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Macron's Palestinian state push comes as report recommends step to appease Muslims

France is sponsoring a U.N. conference towards recognizing a Palestinian state, as experts warn harsh rhetoric from Macron encourages homegrown antisemitism

By Lahav Harkov

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Israel and France have been on a diplomatic collision course in recent weeks, with French President Emmanuel Macron set to lay out steps toward the recognition of a Palestinian state at a French- and Saudi- sponsored conference promoting a two-state solution being held at the United Nations headquarters in New York next week.

The move comes as the French government released a report calling on Paris to recognize a Palestinian state and recalibrate its policies towards Israel to “appease” France’s growing Muslim population.

Last month, Macron called Israeli policies on Gaza “shameful” and raised the possibility of downgrading European Union cooperation with Israel; in response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Macron of spreading blood libels and standing with Hamas. Days later, France threatened sanctions on Israel if it does not allow unrestricted humanitarian aid to be distributed by U.N. agencies in Gaza. After Macron once again threatened to “toughen” his stance against Israel last week, the Israeli Foreign Ministry accused him of being on a “crusade against the Jewish state” — referring to a period in which French knights massacred European Jews.

France has been preparing to co-chair “The High Level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution” with Saudi Arabia at the U.N. on June 17-20. Macron said last week that the conference, which was first announced in December, is meant “to give fresh impetus to the recognition of a Palestinian state.” The French Foreign Ministry told The Guardian that Paris is trying to convince other countries to join it. The gathering’s other agenda items include reforming the Palestinian Authority and disarming Hamas.

French diplomats met with officials in Jerusalem to discuss the matter, and briefed reporters that the main goals of the conference are disarming Hamas, freeing the hostages, reforming the Palestinian Authority and planning for the “day after” the war in Gaza, including a two-state solution.

A French diplomatic source said on Sunday that France is “determined to recognize the state of Palestine to create the conditions for the existence of this state ... Our goal for this

conference indeed goes beyond the question of recognition. It is indeed about recreating an international consensus around the two-state solution, which allows for a lasting resolution to the conflict.”

Amid the sparring between Israel and France and the preparation to recognize a Palestinian state, the French Interior Ministry released a report titled “Muslim Brothers and Political Islam in France,” calling the Muslim Brotherhood an “imminent threat” to French national security. The Islamist group is funded by foreign powers, has over 100,000 members in France and runs or influences countless mosques, schools and other organizations. The report also describes the Muslim Brotherhood’s dissemination of antisemitic texts and propaganda.

Among the report’s recommendations is “the recognition by France of a Palestinian State alongside Israel” to “appease the frustrations” of French Muslims who perceive Paris as “supporting Jewish Israelis against Muslim Palestinians.”

Experts drew a connection between Macron’s pressure on Israel, Muslim Brotherhood influence and antisemitism in France.

French conservative intellectual Michel Gurfinkiel told *Jewish Insider* that “the main point of the report is not what it says about the Muslim Brotherhood. The real point is the conclusion that the French government should make efforts to bring French Muslims into the French fold, and that means ... to recognize a state of Palestine.”

“There is a kind of interplay here,” he added. “The interior minister wanted to publish the report in order to give legitimacy to his own policy against Islamism in France. But it was published with the approval of President Macron ... and obviously, the real goal of the president was to tell everybody, ‘I must recognize a State of Palestine because it is the only way for us to fight the Muslim Brotherhood.’”

Gurfinkiel noted that while Macron has to vacate the presidency in two years, he can run for a third nonconsecutive term in 2032, when he will be 55. “To return, his calculation is that he needs to secure the Muslim vote in France, which is going to grow in the coming years. He wants French Muslims to see him as the champion of their cause, and to be a champion of the Muslim cause means you support Palestine. Palestine is a code word for Muslim power in France, just like the right is extremely pro-Israel as a metaphor” against growing Islamism.

Emmanuel Navon, a professor of international relations at Tel Aviv University, also pointed out that the report about the Muslim Brotherhood says “clearly the Muslims are out of control and maybe one way of calming them down is to recognize a Palestinian state.”

“The report says there is a plan to conquer and Islamicize France. That’s not a conspiracy theory, it’s in the report,” Navon added.

Israel’s former ambassador to France, Daniel Shek, told JI, “I can’t rule out that there are domestic political motivations, but I can say that as someone who knows [Macron] and spoke with him about the topic [of a two-state solution] years ago, it’s not his central motivation. He wants to end the war out of a concern for Israel.”

“You see what happened on the Champs-Élysées on Saturday night,” Navon added, referring to soccer riots last month, during which there were several incidents of antisemitic vandalism. “Macron used an Arabic expression for ‘my brothers’ on Twitter, it is very telling. It’s clear he wants to appease the Muslims. Spoiler: It’s not going to work.”

The report’s repeated references to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict show that it is an important part of the French public debate because it is a synecdoche for political positions on immigration and Islam in France, Navon and Gurfinkiel said.

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Boaz Bismuth, a Knesset member from Netanyahu’s Likud Party and a former diplomat and foreign correspondent based in France, told JI that French Foreign Ministry representatives discussed Macron’s plan to sponsor a conference supporting Palestinian statehood months ago, long before the French Interior Ministry’s report came out.

“I would even say this is the usual position of the French,” he said.

Over a week ago, vandals targeted Paris’ Shoah Memorial, two synagogues and a Jewish restaurant in the Marais, the historic Jewish neighborhood, and a third synagogue in another part of the city. A French rabbi reported that he was assaulted twice in the past week.

Gurfinkiel said that Macron’s remarks “obviously” encourage antisemitism.

“What people don’t understand,” he said, “is once you start saying that the Jews in Israel are bad, the consequence is that Jews everywhere are [perceived as] bad. It reactivates countless negative views and images of the Jews that are embedded in Western culture. You can’t escape it.”

Navon cited a recent French decision to posthumously give Alfred Dreyfus a promotion and said: “Remember that book People Love Dead Jews? It’s exactly that. They love dead Jews. They’re trying to fight antisemitism 100 years ago ... but when it comes to the true antisemitism, which is the obsession with Israel and attacking Jews under the name ‘Zionist,’ they basically are taking part in demonizing Israel which encourages it.”

“He says [Israel is] committing war crimes and killing women and babies,” Navon added. “That feeds the antisemitism of the far-left and the Muslims. This hypocrisy is unacceptable.”

Bismuth also said that he “wouldn’t say [Macron] is an enemy of Israel or hates the Jews. I think he doesn’t understand the significance of what he’s doing.”

“I give him the benefit of the doubt that it’s not intentional ... I call on him to show responsibility and understand the consequences and the meaning of the things he said,” the Likud lawmaker stated.

Shek took issue with what he said was “the Israeli government’s position that any initiative to end the war is an existential threat and anyone doing it is an antisemite.”

Bismuth voiced disappointment in Macron, who expressed support for Israel after Oct. 7. “I was in a meeting between him and Netanyahu [in October 2023]. I heard him call to establish an international coalition with Israel against Hamas. And he went from there to calling for an arms embargo on Israel [in 2024] ... He did a 180-degree flip-flop.”

“What France, the U.K. and the U.S. need to remember is that we don’t only share the same values, but also the same enemies,” he added.

Shek also noted that “Macron was a real friend of Israel and defended Israel’s right to defend itself for months.”

“Then we turned him into an antisemitic enemy and a supporter of Hamas,” he added, referring to the way Israelis spoke about the French president. “And then, we’re surprised that Israel is isolated.”

According to Shek, Macron’s critical turn happened because “time has gone by and nothing positive is happening. He, like many other leaders in the world, think this war has been continuing for too long and the time has come to stop it. He’s not alone; he’s just more vocal. At least he’s trying to do something.”

Ilan Berman, senior vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council, said that France leading the U.N. two-state solution conference “speaks to [its] eroding global position currently,” Berman said. “For France, the Middle East in general and Israel-Palestine in particular is a very attractive portfolio to play in and take an outsize role.”

Navon cited two advisors to Macron as major engines behind the U.N. conference. Ofer Bronchtein, a French-Israeli who was involved in the Oslo Accords, is Macron’s advisor on the Middle East and is expected to represent him at the U.N. next week. The other is Jacques Attali, an Algiers-born Jewish social theorist who advised former French presidents Francois Mitterand, Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande before Macron. Attali began criticizing the war in Gaza as early as November 2023 and recently equated Hamas with Israel’s leadership in a post calling for Europe to “exert pressure” so that both are removed.

Navon also blamed Qatar’s influence on France, noting that Doha has made major investments in France at a time when the country has a large budget deficit.

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Berman expressed concern about the practical impact of France’s moves, saying that “as more and more countries, including upper-tier countries like France, begin to preemptively recognize Palestine as a state, it becomes harder and harder to assume that there isn’t a state, even though the fundamental conditions [for statehood] don’t apply.”

“It’s one thing for Sweden to say it; it’s another when France does,” he added. “There is a question in my mind: At what point does this boulder rolling downhill begin to pick up steam, and what does that mean?”

Shek said that not much will change if France recognizes a Palestinian state, noting that 147 countries, over three-quarters of U.N. member states, have already done so.

“It only pressures Israel, and as far as I’m concerned, that’s OK. If pressure ends the war, brings back the hostages and integrates Israel into the region, then it’s a very pro-Israel act,” he said.

The former ambassador argued that the establishment of a Palestinian state is in Israel’s interest, in that it would “turn the Palestinian Authority into a responsible party.”

Navon agreed that recognition of a Palestinian state will not change much on the ground, but he still called on Israel to scale back relations with France should they take such a step.

“We have to try to circle the wagons against countries trying to appease our common enemy. They are making a moral and practical mistake. The U.S. should make that point very clear,” said Emmanuel Navon, a professor of international relations at Tel Aviv University.

“Make sure they don’t participate in any future diplomatic initiatives in the Middle East. Downgrade security and defense relations, on which they depend. There should be

consequences,” he said. “Let’s be obnoxious too. France has problems with former colonies ... New Caledonia is supposed to have a referendum [about independence from France] and [the French] keep pushing it off,” Navon said, referring to the Pacific island nation. “Why don’t we bring up a resolution at the U.N.?”

As to what the American response should be to France’s latest moves against Israel, Navon said that the U.S. should not participate in the conference at the U.N. next week and “should be very clear in their statements that this is a global war against terror and that we don’t break ranks.”

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Berman said that “for the Trump administration, this is a really good opportunity to say ‘put your money where your mouth is’ and help reconstruct Gaza. There is a really good play to be made here. The French, Spanish, Dutch and others are very eager to moralize and grandstand, but very reticent to put their money where their mouth is and contribute.”

Berman suggested that the Trump administration can say “we disagree with their decision, but in light of it, we hope Paris will agree to [help with] reconstruction and expect greater contributions to the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation,” the U.S. and Israel-backed group distributing food in Gaza.

“It’s the worst of all possible worlds if Macron gets an easy win and doesn’t have to actually do anything,” he added.

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