

# 'Tolerant' French Close Mosques

*Al Jazeera* [reports](#),

"France is likely to close up to 160 mosques in the coming months as part of a nationwide police operation under the state of emergency which allows places of worship that promote radical views to be shut down, one of the country's chief imams has said."

Curiously, Hassan El Alaoui, a Muslim prison chaplain-general "who is in charge of nominating regional and local Muslim imams and mediating between the imams and prison officials" defends the move:

"'According to official figures and our discussions with the interior ministry, between 100 and 160 more mosques will be closed because they are run illegally without proper licenses, they preach hatred, or use takfiri speech,' he said.

Takfiris are classified as Muslims who accuse others of the same faith of apostasy, an act which has become a sectarian slur.

'This kind of speech shouldn't even be allowed in Islamic countries, let alone secure countries like France,' El Alaoui, who became the first Muslim prison chaplain-general in 2005, said."

Three mosques have already been shut down. *International Business Times* [reports](#),

"Ammunition for Kalashnikov assault rifles and Islamic State (ISIS/Daesh) propaganda was seized in raids following the closure of a mosque in Paris, French

authorities said. Three mosques have been closed since the 13 November terror attacks on the French capital.”

Yes, under its new emergency powers, the land of “Liberte, Egalite, and Fraternite” is shutting down mosques and limiting religious freedom. That is not the land of Donald Trump or the Tea Party. France is led by President Hollande, who represents the French Socialist Party.

In *The Twilight of Authority*, the famed sociologist Robert Nisbet warned about the dangers of terrorism to Western liberal societies:

“The second great force in the world scene that is bound to accelerate the process of militarization of not only Western but other societies is terrorism. If terror, as manifested by such groups as the PLO and the IRA, increases by the same rate during the next decade as it has during the past decade, it is impossible to conceive of liberal, representative democracy continuing, with its crippling processes of due process and its historic endowments of immunity before, or protection by, the legal process.”

It certainly seems that with limited means of identifying who amongst is a threat, we have a serious problem. The San Bernardino terrorists had been making plans for a year and went undetected, after all.

So, how can a free and just society maintain itself in the face of terrorism? France clearly believes that shutting down mosques is a reasonable response. And in that action, a deeper truth may lie.

When we think about modern terrorism, the threat is external. The terrorists may enter into the society, they may live in the society, but they are never a part of the society. That is true of the IRA bombers of the past and the ISIS attackers of today. They all saw themselves in opposition to the existing

order.

The existing order is maintained by a homogenous society maintaining power. Internally factions may quibble over differences, but all sides understand the rules by which disagreements are managed. Terrorists don't care about the rules, they want a new order. They represent a diversity of belief and action that a tolerant society cannot tolerate. And so it is that societies may find themselves walling themselves off and pushing for greater homogeneity around certain core values.

Time will tell how Western countries deal with the terrorist threats, both internal and external. What we can see from France's experience is that there are limits to tolerance and that the idea of universalism or multiculturalism is breaking down.