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Antisemitism 2002 in France

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“Intifada” Import or Domestic Malaise?

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INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the Palestinian “Intifada” on 28 September 2000 unleashed a wave of Middle East related antisemitic incidents worldwide.

Among Western democracies, in the single month of October 2000, the highest numbers of such attacks were perpetrated in France (70), followed by Canada (29), the United States (22), Great Britain (20) and others...

The trend continued throughout 2001 with some 320 reported incidents in France i.e. targeting Jewish institutions (synagogues, schools, cemeteries) and individuals almost daily.

The 57 incidents listed below, drawn from the records of the Coordination Forum for Countering Antisemitism, are only the most visible of an extensive number of assaults, attempted assaults, violent acts, personal, telephonic or mail threats against Jewish institutions and individuals.

FROM INTIFADA TO 9/11--

Most incidents have occurred in Paris suburbs and other neighbourhoods where Jews and Moslems live in close propinquity. Indeed, Moslem anti-Jewish activity has increased *pari passim* with the increasing intensity of the Intifada represented through the extreme imagery and anti-Israel hostility of the media.

The post-11 September US-led “war against terror” has merged the traditional anti-Americanism of the left, and the nationalism of the extreme right with an immediate sympathy for Al-Qa’eda among young socially marginalised Moslems in France.

Much of the antisemitic graffiti and mail used such expressions as “Vive Bin-Laden,” “Victory to Bin-Laden”.

The volume of violent incidents against Jewish targets reached a peak immediately after the attacks on New York and Washington, especially around the New Year and “Yom Kippur” festivals.

Our background report analyzes the sociological frustration of the French North African/Arab/Moslem identity.

The same climate of intimidation, threat and hatemongering of Jews that pervaded the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, has been replicated in pro-Palestinian demonstrations across Europe, that are the rallying point for extreme-left, extreme-right and anti-globalization elements. Such gatherings in France have deteriorated into particularly violent sloganeering against Jews.

In June 2001, French Foreign Minister, Hubert Vedrine, told a Wiesenthal Centre delegation that assaults on Jewish institutions were “only acts of suburban hooliganism.” He rejected any aggravating implications of French policy on the Middle East conflict being interpreted as consistently pro-Arab.

This position had been first enunciated to the Centre at its meeting in Tel Aviv with French Ambassador Huntzinger at the height of the “Intifada-related” incidents in October 2000. “This is only part of the general violence manifested by marginal youth in France,” he said.

Yet, the Minister for the Interior and for Religions, Daniel Vaillant, on 5 December 2001, reported “a net diminution of antisemitic threats and aggressions in the course of 2001, after a peak in 2000 coinciding with the beginning of the Intifada.”

DOMESTIC MALAISE?

After interrogating 42 suspects, the police concluded that these are “predominantly delinquents without ideology, motivated by a diffuse hostility to Israel, exacerbated by the media representation of the Middle East conflict...a conflict which, they see, reproduces the picture of exclusion and failure of which they feel victims in France.”

Indeed, three individuals arrested for involvement in one of the synagogue attacks received a suspended sentence of three months for “general violence” and were immediately set free. Hence, many of the incidents against Jews are not registered as such, and are not treated as antisemitism.

The press has hardly addressed the phenomenon and, despite a condemnation by Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, the few political reactions have been ambiguous. President Jacques Chirac was reported to have warned against over protesting antisemitism for fear of encouraging its increase.

A demonstration on 13 January 2002 of Jewish leadership assembled in the Créteil synagogue – the latest victim of violence – was marked by the sparseness of non-Jewish sympathizers. Indeed, the town’s Deputy Mayor used the occasion to publicly revile the Sharon government and was met by jeers from the audience.

There was talk among the crowd of Dreyfus and Vichy, though they were well aware that the antisemitism of the Church and the neo-Nazis has been eclipsed by new mutations that gnaw at the fabric of France.

The disease of the body politic has endured, though the symptoms may differ: media Jew-baiting, intellectual Judeophobia, Islamic Jew-hatred. For the victim in the Paris suburbs, the nuances are totally irrelevant.

The Jewish community is beginning to feel that its government lacks political will to take the problem seriously, interpreted by some as due to a heightened perception of the Arab constituency's voting power in forthcoming elections. Banalization of antisemitic incidents has compounded the community's sense of isolation.

One of the Créteil worshippers, whose synagogue was twice hit this year, asked, “Why are only synagogues targeted? How come no mosques, nor churches? And still the authorities call it general violence and claim that we are over-sensitive. The policy of silence regarding Islamic Judeophobia must end!”

CONCLUSION

In a *Le Monde* article of 16 January, entitled “A New Antisemitism?”, University of Paris Professor of French Literature, Eric Marty, suggests that the Jews of Paris are once again “Dhimmis” (the protected second-class citizens under Islam)... “They are tolerated subjects... but mistreated as perpetual hostages to the political necessities of the moment.”

Marty continued, “...there has been no voice of political authority ready to say simply that... irregardless of the policy of Israel, there is nothing that can justify a policy of terror against Jews... Individual or group violence against the Jews of France could never have gone so far without the perception that, even if not authorized, there has at least been a certain indulgence or understanding... This violence enjoys a double impunity:

- Practical impunity: there have been few arrests;
- Moral impunity: media banalization and euphemism.”

His conclusion: “Every Jewish building in Paris requires protection, every Jewish festival is an occasion for concern and anguish, anyone walking in Paris or its suburbs wearing a “kippa” is imprudent and any child leaving school may be beaten because he is Jewish, only because he is a Jew.”

PRINCIPAL ANTISEMITIC ATTACKS IN FRANCE THROUGHOUT 2001

31 January Strasbourg	While jogging, a young Jew in a skullcap was slashed in the arm by knife-wielding Arabs
25 February Sarcelles (Paris suburb)	Burning objects were thrown into the “Tiferet Israel” school. The building was totally destroyed
8 March Julien La Croix (Paris)	On the eve of Purim, young men broke into the synagogue throwing firebombs
1 April Garges les Goneses (Paris northern suburb)	Burning objects thrown into synagogue
5 August Saint Augustin (Suburb of Nice)	On Shabbat, petrol was poured through a broken window of the synagogue, which is situated in a neighbourhood predominantly populated by Arabs
1 September Paris	Orly Airport, swastika on door of El Al office
1 September Meudon (Paris suburb)	Arabs on motorbikes stone Rabbi’s son
5 September Paris	Antisemitic mail sent to La Victoire synagogue
7 September Paris	Antisemitic mail sent to La Courneuve synagogue
9 September Paris	Arab youths chase Jews into a restaurant, resulting in a brawl
10 September Paris	Arab attack on worshippers leaving the Henri Murger synagogue
10 September	Antisemitic threats sent to synagogue

Drancy (Paris suburb)	
11 September Paris	Window smashed at “Beit Eliahou” synagogue
11 September Aubervilliers (Paris suburb)	13-year-old pupil beaten up leaving “Shneour” school, his eye-glasses smashed
12 September Paris	Antisemitic slogans on the wall of the Turgot secondary school
12 September Villeneuve la Garenne (Paris suburb)	The synagogue received a bomb threat and the police discovered an explosive gas canister without a detonator in front of the building
13 September Villepinte	Antisemitic graffiti on wall of the synagogue
14 September Paris	Antisemitic letter sent to the CRIF
15 September Clichy (Paris suburb)	8 Arabs stone the synagogue
15 September Massy (Paris suburb)	Synagogue windows stoned
15 September Villepinte (Paris suburb)	15 Arabs stone synagogue during services
15 September Garges les Goneses (Paris suburb)	Beer cans thrown at synagogue and Rabbi threatened
17 September Paris	Antisemitic graffiti scrawled on “Ohel Baruch” school
18 September Sarcelles (Paris suburb)	Arab throws knife at Jewish passer-by
18 September Villepinte (Paris suburb)	Synagogue stoned again in drive-by attack by Arabs screaming, “We will burn you!”
21 September Villepinte (Paris suburb)	15 Arabs harass and threaten Rabbi
22 September Paris	Glass bottle thrown at worshippers at the MJLF (Reform) synagogue
22 September Paris	Knife-wielding Arabs threaten worshippers at the Henri Murger synagogue again (see 10 September)
22 September Sarcelles (Paris suburb)	Stones thrown at women on their way to Torah classes at the synagogue
22 September Les Lilas (Paris suburb)	Youth attacked at Les Epinettes synagogue
23 September Sarcelles	Antisemitic graffiti on city buildings

(Paris suburb)	
27 September Issy les Moulineaux (Paris suburb)	Eggs thrown into synagogue
27 September Vitry (Paris suburb)	During “Yom Kippur,” a gun was pointed from the window of a flat upon worshippers in the synagogue opposite
27 September Paris	Arabs drove past “Yom Kippur” worshippers at the “Yavneh” school, screaming threats
3 October Paris	The Simon Wiesenthal Centre, France-Israel Association and the ACIP received antisemitic mail
6 October Paris	“Death to the Jews,” “Vive Bin Laden” scrawled on walls around Place Robert Desnos
6 October Stains (northern Paris)	A firebomb was thrown at the synagogue’s outside wall
13 October Asnières (Paris suburb)	Arabs attack worshippers entering the synagogue
17 October Paris	Swastikas and graffiti desecration of Trois Luc Jewish cemetery
17 October Marseilles	Arson at Jewish school
24 October Paris	CRIF (Representative Council of French Jewry) received an envelope, postmarked Nîmes, which contained white powder and a message: “the biological war against the Jewish lobby has begun,” signed “friends of Bin Laden.” A similar letter was sent on the same date to the BBYO of Paris
28 October Marseille	The “Gan Pardes” school in a northern suburb was firebombed, pro-Bin Laden and antisemitic graffiti were scrawled on the walls
2 November Julien La Croix (Paris)	For the second time (see 8 March), the synagogue was firebombed. Arab youths were seen fleeing the scene, leaving behind unexploded “Molotov cocktails”
4 November Nice	A central city synagogue was firebombed
9 November Toulouse	A gang of Moslem youth stood in front of the Jewish school harassing the pupils with antisemitic slurs and threats
30 November Rouen	Leaving the synagogue service, the Rabbi, community Vice-President and her husband were attacked by an Arab wielding a truncheon. The husband was hospitalised and was incapacitated for several weeks
1 December Nantes	Arabs threaten the Rabbi’s son
1 December Nantes	Antisemitic graffiti, “Death to the Jews” at the cathedral
14 December	French Ambassador to Britain, Daniel Bernard, called Israel “that shitty little State” at a dinner given by the editor of the <i>Sunday Telegraph</i> . The ambassador refused to apologise
16 December Paris	A Hanukkah screening of “Harry Potter”, reserved by the Jewish National Fund for Jewish children, was cancelled by the cinema management following Palestinian pressure and threats. The JNF

	organised a demonstration against this discrimination outside the cinema
18 December Marseilles	A knife-wielding Arab threatened Jewish children in a schoolyard
30 December Créteil (Paris suburb)	Two youths were arrested while stoning the Fredj Halimi synagogue and attempting to break in and firebomb it
30 December Créteil (Paris suburb)	The “Otzar Ha Torah” school was firebombed, destroying a classroom and leaving further structural damage

Such incidents continue into 2002, as we go to press, e.g.

5 January Goussainville (Paris suburb)	The synagogue was stoned and firebombed
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BACKGROUND TO THE ATTACKS AGAINST JEWS IN FRANCE

1) Numbers of threats against Jews in France 1990 / 2000

The recent report by the National Consultative Commission of Human Rights (NCCHR) submitted to the French Prime Minister in 2000 makes telling reading. It traces the pattern of antisemitic threats against Jews in France over the past decade.

That pattern shows a sharp rise in the number of antisemitic incidents recorded in the wake of the desecration of the Jewish cemetery at Carpentras in May 1990:

- 372 in **1990**
- 143 in **1991**
- 94 in **1992**
- 156 in **1993**
- 120 in **1994**
- 86 in **1995**
- 90 in **1996**
- 85 in **1997**
- 74 in **1998**
- 60 in **1999**, but then
- 603 in **2000**, an unprecedented level, **85%** of which concentrated in the last quarter of the year.

2) Acts of violence 1991-2000

The NCCHR report also lists antisemitic acts of violence reported over ten years.

- From 1991 (24) onwards, the pattern of the number and gravity of such acts of violence aimed at members of the Jewish community gradually dwindled

- 20 in 1992
- 14 in 1993
- 11 in 1994
- 2 in 1995
- 1 in 1996
- 3 in 1997
- 1 in 1998
- 9 in 1999, until
- 116 in 2000. The last quarter of 2000, the reports notes, shows a veritable eruption in terms of the number of incidents (111), due to events in the Middle East.

3) Overall Antisemitism in 2000

The political commentators Mayer and Michelat writing the report paint a fairly alarming picture of the situation. Clearly there were not necessarily more anti-Semites in French society in 2000 / 2001 than in 1990, but there are fewer unashamed anti-Semites, note the researchers at the French politics study centre: *"The rise in overt anti-Semitism is to be found in all sectors of the population: men and women, young and old, workers and executives, left and right (p.100)"*.

4) Breakdown of recorded acts of violence in 2000

116 antisemitic acts of violence were recorded:

- 44 attempted arson attacks
- 33 acts of damage by shots, stone-throwing or breaking of windows
- 33 attacks injuring 11 persons
- Synagogues and other places of worship targeted on 43 occasions
- 3 Jewish cemeteries desecrated
- 39 acts of violence targeting Jews leaving places of worship
- Teachers, pupils or coaches transporting pupils attacked on 9 occasions.

5) Sensitive period - October 2000

For 1-25 October, we can point to 50 and 80 acts of aggression in Paris and the Paris area respectively. The first set of indicators shows the breakdown of acts of violence committed over this period:

<u>Type</u>		<u>%</u>
Arson	6	12
Molotov cocktails	18	36
Physical attack	7	14
Objects thrown	12	24
Attempted arson	1	2
<u>Vandalism</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>50</u>	

Most common was the throwing of cocktails and other missiles at schools or synagogues. The second set of figures below shows the breakdown by target.

Attacks on buildings

Synagogues, schools	37
Private property	5
Cemetery	1

It is alarming to note that private property, in the form of apartments or business premises was targeted during this period. As for acts of aggression against the person, the attacks spare no one:

Assaults on individuals

Community leaders	5
Jews at home	11
Jews outside	13

<u>Acts in public</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>40</u>

The geographical distribution of these antisemitic attacks and assaults on Jews is provided in a third set of figures. It shows more precisely that it is notably in East Paris - i.e. the 19th and 20th arrondissements, which have high concentrations of multiethnic populations and the highest numbers of immigrants and Jews - that the most attacks took place. Of the 14 acts perpetrated over this period in just one such arrondissement, 3 involved threats, 3 insults, 3 throwing of objects, 3 Molotov cocktails, 1 physical attack, 1 act of vandalism and 1 arson attack.

6) Attacks on Jews in October 2000 in France / abroad

70 perpetrated in France, 29 in Canada, 22 in the US and 20 in the UK.

7) Profile of the perpetrators

A detailed report on these attacks – an extract of which was published in the weekly *Marianne* (17 – 23 September 2001) – was prepared at the Interior Ministry. It is based on the questioning of 42 suspects interviewed by the police. It specifies their profile: *"Most are individuals largely involved in delinquency and claiming adherence to no particular ideology. They nevertheless seem driven by a fairly general feeling of hostility towards Israel, exacerbated by the exaggerated media coverage of the clashes in the Middle East. This facilitates their identification with a conflict which, from their viewpoint, reflects the patterns of exclusion and failure of which they themselves feel victim in France."*

As the second Intifada is also a war of images and symbols, the force of the images has its effect. It is the images that impress on people's minds and demonise. It is with these images - and the reality they portray, imbued with violence - which the young identify with.

The analysis carried out by sociologist Laacher at a school of advanced social science studies of the profile of the youngsters having carried out such acts deserves to be underlined: it is the force of the images seen on TV that has pushed those most inclined to delinquency. For many observers, the impact of TV pictures is the main explanation for the escalation into violence. For Lallaoui, a community leader, these young people see very violent clashes on TV. They feel a sense of solidarity and, in empathy, attack Jewish symbols for lack of Israeli targets. The impact of the pictures is also the explanation given by Muslim youth leaders like Ali Rahmi, who runs a 'meet and discuss' group at Roubaix. He firmly condemns these "unpardonable" acts.

Lallaoui, a film director active in suburban movements for over twenty years, does not split hairs. *"We have been fighting for years against racism (...). We hear unacceptable things said in certain associations. The emotion stirred by certain pictures does not justify any of the violence. We have to say things as they are. Clearly these acts of violence are a tiny minority, but if we activists stay silent, that is a message we send to the most organised groups, who will understand that they can go ahead. I do not want to hear "Death to the Jews" chanted every time there is a demo. And even if things calm down, we are obliged to tackle this issue. We should be careful not to let a trend set in. A certain form of intellectual reasoning consists in not facing matters head on. During the Gulf War, we did not see such excesses. We had succeeded in channelling the anger. We need to do that again now ..."*

In a recent interview (December 2001), the French political commentator Mayer argues that there is within a disadvantaged population of Magreb immigrants a feeling of resentment towards society and towards the Jews, who are perceived, rightly or wrongly, as faring better than the Arabs in France. There is on the part of these youngsters a knee-jerk reaction of solidarity prompted by the TV pictures and an identification with what is happening in the Middle East.

8) Numbers questioned and arrested

On 22 October 2000, the Interior Ministry announced that its authorities had questioned 55 suspects since the start of the attacks, 38 who were subject to ongoing legal proceedings.

In all cases, the suspects were youths from the suburbs some of which had already been in trouble with the authorities. Six were to answer for the arson attack on the synagogue at Trappes, Les Yvelines. Twelve were charged with arson attacks on shops belonging to Jewish businesses and four for violence against the person. According to the information at our disposal, it seems that the bulk of those questioned were interviewed in October and to a lesser extent in November 2000. At that time, the pressure was high. The authorities were sensitive to the requests emanating from the various communities. But the pressure seems to have died down subsequently, with the numbers questioned tailing off significantly.

One wonders what impact (if any) this questioning of suspects might have had, since the acts and repression are continuing to this day.

The CNCDH report also states concerning the hundreds of acts of intimidation of an antisemitic nature, of sixty-odd persons questioned by the police, only five were subject to legal proceedings, being far Right. As if the others were not really antisemitic and their exactions not just as serious.

9) Silence in political circles

The silence of the political class in the face of these attacks against Jews has been deafening. During the past year, few politicians have reacted, as they seemed embarrassed or disinclined to do so. It is interesting however to contrast this surely troubling silence with the increasing numbers of public pronouncements that have been made by French politicians following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States, warning that the Republic could not accept Muslims being subjected to racism or discrimination and that Islam on the one hand and the Islamic extremism on the other should not be tarred with the same brush.

10) Jewish community figures

During the period October 2000 to December 2001, the Jewish community authorities recorded over 350 antisemitic incidents. The list can be consulted and verified.

11) Interior Ministry figures

For 2001, the Interior Ministry, which suddenly rushed to release figures and comment, announced it had recorded, up to 15 November 2001, in all 26 acts of violence - but only those acts causing the victim to be laid off work for a week were included - and 111 acts of intimidation or threats. Its conclusion was that the levels of violence had been exaggerated and it thus played down the figures provided by Jewish institutions. However,

- The Ministry experts admit that their statistics are far from complete
- Unreported incidents are excluded from their figures, whereas the Jewish institutions record all such acts
- Complaints had to have been registered.

The hurried and sudden reaction of the Ministry was designed to appease and silence the criticism emanating from the French Jewish community. The statistics and position taken by Ministry advisers seek to provide reassurance that the acts of violence are decreasing and that the Ministry is in control of the situation.

Conclusion

The continuing attacks on Jews in France – which have been more numerous than in any other Western country – are being carried out against the background of an alarming indifference, with public opinion and the political class preferring to appear ideologically blind. This indifference, coupled with the threat of anti-Semitism and the verifiably documented acts of violence, are prompting a feeling of utter abandonment within France's Jewish community.