

Macron's Folly

by Bruce Bawer



Last October, I reported [here](#) that French president Emmanuel Macron had just “delivered what, on the face of it, seemed to be a remarkable speech on Islam.” Having previously been wishy-washy on the topic, he now promised a new program “intended to defend French *laïcité*, or official secularism, from ‘Islamist separatism,’” which he explicitly characterized as an existential threat to the Republic. Acknowledging that “one reason why ‘Islamist separatism’ had been allowed to fester was the ‘cowardice’ of French authorities,” Macron proclaimed that a new day had dawned. In public services, in cultural and athletic associations, in schools and universities, and in other sectors of society, Islamic indoctrination would be officially, firmly, and comprehensively resisted, and Islam itself modernized into an “Islam of the Enlightenment.”

My comment at the time was that a great deal of Macron’s scheme, on close examination, “starts to look not like a

program for the secularizing of Islam but, rather, like a blueprint for propping up public *laïcité* while actively promoting private Islamic observance – a blueprint born, one imagines, of pie-in-the-sky hopes that, when the Muslims take over, they won't replace the Napoleonic Code with sharia law." In any event, given the decades of French government inaction on the Islam issue, it was hard to take Macron's vows any more seriously than a *boeuf bourguignon* prepared with a Beaujolais.

Two weeks after Macron's speech, a Muslim named Abdoullakh Abouyezidovitch Anzorov [beheaded](#) a history teacher named Samuel Paty, who'd shown his students some cartoons of Muhammed as part of a lesson on freedom of expression. The French took to the streets in outrage (which soon subsided). The government expelled a couple of hundred immigrants who'd been identified as potential terrorists (leaving heaven knows how many hundreds of thousands of others). A mosque was closed (and has since been reopened). Macron praised Paty while also making the usual nice, empty noises about Islam, but admitted that he hadn't done enough about the problem so far and again promised action. Again I was dubious. "What guarantee is there," I wrote, "that Macron will keep his eye on the ball after the furor over Paty's murder dies down – let alone that he will take action that is sweeping enough to make a real difference in this long-term civilizational war?"

Alas, if you're consistently cynical about the promises of French leaders, you'll rarely be disappointed. In October, as noted [here](#) by Hugh Fitzgerald, France's ambassador to Sweden, Étienne de Gonneville, had declared on Swedish television that "France is a Muslim country." As Fitzgerald noted, the veracity of such a statement is dependent not just on the sheer number of Muslims in France but on the question of whether they "see themselves as part of a wider society, contributors to its culture, inheritors of its history." To ponder Muslim attitudes toward the victory of Charles Martel

at Tours in 732 or the central French role in the Enlightenment is to realize that the overwhelming majority of Muslims don't identify with these achievements.

When an op-ed in the *Financial Times* described Macron as fighting "Islamic separatism," he considered the word choice consequential enough to write a reply, insisting in a November 4 letter that he was fighting "*Islamist* separatism." France, he explained, has for the past several years been under attack "by terrorists [acting] in the name of an Islam that they have distorted" (yes, that old line) and is at war against "designs of hatred and death that threaten its children – never against Islam. We oppose deception, fanaticism, violent extremism. Not a religion." A few days later, Macron's Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, [met](#) with the Grand Imam at Cairo's al-Azhar University. Now, you might have thought that, if anything, he'd have been on the offensive, reading the Grand Imam the riot act about jihadism in the wake of Paty's murder. Instead, because of the recent reprinting of some Muhammed cartoons by *Charlie Hebdo* (a publication much of whose staff had been slaughtered in a previous act of jihad), Le Drian contritely assured his host that the French government has a "deep respect" for Islam. It hardly sounded as if the leaders of *La Belle République* had any serious intention of fighting Islamization.

Indeed, even as Macron and his chief diplomat were trading in defiance for deference, legislators were watering down his "Law against Separatism." The references to "Islamic separatism" and the word "secular" disappeared. A ban on home schooling – which targets Christians, not Muslims – was added, and the Islam-specific language was generalized in such a way that Jewish and Christian leaders [opposed](#) the law as an attack on their own freedom of worship. Some leftists even tried to include an [amendment](#) named for outspoken (and frequently fined) Islam critic Éric Zemmour, which would have instituted new punishments for "inciting hatred." While politicians on

the left [opposed](#) the bill for failing to address the alleged “root causes” of Islamic mischief, such as “poverty, exclusion, racism, discrimination,” Marine Le Pen, the critic of mass Muslim immigration who is expected to challenge Macron in next spring’s elections, [dismissed](#) the law as toothless. In February it [passed](#) the National Assembly; in April, a purportedly somewhat tougher version [passed](#) the Senate.

In addition to his new law, Macron cooked up a so-called “Charter of Principles for Islam in France” and asked religious leaders belonging to the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) to sign on – the idea presumably being that these new “principles” would then trickle down into the hearts and minds of France’s Muslims (whose numbers de Gonneville vaguely put at somewhere between 4 and 8 million). Of course, this is pure magical thinking. We’re talking here about people who, among much else, accept the legitimacy of forced marriage and honor killing, who consider women inferior and homosexuality a capital offense, and who are convinced that everything they confess and profess and practice was confided in their prophet by Allah himself. How can any sane government official imagine that some charter signed by a few imams is going to alter any of that?

In any event, three of the CFCM members refused to okay Macron’s charter. Among the items they objected to, apparently, was a promise to decriminalize apostasy. Under Islam, of course, apostasy is punishable by death. In at least ten Muslim countries, the death penalty for apostates is the law of the land. This is not, as Macron would have it, “Islamism” – an instance of the misunderstanding of the faith by a handful of radicals. It’s mainstream Islam, pure and simple, straight out of the Koran, and the leaders of French Muslims plainly want to keep it that way. One article suggested that Macron might try to get around this roadblock by doing the Gallic equivalent of packing the Supreme Court – that is, finding “liberal” imams and putting them on the CFCM.

But to think that such a move would affect the behavior or beliefs of the devout multitudes is, of course, sheer self-delusion.

It's hard not to feel that this whole half-hearted project is doomed to failure. Because talking about "Islamism" and "Islamists" is an exercise in diversionary euphemism. Because whatever pretty things Macron may say about it, Islam – the selfsame Islam that sends hordes of Muslims out into the streets of Paris and Nice and Nantes with their prayer mats to get on their knees and block traffic, a daily practice that the *gendarmes* don't dare to address – *is* a problem. The minds and hearts of these people are consecrated to a set of beliefs and practices that represent an existential menace to Western civilization. To pretend that these believers can be reined in by any lame law or charter or pact is sheer folly. As one General Roland Dubois asked rhetorically in a recent [commentary](#): when faced with a choice between "a sacred text, dictated by Allah himself, and therefore untouchable to the end of time" and some newly concocted document, "more or less imposed by the unbelievers," which text can you expect to win out? Muslims have felt a sense of indomitability in France for some time now; can anyone honestly expect them to turn meek? The bottom line, then, is this: if Islam were harmless in the first place, there would be no need for any laws or charters to control its adherents; but since Islam is *not* harmless, such documents are useless – except perhaps as part of an effort by Macron to make it look to voters, in the run-up to the next election, as if he's actually doing something about the issue.

On April 25, an article at the Norwegian site [document.no](#) drew my attention to an [open letter](#) to the President and government of France in the conservative magazine *Valeurs Actuelles*. Signed by over a thousand members of the French military, including twenty generals, it declared, in strong and solemn language, that France is "in peril" owing to

“fanatical and hateful” people who “despise our country, its traditions, its culture, and who want to see it dissolve by removing its past and its history.” That the Muslim *banlieus* have become “territories subject to dogmas contrary to our constitution” is intolerable, they wrote, for “there cannot and must not exist any city or neighborhood where the laws of the Republic do not apply.” Hence, they maintained, it is “imperative that those who run our country find the courage to eradicate these dangers. To do this, it is often sufficient to apply existing laws without weakness.” Cautioning against “prudence” and cowardice, emphasizing that the job ahead is “colossal,” and warning that time is growing short, they declared their readiness to take action to “safeguard the nation” and forestall an otherwise inevitable civil war in which the deaths “will number in the thousands.”

So far, alas, nobody is mounting the barricades. While the French, alas, routinely respond to trivial provocations by pouring into the streets to protest, they take longer to volunteer for meaningful – and potentially life-threatening – action than it takes to make a proper cassoulet. Indeed, even as Macron and other French leaders pretend to be turning the page when it comes to the official approach to the Religion of Peace, outspoken Islam critics like Zemmour continue to be tried and fined for articulating objective truths. How seriously can we take any law that promises to curb the excesses of Islam in a country that still bows to the Muslim mob by prosecuting its small number of genuine heroes?

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