

Tormenting the Souls of Religious Arabs: ‘Arab Spring’ Degrades into Sectarian Counterrevolution

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The blind sectarian rampage, which has been waging a war on worship mosques, churches and religious shrines have become a modern Arab trade mark phenomenon, since what the western media called from the start the “Arab Spring” overwhelmed the Arab streets.

The sectarian rampage is sweeping away in its rage cultural treasures of archeology and history, hitting hard at the very foundations of the Arab and Islamic identity of the region, but more importantly tormenting the souls of the Arab Muslim and Christian believers who helplessly watch the safe havens of their places of worship being desecrated, looted, bombed, leveled to the ground and turned instead into traps of death and monuments of destruction by the “suicide bombers” who are shouting “God Is Great.”

The only regional precedent for the destruction of worship places on such a scale was the destruction of some one thousand mosques since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. A research by Israeli professor Ayal Banbanetchi, Rapaport noted that after 1948, only 160 mosques remained in the area. In the following years, this number shrank to 40, meaning that 120 were destroyed. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip documented the names and locations of 47 mosques that were destroyed completely and 107 others partially damaged by Israeli bombing during the “Operation Cast Lead” in 2008.

May be because those crimes went unpunished the western public opinion turns a blind eye to the new Arab phenomenon.

Most likely, the leaders of the Israeli fundamentalist Jewish “Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement” are watching closely and wondering whether the current destruction of mosques by the Muslims themselves would be enough justification to carry out the movement’s public threats to build the “third temple” on the debris of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam’s third holiest site, in Jerusalem.

It is noteworthy that this destructive phenomenon was an integral part of the “Arab Spring,” which so far has ousted two presidents in Egypt and three others in Tunisia , Yemen and Libya , but successfully contained in the Moroccan and Jordanian monarchies.

However containment has been so far unsuccessful in the Kingdom of Bahrain , where the ongoing anti-government mass protests still rage uncontrollable to the extent that the tiny island kingdom was forced to invite a Saudi Arabian contingent of the GCC’s “Peninsula Shield Force” to move in for help. Nonetheless, opposition sources and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights reported “documented” attacks by “the ruling regime” on 37 Shiite mosques, destroying 27 of them, some one thousand years old.

Islamist Copy of Christian Inquisition

The “Arab Spring” was optimistically named after a season in nature during which life is reborn and was supposed to promise a renewal of the stagnant political, social and economic life in the Arab world, but unfortunately it turned instead into a sectarian season of killing, death and destruction by counterrevolution forces nurtured financially, logistically, militarily and politically by the most conservative among the Arab ruling regimes in the Arabian Peninsula and their U.S. – led western sponsors and backers.

The sectarian cleansing in Iraq and Syria committed by the exclusionist sectarian zealots has become an Islamist modern copy of the European Christian inquisition in the Middle Ages, with the difference that the old European one was more systematic and organized by the Vatican institution and its allied states while it is perpetrated by uncontrolled sporadic and shadowy gangs of terror in the modern Arab case.

The fact that this horrible phenomenon came into life only with the U.S. – led invasion then occupation of Iraq in 2003 and exacerbated with the on – record U.S. campaign for a “regime change” in Syria could only be interpreted as an outcome of a premeditated policy to divide and rule in the Arab world.

On last August 24, the Maronite patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rai’e told the Vatican Radio: “There is a plan to destroy the Arab world for political and economic interests and boost inter-confessional conflict between Sunnis and Shiites,” adding, “We are seeing the total destruction of what Christians managed to build in 1,400 years” in terms of peaceful cohabitation and coexistence with Muslims.

This interpretation is vindicated, for example, by the fact that both the sectarian ruling antagonists, who were brought to power in Iraq by the invading U.S. army, and the al-Qaida –linked protagonists, whose presence in Iraq coincided with the U.S. occupation of the country and who are waging a sectarian war of terror to remove them from power, were both U.S. – made warriors, the first as the “democratic opposition” to the national “dictatorship” of late Saddam Hussein and the second as the “freedom fighters” against the military occupation of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union “empire of evil,” according to the U.S. propaganda terminology.

In Iraq , the AFP on last May 20 reported that a “war on mosques” still “rages.” Seven years earlier the bombing of the dome of the Shiite Al Askari Mosque in Samarra , or the Golden Mosque, was followed by attacks on more than 200 Sunni mosques within two days according to the UN mission in the country. This is indeed a sectarian civil war, but its seeds were sown during the U.S. “Operation Phantom Fury” in 2004 on what Iraqis call “the city of mosques” of Fallujah, where scores of mosques were destroyed completely or damaged by the Americans.

Singling out Plight of Christians Misleading

Misleadingly or otherwise, the mainstream western media is singling out the plight of Arab Christians in this blind rampage, although their plight is incomparable to that of their Muslim compatriots neither in numbers and magnitude of the phenomenon nor in the resulting human, social, political, cultural and material losses.

Writing in the Gulf News on this September 11, Dr. Joseph A. Kechichian said “it was impossible to separate the fate of Arab Christians from their Muslim brethren, a term used here in the sense of fellow citizens not necessarily brotherhood. Indeed, when Iraqi,

Egyptian and now Syrian churches were/are destroyed, it is necessary to also note that Sunni and Shiite mosques were and are shelled on a regular basis.”

In Iraq for example more than sixty churches were attacked since the U.S. invasion in 2003, but more than four hundred Muslim mosques were targeted. An estimate of two thirds of Iraq's 1.5 million Christians have been forced to flee the country, but four million Iraqi Muslims became refugees abroad and a few millions more were internally displaced as the result of mass sectarian cleansing campaigns. Patriarch al-Rai'e accused the international community of “total silence” over Iraq .

However, proportionally Arab Christians are now a threatened species. Writing in Foreign Affairs on this September 13, Reza Aslan expected “no significant Christian presence in the Middle East in another generation or two” because “What we are witnessing is nothing less than a regional religious cleansing that will soon prove to be a historic disaster for Christians and Muslims alike.”

On this September 16 in the town of Mezda south of Tripoli , the tomb and minaret of Sheikh Ahmad al-Sunni mosque were bombed, a cemetery was dug up. In the capital, Tripoli , itself explosives were detonated by remote control late last March inside the Muslim Sufi ancient shrine of Sidi Mohammed al-Andalosi. These “incidents” were the latest sectarian rampage. Last year, The New York Times reported on August 25 the bulldozing of a mosque containing Sufi Muslim graves “in broad daylight” in the “center” of the Libyan capital. A mosque library was set on fire a day earlier. Scores of similar assaults since the “revolution” toppled the Muammar Gaddafi regime late in 2011, including one against the tomb of 15th-century Muslim scholar Abdel Salam al-Asmar, led UNESCO to urge an “end to attacks on Libyan Sufi mosques.” UNESCO's Director General Irina Bokova warned the attacks “must be halted if Libyan society is to complete its transition to democracy.”

In January this year, the “revolutionary” government of Tunisia announced an “emergency” plan to protect the Sufi mausoleums from similar sectarian vandalism, including against two of the best known Sufi shrines of Saida Manoubia and Sidi Abdel Aziz. UNESCO's appeal to “Tunisian authorities to take urgent measures to protect the heritage sites, which represent the country's cultural and historical wealth” did not stop the sectarian rampage. In February this year The Union of Sufi Brotherhoods in Tunisia reported at least thirty-four shrines were attacked since the revolution forced former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali into exile in Saudi Arabia in 2011; the number is higher according to other reports and the attacks continue.

In Egypt , UN [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon had called the recent attacks on mosques and churches “unacceptable.” As recently as August 14, supporters of the first elected Egyptian president and the Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammad Morsi, who was removed from power on July 3rd, occupied Delga, a remote town of 120,000 people in Minya province in central Egypt, in a wave of retaliation attacks on dozens of police stations, manpowered mostly by Muslim Egyptians, and at least 42 Christian churches, of which 37 were burnt and looted.

British The Guardian on September 16 reported: “According to Christians in Delga, huge mobs carrying machetes and firearms then attacked dozens of Coptic properties, including the 1,600-year-old monastery of the Virgin Mary and St Abraam,” torched three of the five churches in the town, looting everything, killing some Coptic compatriots, forcing scores of Christian families to escape the town, and those who remained were forced to pay

“protection money.” After more than two months, authorities recaptured the town last week ending their ordeal.

Delga’s story was not the latest nor the longest, ugliest or largest of the blind sectarian atrocities; to look for these, observers will find plenty of ongoing daily manifestations of these atrocities in Iraq and Syria where they are still raging at large, and where the control of authorities could be the guess of anybody for the unforeseeable future, threatening to spill over to the neighboring Arab countries of Lebanon and Jordan as well as to the non-Arab and NATO member Turkey.

The Cradle of Diversity and Coexistence

The political degradation of the “Arab Spring” into a sectarian counterrevolution is best illustrated in Syria . The former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in a recent UPI report described the current conflict in the country as a “Sunni confessional revolution” against a ruling regime supported by other religious minorities. Kissinger was not accurate. The majority of the Sunni Muslims in the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo , which together are the home of half the population, are against the sectarian “revolution” led by al-Qaida and the Muslim Brotherhood, which are not considered representatives of mainstream Islam or Muslims.

On last August 30 UNESCO warned that a rich cultural heritage was being devastated by the conflict now in its third year, from Aleppo ’s Umayyad Mosque to the Crac des Chevaliers castle dating from the 13th century Crusades.

The BBC on last April 23 quoted the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of the church of Antioch, Gregorios III Laham, as saying recently that more than 1,000 Christians had been killed, “entire villages... cleared of their Christian inhabitants”, and more than 40 churches and Christian centres damaged or destroyed. He reported that 450,000 of Syria ’s two million Christians have been displaced.

However the magnitude of the plight of the Arab Syrian Christians should be seen within the context of the wider disaster that befell the Muslim majority as a whole. More than one hundred thousand Syrians are reported killed so far, hundreds of “Sunni” mosques targeted, one third of the more than 23 million Syrians, overwhelmingly Muslims of all sects, are now either refugees abroad or internally displaced. It’s a national disaster and not only a Christian one.

The Catholic Pope Francis declared September 7 a day of fasting and prayer for peace in Syria worldwide and his declaration was received positively among other Christian churches as well as among the mainstream Arab Muslim public opinion.

Two days ahead of “the day,” Islamist sectarian counterrevolutionaries of Al Qaida-linked rebels, especially Jabhat Al Nusra and the more extremist Ahrar Al Sham, targeted what Wadie el-Khazen, chairman of the Maronite General Council, described as “the most important Christian stronghold in Syria and the Middle East,” namely the Syrian town of Maloula, which “retained its Aramaic heritage since Christ spoke Aramaic” and holds many of the oldest monasteries and churches, including Mar Thecla that predates the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. Shouting “God is Great,” they declared they “won the city of the Crusaders,” which became a “ghost town” within hours.

It was a clear retaliation message to Pope Francis for not blessing their ongoing sectarian counterrevolution.

Longer before the Americans of the “new world” started to pose as the apostles who lecture and preach them, Syria has been the oldest cradle of religious and ethnic diversity and coexistence. Therefore the sectarian counterrevolution is now fighting in Syria its bloodiest battle, the result of which will make or break its rising tide for a long time to come.

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