

Macron's diplomatic gambit—appeasing Islamists, isolating Israel

“Wartime realities make France’s anti-Israel stance a particularly harmful and aggressive manifestation of a long-standing strategy,” researcher tells JNS.



Palestinian Authority chief Mahmoud Abbas welcomes French President Emmanuel Macron to Ramallah on Oct. 24, 2023. Photo by Christophe Ena/POOL/AFP via Getty Images.



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(Aug. 30, 2025 / JNS) Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has chastised French President Emmanuel Macron for inciting a wave of antisemitism across France via his calls to recognize a Palestinian state.

In a letter sent by Netanyahu to the Élysée Palace on Aug. 19, the prime minister wrote, “Your call for a Palestinian state pours fuel on this antisemitic fire. It is not diplomacy, it is appeasement.”

In a letter published on Aug. 26, Macron strongly rejected the premier’s criticism over French inaction in combating antisemitism.

The French president accused Netanyahu of misusing the issue of antisemitism for political purposes. “These accusations of inaction in the face of a scourge that we are fighting with everything in our power are unacceptable and are an offense to France as a whole,” Macron wrote.

Macron further emphasized Paris’s discontent over Jerusalem’s continued military action in Gaza. “I solemnly appeal to you to end the desperate race of a murderous and illegal permanent war in Gaza, causing indignity for your country and placing your people in a deadlock,” he wrote.

Over the course of the current war, France has time and again raised the banner of anti-Israel policy. As early as Oct. 27, 2023, the first day of Israel’s ground incursion into Gaza, France voted in favor of a “humanitarian truce” in the U.N. General Assembly.

France has voted in support of every ceasefire resolution brought to the U.N. since the beginning of the war. France has banned Israeli companies from participating in defense exhibitions, and Macron has publicly called on all nations to impose arms embargoes against Israel.

France has sanctioned Israeli citizens and has opened two judicial investigations for “complicity in genocide, incitement to genocide, and complicity in crimes against humanity” targeting French-Israeli activists.

France also exerted immense pressure on Israel during the Lebanon campaign, including condemnation of strikes against terror targets, attempts to limit Israeli anti-Hezbollah operations, and demands for Israeli withdrawal from strategic points in Southern Lebanon.

Finally, France became the first G7 country to announce its recognition of a Palestinian state, paving the way for others, including the U.K. and Canada, to follow suit, thereby tacitly endorsing Hamas’s strategy of leveraging terror to drive its political agenda.

The rise of antisemitic incidents

The recent spike in anti-Israel policy in France has coincided with a significant increase in antisemitic attacks.

In 2024, France recorded over 1,500 antisemitic incidents, making up more than 60% of all religion-based hate crimes in the country. In the first half of 2025, another 646 incidents were reported.

Cases include the assaults on rabbis, vandalism of synagogues and the Holocaust Memorial (the Mémorial de la Shoah museum in Paris's Marais neighborhood), graffiti on El Al's office in the city reading "genocideairline," and "Free Palestine" spray-painted on Jewish tourists' cars in the Alps. An outdoor adventure park manager was also detained for refusing entry to a group of Israeli children.

The French government has vehemently denied any link between its anti-Israel stance and the rise of antisemitic incidents, leading to a recent spat between the Élysée and U.S. Ambassador to France Charles Kushner.

"On the 81st anniversary of the Allied Liberation of Paris, which ended the deportation of Jews from French soil, I write out of deep concern over the dramatic rise of antisemitism in France and the lack of sufficient action by your government to confront it," Kushner wrote in a public letter published this week in *The Wall Street Journal*.

While the recent wave of anti-Israel policy may seem out of place for a country that ostensibly is considered an Israeli ally, France has for many decades backed anti-Israel policies and has openly undermined Israel's interests.

While the first decades of the revived state's history were marked by close ties with Paris, including significant support during the 1948 War of Independence and close cooperation in the 1956 Sinai War, the relationship first turned cold in the late '60s.

In 1967, Charles de Gaulle's government established a policy of full military embargo just three days before the breakout of the Six-Day War, and refused to recognize Israeli sovereignty over even western Jerusalem at the war's conclusion.

Paris has pursued a policy of rapprochement with much of the Arab world, which harbored strong anti-French sentiments due to French colonialist policies. To solidify the diplomatic strategy, Paris has consistently criticized Israel over a litany of issues and has backed many anti-Israel U.N. resolutions.

Emmanuel Navon, a scholar of international relations at Tel Aviv University and a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS), explained that in this context, the recent moves by Paris are not a policy shift but rather a continuation of France's approach to Mideast affairs.

"France has had a very hostile policy toward Israel since the late '60s. Macron is merely reconnecting with the French tradition of hostility toward Israel," Navon told JNS.

Tsilla Hershco, a senior research fellow and Israeli-French relations expert at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, said that while attacking Israel is a well-established French foreign policy, the wartime realities make the stance a particularly harmful and aggressive manifestation of a long-standing strategy.

“In a certain sense, Macron continues the traditional French policy of defining France’s core interest in its relations with the Arab-Muslim world. Throughout numerous debates in the U.N. Security Council on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, France has consistently taken a stance of condemnation and criticism toward Israel,” Hershco told JNS.

“It seems that, due to developments related to Israel’s current war, a more dangerous reality has emerged,” she added.

Domestic considerations

Experts agree that a constellation of political factors is driving France to challenge and instigate against the Jewish state. “France’s policy toward Israel is connected to both its foreign and domestic policies,” Hershco said.

“On the domestic front, the French government faces internal contradictions: On the one hand, a desire to appeal to its growing Muslim population; on the other hand, a need to appear as a strong government unwilling to compromise on its core principle of secularism and the separation between religion and state,” Hershco expanded.

Navon explicitly stated that a significant factor in France’s anti-Israel stance in general and its recognition of a Palestinian state in particular is related to the rising influence of Islam.

Navon further explained that France’s domestic coalition dynamics are also contributing to Macron’s increased interest in Middle Eastern affairs.

“Macron has a minority government, and so he essentially cannot govern. In this situation, the easiest thing to do is to stay away from domestic issues, which require consensus, and to focus on foreign policy to make yourself relevant,” Navon said.

Hershco added that the French government sees the Gaza war as a unique opportunity to bolster its ties with the Arab world while simultaneously setting itself up as a global moral arbiter and a separate base of Western leadership, distinct from Washington.

“For many years, France has defined its relationship with the Arab world as one of its central interests. At the same time, France aspires to present itself as a major uninvolved power that mediates in conflicts between other nations, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” Hershco said.

France’s climb to European leadership, partially on the back of anti-Israel policy, threatens to isolate Jerusalem not just from Paris but from Europe as a whole, as European countries are likely to prioritize intra-European unity over their Israeli ties.

Already, multiple organs in the E.U. and in Western Europe are taking similar positions to France, and major Western powers, including the U.K., Canada and Australia, have followed in pledging to

recognize a Palestinian state.

However, there is still general agreement that Israel has a significant base of support in Europe and that there are still broad common interests that could serve as a basis for stable diplomatic ties.

“Europe has a strategic interest in maintaining its relationship with Israel, partly because of Israel’s military capabilities and the shared concern, particularly regarding Iran’s nuclear ambitions,” Hersheo said.

Navon added that there are still major centers of open support for Israel inside Europe.

“It is important to remember that there is no such thing as European foreign policy. Each country has its own position, and Israel has very strong ties with a lot of European countries, particularly in Eastern Europe,” Navon said.

“Even in Western Europe, it’s really a question of which government is in charge, and there are many strong parties in Western Europe that openly support Israel. Right now, many anti-Israel parties control governments, but that could change very quickly,” Navon added.