



The Clash of Civilizations

The Muhammad Caricatures as a Case Study

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Europe is experiencing a wave of terror attacks in response to the publication of Muhammad caricatures. These attacks are a manifestation of a clash between two civilizations - one is the western liberalism and the other is radical Islamism that global jihadi organizations and the supporters of radical ideologies follow. These attacks in major European cities despite being tactical in nature, have a strategic effect on the population, decision makers and the relationship in the international arena between the West and Muslim countries and global jihadi organizations.

From the analysis of the attacks and the reactions to them, as presented in the article: the main concern in light of the success of recent weeks' attacks and the call for additional ones by terrorist organizations, is that **we may be facing the beginning of a new wave of violence**. In this context there is a possibility that attacks will spill over from France into the close European circle or even farther. The global nature of the threat is made possible, inter alia, due to amongs othersn, the threat posed by foreign fighters returning from jihadi theaters back to Europe and releasing those who have been convicted for terrorism.

The French response to the attacks stressed the importance of secularism, freedom of worship and freedom of speech in the Republic. France has elevated its level of readiness to the highest one and French President Macron announced a far-reaching program to contend with radical Islam. It is safe to assume that France will harden its position and policy vis a vis radical Islam at least in the foreseeable future, through shutting down Islamic institutions, large scale arrests, expulsion, increased penalties and more.

European leaders admitted that the **multicultural** approach attempting to promote integration of ethnic minorities into the general society has failed. It **neither stopped radicalization nor promoted integration**. In addition, the efficiency of deradicalization programs, rehabilitation and reintegration into society are being doubted. It seems that coping with radicalization requires the examination of new mechanisms that include tight cooperation between different sectors surrounded by strong public support.

The Terror Attacks in Europe

On September 2nd, 2020, slightly over five years after the January 2015 attack against the Charlie Hebdo staff members and the Hypercacher Supermarket Siege, the attackers' trial opened in Paris. To mark the beginning of the trial, Charlie Hebdo magazine chose to republish the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad that originally made it the target for jihadists. This republication led to an attack perpetrated on **September 25th, 2020** by a Pakistani immigrant on his twenties, Zaher Hassan Mahmood. Mahmood attacked, as a revenge for the caricatures a group of people with a machete close to the Charlie Hebdo's old office building and severely injured two people. France's Minister of Interior, Gerald Darmanin, admitted that the security forces played down the level of the threat applicable to the area where the building is situated¹.

The perpetrator reportedly arrived in France about three years prior as a minor (16 years old) by the name of Hassan Ali. Per the reports, he was unknown to the security services.² During his interrogation, the security forces located a clip on his phone where he announced his intention to perpetrate the attack. During his interrogation, he revealed that his spiritual leader was Mullah Maulana Ilyas Qadri, the leader of the Dawat-e-Islami Islamic organization. That said, the anthropologist Paul Roulier, an expert on South Asian Islam explained that this organization views blasphemy as a mortal sin and whoever defends the image of Muhammad is revered as a hero³. Additionally, it was found that the attacker used to watch clips of the leader of the Pakistani party Tehreek-e-Labbaik that organized demonstrations in Pakistan against the republication of the caricatures⁴. After the attack, Mahmood's father said he was proud of his son and happy that he had perpetrated the attack⁵.

Charlie Hebdo's staff offices have been under jihadi organizations threats as early as the beginning of September when al-Qaeda's leadership renewed its threats to hurt staff members. In an editorial in its official publication **One Ummah**, al-Qaeda's leadership posted, that Charlie Hebdo

1 <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/sep/26/suspect-in-new-charlie-hebdo-attack-angered-by-republished-cartoons-say-paris-police>

2 https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/29/world/europe/france-attack-suspect-terrorism.html?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=1570526_

3 https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/09/28/des-soufistes-radicaux_1800788

4 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/29/world/europe/france-attack-suspect-terrorism.html>

5 https://www.ict.org.il/Article/2596/Attack_in_front_of_the_ex-premises_of_Charlie_Hebdo_in_Paris

staff members will be hurt again if they dared to mock Muhammad again, as this was an affront to the honor of the Islamic nation and the Muslim Belief.



The Threats in One Umaah against Charlie Hebdo Staff Members

Three weeks later, on **October 16th**, in a Paris suburb, Abdoullakh Anzorov, an 18 years old Chechen immigrant, attacked and beheaded a history teacher, Samuel Paty, after the latter presented to his students the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad as part of a discussion on freedom of speech in the French Republic. It should be noted that the Paty's lesson caused a controversy in the weeks prior to the assassination. For example, one of the students' parents complained about it on social media and even called to have Paty censured and ultimately fired⁶.

The attacker lived in a small Normandy town some 100 kilometers away from the site of the attack.⁷ He had asked two students (minors, ages 14 and 15 who have been arrested after the attack and were not known to the security services prior) to identify the teacher. Moments before

⁶ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/21/europe/france-secularism-macron-samuel-paty-intl/index.html>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54581827>

he was eliminated by the police the attacker posted to social media that he had killed the teacher⁸.

The murder caused a deep shock in the local community, in France and all of Europe. French President Macron arrived at the scene a few hours later and announced that the murder happened because Mr. Paty was a teacher that taught about freedom of speech. “The whole country stands behind its teachers. Terrorists will not divide France, obscurantism will not win”⁹. In response to the attack, the French police opened a large-scale investigation to locate all those involved; among others, the parents that condemned Paty, relatives of the perpetrator and others. Moreover, several friends of the perpetrator have been arrested, among them an 18 years old and a 19 years old, one suspected of transporting the perpetrator to Paty’s school and the other of assisting him to buy weapons¹⁰ (the perpetrator was armed with a knife and a BB gun)¹¹.

Within this framework, Abdelhakim Sefrioui has also been arrested for posting threatening messages against Paty. Sefrioui, known for years to the French security services established in 2004 a pro-Palestinian charity named Collective Sheikh Yassin (after Hamas’ founder) and in July 2014 marched in pro Gaza demonstrations in Paris where he praised Hamas and the activity of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)¹². In the speech given by President Macron after the attack, he mentioned that Sefrioui’s charity will be outlawed for “direct involvement” in the attack on Paty¹³. Similarly, the French minister of interior announced that organizations that supported or were involved in the attack will be outlawed. For example, the Pantin mosque in a northern Parisian suburb will be shut down after sharing clips against Paty and posting his school’s address. The mosque has expressed regrets for the clips, took them down and even posted an announcement condemning Paty’s murder¹⁴.

⁸ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/21/europe/france-secularism-macron-samuel-paty-intl/index.html>

⁹ <https://www.dw.com/en/france-teacher-decapitated-in-gruesome-islamist-terror-attack-near-paris/a-55304870>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/22/samuel-patys-killer-was-reportedly-in-contact-with-jihadist-in-syria>

¹¹ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/BJk117lvww>

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54632353>; <https://www.en24news.com/2020/10/who-is-abdelhakim-sefrioui-a-figure-of-radical-islam-who-is-among-those-in-custody.html>

¹³ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/head-of-pro-hamas-group-and-school-parent-said-behind-fatwa-on-beheaded-teacher/>

¹⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/21/europe/france-secularism-macron-samuel-paty-intl/index.html>

Per a number of reports the attacker, born in Moscow to a Chechen family, emigrated to France in 2008 and had a criminal history of minor offenses but no connection to terrorism¹⁵. Yet, prior to the attack, he was in contact with a Russian speaking jihadist residing in Syria¹⁶. Additionally, there are reports per which his sister joined ISIS in 2014¹⁷.

Following the beheading of Paty, **ISIS and al-Qaeda** posted banners attempting to reap credit for the attack. Al Tabbat media outlet, assisting with al-Qaeda propaganda posted a banner claiming that the article published in One Ummah inspired the attacker whereas Aamaq agency, an ISIS affiliate media agency, claimed that the attacker was inspired by ISIS.

On **October 29th**, three people were killed in a stabbing attack that took place at the Notre Dame Cathedral in Nice, France. During the attack, one of the victims was beheaded. The attacker, Ibrahim Issaoui, a 21 years old Tunisian who was armed with several knives, was shot by the police and severely injured. Security services arrested a few suspects for involvement in the attack, among them a 29 years old Tunisian who has immigrated to France with the attacker. The investigators believe that the attacker arrived at Lampedusa Island south of Sicily (a known transit location for North African immigrants) on September 20th, continued to the Port of Bari on October 9th and two days later arrived in Nice¹⁸, likely via train when the attacker had no documents except a certificate from the Red Cross in Italy¹⁹.

The wave of attacks spread beyond the French borders and on **November 2nd**, another attack was perpetrated in Vienna by a terrorist armed with an automatic weapon, machete and a fake suicide vest²⁰. The attack claimed the lives of four people and injured 15 more. The attacker was killed after being pursued by the police²¹. The attacker, Kujtim Fejzulai, 21 years old Austrian of Balkan descent, was known to the security services after attempting to join ISIS in Syria. He was captured in Turkey in September 2018 and was exiled to Austria in January 2019 to serve his sentence;

¹⁵ https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/entry/abdullah-abouyevidovitch-a-le-suspect-de-conflans-sainte-honorine-est-un-refugie-dorigine-tchetchene_fr_5f8aef80c5b6dc2d17f744c6

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54632353>

¹⁷ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/world/europe/.premium-1.9241000>

¹⁸ https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20201102-french-police-make-more-arrests-as-catholics-pray-in-shadow-of-nice-attack?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=1682291_

¹⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54745251>

²⁰ https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/shooting-incident-reported-in-austrian-synagogue-one-casualty-reported-647801?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=I+used+to+be+a+++Never+Trumper+++Not+anymore&utm_campaign=Nov+3+Day

²¹ <https://www.dw.com/en/vienna-terror-attack-islamist-motive-suspected-in-deadly-shootings/a-55478882>

which has been reduced to a mere 22 months²² under set supervision terms and his undertaking to participate in a deradicalization program. Following the attack, Austrian Minister of Interior, Karl Nehammer, claimed that Fejzulai deceived his supervisors when he convinced the latter at the end of the deradicalization program that he was no longer an extremist. The minister's claim was in contrast to the deradicalization program managers statement per which no assessment was made that Fejzulai was no longer an extremist²³.

It was further reported that Fejzulai used to frequent a notorious mosque in the Ottakring area of Vienna where the preacher used to gather a group of extremists and convinced them to go to Syria, before he himself was killed there in a drone strike. Moreover, in July 2020 Fejzulai went to Slovakia and tried to purchase ammunition but failed. The Slovakian police reported him to the Austrian police, but it turned out that the latter didn't follow up²⁴.

The day after the attack, ISIS claimed responsibility and disseminated the attacker's photo, AKA Abu Dajana al-Albani, an Albanian Muslim. Its news agency Amaq described him as "a soldier of the caliphate" and posted a clip showing him pledging allegiance to the caliph Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Quraishi²⁵. Apparently ISIS made use of the attackers post to social media prior to the attack where he presented various weapons²⁶.



ISIS Claims Responsibility for the Vienna Attack

²² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54788613>

²³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54798508>

²⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54798508>

²⁵ 3.11.20. RocketChat.

²⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2020/nov/03/vienna-austria-synagogue-terror-attack-police-live-updates>



The Vienna Attacker

It should be noted that even though Austria didn't suffer from jihadist attacks, the BVT (Austria's domestic intelligence agency) has been monitoring some 94 people that returned from conflict regions and the ministry of interior assessed at the end of 2018 that over 100 Austrians were still fighting in Syria and Iraq²⁷.

The above attacks are part of a violent cycle revolving around the publication of the caricatures of Muhammad in the name of freedom of speech. The caricatures were first published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2005 and in 2006. That, despite wide spread condemnation in the Muslim world, boycotting of products, protests, torching of European embassies and even explicit calls for revenge against the caricaturists²⁸. An attempt to execute the threats was made in 2007 and again in 2010 when the Danish security services foiled an attempt to assassinate the caricaturist Kurt Westergard and another attack on the newspaper's office²⁹. Unlike these failed attempts, al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for detonating an explosive charge near the Danish embassy in Islamabad Pakistan in 2008, as a revenge for the caricatures³⁰.

Alongside the above attacks, a few recent attempts were foiled in Europe recently. For example, two minors were arrested in Belgium on suspicion that they have planned a stabbing attack

²⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/austria/>

²⁸ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/flemming-rose-danish-cartoons/473670/>

²⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/04/danish-cartoonist-axe-attack>

³⁰ https://www.ps.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/pdf-filer/fordrag2.pdf

against police officers. According to a Belgian reporter, the suspects made a video wherein they pledged allegiance to ISIS³¹.

This chain of violence needs to be understood on the backdrop of additional lethal attacks that took place in Europe, mainly in France, in recent years, among them a shooting attack and a few suicide attacks in several targets throughout Paris five years ago, in **November 2015** that killed 130 people and a truck ramming attack in Nice in **July 2016** during Bastille Day celebrations that killed 86 people and injured hundreds more.

The French Response to the Attacks

President Macron's Speech on the Fight against Separatism³²

On October 2nd, 2020, after several delays, President Macron gave a speech where he presented his plan to fight "Islamic Separatism". It was important to him to present a decisive image a year and a half prior to the 2022 presidential elections when the polls show him neck and neck with Marine Le Pen the leader of the extreme right National Rally Party (former National Front Party).

For Macron secularism is "the freedom to believe or not believe, the possibility to worship in any way as long as the public order is guaranteed. Secularism is the state's neutrality....it is the adhesive of a united France". Therefore, one must ensure that secularism is aggressively zealously respected without being dragged into traps set by extremists "that stigmatize" all Muslims.³³

"What we must tackle is Islamist separatism. A conscious, theorized, political-religious project is materializing through repeated deviations from the Republic's values, which is often reflected by the formation of a counter-society as shown by children being taken out of school, the development of separate community sporting and cultural activities serving as a pretext for teaching principles which aren't in accordance with the Republic's laws. It is indoctrination and,

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/05/two-teenagers-arrested-in-belgium-on-suspicion-of-terrorist-plot>; <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/europe/1604589421-belgium-arrests-two-teenagers-over-alleged-islamic-state-plot>

³² <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron>

³³ 1905 French law on the Separation of the Churches and the State: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france>

through this, the negation of our principles, gender equality and human dignity. The problem is this ideology, which claims that its own laws are superior to the Republic's."³⁴

Per the French president, as of the end of 2017, the state implemented deradicalization programs in 15 neighborhoods, 15 places of worship were shut down as well as 4 schools and 13 charities.³⁵

The Plan for the Necessary Changes

In President Macron's speech on the Fight against Separatism, he presented a comprehensive program that includes five aspects, including the promotion of a new education program and training for religious preachers. President Macron wishes to implement a compulsory school curriculum for all children ages three and up, as of fall 2021 to significantly eliminate home schooling that to date amounts to 50,000 children, a number that is rising annually. Within two years, a real policy on teaching languages and cultures at the school system will be promoted and will be administered by teachers who have linguistic qualifications and respect the values of the Republic.³⁶

Macron wants to put an end the situation where Imams and other religious leaders are being trained overseas and sent to operate in France. Per him, France will train its own Imams to serve their public and disconnect from the "Consular Islam"³⁷. Imams will not only be trained and get qualified in France, but they will also be required to sign a contract that if violated they will be terminated from their positions. Without being detailed about the steps that will be taken against the violators, Macron said he wanted to protect those in charge of the mosques from being coerced by extremists. The goal, per him, is to prevent the extremists, which admittedly are very sophisticated, from leveraging the weakness of the democratic rules to take over mosques and religious charities.³⁸

³⁴ <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron>

³⁵ <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron>

³⁶ <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron>

³⁷ Consular Islam system describes the foreign influence on Europe's management of Islam. Many European countries recruited Imams using consular networks in order to avoid fundamentalist effect. For more information see: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/ressources/pdfs/publications/a-french-islam-is-possible-report.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron>

The president undertook to identify ways for equality, fight any and all discrimination and promised that anyone, regardless of color, origin or religion, will be able to find his place in the Republic.

Simultaneously, France is preparing to expulse 231 foreigners on its watch list of suspected of religious extremists. Of these 231, 180 are currently incarcerated and 51 will soon be. According to Reuters, France defines extremists as “people who are in the process of radicalization, may join terrorist groups overseas or partake in terrorism activity”³⁹.

Responses to the Attacks in the Arab World

Turkey

Erdogan’s relationship with Macron has been tense in the past two years. They are divided on issues such as security, NATO, and the Mediterranean. Macron criticized the Turkish activity in Syria and warned Turkey that it shouldn’t expect NATO’s support if it continues to act without consulting with the rest of the alliance members. As far as the eastern Mediterranean is concerned, France has an ongoing dispute with Turkey over natural gas reserves and marine borders, and it supports Greece and Cyprus in the latter’s dispute with Turkey. Consequentially, Macron became a target for Erdogan’s attacks and lashing out.

Since Macron’s speech, Erdogan focused on the anti-extremism steps Macron presented and dubbed them Islamophobic. The Turkish pro-government media published critical articles on the French security services’ activity, raids and arrests against Islamic networks and prominent personalities⁴⁰. For example, they criticized the police for the arrest of Idriss Sihamedi the president of the BarakaCity NGO and his family members. Sihamedi was arrested in a raid that was broadcasted in the media after he had criticized Macron’s latest comments on the “Islamic Separatism”. Following the arrest Sihamedi requested political asylum in Turkey for himself and his organization’s member. His supporters described the raid as an act of intimidation and violation of

³⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-security-foreigners-idUSKBN2730RV>

⁴⁰ See for example: 26.10.2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/fransa-islamofobi-ile-mucadele-kolektifi-guvenlik-nedeniyle-calismalarini-yurt-disinda-surdurecek/2019785> ; 26.10.2020. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/fulya-soybas/avrupada-islamofobi-nereye-gidiyor-41645635>

the freedom of speech. To rebut, the French minister of interior accused Sihamedi of supporting terrorism via a tweet that has been erased but didn't provide any supporting evidence. Up until the attack, Sihamedi was harsh critic of Macron's plan to fight Islamic extremism⁴¹. It should be noted, BarakaCity much like Mili Gorus (National Outlook) in Germany, collect charitable donations through *Zakat* and transfer these funds to Muslims all over, including in Gaza and collaborate with Hamas, The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups on financial matters.⁴²

Erdogan wishes to turn Macron into a symbol, the leader of Islamophobia in Europe, in order to improve his status and increase support from his base. He needs it because according to polls, had the presidential elections take place today, Erdogan will lag behind his main opponent, Istanbul mayor Imamoglu Ekrem⁴³.

Erdogan highlighted in his tweets that the Muslim world is determined to stand against the French attack on Muhammad "that bestowed honor on Mecca, al-Medina, Asia, Africa, Europe and the entire world" as this was a matter of honor to Muslims⁴⁴. In a speech given at the Turkish Parliament, Erdogan stated that Islamophobia and disrespect to the Prophet Muhammad are spreading among the European leaders who are not afraid anymore to hide their hatred of Islam. He also accused European countries, particularly France, of having intentions to embark on a crusade against Muslims⁴⁵.

It should be noted that during festivities to celebrate Muhammad's birthday (which in 2020 were held on October 29th) Erdogan called the Muslim world to boycott French products.⁴⁶

Most of the pro-government Turkish media are a true reflection of Erdogan. They lately described France as a "colonialist" "racist" country where Muslims are being persecuted "much like the European Jews were demonized in the 1920s". The Turkish authorities do not accept the fact that Macron wants to solidify the control of Muslim places of worship on French soil and to that end decides to terminate the practice of sending foreign Imams to France. Turkey is the country most invested in managing the Islam in France because it, alone, sends over half of the 300 foreign

⁴¹ 30.10.2020. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1756316/middle-east>

⁴² 12.12.2020. <https://www.france24.com/en/20141212-french-muslim-ngos-accusations-terror-links-perle-espoir-syria-jihad-terrorism>

⁴³ March 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyNote77-Danforth.pdf>

⁴⁴ 28.10.2020. <https://twitter.com/RT Erdogan/status/1321422787051966464/video/1>

⁴⁵ 29.10.2020. <https://www.yeniasir.com.tr/politika/2020/10/29/namussuzlar>

⁴⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54692485>

Imams⁴⁷. It is concerned of losing its influence if the law to reinforce secularism will pass in France because “The Turkish Union for Islamic and Cultural Affairs” (Ditib) will lose its business and influence should that happen.

According to the nationalist Turkish periodical Misvak, Macron has been defamed in multiple caricatures and presented in a demonic light. For example, he was compared to the Ethiopian army general and then self-proclaimed king Abraha, whom according to Muslim tradition led an army of elephants to destroy the Kaaba in Mecca as a revenge for defacing a church he built in Yemen. His army however collapsed en route because of a flock of birds that were sent by Allah and threw small stones at his army. The lesson is that much like Abraha’s plan to destroy the holy of holies of Islam has failed due to god’s intervention, the same will happen to Macron and crony Merkel’s plan to destroy Islam and insult Muhammad’s honor⁴⁸.



Misvak’s Caricatures Mocking Macron and Merkel

⁴⁷ <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/barcin-yinanc/france-and-turkey-at-odds-on-french-islam-152476>

⁴⁸ 25.10.2020. <https://www.facebook.com/misvakdergi/photos/a.1668212910067998/2820254578197153/>

The harshest Turkish response was made in English by the director of Erdogan’s propaganda bureau, Fahrettin Altun. Altun took upon himself the role of spokesman and defender of European Muslims and strengthened their belief that the West detests Islam while threatening Europeans: “The Muslims will not leave because you don’t want us. We will not turn the other cheek when you insult us. We will defend ourselves and ours at all costs.” Additionally, he condemned Charlie Hebdo when he said “we condemn the vile effort of the publication to spread cultural racism and hatred...⁴⁹ this is the product of xenophobia, Islamophobia and an atmosphere of cultural intolerance the French leadership seems to wish for its citizens⁵⁰”.

It seems that Ankara doesn’t mind creating a rift between Europeans and Muslims and it will provide extremists, regardless of whether they are Muslims or white supremacists, with additional ammunition. That said, the Turkish ministry of foreign affairs (but not Erdogan personally) issued a statement condemning the “vicious” attack on October 29th in Nice.

Indeed, Erdogan talks obsessively about freedoms to Muslims in the West however only days after the attack on Charlie Hebdo he said the freedom is “not unlimited”. Within this framework it was decided to try a handful of Turkish journalists for sharing the Muhammad caricatures.

Egypt

The Sheikh of al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayeb decided to form an international committee of Islamic jurists that would sue Charlie Hebdo for publishing the caricatures. Per him, France cannot excuse the insults to Muslim’s feelings by citing freedom of speech but rather it has to exercise discretion and self-restraint on sensitive issues. That said, he condemned the Paty murder as well as Islamophobia.

Other Countries

The Iranian ministry of foreign affairs summoned the French representative to seek a clarification on French policy on the issue. Similarly, in Pakistan the foreign affairs ministry summoned the French Ambassador to Islamabad and provided him with a formal complaint letter over Macron’s statements.

⁴⁹ 27.10.2020. <https://twitter.com/fahrettinaltun/status/1321184914885193728>

⁵⁰ 27.10.2020. <https://twitter.com/fahrettinaltun/status/1321184916453863427>

Additionally, on the day of the Notre Dame Cathedral attack in Nice (October 29th) an assailant stabbed a guard at the French consulate in Jeddah, KSA⁵¹.

Demonstrations and Products Boycotts

Across the Muslim world, many went out to protest the insults to Muhammad's honor. For example, Muslim residents of Jaffa delivered a protest letter to the French Ambassador to Israel and demonstrated, waving signs condemning France's policy toward Muslims, next to the residence of the French Ambassador in Israel.

Alongside the protests many Muslims around the world participated in an online campaign to boycott French products, predominantly under the hashtag #مقاطعة_المنتجات_الفرنسية (boycott French products). Clips showing French products being removed from store shelves have been uploaded. Many Muslims called for a continued boycott until France will apologize for slighting Muhammad's honor. Al-Jazeera channel widely covered the demonstrations and the online boycott campaign⁵².

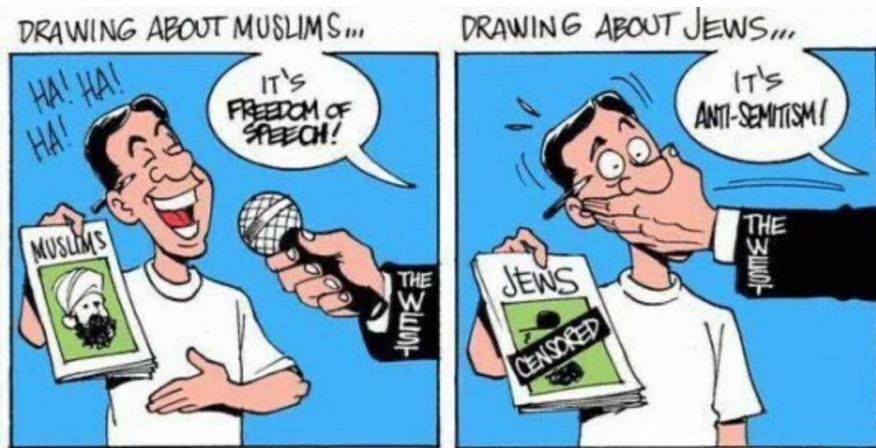


Social Media Campaign to Boycott French Products

⁵¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20201029-saudi-man-arrested-after-stabbing-guard-at-french-consulate-in-jeddah>

⁵² 1.11.2020. https://twitter.com/AJA_Egypt/status/1322797883201126400

Moreover, on social media, Muslim users accused France of double standards and hypocrisy for not clashing with the Jewish community for fear of being branded anti-Semites whereas at the same time they not concerned at all to mock Islam and encourage Islamophobia⁵³.



Blaming France for Double Standards - Attitude towards Jews vs. Muslims

Some Muslims said they were willing to sacrifice their souls for Allah and the Prophet Muhammad⁵⁴, and others called to their governments⁵⁵ to expel the French Ambassador⁵⁵.

France did not sit idly by in the face of the responses in the Arab world and especially vis a vis Erdogan's statements. First, it brought back its ambassador from Ankara and shared its concerns over Erdogan's rude comments and the lack of condemnation of Paty's murder on his part.

Additionally, on October 31st, Macron gave an hour-long interview to al-Jazeera, the Qatari TV channel⁵⁶. Regarding Erdogan's comments that questioned Macron's mental health Macron said: "I never insulted a leader, whoever he was". Macron said he would have like to reconcile with Ankara however this was mostly up to Turkey. He accused Erdogan of being "belligerent with his NATO allies" and demanded that "the president of Turkey respect France, respect the EU, respect its values, won't lie or cast insults".

Macron dubbed the campaign to boycott French products in certain Muslim countries where the above demonstrations took place as "inappropriate" and "unacceptable". Again, he condemned

⁵³ https://twitter.com/hashtag/مقاطعة_المنتجات_الفرنسية; 30.10.2020.

⁵⁴ 29.10.2020. <https://twitter.com/mostafa0magdy/status/1321706704443244545>

⁵⁵ 28.10.2020. <https://twitter.com/Noursal14993531/status/1321380965357441024/photo/1>

⁵⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/31/frances-macron-cartoons-came-from-free-and-independent-news>

Islamic terrorism and the “extreme elements” who claimed they were acting in the name of Islam and claimed that “the main victims, more than 80%, are Muslims”.

Macron explained the “the basics of the French model”, i.e. “the values of the Republic, freedom of speech, writing, thought and drawing/painting”. During the interview he further said: “I understand one may be shocked from the caricatures, but I will never accept that violence is justified. Our freedoms, our rights our destiny is to protect them”. The president used the interview as an opportunity to reaffirm his wishes to fight terrorism in France. He condemned the “manipulations” around his statements on the Muhammad caricatures that “sometimes came from political and religious leaders” that announced that the caricatures were published within the framework of “the French government’s war” against Islam.

ISIS and al-Qaeda

In several of their publications ISIS and al-Qaeda called for revenge against the French whether in France or elsewhere. For example, **ISIS** posted in its *al-Naba* magazine instructions for attacks against the French and their allies, especially in Europe, such as planting explosive devices, stabbing and ramming attacks, poison injection, torching houses, stores and agricultural fields⁵⁷.

In another *al-Naba* article, ISIS said that the demonstrations and the boycott of Muslims against western elements that slight Muhammad’s honor are ineffective and do not deter the westerners. Case in point, since 2004 when the caricatures saw light the West has been insulting Muhammad’s honor. In light of the above, the vicious circle, per ISIS, needs to be broken and the West has to be effectively deterred. Such deterrence will be achieved by armed attacks against French citizens, institutes and interests around the world and especially in the Middle East⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ Al-Naba, vol. 257 (October 22nd, 2020), p. 3

⁵⁸ Al-Naba, vol. 258 (October 29th, 2020), p. 3



Anti French al-Naba Posts

Additionally, **al-Shabab al-Mujahidin**, al-Qaeda’s extension in Somalia, posted a call to Muslims to defend Muhammad’s honor and follow the Quashi brothers, Abdallah the Chechen and others. It highlighted that “our nation should know that the war today is not against ‘terrorist organizations’ or ‘extreme parties’ as they call it but rather it is a war against Islam and Muslims, a war between faith and heresy, between shariaa and secularism and between the followers of Muhammad to the followers of Qaab Bin Ashraf (a seventh century AD Jewish poet who mocked Muhammad)⁵⁹.

Conclusions and Assessment

The wave of attacks in response to the publication of the caricatures, as well as the radicalization processes discussed herein, are a manifestation of a clash between two civilizations that view reality in a way that cannot be bridged anymore. One is the western liberalism that France follows and the other is radical Islamism that global jihadi organizations and the supporters of radical ideologies follow. The pragmatic and moderate Islam that comprises most of the Muslim world is found in the middle.

The radicals and their supporters do not hesitate to act violently or incite to violence against anything they regard as offensive to Islam, in this case - Muhammad’s honor. The sensitivity to Muhammad’s honor is at its height these days in light of the Muslim’s world preparations to celebrate the birth of Muhammad (Molad al-Nabi) on the 12th of the third month of the Muslim

⁵⁹ Telegram, 1.11.2020.

calendar (Rabia al-Ol) that in 2020 coincided with October. This month is considered by Muslims as the most significant month due to Muhammad being born during its course.

The main concern is that we may be facing the beginning of a new wave of violence where even tactical attacks may have strategic importance. It may very well be that in light of the success of recent weeks' attacks and the call for additional ones by terrorist organizations we will see a growing wave of lone wolf attacks. The competition between ISIS and al-Qaeda as well as the above success of recent attacks may encourage such escalation. In fact, the terrorist organizations are constantly leveraging the current tension, inter alia due to the publication of the caricatures and the success of recent attacks to recruit, influence and encourage lone wolf attacks. Apart from generally threatening the West the terrorist organizations have singled out specific persons as targets for elimination, e.g. the caricaturists. **At the end of the day, these attacks in major European cities despite being tactical in nature, have a strategic effect on the population, decision makers and the relationship in the international arena between the West and Muslim countries and global jihadi organizations.**

An analysis of the attacks draws the following conclusions:

1. The radicalization process was and still is a central component in mobilizing people even when they are not within a hierarchical structure. In this space jihadi organizations compete via inspiration or influence.
2. Much like many other attacks that took place in Europe in recent decades, some of the perpetrators already had either a criminal record or a jihadi activity history. Some were former prisoners, some partook in deradicalization programs and some or rather most of them were on European security services watch lists.
3. The current wave of attacks, much like its predecessors and ongoing arrests, attest that the global jihadi organizations efforts to attack on European soil have not died down. On the contrary, they are going on in full force. Dramatic events such as the Muhammad caricatures provide triggers to activate and mobilize dormant infrastructures already in existence on European soil.
4. The success of "lone wolf" attacks invites copycats and additional attack attempts under the same modus operandi. The global jihadi organizations, on their end, are trying and will try to

leverage the success of the attacks into continued inspiration and encouragement for further terror attacks.

5. Organizational involvement, as the case might be in the Vienna attack may cause a larger number of victims due to the assistance of the organization in acquiring weapons and the supply of better trained attackers, compared to the “lone wolves”.
6. An analysis of the “lone wolves” attacks of the current wave shows they weren’t so “lonely”. Almost always the attacker was surrounded by a circle of friends or activists that at the very least knew, if not actively assisted the attacker to perpetrate the attack. The arrests after each attack and details released regarding the preparation of the attacks and their execution attest to that.
7. Additionally, there are concerns that increased activity by radical Islam will lead to an increase of far-right attacks. For example, after the attack at the Notre Dame Cathedral in Nice, an armed male which per reports was wearing a “defend Europe” coat and apparently a member of “Generation Identity”⁶⁰ far right group was shot down in Avignon.

The French response to the attacks stressed the importance of secularism, freedom of worship and freedom of speech in the Republic. Whereas previous French leaders implemented steps intended against Muslim - such as the prohibition to wear head scarves and the prohibition to cover one’s face, France has now elevated its level of readiness to the highest one and the president announced a far-reaching program to contend with radical Islam. **It is safe to assume that France will harden its position and policy vis a vis radical Islam at least in the foreseeable future**, through shutting down Islamic institutions, large scale arrests, explosions, increased penalties and more.

In this context there is a possibility that attacks will spill over from France into the close European circle or even farther. **The global nature of the threat** is made possible; inter alia, due to the threat posed by foreign fighters returning from jihadi theaters back to Europe. Indeed, each European country has its own policy in contending with the latter, but it seems all of them are having difficulties on that front. Per reports, some 6,000 European Muslims have arrived at jihadi theaters and the highest number among them was French. Of the above, over 1,300 have

⁶⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/france-terror-avignon-attack-stabbing-police-shooting-nice-today-b1420399.html>

returned to Schengen member states⁶¹. These have gained combat experience in jihadi theaters, have formed connections and now pose significant security threat to their countries.

Additionally, there are concerns about releasing those who have been convicted for terrorism. Prisons are fertile ground for recruitment, formation of operatives' networks and attack planning. Only recently France reported the highest number of incarcerated radicals (400) in addition to some 26,000 extremists on its security services watch lists. About half of the above have undergone radicalization in mosques, prison, internet or overseas⁶².

In recent decades Europe has adopted a multicultural approach while attempting to promote integration of ethnic minorities into the general society. **The multiculturalism policy effectively enabled the preservation of non-liberal values under the protection of liberal values. It neither stopped radicalization nor promoted integration.** At the end of the first decade of the twenty first century European leaders admitted that this policy has failed and examined other approaches. It seems that even those didn't mitigate the scope of radicalization among Muslim communities in the West and strong evidence of that is the recruitment to the caliphate at the beginning of the second decade and the waves of violence around the Muhammad caricatures.

Competing with radicalization requires tight cooperation of multiple actors - internal as well as external - to win public support for such a process. That said, many questions arise regarding the struggle with the radicalization processes in the West. **The efficiency of deradicalization programs, rehabilitation and reintegration into society are being doubted time and again** and require the West, particularly Europe, to create better mechanisms to contend with radicalization among its citizens.

⁶¹ https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/12/ICCT_Terrorism_Threat_Assessment.pdf

⁶² https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/12/ICCT_Terrorism_Threat_Assessment.pdf

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Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism. ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy.

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