

Keeping Kosher

In the week of deadly attacks by Islamic terrorists in Paris, a heavily-armed 32-year-old Frenchman born of Malian descent, Amedy Coulibaly, on January 9, 2015 stormed the Hyper Cacher kosher supermarket store near the Porte de Vincennes in eastern Paris and killed four Jews during a day-long siege. The French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, in his speech to the National Assembly on January 13, 2015 said that the murders have “touched the heart of the whole of France, but France has risen up.”

It was a felicitous, welcome, and symbolic exemplar of France “rising again,” at least in regard to civil rights of its citizens, as well a sign of the resilience of the French Jewish community, that on March 15, 2015 the Hyper Cacher store reopened. The small ceremony was attended by the French Minister of the Interior, Bernard Cazeneuve, and by Joel Mergui, the President of the Jewish Consistory. The store had been repaired after the heavy damage caused by the French Special Forces who conducted the assault to free the hostages held by the terrorist, Coulibaly.

Coulibaly, who had killed a trainee policewoman, in the Paris suburb of Montrouge the previous day, was himself killed by the police who launched the attack to free the hostages in the store. The terrorist, in a prerecorded video published three days after the attack, claimed allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS), and it was clear he had not been a lone wolf. When his apartment was searched after his death, an arsenal of weapons was found, including a Kalashnikov, a stun gun, a detonator, pistols, and sticks of dynamite, suggesting he had been funded and assisted.

Coulibaly’s companion, the 26-year-old Hayat Boumeddiene, who fled Paris via Turkey to Syria, to reside in the “Caliphate,” was thought to have been the main accomplice of the terrorist.

She gave an interview to the magazine, *Dar al-Islam*, the English language propaganda paper of IS, confirming she had entered the Caliphate. She also reported that her companion had wanted, after the Caliphate was proclaimed, to "join his brothers and fight the enemies of Allah." Even more upsetting than Boumeddiene's words is the cover and contents of the magazine which contained her article: the title was "May Allah curse France," and the contents included 11 pages of anti-French propaganda, and praise for the massacre on January 7 of cartoonists, journalists, and policemen at the Paris headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo*.

However, others have now been arrested. On March 13, 2015 a Paris court filed preliminary charges against two men, of six total suspects, for participating in a terrorist group with intent to commit a crime. They are believed to have been linked to Coulibaly, and to have provided him with logistical support, including weapons and vehicles.

French authorities are investigating other suspects, some of whom knew Coulibaly in prison, others who aided Boumedienne to flee France, and some who were members of a support cell in Spain. Most troubling for the authorities is that Coulibaly was linked to the two Kouachi brothers, Said and Cherif, who had massacred 12 people at the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo*. The brothers claimed they were acting on behalf the al-Qaeda branch in Yemen. All three terrorists were connected through membership in the jihadist group known as the Buttes Chaumont network, in the 19th arrondissement of Paris.

Caution is obviously necessary for Jews in France. As a precaution, stores in the largely Jewish section of the Marais were told to close on the day of the murders on January 9, and temples were advised not to hold Sabbath services. More than 15,000 police and troops were deployed to guard Jewish schools and institutions.

Yet interestingly, there was also a social media campaign to

prevent attacks on Muslims. Twitters on the Internet using the hashtag "*VoyageAvecMoi*" (Travel with me) offered to accompany Muslims who feared to travel on public transport.

The hero for both Jews and Muslims was Ahmed Merabet, the French-born Muslim of Algerian descent police officer who was slain while on patrol in the streets of Paris by the Kouachi brothers who were fleeing the Charlie Hebdo massacre. At his funeral, French President François Hollande praised him as a symbol of the "diversity of French forces of law and order," and bestowed on him in the name of the French Republic the award of Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

As a result of the murders of journalists and Jews two questions may be asked. What kind of controls should there be on speech and expression, particularly incitement to violence and hate speech, and how should terrorists be treated? The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens proclaimed (in Article 11) freedom of the press, free communication of thoughts and opinions. The French Press Law of July 1881, supplemented by a law of 1986, also provides for free speech except if it is abused. Abuses include defamation, slander, and incitement to hate. The anti-terror law passed in November 2014 imposes a five-year prison sentence and a fine of 75,000 euros.

Not surprisingly, Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front, (FN) has called for the harshest penalties against terrorists or the threat of terrorism. In 2015 she called for the restoration of capital punishment that, paradoxically, was abolished in 1981 by Robert Badinter, who was Jewish, when he was Minister of Justice. FN leaders wants sermons in mosques to be spoken in French, and Muslim associations to be monitored with vigilance and their funding strictly controlled. They hold that all involved in jihad must be severely punished including loss of French citizenship if they have dual citizenship.

The reopening of the kosher store and the presence of senior French officials is a demonstration of the resilience of the French Jewish community and a welcome reminder of the campaign to overcome Islamist terror. It is even more welcome and meaningful when contrasted with the celebration in Ramallah by the Palestinian Authority, starting on March 10, 2015, of the anniversary of the Israeli Coastal Road Massacre of March 1978 in which Palestinian Fatah terrorists hijacked a bus and murdered 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children, and injured more than 70 others. The PA dedicated a square in the city in the name of Dalal Mughrabi, the leader of the terrorist group, who it declared was for us “a model and a symbol.”

The logical conclusion can only be that the PA instead of declaring that murder is the way “to liberate the homeland,” and in place of honoring terrorists, should buy and eat some kosher food and bring it to the peace negotiation table.

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