

France at the brink

Urban rioting signals a far deeper peril

By Alex Alexiev
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After two weeks of unrestrained violence across the country, France imposed curfews and a state-of-emergency rule on 24 of its provinces. The government certainly hopes that this wartime measure will quickly scale down the riots and it may well do that. Yet history is more likely to look back on this not as the end of an irrational burst of urban violence, but as the first act in a protracted time of troubles for France and Europe that could ultimately lead to the demise of European civilization as we know it.

None of this is even remotely discernible in French political rhetoric or media coverage surrounding the violent events in the Muslim ghettos. Shrouded in the thick fog of political correctness, government and media alike insist on euphemistically calling areas that have long been outside the reach of French law "sensitive zones," their pervasive drugs and stolen goods culture, a "parallel economy" and the criminal hoodlums that control the streets just "youths." More than anything else they insist on convincing us that none of it has anything to do with Islam. And so we're bombarded with shop-warn half-truths about poverty and unemployment, racism and poor social services and countless other indignities a cruel society allegedly inflicts on its "youth." All of this in a country that spends 30 percent of its budget on "social protection" and makes it possible for even an illiterate immigrant to live fairly well without having worked a day in his life.



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 A man threw a Molotov cocktail as a bus burned at the entrance of "le Mirail" in Toulouse, France.

Yet, shying away from reality by France's ruling class does not reality change and that stark reality is one of a civilized European nation sliding into barbarism. On the day emergency rule was imposed, the socialist mayor of the small Paris suburb of Noisy-le-Grand issued an anguished appeal for the army to intervene and described an atmosphere of complete lawlessness in his town, where gangs of thugs dragged women out of their cars by their hair, stoning them and setting the vehicles on fire, as other hoodlums amused themselves by fire-bombing the psychiatric hospital. "We need to know whether this country still has a state," he cried out in desperation that seems to have gripped many of his fellow-citizens.

What exactly is going on? The first thing to be noted, much hand-wringing to the contrary, is that none of the violence was either surprising or unexpected. Indeed, it was the easily predictable denouement of the gradual transformation over two decades of hundreds of Muslim enclaves into crime-ridden, self-isolated, anti-societies that have de facto seceded from French society in virtually every aspect except for continuing to depend economically on the welfare state. With 70,000 cases of vandalism and arson, 29,000 cars burned, pervasive drug trafficking and an epidemic of gang rapes in just the current year,

these ghettos were an explosion waiting to happen long before the recent events. None of this is new and numerous French authors have described in detail the troubling evolution of what one recent best-seller called "Lost Territories of the Republic."

To really understand why this is not a localized phenomenon, but a development with dire long-term implications for much of Europe, though, one has to look at the broader socio-political and economic context that has made it possible. And here we see a dangerous congruence – a "perfect storm" – of three powerful and seemingly unstoppable trends: the implosion of the European "social-market" economy, an unprecedented demographic collapse of native European populations and the takeover of the burgeoning Muslim communities in Western Europe by radical Islam. Taken together, these trends could and would lead to the undoing of Europe unless reversed in the near future.

Though counterintuitive at first glance, the French (and European) socio-economic model had much to do with the rise of the Muslim ghetto and its ongoing implosion will dramatically exacerbate its conflict with society at large.

In the aftermath of WWII, there were probably fewer than 100,000 Muslims residing in France. This began to change rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s as large numbers of Arabs from the Maghreb were imported as cheap labor for the booming post-war economy. From the very beginning, the French government treated them as temporary "guest" workers that were expected to go back at some point. No effort was made to integrate them, they were housed in segregated public housing projects on the outskirts of town and their religious and cultural needs were treated as the responsibility of their countries of origin. For instance, France signed agreements with Algeria to cater to the religious needs of its Muslims and, as late as 1982, a treaty with Morocco obligated French judges to use Moroccan Islamic statutes in family law cases for Moroccan immigrants.

Another major change occurred following the 1973 oil crisis and the economic recession it triggered, when it became clear that the immigrants were not going home even as the need for unskilled labor rapidly dwindled. The new tougher economic climate, combined with the everpresent French xenophobia and racism, led to high unemployment rates and the progressive ghettoization of the, by then, second-generation Muslims. This was also the period when the "social-market" economy was fully implemented with its rigid labor markets, union-set wages, over-regulated business, high-taxation and extensive social-welfare schemes. As everywhere else, this system was made to order for skilled union labor and government employees with lifetime jobs and very bad for the young and unskilled. Unemployment rates soared and so did the number of those that became permanent wards of the state at the cost of their basic human dignity. Today, as the French and European economies have slowed to a crawl with worse to come, the unemployed of the second generation have become the unemployable of the third one. Seething with resentment, uneducated and unskilled, the ghetto is completely alienated from French society and despises any contact with it, save for the welfare and unemployment checks that make it feasible in the first place.

This would be irrational behavior for a minority, except for a simple fact – Muslims are the only ones who are having babies in a country and a continent that are committing demographic suicide as we speak. With a fertility rate twice that of the natives and large-scale illegal immigration, the Muslim community in France and throughout Western Europe is growing at 50 percent every decade, while the native populations are shrinking and rapidly aging. Already by 2010, according to French demographer Jean-Claude Chesnais, people 65 and over will outnumber those aged 0 to 14, something that has never happened in recorded history. On current trajectory, those angry Muslim youth in the banlieues will be a majority of all French under twenty in urban areas in 25 years or less. The European Union (EU-25) as a whole, with a fertility of 1.38 children per woman (30 percent below replacement) will lose nearly a third of its native population by 2050, while its Muslims will increase five-fold to 100 million. Long

before that, the large cohorts of young, poor and uneducated Muslims would have to provide much of the labor force and pay the taxes to maintain the pension and health care benefits of the old and wealthy natives. Is this likely to happen or is Europe facing a future that will make the current strife look like a walk in the park?

The answer to this question depends on what kind of Islam takes hold of European Muslims. If it is the kind of Islam long practiced in the native Muslim communities in Turkey, Eastern Europe and Russia, there is a good chance that a version of it could emerge that is fully compatible with European values. It is often forgotten that for most of its history, and certainly until the Reformation, the Ottoman Empire was more tolerant of other religions than Christendom.

If, on the other hand, the dominant Muslim creed at that time is anything like the one that rules the French ghettos today, Europe's prospects are very dismal indeed. This is the key question that the French political elite is afraid to touch, as evidenced by their nearly paranoid insistence that Islam had nothing to do with the violence.

It is probably true that the Islamists did not directly instigate the riots. But radical Islam has everything to do with today's culture of the Muslim enclaves. From its hatred of French secular society and its norms, fanatic anti-Semitism and cult of violence to misogyny, self-isolation from the "infidels" and admiration for extremists and terrorists, the dominant values and attitudes among third generation French Muslims are increasingly those of radical Islam. This is neither a coincidence nor the result of a spontaneous process. Misguided government policies in the socioeconomic and immigration realms have certainly contributed in a major way by creating a climate of hopelessness and extreme alienation in which the siren call of Islamism has flourished. But it is difficult to envisage the kind of radicalization that has taken place without three decades of organized subversion and infiltration of French Islam by the fascist-like Wahhabi/Salafi ideology.

Since the mid-1970s when the House of Saud began to aggressively export its extremist Wahhabi creed, often in cahoots with Muslim Brotherhood zealots, huge amounts of Saudi money have been spent to finance the seditious activities of Wahhabi front organizations like the Muslim World League, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Deobandi Tablighi Jamaat and countless others. As early as 1982 the Muslim World League funded the "maintenance and renovation" of 300 mosques throughout France. Hundreds of Wahhabi imams and thousands of Tablighi proselytizers who speak no French have for years been allowed to preach hatred against the West and indoctrinate the youth in countless mosques, Koranic schools and on the street.

The result has been the takeover of much of the Muslim establishment by radical Islamists, respectfully referred to as grand freres and the transformation of the banlieues into breeding grounds of fanatics and terrorists. And there is no reason to expect that things will get better any time soon. An official French ministry of education study of the ongoing Islamization of French schools in the suburbs, known as the Rapport Obin and suppressed by the government, but leaked on the Internet earlier this year, paints a disturbing picture of a school system that is descending into Islamist obscurantism. Directed by the inspector general of French education, Jean-Pierre Obin, it documents how Islamic extremists in the community and among the students are already able to enforce de facto segregation by gender and between Muslims and non-Muslims, force students to refuse studying European philosophers and writers deemed unacceptable and sing, dance, play instruments or draw faces or geometric figures bearing a resemblance to a cross. Girls are subject to a strict Islamist dress code (no skirts, dresses or make-up) enforced by beatings and are not allowed to participate in physical education, visit the gym, the swimming pool or the movie theater. Aggressive proselytism and threat of violence make it further virtually impossible for Muslim students to avoid conforming to strict fundamentalist practices and force even non-Muslims into conformance with Islamist norms at school.

All this, combined with the open rejection of Western values, violent anti-Semitism and wide-spread Osama bin Laden hero worship is transforming these public schools into religious counter-societies, concludes the study, with "norms on a collision course with those of modern, democratic society."

What could be done to make sure that the violent events of the past two weeks are not just a dress rehearsal of much worse to come? Perhaps the first thing to do is to simply realize that France's current untenable predicament is the result of a combination of systemic problems and decades of wrong-headed policies that must be reversed. Reversing policies that have made it easier for Islamism to spread its malignant ideology should not be difficult if the political will exists. Islamism is not about religion, but about religious and political sedition and violence and should be treated as such. Changing the angry mood of the ghetto, however, would be a much more difficult proposition. It will not begin to happen until France is able to give its sullen Muslim underclass economic opportunity and a vested interest in the system that will gradually dismantle the ghettos. And this, in turn, will not happen before the French people realize that their ossified socio-economic model has long outlived its usefulness.

What is needed, in short, is a cultural revolution. With a president and a political class that seem to believe that economic liberalism is worse than totalitarian communism, there are few reasons to be excessively optimistic.

■ Alexiev is vice president for research at the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C. and a former analyst at the RAND Corporation.

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