

Paris Attacks Revive Israelis' Fears

Jan 13, 2015, Daniel Gordis

The horrors that unfolded in Paris and its outskirts last week captivated Israel no less than any other Western country, but they have played differently in the Jewish State, which knows well what it is like to have cities turned into war zones. In Israel, chilling scenes like the blood-soaked floor of the Charlie Hebdo offices unfold far too often, as they did most recently in a Jerusalem synagogue.

The Charlie Hebdo attack and the hostage scene in the kosher market did more than evoke recent Israeli memories. Far more poignantly, they brought images of the Holocaust to Israelis' minds. The image of frightened European Jews hiding in a freezer was for many Israelis a haunting reminder of Jews hiding from Nazis, as were images of parents holding young children and fleeing for their lives. (Israel's press also went to great lengths to praise the young Muslim man who protected some of the patrons of the Hyper Cacher supermarket; Israeli newspapers plastered his photograph across their front pages.)

The massacre in the Charlie Hebdo offices had Holocaust echoes, too. Georges Wolinski, the 80-year-old Charlie Hebdo cartoonist, was born to a Polish Jewish father who had fled to Tunisia to escape the Nazis. In 1936, Siegfried Wolinski was killed in Tunisia, and his family left for Paris. Georges, Siegfried's son, was killed by Muslim extremists in Paris last week.

Such moments afford an ironic sense of confirmation for the Jewish State; modern political Zionism was born of a Jewish consensus that Europe was a bloodbath just waiting to happen.

Even bitter political rivals such as Ze'ev Jabotinsky (father of Revisionist Zionism and mentor to Menachem Begin) and David Ben-Gurion (Israel's first prime minister and a leader of Labor Zionism), who detested each other and disagreed about most everything, agreed that Jewish life in Europe was doomed and that the only answer was a state.

The events in Paris seemed to confirm again their prediction. The rate of Jewish immigration from France to Israel had already doubled to 7,000 in 2014, making France Israel's largest source of immigrants. That rate is expected to rise to about 10,000 immigrants in 2015. In the aftermath of the attacks, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel called for French Jews to come to Israel en masse, while France's prime minister, Manuel Valls -- apparently taking seriously the possibility of mass Jewish emigration -- said if 100,000 French Jews were to depart, France would no longer be France. The burial of the four Jewish victims of the supermarket attack in Israel, and not in France, held symbolism that was lost on no one; in moments of crisis, Israel goes to great pains to remind the world that Jews have only one true home.

Whatever validation Israelis might have gleaned from the horrors, however, was short-lived. Although the image of Netanyahu walking arm-in-arm with other world leaders in Paris suggested an easing of Israel's pariah status in France, a darker back-story soon emerged. The French had asked Netanyahu not to come because they did not wish to highlight the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the march. When he insisted on attending, Netanyahu was told that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (who is not technically a head of a state) would be invited and would also be in the front row. Netanyahu and President Francois Hollande of France attended a ceremony in Paris's Grand Synagogue after the march, but when Israel's prime minister got up to speak, the French president walked out.

And even as hundreds of people were attending the funeral of one of the supermarket victims, Israel's Foreign Ministry released a report predicting that Israel's international standing would plummet further in 2015. Europe would extend its boycotts of Israeli products, the

Foreign Ministry said, and after Israel's elections, the U.S. might not use its veto in the UN's General Assembly on Israel's behalf.

A week that began with horrific images of Jewish vulnerability allowed Israelis to believe, however fleetingly, that the necessity of a Jewish State was obvious to all. By the end of the week, though, the press was calling Netanyahu's visit to Paris a public-relations disaster, and even Israel's government was predicting that Israel's standing would only worsen. It was a week, some Israelis muttered, that demonstrated with regard to both Netanyahu and Europe that plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

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