

Macron, Testy and Petulant Outside a Church In Jerusalem

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The disturbing story is [here](#).

“Go outside,” French President Emmanuel Macron demanded in English in a melee with Israeli security men on Wednesday, demanding they leave a Jerusalem basilica that he visited before a Holocaust memorial conference.

Here’s what he shouted, in English, to the Israeli security men:

“I don’t like what you did in front of me. Go outside. I’m sorry but you know the rules.

“Nobody has to provoke, Nobody! We keep calm!”

Emmanuel Macron was demanding that the Israeli security men who were standing at the entrance to the Church of St. Anne with only one purpose in mind – to make sure that he, President Macron, would be made as safe as possible in visiting the site– should leave, “go outside.” He didn’t think it right for Israeli police and Shin Bet to enter the church, which he considers to be the property of France, akin to an Embassy which, juridically, is a debatable proposition. Does he think that a Saudi-funded mosque in Paris would be off-limits to the French police?

The Israeli security people had a job to do: to ensure Macron’s safety. Isn’t it possible that they know how to do this, in Jerusalem, better than anyone else, including the security men who accompanied Macron from France? Is Macron an expert on Palestinian terrorism? Does he know how to look over people of Middle Eastern mien in the crowd at the church to detect if anything is amiss? Does he know what the Shin Bet people know about the particular risks of visiting the Church of St. Anne’s? Does it make sense to berate the Israeli security men for fulfilling their task, a difficult job in any circumstances, for which Macron, instead of becoming angry, should have been grateful?

The French tricolor has flown over the Church of St. Anne in Jerusalem’s walled Old City since it was gifted by the Ottomans to French Emperor Napoleon III in 1856.

France views it as a provocation when Israeli police enter the church’s sandstone complex.

Why is it a “provocation” when the Israeli police attempt to enter the church? How, and who, are they provoking in trying to assure security for Macron at the church? Are the Israeli police there to interrupt or shut down a service or otherwise make trouble for their distinguished visitor? Did they try to prevent his security detail from entering? Wasn’t it the other

way round, with the French trying to keep out the Israelis? The Israelis were there for only one reason, which we must keep repeating: to safeguard a foreign dignitary who, because of his position, might be at risk of attack. Is that really beyond the intelligence of Macron, who has gone to all the right French schools – the Lycee Henri IV, followed by Sciences-Po, followed by the Ecole Nationale d'Administration – to understand? Would the French, who know perfectly well what Arab terrorists are capable of, prefer that the Israeli security services, both police and Shin Bet, not have visited the Church of St. Anne's before Macron arrived to check it out? Would he really prefer – as his rude outburst suggests – not to have any Israelis in the church to provide an extra level of protection?

Perhaps Macron needs to be reminded of what happened to him just three days before he arrived in Jerusalem. He and his wife had gone to see a play – “La Mouche” – at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord.

When 30 protesters outside tried, vainly, to enter the theatre, his security detail quickly surrounded him, treating others in the audience rather roughly. The security men weren't about to stand on ceremony. Does Macron remember that? But he understood that it was part of their job; he did not berate those security men at the theatre, as he did, just a few days later, the Israelis who were, in much more difficult and potentially dangerous circumstances only attempting to ensure his safety?

While the Israelis behaved with professionalism and, indeed, admirable restraint under conditions made more difficult for them by the French security detail, and by the outburst from testy and petulant Emmanuel Macron himself, nothing at St. Anne's Church compares to the behavior of Macron's personal bodyguard and friend Alexandre Benalla, who in 2018 caused a scandal by lunging out and hitting two protesters, one a woman, who posed no danger whatsoever to Macron or anyone

else. At the time, Macron found nothing wrong with his bodyguard's behavior. Benalla's brutality went unreported until the story appeared on social media. But as for those Israelis, they were truly indefensible in wanting to help protect Macron he was right to yell at them.

Wednesday's incident was a case of deja vu all over again. In 1996, former President Jacques Chirac lost patience with Israeli security agents at the same church, telling one of them that his treatment was a "provocation" and threatening to get back on his plane.

Chirac refused to enter St. Anne until Israeli security left the site.

Again, for Chirac then as for Macron now, a moment's reflection would have told them that that they should be grateful for, and not be angry with, Israel's superb security services. Just the other day, the Shin Bet revealed that in 2019, it had foiled 560 terrorist attacks. Macron himself, as the President of France, has received threats from Arab terrorists. Why should he shout at the Israeli security men who are keenly aware of such threats, and have longer experience at foiling them than anyone else, including the members of Macron's security detail?

Video showed Macron, jostled in the center of a crowded circle between his own protective detail and Israeli security personnel, including several paramilitary policemen in uniform, under an archway leading into the church.

When there are two distinct groups providing security for the same dignitary, as here, with both Macron's French "protective detail" and Israeli security personnel, the task becomes more difficult: who will have final say? Who answers to whom? How close should crowds of well-wishers be allowed to come? How do we ensure Macron's safe entry and exit? Isn't it just possible

that the Israelis, who are well-versed in scanning Jerusalem crowds for suspicious types, and who know, too, the precise layout of the church, and the places where one bent on mayhem or murder could hide a weapon, or plant an explosive, should be worked with, instead of enduring Macron's shouting in English at the Israeli security guards that "I don't like what you did in front of me. Go outside. I'm sorry but you know the rules. Nobody has to provoke, Nobody! We keep calm!"? Of course. Keep calm! Just like Emmanuel Macron.

There were reports of "shoving." But who was doing the "shoving" and who was being "shoved"? The contretemps was between the two security services, French and Israeli, at the entrance to the church. The French wanted to keep all the Israeli security men out; it was they who were "jostling" and "shoving" the Israelis, who were determined not to back off; they had been tasked by the government with ensuring Macron's safety and wanted only to do so. But after Macron's shouting, which stunned the Israelis, they agreed to send in only two people, one policeman and one member of Shin Bet.

According to a statement put out by the Shin Bet, Macron later apologized to Israeli security men. Later on the same day as the church visit, an Élysée spokeswoman said that the incident was "nothing serious," and that Macron's visit continues as planned. "Everything is going well." And then, on the next day, the French government denied that Macron had apologized to Israeli security for anything.

Here's what Macron should do, to make proper amends. He should recognize that his behavior at the church was intolerable. He should apologize publicly and unambiguously, to the security services and the people of Israel, for his unseemly performance. He might word it thus: "I must apologize for my inexcusable behavior outside the Church of St. Anne's on Wednesday. I failed to give sufficient weight to the difficult task it must have been for those Israelis providing me with an extra level of security, and I am sorry for my outburst." But

he won't. Macron belongs to the never-apologize-never-explain school of statecraft. And Israel's security professionals will just have to soldier on, for the grateful and the ungrateful alike, as they have had to do for decades.

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