

Islamicizing France

BOOK REVIEW BY GERDA BIKALES

Here is what this book is *not* about: it is not about the ways France manages, or attempts to manage, the antagonistic relations between its Arab and Jewish citizens. The subject of growing tensions between these communities does come up briefly, the escalation of violence against Jews and harassment of Jews by Muslims is acknowledged, as is the French government's cavalier dismissal of their significance. Only recently has there been recognition of the seriousness of this conflict.

Under the subtitle of *France, the Arabs, and the Jews*, one might have expected a more thorough examination of this topic. It would have been

welcome, for as a result of its longstanding incoherent immigration policies, America too must brace itself for the explosive growth of its Muslim population, many indoctrinated in rabid antisemitism. While Americans have historically been able to leave behind the ancient ethnic and cultural prejudices of their countries of origin, it is unlikely that this pattern will hold in the case of radicalized Muslims inflamed by religious hatred of Jews and by Middle-East politics. Unless we slow immigration and take a more proactive part in the civic integration of Muslim immigrants, we can expect a rise in "incidents" against our Jewish citizens.

Here is what this book *is* about: it traces the

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official and unofficial policies of the French Foreign Ministry, known by its Paris address as the *Quai D'Orsey*, with regard to that country's stated diplomatic interests in the Muslim world. The author had access to the Ministry's archives, which he quotes amply and references copiously. Gaining such access was apparently a delicate maneuver, reflected in the request for anonymity by the friends who facilitated it. The archives reveal a consistent search for influence in the Middle East, many decades before the region became important as the world's largest oil depository. Already in the nineteenth

century, France established a footing in Ottoman Palestine through sponsorship of religious and scholarly institutions which served to bolster

Betrayal: France, the Arabs, and the Jews

by David Pryce-Jones

New York: Encounter Books

153 pages, \$23.95



its own perception of France as the rightful protector of Christian interests in the Holy Land.

After World War I, France expected to fill the vacuum created in the Middle East by the collapse of the Ottoman empire. In Palestine it lost out to rival Britain, but in the reshuffling of countries and borders, Syria and Lebanon came into its orbit as French "protectorates." The rise of Zionism as a political force, initially supported by Britain, provoked much consternation at the *Quai D'Orsey*, which correctly foresaw that a Jewish state would permanently keep France out of the Holy Land. The Ministry's underlying hostility toward the Jewish state remained unchanged through changing times—the rise of Nazism, World War II and the country's military defeat and occupation, the Holocaust in which French some 80,000 Jews were murdered with French collaboration, the establishment of Israel, the dark years of communism, and the coming of radical Islam.

At the height of French imperial power, when its rule extended to colonies in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in the North African Maghreb, and to vast domains in sub-Saharan Africa, the mantra of French diplomacy became “France is a Muslim power.” France derived much wealth, prestige, and power from the exploitation of Muslims, but the statement went beyond the obvious to include pride in its intellectuals’ cultural competence in the ways of the Muslim world. The study of Arab and Muslim cultures and languages became important and produced excellent Orientalists who joined the Ministry and encouraged its pro-Arab bend.

Pryce-Jones’ searches in the Quai D’Osay files also bring to light the Ministry’s persistent antipathy toward Jews. The French Revolution had brought about their emancipation by bestowing French citizenship upon them, but until quite recently the Foreign Ministry remained an elite intellectual club from which Jews were all but barred. Sophisticated as these diplomats were, they swallowed (or pretended to) a Czarist forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, purporting to be a Jewish plan for world domination.

Mistrust of Jews as British or German sympathizers runs through the formal archives and the personal writings of the Ministry’s celebrated diplomat-authors.

At the End of Word War II, a weakened France faced nationalist uprisings in its colonies. After losing Algeria in an eight year bloody conflict that brought France to the brink of civil war, the adage that had driven French policy—“France is a Muslim power”—took on new meaning. The post-war migration of temporary Arab guest-workers from the former colonies to the mainland proved to be the advance of a massive permanent settlement of Muslims, now estimated to number six million and growing rapidly through continued immigration and high birthrates. As we have seen in recent years, many in the French-born generation have rejected all attempts at cultural and civic assimilation

and have embraced violent crime and insurrection as a potent weapon against French society. The immigrant neighborhoods that ring the major cities have been transformed into lawless zones ruled by criminals, into which the police no longer dares to enter. Ominously, much of the aggression is directed against the well-assimilated Jewish population, numbering about 600,000. For too long, a government too intimidated to confront the perpetrators of incessant racist attacks upon its Jewish citizens had chosen to see no evil.

France is now faced with a very large, very young, and very frustrated Arab and African cohort, one that has repeatedly demonstrated its power to visit destruction and chaos on a country that has for centuries been at the core of Western Civilization. The problem is of its own making, for it acquiesced to immigration in numbers far beyond the French nation’s cultural carrying capacity. By failure to assert its

sovereignty and control the inflow, France has in fact become what it long claimed to be—a Muslim power.

But the power now rests in Muslim hands.

The *Betrayal* of the title may not jump right out at the reader, but the author provides his interpretation of it.

Among France’s proudest contributions to democracy and civilization are authorship and pursuit of the Rights of Man, and nationalism, the sense of nationhood that has a direct and intimate relationship to rights.... The record shows that its policies toward Arabs and Jews have been consistently misguided as well as untrue to the values France once claimed to exemplify in the name of enlightenment.

Alas! ■

(1) This policy was reversed in recent years. The current Ambassador to the United States is Jean-David Levitte, a Jewish career diplomat.

