

'Pogrom' in Amsterdam

By Bruce Bawer

It was while living in Amsterdam, in early 1999, that I realized Europe was in trouble. Let me pause for a moment to apologize for repeating myself: I wrote about that epiphany in my 2006 book [While Europe Slept](#), and over the ensuing years I've repeated the story from time to time. But I think it bears repeating.



Anti-Israel protesters in Amsterdam on Nov. 7, 2024 (CBS News YouTube)

Beginning in August 1997, I visited Amsterdam several times in quick succession. It was beautiful, safe, peaceful, and tolerant – so wonderful that after a lifetime in New York, I pulled up stakes and moved there in the fall of 1998. First I lived in an upscale neighborhood in the heart of the city. From there, I moved to a flat on a canal with a postcard-picture view. Then I relocated to a third neighborhood, just outside the *centrum*.

That neighborhood, I discovered, was heavily populated by Muslims – men in long beards and women in hijab, with almost every each couple accompanied on their afternoon constitutionals by an army of children. If you happened to meet the men's eyes, the look you got back was chilling. I recognized at once that something was happening in Amsterdam

of which I'd previously been unaware, and that it was not something good. I further recognized that if it was happening in Amsterdam, it must also be happening in other major European cities.

Indeed, soon enough I was living in Oslo, which also turned out to have sizable Muslim enclaves, some residents of which proved to be aggressive. After discovering the same situation in other European cities, I began to write about the subject.

To be sure, I still love Amsterdam, and over the quarter century since I moved from there I've been back probably 50 times. I've been safe there, because I know my way around and because, as a born and bred New Yorker who grew up in the pre-Giuliani Big Apple, I know how to safely navigate a dangerous city. In any event, I'm deeply aware that the problem I first observed in 1999 has grown steadily worse over the years.

I'll cite just one incident. On April 30, 2008, which was Queen's Day in the Netherlands – a major holiday during which city streets all over the country are packed with celebrants – a “gay fashion show” was held in the middle of a busy street just off Rembrandt Square. It was disrupted when 10 young Muslim men dragged a model named Mike du Pree down from the catwalk and beat him brutally, breaking his nose. Reporting about this incident on my now-defunct [blog](#), I noted that the story had come to my attention only because a friend of mine had been told about it and written about it on *his* blog. Apparently it hadn't been reported in any major Dutch or foreign media. The same can be said of any number of other such acts of violence by unruly Muslims in the Netherlands, who while capable of assaulting any infidel who comes along, have a special proclivity to victimize gays, Jews, and uncovered women.

So I can't say I'm terribly surprised by the latest [news](#) from the Dutch capital. On Thursday, the soccer team Maccabi Tel Aviv was in town for a match against the Amsterdam-based team

Ajax. Some 3,000 Maccabi fans traveled from Israel for the occasion. After Maccabi lost, many of those fans were set upon by masked Muslim men, some of them waving Palestinian flags.

Or so I read in a bare-bones account for the *Times of Israel*. But the same newspaper ran another report in which the Maccabi fans were called “hooligans” and accused of provoking the Muslims. “Pro-Palestinian activists,” [reported](#) the *Times*, “have claimed that the Maccabi Tel Aviv fans were the first to engage in harassment and violence, saying they assaulted Arabs in the city and vandalized Palestinian flags.” Which raises the question: why were there Palestinian flags on the scene in the first place?

Another [article](#) in the *Times* noted that the Dutch legislator Geert Wilders, writing on X (formerly Twitter), had described the incidents as “pogroms” and as “a Jew hunt in the streets of Amsterdam.” Calling on the Dutch government to “deport the multicultural scum that attacked Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters in our streets,” Wilders added that he was “[a]shamed that this can happen in the Netherlands” and said: “We have become the Gaza of Europe.” Appallingly, the *Times of Israel*, rather than being grateful for these words from Wilders, a staunch supporter of Israel, took the opportunity to smear him as being “[f]ar-right.”

Turning to the websites of some major Dutch newspapers, I found several articles about the attacks in *NRC Handelsblad* alone. One recounted a noon press conference on Friday at which Amsterdam mayor Femke Halsema was unambiguous about what had occurred. “Amsterdam,” she [said](#), “looks back on a pitch-black night” during which “rioters” had “destroyed” the “safety and trust of Jews in our city,” and “it is still dark today.” At the same presser, Amsterdam’s police chief, Peter Holla, stated: “I look back on 36 hours that shocked me.” An *NRC* [story](#) was headlined: “Dutch politicians react with shock to violent night in Amsterdam, speak of anti-Semitism.” [Another](#) was headlined: “Jewish organizations ask

politicians to take action, 'The Netherlands should be deeply ashamed.'"

A [live blog](#) at *De Volkskrant* covered the story hour by hour, and dispelled any notion that the trouble had been started by the Israelis. During the soccer match, apparently, about 200 Muslim agitators tried to break through a line of police and enter the stadium, Johan Cruijff Arena in southeast Amsterdam. They were unsuccessful, but later, in and around Dam Square in the heart of the city, they encountered some Maccabi supporters and set upon them. Some used fists or fireworks; others threw the Israelis to the ground and kicked them. [Gangs](#) of Muslims stopped pedestrians on the street and demanded, Gestapo-style, that they show their ID to prove they weren't Israelis; when Israelis were identified, they were told to "shout 'Free Palestine'" or face the consequences. Some of the attackers, [according](#) to *NL Times*, were "boys on scooters." Some brandished knives. Videos posted on X were harrowing to watch.

Early Friday morning, a spokesperson for Maccabi urged Israelis in Amsterdam to stay in their hotel rooms and to avoid wearing "Israeli or Jewish symbols." Early on Friday morning, it was reported that the Israeli army planned "to launch a rescue mission" involving cargo aircraft and that Dutch officials pledged their cooperation, but later it emerged that this plan had been quashed – by whom, it was unclear.

Even as many international media either ignored the incidents or whitewashed them – portraying them as "clashes" between Jews and Muslims – political leaders around the world expressed, or feigned, outrage at the anti-Semitic violence. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission (which is largely responsible for the massive influx of Muslims into the continent), claimed she was "furious" about the attacks. Daan Wijnants, head of the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), wrote on X that Jews are no longer

safe in Amsterdam. (Well, that's been true for a long time.) King Willem-Alexander, according to *De Volkskrant*, "condemned the attack in the strongest terms and compared it to the Dutch failure to protect Jews during the Holocaust." He told the Israeli president, Isaac Herzog, that "We failed the Jewish community during the Second World War, and last night we failed again." It was surprising to read such words from the Dutch king, who, like his mother and predecessor, Queen Beatrix, has for a long time been the very embodiment of the appeasement of Islam. Herzog, for his part, said that Amsterdam had witnessed a "pogrom."

On Friday morning, Israeli prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke with his Dutch counterpart, Dick Schoof, who said the anti-Semitic attacks were "unacceptable" and promised that the perpetrators would be punished. Writing on X, Schoof declared himself "appalled" by the attacks, while Netanyahu called the incidents "very violent." As for the [numbers](#), one report indicated that five victims had received treated in hospital, while 30 or 40 others "were taken in for minor injuries"; all were later discharged. The number of arrests was recorded as 62, but as of early Friday afternoon only 10 suspects were still in custody. Which sounds par for the course.

On Friday evening Dutch time, Wilders wrote online that he'd "[j]ust met the Israeli Foreign Minister Gidon Saar at Schiphol Airport and assured him of our common interest to beat antisemitism and Jew hate and that radical Islamic values have no place in a free society. Europe must wake up now and act accordingly as tough as possible!" Yet for all the outrage and apologies and promises – and despite Wilders' genuine seriousness about these matters – there is no sign that any major policy changes will take place in the Netherlands. Once this incident fades from memory, things will go back to normal – meaning that in the once-magical city of Amsterdam, law-abiding residents' sense of freedom and security will resume eroding steadily as Islam continues its

advance.

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