

French right-wing candidate Alain Juppé warns of rising anti-Muslim hysteria

By Kumaran Ira
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On Friday, former Prime Minister Alain Juppé, the favorite in the right-wing Les Républicains (LR) party primaries for the 2017 presidential elections, spoke to *Le Monde* to declare his concern over the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim hysteria dominating the election campaign. Juppé said that major candidates were inciting so much ethnic hatred that France risked sliding into civil war.

Juppé told *Le Monde*, “We must absolutely calm down the climate that exists in France today. Simply saying the word ‘Muslim’ leads to a hysteria that is totally disproportionate.” He added, “We must calm down the situation. If we continue the way we are going now, we are heading towards civil war. But I want civil peace.”

This extraordinary remark comes after deep attacks on Muslims in France in the last two years, after terror attacks in France and Belgium by Islamist networks fighting for NATO’s proxy war in Syria. Thousands of Muslim homes have been raided under the state of emergency. President François Hollande of the Socialist Party (PS), which imposed the state of emergency, has repeatedly invited Marine Le Pen, the leader of the neo-fascist National Front (FN), to the Elysée presidential palace. The FN is expected to easily qualify for the presidential run-off in May.

Since the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks of January 2015, the French people have been subjected to relentless propaganda, including from Juppé’s own LR party, denouncing Muslims. Thus, in one column after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, *Nouvel Obs* commentator Jean Daniel wrote that, “Yes, we are at war, and what’s more it is a war of religion.”

Nearly two years later, a former prime minister of France is admitting that the state of emergency has cultivated a hysterical atmosphere that brought ethnic

and religious tensions to a fever pitch.

The immediate target of Juppé’s remarks was the provocative comments of his main rival for the LR nomination, former President Nicolas Sarkozy, who is building his campaign around appeals to neo-fascistic sentiment and the worship of French ethnic identity.

Last Monday, Sarkozy said: “If one wants to become French, one lives as a Frenchman. We will no longer tolerate an integration that doesn’t work, we will demand assimilation.” In a reactionary and bizarre reference to ancient Gaul, the region of Europe encompassing most of present-day France that was first inhabited by Celtic peoples, Sarkozy declared, “Once you are French, your ancestors are the Gauls.”

This statement violates fundamental juridical principles that French citizenship is a legal and not an ethnic or blood relationship, and flies in the face of France’s large ethnic Arabic, African, Italian, and Portuguese populations. Sarkozy’s promotion of views that French identity is a blood tie echoes the conceptions of Charles Maurras of the anti-Semitic *Action Française* movement before World War II. They are in line with the views of his top advisor, Patrick Buisson, a former editor of the far-right *Minute* magazine who is known as a devotee of Maurras.

Juppé’s remarks reflect growing concern in sections of the ruling elite that, amid the deepest crisis of European and world capitalism since the 1930s, their longstanding promotion of anti-Muslim and law-and-order prejudices has taken on entirely new dimensions.

Since 2003, French bourgeois politicians of all stripes have backed bans on the veil in the public schools, or on the burqa. Such anti-Muslim campaigns were promoted not only by right-wing forces, but also by the PS and its pseudo-left allies like the New

Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), *Lutte* (Struggle, LO), and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left Front.

Today, after nearly a decade of intense economic crisis, however, and mounting anti-Muslim sentiment after the Paris terror attacks and under the state of emergency, the level of tensions are far higher. Calls for banning the burkini or dismantling refugee camps in Calais reflect the growing emergence of politicized anti-Muslim nationalism as a key force in French bourgeois politics.

Sympathizers of the *Action Française*, which formed the key basis of the Nazi-collaborationist regime in Vichy, play increasingly visible roles as advisers and associates of the PS and the pseudo-left. In particular, Mélenchon developed close ties with both Buisson and far-right journalist Eric Zemmour, whom the NPA-linked news site *Médiapart* also promoted.

The defense of democratic rights in France and across Europe cannot be left to any faction of this utterly corrupt and reactionary political establishment. This is a task that falls to the working class, mobilized in struggle on a socialist program.

Juppé himself was at pains to reassure *Le Monde* that his limited criticisms of anti-Muslim hysteria did not mean that he would not firmly crack down on Muslims and the population at large. "Of course, I am aware of how serious the situation is," he said, citing Montaigne Institute polls purporting to show that "over two-thirds of French Muslims accept the laws of the Republic. ... but one quarter of them do not."

Juppé's claim that one-quarter of French Muslims—well over one million people—are in rebellion against France's legal system is ludicrous. By making it, Juppé showed that he himself helps stoke law-and-order hysteria against Muslims. He went on to call for "undertaking a major campaign of de-radicalization, together with the leaders of the Muslim community."

Moreover, while he expresses his reservations over anti-Muslim hysteria, Juppé has no viable alternative to propose, and he himself approves measures targeting Muslims and immigrants. While distancing himself from more outrageous anti-Muslim incidents like the expulsion of a Muslim student from school for wearing a long skirt or the banning of burkini swimwear on beaches, Juppé supported banning certain types of Muslim dress.

Ouvrière Juppé falsely (Wrote) such bans not as appeals to racism, but as simple police measures. He told *Le Monde*, "On the niqab, the State Council took a position: it must be banned not for religious reasons, but because it is contrary to the need to identify all faces in any public location. [But if one accepts religious bans,] The next thing that is posed is the question of bans on veils in universities, on 'burkinis,' or even one day on long skirts..."

The basic lines of Juppé's police-state and austerity policies are virtually indistinguishable from those of Hollande and the PS, and there can be little doubt that—should he be elected—he will also rely on anti-Muslim rhetoric, as Hollande did, to disorient popular opposition.

Juppé plans an escalation of law-and-order measures and a prison build-up. As he told *Le Monde*, "I propose to create prison places for 10,000 new inmates, and to launch under the authority of the justice ministry a penitentiary police that will carry out intelligence work in the prisons and support prison guards. Finally, we need prison compounds to fight radicalization."

With France's economy stagnating, its budget deficits are set to rise. It therefore has to implement further budget cuts to keep the deficit below the 3-percent-of-GDP limit set by the European Union. Juppé is therefore vowing to carry out deep attacks on social spending, should he come to power.

"After the election, we won't be at 2.7 percent but 3.5 percent if you look at all the [current PS] government's promises," he said. "From the start of my term in office, I will launch major structural reforms that have been too long delayed, like setting the pension age at 65 or deregulating the labor market. Overall, I will make €80 billion in spending cuts so we can finance €30 billion in tax cuts and €50 billion in structural reduction of the deficit."

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