French government suggests that, while he had no formal connection to a terrorist group, he had a clear and recent interest in Islamist movements. Like other Muslims, he was sensitive to messages of ISIS without being trained by it.

For its part, ISIS claims him as one of its "soldiers, a soldier of the Islamic State," one who targets the crusader coalition fighting the caliphate. Whether by chance or not, ISIS only a month ago called for the use of cars and trucks in terror attacks, and urged potential terrorists to fill their cars with gas. Even earlier, ISIS spokesperson Mohammed al-Adani had ordered slaughter by all means, such running people over by a car.

In addition, a pervasive influence in the area of Nice in previous years has been the 40 year old jihadist Omar Diaby, (AKA Omar Omsen) Senegalese in origin, an influential

recruiter for Islamist fighters for al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and head of the French jihadist battalion in Syria, associated with the Jabhat al Nusra, the branch of al-Qaeda. He issued a documentary approving the terrorist attacks in Paris. He was regarded as a central figure in French terror cells in Nice until he was expelled first to Senegal in 2013, and then to Syria.

Patrick Calvar, head of France's General Directorate for International Security (DGSI) in May 2016 said his country faced the greatest threat of any nation in Europe. His pessimistic view is that France is on the verge of civil war between right wing groups and Islamist extremists. In a 300 page report he pointed out the "global failure" of French intelligence and the numerous intelligence errors. There are 6 intelligence services, agencies that compete with each other rather than cooperate.

Why has France suffered so much? For the terrorists France is a special case even though it did not take part in the Iraq war. Noticeably, ISIS in 2014 issued a special recruiting video aimed at French Muslims portraying France as "spiteful and filthy."

One can suggest a number of reasons.

First, France was a colonialist power in North Africa since 1830. The heritage of the rule in Algeria and the bitter eight year war, 1954-62, during which 700,000 were killed has not dissipated., nor has the memory of the cruelty of French in the demonstration by Algerians in Paris on October 17, 1961 when the police killed 200 and a number of bodies were thrown into the Seine. Terrorist organizations can draw on the pool of descendants of those not regarded as Francais de Souche (French from the Roots).

Secondly, In the high rate of criminality the estimate is that 60% of prisoners in France are Muslims, and jails are the

breeding ground for radicalization.

Thirdly, France officials, both President Francois Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls, have spoken of war against Islamist terrorism, and taken militant action against it in Libya, in Mali, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Fourthly, France is seen by terrorists as the automatic target of everything anathema to them, as the symbolic figure for western liberalism, an officially secular country, symbol of free speech, center of western European culture, and symbol of decadent life style.

France is troubled by practical problems. Estimates suggest that at least 1,700 French people, more than 100 of whom came from Nice, fought for ISIS and are returning to France. French recruits to ISIS have been given special roles in propaganda..

France is suffering and is responding. Not surprisingly, French public opinion takes an increasingly unfavorable view of Islam: two thirds of the French see it as too visible and influential. This has increased the support for political populist parties and groups in France as it has in other European countries, and opposition, to immigration and to Muslims.

One knows that immigration, home grown jihadists, and Islamist terrorism head the agenda of politics in Europe and to a growing degree in the US. The West must fortify France so that what Albert Camus called "implacable grandeur" can prevail in that country.