

Massacres in September

by Michael Curtis



It's a long, long while from May to December, but the days grow short when you reach September.

Many songs have welcomed the month of September, the beginning of fall, exhibiting in the rain the leaves of brown come tumbling down, and the sun going out just like a dying ember. But unfortunately, it has also been the season for massive terrorist attacks on innocent people. Some anniversaries of these attacks in France, Turkey, and the United States, are being commemorated or remembered in September 2020.

It is France that has the dubious distinction of what has been called the *September Massacres*, the killing of about 1,400 prisoners, half the prison population of Paris, by a mob in

Paris on September 2-6, 1792. It is generally assumed that Jean-Paul Marat, later killed in his bath by Charlotte Corday in July 1793, was the main instigator of the mob. However, Georges Danton was also accused of being responsible because of his fiery speech on September 2, 1792 in which he proclaimed, "The bell we are about to ring is not an alarm bell; it sounds the charge on the enemies of our country."

The event, the first Terror of the French Revolution, based on rumor emanating from fear and panic, not reliable information, occurred because of rhetoric that if foreign armies invaded Paris, as Prussians and Austrians had done in Northern France to end the Revolution, the prisoners, though almost all were ordinary criminals and non-political, would join them. After an initial attack on prisoners by an armed band, massacres took place over the next few days in the Paris prisons. The massacres were all pointless because no prisoners were likely to be part of a supposed counter revolutionary conspiracy.

On September 6-7, 1955, another massacre based on fake news took place in Istanbul. The Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in August 1955, falsely claimed that Greek Cypriots were planning massacres against Turkish Cypriots, and blamed Greece. Less than a month later, it was reported that the Turkish consulate in Thessaloniki, Greece, the birth place of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the republic of Turkey, had been bombed, and falsely, that Greeks were responsible. In fact, the bombing was by a Muslim employee in the consulate who came from Komotini, Greece. On September 6, 2020, a commemoration service was held in the Greek Orthodox church in Istanbul in honor of those killed 65 years ago, the Greeks of Istanbul.

Turkish authorities, and some Turkish studies university departments have for long distorted the nature of the event that began as a protest rally. But it developed into what Turkey calls "the events of September 6-7," but which in reality was a Turkish version of the Nazi Kristallnacht of November 1938 carried out by organized mobs whose object was

to get rid of Greeks who were an active part of the city's business and cultural life. Beside the false accusation of the bombing in Thessaloniki, the Greeks were made the scapegoats for bad economic conditions. Though the country did not initially call for the killing of Greeks, the Turkish mob killed more than 30, with 300 injured, destroyed or looted 4,000 stores, factories, 71 churches, 2,000 residences. and hotels of Greeks, in all over 5,300 properties.

Turkish police were largely inactive, and finally the government declared martial law and called in the army to stop the violence. The main point is that Turkey continued its policy of getting rid of most of its Greeks. In Istanbul, the Greek population immediately declined from 116,000 to 49,000. The Greek population in Turkey as a whole declined. In 1927 it had been 120,000; in 1978 it was 7,000, and currently it is about 2,500.

The final paradox in these Turkish affairs is that Adnan Menderes, prime minister from 1950 was arrested after a military coup d'etat. He was tried, accused among other issues, of ordering the pogrom of September 6, and of busing villagers into the city to harm the citizens of Greek ancestry, and was executed on May 27, 1960.

This Turkish massacre killed mostly Greeks, but Armenians and Jews were also among the killed. Though Turkey, in spite of unfriendliness toward Israel, has not called for the exodus of its Jews, now estimated to number 17,000, it was the place on September 6, 1986 for an attack in Neve Shalom synagogue in Istanbul when Palestinians, allegedly under orders of Abu Nidal, murdered 22 worshippers, including seven rabbis, none of whom had any relation with Israel. Further attacks took place in March 1992, and November 2003.

For all Americans, September 11, 2001, 9/11, is unforgettable, and the images of smoke pouring from the destroyed buildings in New York are indelible. This week marks the 19th anniversary

of the tragic date when nineteen members of the terrorist group al Qaeda conducted four coordinated attacks, by hijacked planes flying from airports in the northeast bound for California, against the U.S., the largest attack by a foreign group on U.S. soil, killing 3,000 people. Of the 19 terrorists, 15 came from Saudi Arabia, two from the UAE, and one each from Lebanon and Egypt. Some of the 19 had lived in the U.S. and had taken lessons at commercial flying schools, others arrived in the U.S. only a short time before the events.

The terrorists hijacked and took over control of the planes, which then became virtual missiles.

The first plane, a Boeing 767 with 20,000 gallons of fuel, crashed into the 80th floor of the north Tower, one of the Twin Towers, the tallest buildings with 110 floors in New York City, part of the commercial complex of seven buildings and an underground shopping mall. It instantly killed hundreds, and trapped those in higher floors. Eighteen minutes later, a second Boeing 767 crashed in the second Tower causing a mass explosion and the collapse of the building. The calculation is that 2,996, including the 19 terrorists, were killed in the NYC attacks.

After the twin Towers in New York had been attacked, a third plane, another 757 crashed into the west side of the Pentagon, the headquarters of the Department of Defense, in Arlington, Virginia, causing collapse of part of the concrete building, and killing 125 military and civilian workers, and a total of 189 altogether.

A fourth plane United 93, from Newark bound for San Francisco had been delayed, and thus passengers were able to learn about the fate of the other planes. Understanding that the intended target of the plane was Washington, either the White House, or Capitol Hill, or Camp David, the passengers agreed to a heroic insurrection fighting and overcoming the terrorists. The

immortal line of one passenger, the 32 year-old Todd Beamer still resonates, "Are you guys ready, let's roll." The diverted plane crashed in an empty field outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and all 44 aboard were killed. It was the only one of the four planes that never reached the intended destination of the terrorists.

From the Oval Office, President George W. Bush proclaimed that the terrorist attacks "could shake the foundation of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America." The search for those ultimately responsible for the massacres continued.

Osama bin Laden, who varied at different times in accepting responsibility, who called on Muslims to attack Americans, was finally tracked down and killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan, at age 54 on May 2, 2011. The alleged chief architect of the attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. Pakistani terrorist, a member of Osama's al Qaeda group, was captured in Rawalpindi on March 1, 2003 by the CIA, and has been imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay , and is due to be tried in 2021.

Terrorist activity has not stopped. In June 2016 a lone gunman using a semi-automatic rifle killed 49 people at the small Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Since 9/11, 107 persons have been killed in domestic terrorist attacks. Moreover, the effects of 9/11 remain. There were initially heavy losses in jobs, finance arrangements, air transportation, and the task of rebuilding the World Trade Center in NYC. People were exposed to toxic fumes and dust particles from the Towers. At least 10,000 have been diagnosed with 9/11 related cancer; compensation has been given to the families of 9/11 victims and those , estimated at 2,680, who were injured.

The war on terror, announced by Bush on September 20, 2001 as war on every terrorist group of global reach, has altered the fabric of American life. A major consequence has been the expansion of military authority, law enforcement and

intelligence powers, restrictions on immigration, and on “no fly” lists. Change in air travel, with more security and surveillance, had already begun after the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland.

It is gratifying that the World Trade Center in NYC has been rebuilt, with the grand Tower symbolically 1776 feet high, and the site a pitting memorial for the dead.

It is much less gratifying and rather sad to recall another event of September 11. This was a speech by the celebrated aviator Charles Lindbergh, best known for The Spirit of St Louis, in Des Moines, Iowa on 9/11,1941. He proclaimed that the “three most important groups who have been pressing this country towards war are the British, the Jewish, and the Roosevelt administration... the greatest danger (of Jews) to this country lies in their large ownership, and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio, and government.” Lindbergh said he admired both the British and the Jewish peoples. One wonders what he would have said if he was not an admirer.