

A WORLD IN MOTION

ISSUE 173 | 8 JUNE 2017

P1 | QATAR

The Arab world's strongest powers dramatically cut ties with Qatar over alleged support for terrorists and Iran.

P2 | UNITED KINGDOM

The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the third terror attack in the UK this year, days before snap national elections.

P3 | AFGHANISTAN

Kabul residents are reeling in the wake of multiple terror attacks and violent protests, which left more than 150 dead and hundreds injured.

P4 | PUBLICATIONS

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THE NUMBERS:

QATAR CRISIS



9

The number of nations that have cut ties with Qatar



2.3 million

The population of Qatar (88% are non-Qatari; only 12% are ethnic Qataris)



14 days

The notice given to Qatari citizens to leave Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE



11,000

The number of US troops stationed in Qatar (Air Force Central Command; Combined Air and Space Operations Centre; and Air Expedition Wing)

QATAR CRISIS: NUMEROUS ARAB NATIONS CUT TIES



By Andrew Richards

The Arab world's strongest powers cut ties with Qatar on Monday over alleged support for Islamists and Iran, re-opening a festering wound two weeks after US President Donald Trump's demand for Muslim states to fight terrorism. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain cut relations with Qatar in a coordinated move. Yemen, Libya's eastern-based government and the Maldives joined in later. Qatar denounced the move as based on lies about it supporting militants. It has often been accused of being a funding source for Islamists, as has Saudi Arabia. Iran, long at odds with Saudi Arabia and a behind-the-scenes target of the move, blamed Trump's visit last month to Riyadh. (*Reuters*)

Trump support emboldens Saudis

During Mr Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia, he singled out Iran as a key financial source for armed groups in the region, leaving Saudi to conclude that because Qatar has known ties with Iran, Qatar must be targeted. The question is why would they break ties with Qatar so drastically, when Mr Trump said Iran was sponsoring terrorism? Eurasia Group's Middle East practice head Hani Sabra explains that the Saudis have always wanted to bring reform to Qatar, but was unable to do so under the presidency of Barack Obama. Mr Obama pursued a stable diplomacy, trying to keep everyone happy at the same time. Although his administration opposed Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood that essentially highjacked democracy in Egypt, Mr Obama never went so far as to label Qatar "the enemy", fearing it would destabilise the region. Donald Trump, on the other

hand, is visibly pro-Saudi and the opportunity provided by a friendlier White House allowed the Saudis an opportunity to apply pressure to Qatar.

According to *The Independent*: "The Saudis and their allies are demanding, in effect, that Qatar end its independent foreign policy and tame or close down its television station, Al Jazeera. They claim that Qatar is complicit with Iran in supporting terrorism." In 2014, Saudi Arabia recalled their diplomats from Qatar over much the same issue – their ties to the Muslim Brotherhood – but at the time, the Saudis did not have strong US support from Mr Obama. This time around, the Saudis and other Gulf States have gone so far as to sever land, air and sea travel with Qatar. This, according to Sabra, is all because of Mr Trump's support.

Complicated relations

The Trump administration, however, is now caught up in a potential Arab war because of its strong support of the Saudis, with whom it signed a \$110 billion arms deal in May. During Mr Trump's address to Arab leaders in Riyadh, he said: "A better future is only possible if your nations drive out the terrorists and drive out the extremists. Drive them out! Drive them out of your places of worship, drive them out of your communities, drive them out of your holy land and drive them out of this earth." If, however, Arab nations view Qatar as a problem when it comes to regional terrorism, violent conflict between them could throw the region into further turmoil, placing the US in a catch-22 situation between Saudi and Qatar.

The US has a lot to lose if tensions escalate between Saudi and Qatar. According to the US Airforce, Qatar hosts the largest US military base in the Middle East, with more than 11,000 troops. The base is of enormous strategic importance to the US as it houses the forward headquarters of the US Air Force Central Command, Combined Air and Space Operations Centre (CAOC) and the 379th Air Expedition Wing that oversees US military air power in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and



US President Trump's bid to slash funding for the UN would make it "impossible" for it to continue its essential work, a UN spokesman said, adding that the organisation was ready to discuss reform with Washington. The US is the biggest UN contributor, paying 22% of the \$5.4 billion core budget and 28.5% of the \$7.9 billion peacekeeping budget. These assessed contributions are agreed by the 193-member UN General Assembly.



President Vladimir Putin said that **Russia** was ready to sell Turkey advanced S-400 surface-to-air missile systems and had discussed the matter with Ankara, the TASS news agency reported. TASS said Putin made the comments to international media at an economic forum in St Petersburg.



Iran's Revolutionary Guards ratcheted up the tension with Saudi Arabia as it accused Tehran's regional rival of involvement in the double terrorist attack in the capital (7 June), which left at least 12 people dead and more than 40 wounded. Gunmen and suicide bombers launched simultaneous attacks on the parliament building and the nearby shrine of Ayatollah Khomeini. The attacks were claimed by IS, in what would be the jihadi group's first significant strike in the Islamic Republic.

18 other nations. Manned by personnel from the US Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines as well as coalition partner countries, the CAOC is the 'nerve centre' of air campaigns across the region.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Saudi's criticism of Qatar is not without merit as their state-sponsored television, *Al Jazeera*, was in many ways responsible for the electoral victories of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Libya after the 'Arab Spring' revolution. The *Al Jazeera* network has increased Qatar's regional influence to such an extent that it has lessened the influence of Western networks, having the ability to influence millions of Arab viewers.

A potential military clash between Saudi Arabia (and other Arab nations) and Qatar could have a devastating impact on the Church in the Middle East, since it would essentially be the US who arms the Saudis under its billion-dollar arms deal. Qatar's broadcasting influence could be used to 'demonise' the US (as has already been done by Iran and others), leading to increased attacks on foreigners and Christians, with two interlinked potential outcomes.

Firstly, because Qatar is linked to Iran (majority Shia Islam), attacks would not only force Christians to flee the region, but also Shia Muslims. Secondly, refugee numbers to Europe would likely spike, in similar numbers to those who fled the violence of IS in Iraq and the civil war in Syria.

Many Christian leaders around the world have concluded that the Muslim refugee wave to Europe, caused by the 'Arab Spring' and the rise of IS, is indeed an opportunity for harvest among Arab people. This harvest season is fast approaching its end as refugees are now being sent back (or are voluntarily returning) to liberated areas in their countries of origin.

If another war between major Arab nations breaks out, it could very well spell the eventual end of Islam, as thousands of Muslims leave the religion every day. This raises a question: will the Church be ready this time around to welcome these millions of new seekers into the Kingdom?

PRAY > For Arab leaders to make wise decisions in this highly strategic region > For Muslims to come to Christ during this time of deepening crisis

IS TERROR ATTACK DAYS BEFORE UK ELECTIONS



By *Cherolyn Amery*

The Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility for Saturday night's attack in London in which three armed men ran over pedestrians on London Bridge and stabbed several more before being killed. This was the third attack in Britain that IS has claimed, after the bombing in Manchester and a similar attack in the heart of London in March. In another development, social media companies Google, Twitter and Facebook have rejected a statement by Theresa May, UK prime minister, that internet companies are partially to blame for giving "extremist views" the "safe space it needs to breed". (*Al Jazeera*)

Response to the attack

The latest in the recent spate of terrorist incidents in Britain happened less than a week before the 8 June election and brought security issues to the forefront of voters' electoral considerations. Widespread consensus was that the election should go ahead as planned, as to do otherwise would have defeated the "democratic process".

In response to Saturday's attack, Ms May called for changes and for tougher measures to be

taken in the fight against terrorism – such as "international agreements to regulate cyberspace to help stop the spread of Islamist extremism"; "difficult and embarrassing conversations", which perhaps implies 'politically incorrect' discussions about issues that many would call 'Islamophobic'; and increased prison sentences for even minor terror-related offenses. In a statement, Ms May said that the "ideology" connecting the three attacks is "a perversion of Islam and a perversion of the truth", and that it "cannot be defeated through military intervention alone".

According to Robert Hutton and Alex Morales of *Bloomberg*, a possible understanding of "embarrassing conversations" relates to Ms May's six-year tenure as Home Secretary, when she was frustrated in her efforts to bring about counter-extremism legislation (partly due to disagreements about a workable legal definition of "non-violent extremism"). Hutton and Morales also link her comment to a possible focus on the problem of Muslim integration in British society. Cressida Dick, the London police chief, said that "while some of the recent attacks in Britain had international links, they had a largely domestic centre of gravity" (*Reuters*). Meanwhile, Tim Farron, the Lib Dem leader, pointed to a need for "difficult and embarrassing conversations" with countries like Saudi Arabia, with whom the United Kingdom is allied.

Electoral repercussions

Before the recent spate of attacks, key issues surrounding the elections were public services (especially healthcare) and the Brexit departure from the European Union (EU). Ms May called for the snap elections (the last elections being only two years ago) with the view of establishing a "strong

NEWS HEADLINES



European leaders dismissed Donald Trump's claim that the Paris climate accord can be renegotiated after the US president announced he will pull out of the deal struck in 2015 to seek better terms. Leaders of France, Germany and Italy released a joint statement rejecting Trump's assertion. "We deem the momentum generated in Paris in December 2015 irreversible and we firmly believe that the Paris Agreement cannot be renegotiated, since it is a vital instrument for our planet, societies and economies."



Japan's defence minister, Tomomi Inada, backed the US using any option to deal with North Korea, including military strikes, and said Tokyo wanted to build a deeper alliance with Washington that could play a regional security role. "The United States is making clear through both words and deeds that all options are on the table. I strongly support the US position," said the Japanese Minister of Defence.



Russia will respond to NATO boosting its military presence in eastern members nearby its borders such as Poland and the Baltic states, Moscow's ambassador to the Western military alliance said. NATO's eastern states asked for additional security guarantees after Moscow annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

and stable" leadership and increasing her majority, especially ahead of the upcoming Brexit negotiations with the EU that are due to begin on 19 June.

Now, however, security issues are front and centre. *Bloomberg* reports that last month, an ICM poll indicated that 44 percent of voters trusted Ms May to "protect people from threats at home and abroad", while only 14 percent trusted Jeremy Corbyn of the Labour Party (the official opposition). Another survey, from YouGov at the end of May, showed that 40 percent of voters saw Ms May's Conservative Party as better at dealing with defence and security policy, compared to 20 percent who supported the Labour Party in that regard. Ms May has, however, received much criticism for reductions in the police force.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

INcontext asked a pastor in the UK to comment on the 'climate' of the Church in the UK, especially in light of the recent attacks and issues of Muslim integration.

One UK church in particular has four congregations: an Eritrean and a Pakistani congregation (most of whom are Muslim converts), a Russian/Eastern European congregation (with a strong Roman Catholic background), and an international congregation

that mostly comprises 'local' and African believers. Among these diverse congregations, the responses to the current social tensions and threats differ greatly. Both the Eritrean and Pakistani congregations want to evangelise more intensively, and because of their backgrounds, there is not much fear. The Eastern European congregation is far more insular, while the international congregation is "angrier" and more inclined towards retaliation.

Meanwhile, the pastor of a church near London Bridge (also with a diverse community of believers) said that everyone came together and opened the doors of the church for people after the attack. There was some fear, but the main response was a desire to 'use' the events for the extension of God's Kingdom, and a conviction that God is in control and is working out His plan, even if that includes a period of destabilisation.

In general, the focus of the Church in the UK at present is forgiveness, praying for peace and actively loving people, including Muslims.

PRAY > For UK leaders as they move forward after the election > For the Church in the UK to lead the way in building community and cultural integration > For believers to actively demonstrate Christ's love and forgiveness

BLOODSHED IN LEAD-UP TO AFGHAN PEACE TALKS



By Donnelly McClelland

It has been an incredibly difficult week for Kabul. In four days, over a hundred people were killed and several hundreds injured – most of them in a massive terrorist attack in central Kabul on 31 May 2017. Two days later, as angry protests threatened to become violent, the police opened fire, killing and injuring several more people. The next day, during the funeral of one of the victims, a triple suicide attack tore through the rows of the mourners just as they started their prayers – miraculously leaving most of the gathered Jamiat leaders unharmed. The situation in Kabul remains tense, but there have been no further protests yet, as politicians mull their options. (*Reliefweb*)

The 'blame game'

There was no immediate claim of responsibility in the wake of the 31 May bombing, which is unusual, especially since claiming such a heinous act could elevate the claimants' stature as terrorists. In fact, the Kandahar Taliban were quick to condemn it and vehemently denied their involvement. So, it is odd that an attack of such magnitude has both no claimant and a disclaimer by a prominent faction.

The government in Kabul was quick to single out the Haqqani network as their prime suspect, adding that they were likely supported across the border (implying Pakistani collusion). Almost every catastrophic incident in Afghanistan, especially those in the capital Kabul, is followed by a war of words between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kabul and US officials have long accused Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of covertly providing sanctuary to the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network, but Pakistan denies any links.

The Haqqani network

The Haqqani network is a militant group fighting Afghan and US forces in Afghanistan. Many consider it the most lethal terrorist group in Afghanistan, which has been blamed for some of the deadliest violence in the country, including attacks on embassies in Kabul, the Afghan parliament building, local residents and US military bases.

Because of ill health, network founder Jalaluddin Haqqani handed over operational control of the group to his son, Sirajuddin, who also acts as deputy leader of the Taliban. Sirajuddin views the current government as a puppet of the US 'occupying force', both of which are considered 'fair game'. According to Shaukat Qadir (of *The National*), Sirajuddin can be considered a "loyalist Afghan", which he argues implies that he does not like 'collateral damage' (i.e. civilian targets). He maintains that the Haqqani attacks are usually characterised by the fact that they target security forces, their installations or the Afghan government.

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For this reason, Qadir maintains that Haqqanis have never failed to claim their attacks, thus calling into question the government's conclusion.

A multi-dimensional problem

Afghanistan's issues are multi-dimensional in origin, with one set stemming from internal structural conflict (ethnic and tribal nationalism), and others arising from the involvement of a multitude of countries over the decades. Such foreign involvement has often further complicated the already volatile internal structural issues. It can be argued that besides the US (and other NATO nations), countries such as Russia, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India and Pakistan, are all 'players' on Afghan soil for a variety of reasons ranging from issues of national security to quests for natural resources or strategic positioning.

The Afghan government and numerous foreign missions in Afghanistan prepared for several weeks to host a conference, the Kabul Process Meeting, on 6 June, in which senior representatives from nearly two dozen countries gathered to discuss the war and a possible route to peace. But the bombing and recent cycle of violence has again demonstrated how fragile even the earliest steps of peace-making can be in the middle of a protracted war.

An "unwinnable" war?

Many commentators across a vast spectrum of US society are calling into question the US presence in Afghanistan and the current proposal to increase the number of ground troops. The proposal, presented by US generals to President Trump, calls for several thousand more American troops and an indefinite US financial commitment (of more than 20 billion dollars per year) to strengthen the Afghan security forces and roll back Taliban gains. There is an argument, however, that although additional troops may shift the frontlines fractionally, the real issues are concentrated in the 'rear' – in the political divisions within the Afghan government, in the sanctuary the Afghan Taliban has enjoyed in Pakistan, and in the hostility of numerous regional countries to the US presence.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

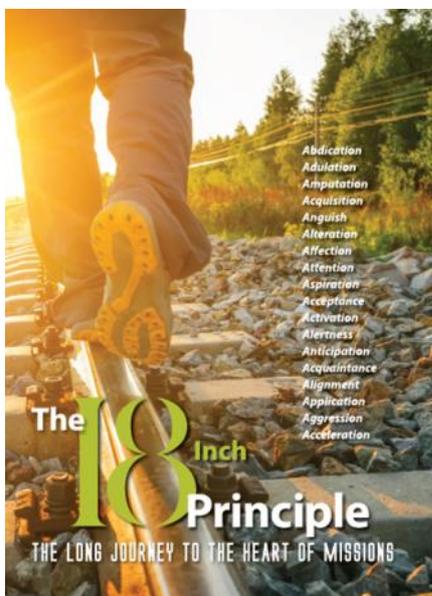
Afghanistan has endured decades of war and conflict, and endless cycles of bloodshed. It has become clear that the 'war' for Afghanistan will never be won purely through military, economic or political means – there needs to be a spiritual tipping point, a monumental shift in the spiritual realm. In official eyes, there are no Afghan Christians. The few Afghans (estimated to be in the thousands) who practice the faith do so in secret for fear of persecution, attending underground churches that are believed to be operating in the country. Expatriates use chapels on embassy grounds, but those are effectively inaccessible to Afghans. Although there are no explicit laws that forbid proselytising, many authorities and most of society view the practice as contrary to the beliefs of Islam.

In 2015, *Operation World* (the mission research organisation) named Iran as the country with the fastest-growing evangelical Church in the world. They identified Afghanistan as the second-fastest growing Church, with Afghans largely being reached in part by Iranians, since their languages are similar.

Another country with eyes on Afghanistan is China. Not only has the Chinese government been showing a deepening and growing interest in the country (with increased economic investment, diplomatic engagement and commitment to assistance in security matters), believers from the Chinese underground Church have committed to go as missionaries (as part of the 'Back to Jerusalem' movement). Who better to come alongside Afghan believers than those from Iran and China (two countries where many believers have already paid the ultimate price, but where the Church shows tremendous growth both in numbers and maturity)?

PRAY > For Godly wisdom to prevail as regional leaders gather to discuss the ongoing war and a route to peace > For those missionaries reaching Afghans with the Gospel > For the underground Church to grow in number and boldness

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