

Muslims Around the World Want to Punish France; Where is the West's Solidarity with the French?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The murder of a French middle-school teacher by a Muslim fanatic would, one would have thought, led to an expression of horror worldwide, and a demand not only in France but by non-Muslims everywhere that the Muslim political leaders and clerics denounce that murder in no uncertain terms. Alas, that is not what has happened. Instead, it is the Muslim lands that are now intent on punishing France with economic boycotts. It is French visitors who are being warned to be wary in Muslim lands, lest they be attacked by Muslims “getting back” at France by attempting to murder its nationals abroad. This

dangerous situation is discussed here: “France Warns Citizens to Be Cautious as Anger Seethes in Muslim World Over Cartoons,” [Algemeiner](#), October 27, 2020:

France warned its citizens living or traveling in several Muslim-majority countries to take extra security precautions on Tuesday as anger surged over cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad...

France’s Foreign Ministry on Tuesday issued safety advice to French citizens in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iraq and Mauritania, advising them to exercise caution. They should stay away from any protests over the cartoons and avoid any public gatherings.

“It is recommended to exercise the greatest vigilance, especially while traveling, and in places that are frequented by tourists or expatriate communities,” it said.

The French Embassy in Turkey issued similar advice to its citizens there...

The French Interior Minister, Gerald Darmanin, has been like a rock in the current crisis: he will give no quarter to Muslims in or out of France who threaten the French state, French economic interests, or individual French people. Neither he nor President Macron has any patience for those who presume to dictate what can be discussed or shown in a French school or, indeed, anywhere in France. They have come down firmly on the side of free speech in the case of the cartoons of Muhammad, and have had the “forces of order” (the police and other security personnel) rounding up Muslims suspected of terrorist ties, including those who were sought most immediately for having whipped up the Chechen murderer of Paty or, after Paty’s murder, of celebrating it on social media.

Paris has recalled its ambassador in Ankara, and Pakistan’s parliament on Monday passed a resolution urging the

government to recall its envoy from Paris....

Erdogan, the Turkish despot, has been the most outspoken in his criticism of President Macron for defending the exercise of free speech – including the use of cartoons of Mohammad in a discussion of that very subject in a middle-school class. Erdogan, of course, is an expert on free speech, a past master on how to curtail it; under his rule, more journalists have been jailed in Turkey than in any other country.

Since the beheading of the teacher Paty this month, the cartoons have been displayed in France in solidarity, angering some Muslims.

The cartoons have been displayed “as an act of solidarity” with the murdered teacher, a martyr to free speech, and also, by implication, with the nine cartoonists of *Charlie Hebdo* who were killed in 2015 by the Kouachi brothers for originally publishing those Muhammad cartoons. Some Muslims have been angered by this sympathy for Samuel Paty. How do those Muslims think the French feel about his murder? Or are these angry Muslims completely lacking the empathetic imagination? Yes, that seems to be the case. After all, why should the “best of peoples,” the Muslims, care what the Infidels – who are “the most vile of created beings” – think about anything?

President Emmanuel Macron, who met representatives of France’s Muslim community on Monday, has pledged to fight “Islamist separatism,” saying it was threatening to take over some Muslim communities in France.

Macron will now discover, to his chagrin, that there are areas in France where the “Islamist separatism” is not just “threatening” to take over, but has already taken over many no-go neighborhoods in French cities. In these areas heavily populated by Muslims, non-Muslims fear to visit, and that

includes representatives of the French state, such as the police and firemen and sanitation men, who enter these neighborhoods only under guard; such areas as Seine St.-Denis in Paris, Lunel just outside Montpellier, the 3rd arrondissement in Marseille, the Empalot neighborhood of Toulouse, are already examples of "Islamist separatism."

Saudi Arabia appeared to be taking a moderate response to the controversy, steering clear of boycott calls. A Saudi foreign ministry official said on Tuesday the Gulf state condemns all acts of terrorism, an apparent reference to Paty's killing.

"Freedom of expression and culture should be a beacon of respect, tolerance and peace that rejects practices and acts which generate hatred, violence and extremism and are contrary to coexistence," the official said in a statement...

The Saudis were in this case a force for moderation, counseling against an "overreaction" by Muslims to Macron's remarks, refusing to join the calls for a boycott of French goods, and even condemning as "terrorism" the murder of Samuel Paty. Of course they also obliquely criticized Paty: "freedom of expression...should be a beacon of respect, tolerance, and peace" that "rejects practices and acts which generate hatred, violence, and extremism." In other words, freedom of expression means, in Muslim terms, "if you can't say something nice [about Islam], don't say anything at all." If you criticize or mock Islam in any way, that will only, and quite justifiably, "generate hatred, violence, and extremism [from Muslims] – such a reaction is the fault of those Infidels who were clearly intent on inflaming Muslims, and succeeded. Blame the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists, blame Samuel Paty. But don't blame Muslims for defending the honor of their Prophet."

Turkey's Erdogan on Monday asked his compatriots to stop buying French goods and accused France of pursuing an anti-Islam agenda...

Apparently, for Erdogan, Macron's refusing to denounce the use of the cartoons of Muhammad in a class on freedom of expression, his stout defense of free speech, makes the French President guilty of having an "anti-Islam agenda." He clearly does not understand: Macron would defend just as stoutly any similar cartoons of Moses, Jesus, or the Buddha. Freedom of expression is clearly something that Erdogan cannot comprehend.

A great many Muslim states – Iran, Turkey, Pakistan – are determined to express their own displeasure with Macron and France, each one wanting to be perceived as the most fervent defender of the honor of the Prophet, and none of them showing the slightest inclination to respect French laws defending freedom of speech. They hope to attain, through a boycott of French goods, a surrender of its free-speech principles; they are most mistaken. Macron will not back down, no matter how much economic damage a boycott of French goods might do. And so far, not a single Muslim nation has imposed such a boycott in law; even Erdogan, who has been most outspoken in his attacks on Macron, has called for a boycott but not imposed it in the law by banning all French imports.

So many Muslims around the world now want to punish France for the unpardonable sin of defending free expression. Where is the Western solidarity in all this? Where are the statements by American, British, German, EU leaders? They haven't spoken. They are leaving France to deal on its own with this attempt at punishment ("for Paty's crime"), and extortion ("you must in the future limit your freedom of expression – or else") by Muslim states. This lack of public solidarity with France is pusillanimous. The Western world should rouse itself as one being, in the manner described by John Milton in *Areopagitica*, his famous defense of freedom of speech: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep." The Western countries should say to the world's Muslims – ideally in a collective statement –

something like this:

"We wish to express our entire solidarity with the people and government of France after the murder of Samuel Paty, killed only for fulfilling his responsibilities in teaching a class on freedom of expression and in practicing that freedom himself. No democratic and free society can tolerate those who would shut down their freedom of speech because they do not like what is being expressed. Some governments have declared themselves in favor of a boycott of French goods. As a response, we here declare that we have committed ourselves not to buy the goods of any nation that engages in such a boycott of France. We will, furthermore, discourage our own nationals from visiting as tourists those countries whose leaders have called for such a boycott. We shall now see, in this contest of wills over freedom of expression, who will remain insubmissive, and who will bend."