

A WORLD IN MOTION



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As Coptic Christians fled the Sinai region after a spate of attacks, President Sisi mobilised support for them. What might this mean for the region?

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After President Trump dropped the US' policy of a 'two-state' solution regarding Israel and Palestine, INcontext asked two experts to comment.

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Rita Elmounayer of SAT-7 (a satellite television ministry) will be speaking at various venues across South Africa.



THE NUMBERS:

EGYPTIAN COPTS



50 AD

The date believed to mark the founding of the Coptic Church, when the Apostle Mark reportedly visited Egypt



2 million

The estimated number of Coptic Christians living outside Egypt



2002

The year in which the Coptic Christmas celebration (7 January) was adopted as a national holiday in Egypt



1100s

The century when Egypt shifted from a majority Christian to a majority Muslim nation

COPTIC CHRISTIANS FLEE SINAI HOMES AFTER ATTACKS



By *Cherolyn Amery*

Hundreds of members of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority have fled the Sinai Peninsula to Ismailia city, 115km northeast of the capital Cairo, following a series of killings by a local armed group. The assailants killed at least seven Christians in separate attacks in Sinai's El Arish city in February. At least 90 families have reached the Ismailia governorate, according to an official of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Nabil Shukrallah of Ismailia's Evangelical Church said the families arrive scared and in need of supplies, which are being stockpiled at the church via donations from several parishes. *(Al Jazeera)*

Escalation of threats

While some reporting has said that no specific group was implicated in the recent series of killings, other reputable sources report that Egypt's Islamic State affiliate has claimed responsibility. Last week, the group released a video in which they threatened attacks against Christians in Egypt, who they see as "infidels" that "empower the West against Muslims". Christians were also described in the video as the group's "favourite prey", and the Coptic Pope and Christian businessmen were identified as particular targets. Additionally, some of those who fled their Sinai homes said that they received threatening messages on their cellphones.

According to Coptic priests and residents of the area, about 5,000 Christians lived in Sinai before the 2011 Arab Spring, but this number has since dropped as low as 1,000, as various 'waves' of Christian exodus occurred at times of increased targeting.

Analysts say that the recent spate of killings are an escalation compared to past threats, especially because the attacks happened in broad daylight and in busy public areas.

Islamic State in Sinai

The Sinai Peninsula, which borders the Gaza Strip and Israel in the northern region, has been a battleground between extremists and the government/military for a number of years. In 2014, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi implemented a state of emergency in response to a spate of suicide bombings that killed over 30 soldiers. At the time, he blamed Gaza's ruling Hamas group for the need for increased militancy, as the group was using underground tunnels in the area for smuggling.

Also in 2014, a militant group called Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State and changed their name to "Sinai Province". However, when the group claimed responsibility for the Cairo cathedral bombing in December 2016, they used the name "Islamic State Egypt". According to HA Hellyer of the Atlantic Council in Washington, this was a "clear expression... that they are not simply going to target Sinai, but the broader country".

Reuters reports that security analysts view the Islamic State's strategy in Sinai as being similar to that in Syria and Iraq – utilising a clear command structure as well as roadside bombs, suicide bombers and snipers. For operations in wider Egypt, however, they appear to be using 'cells' like in Tunisia or Europe – small, secretive groups that do not communicate with one another and only make themselves known when they are 'activated' for a specific attack. Reuters also reports that security analysts have identified Egypt (the most populous Arab nation) as a natural focus for an Islamic State shift as they lose ground in Syria, Iraq and Libya.

The Islamic State in the Sinai Province has called for its supporters in wider Egypt (those who cannot join the fight directly in Sinai) to "track down the apostates of Egypt" by reporting information about

NEWS HEADLINES



Nightmarish conditions in Libya are helping to drive a surge in the numbers of migrants attempting to reach **Italy** in the depths of winter, humanitarian officials and asylum seekers say. European efforts to close the route are also thought to lie behind a 50 to 70 percent increase in the number of mainly African migrants who have landed at Italian ports in the first two months of this year, compared to the same period in 2015 and 2016.



The **South African** government has called for calm after a wave of xenophobic violence in which dozens of shops and houses owned by immigrants have been torched and looted. Attacks against foreigners and foreign-run businesses have erupted regularly in recent years in South Africa, fuelled by the country's high unemployment levels and dire poverty. In the last week, more than 20 shops have been targeted in Atteridgeville, outside Pretoria, while residents in Rosettenville, south of Johannesburg, attacked at least 12 houses.



China said it opposed action by other countries under the pretext of freedom of navigation that undermined its sovereignty, after a US aircraft carrier strike group began patrols in the contested South China Sea.

"soldiers, agents, conscripts, policemen, officers, bank managers, Christian leaders, atheists, crusaders or Zionists". The Islamic State claimed responsibility for seven attacks in Cairo in 2016, as well as four in 2015. They also claimed responsibility for blowing up the Russian passenger plane over Sinai in October 2015, and they launched two rocket attacks on Israel in recent weeks (Israel, however, was not particularly concerned about this).

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

On 23 February, Mr Sisi ordered his security chiefs to "completely eradicate terrorism in northern Sinai", and a few days later, he instructed his government to actively assist with the resettlement of Christians who had fled the region. In the bigger picture, this response appears to form part of a 'pattern' of Mr Sisi responding decisively on behalf of Egypt's minority Christian population. When the 21 Coptic Christian migrant workers were martyred in Libya in February 2015, Mr Sisi ordered airstrikes targeting IS facilities in the country, and in response to the December attack on the Cairo cathedral, the government declared three days of mourning.

As reported in an earlier article in *A World in Motion* this year, Mr Sisi has also been a regular presence at Coptic Christmas Eve in recent years, and in January this year, he promised to build Egypt's biggest church along with the country's

biggest mosque.

Some Christians under threat in Egypt are saying that Mr Sisi is not doing enough to protect them, and others argue that his support for the Christian minority (which constitutes 10 percent of the Egyptian population) is part of a personal political agenda. Egyptian Christians live in a state of tension between choosing to believe in the possibility of a better future and weighing the history of repeated disappointments.

Regardless of this, Mr Sisi's public support of the Christian community goes a long way in 'legitimising' their presence in the country, and undoubtedly has positive ripple effects for the Egyptian Church and possibly the wider region. Neighbouring countries will take note of Mr Sisi's public support for Christians, and whether or not he acts on his stated promises, a 'message' will be sent out to the region. Pledges of help for Christians made by a Muslim president might challenge the opinions of Muslims in neighbouring countries concerning Christians, therefore his words (regardless of his actions) may have a positive impact on the Church in the Arab world.

PRAY > For all Copts living in fear to feel God's presence and peace > For the Egyptian Church to stand strong and remain a voice despite threats > For God to use Mr Sisi for His Kingdom purposes

PRESIDENT TRUMP AND THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION



By Andrew Richards

President Donald Trump dropped a US commitment to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the longstanding bedrock of Washington's Middle East policy, even as he urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to curb settlement construction. In the first face-to-face meeting between the two leaders since Trump's victory in the 2016 election, the Republican president backed away from a US embrace of the eventual creation of a Palestinian state, upending a position taken by successive administrations and the international community. *(Reuters)*

Background

Since 15 November 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has pursued the international recognition of the State of Palestine. After the Palestinian Declaration of Independence was proclaimed by the exiled Palestinian National Council in Algiers (Algeria), at least fifty-five nations – including states as diverse as the Soviet Union, China, India, Greece, Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Malta and Zambia – recognised the Palestinian

State, according to Mark Tessler, in his highly-praised history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In November of 2012, the United Nations awarded Palestine 'non-member observer state' status, resulting in Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, calling the UN resolution a "birth certificate of the reality of the State of Palestine". The Palestinian flag was officially raised at the UN headquarters on 30 September 2015.

It goes without saying that Israel does not recognise the State of Palestine, having voted against every UN resolution seeking such recognition. Having fought independence and acquisition wars against its surrounding Arab neighbours (who mostly supported Palestine), Israel continues to fight for survival (surrounded by hostile Arab nations seeking its destruction) in a region marred by decades of violence. That said, it has been an elusive crowning achievement of every Western head of state, to try and bring lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, with the two-state solution being championed as the only way.

In short, the two-state solution refers to an independent Palestinian and Israeli State, coexisting alongside each other. Over the years, diplomatic efforts to realise the two-state solution have failed six times, with the most recent failure being the 2013/14 negotiations attempted by the then United States Secretary of State John Kerry.

US support under Donald Trump

US President Donald Trump promised to support Israel during his presidential campaign, saying: "I'm

NEWS HEADLINES



The UN needs \$4.4bn by the end of March to prevent “a catastrophe” of hunger and famine in **South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia** and **Yemen**, according to the Secretary-General. More than 20 million people face starvation in the four countries and action is needed now to avert a humanitarian disaster, he told a news conference at UN headquarters. Of the four famine alerts, only one – Somalia – is caused by drought, while the other three are the result of conflicts.



North Korea said the claim that VX nerve agent was used to kill one of its citizens in Malaysia was “absurd” and lacked scientific basis. Last week, Malaysian police said VX, a chemical classified by the United Nations as a weapon of mass destruction, was used to kill Kim Jong-nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, on February 13. South Korean and US officials have said they believe North Korean agents orchestrated Kim’s assassination. North Korea said the accusations were made to tarnish its image.



IS fighters from **China's** Uighur ethnic minority have vowed to return home and “shed blood like rivers” in what security experts said marked the first such threat against Chinese targets.

the best thing that could ever happen to Israel.” During Prime Minister Netanyahu’s recent state visit to the US, Mr Trump hinted at just how lucky Israel is to have him as US President and ally, commenting on the Israel-Palestine conflict as follows: “I can live with either one [of the proposed solutions]. I thought for a while it looked like the two-state, looked like it may be the easier of the two, but honestly if Bibi and if the Palestinians... if Israel and the Palestinians are happy, I’m happy with the one they like the best.”

Mr Trump never did come out saying he supported a one-state solution, whereby Israel is awarded sovereignty over Palestine, but he did say that he did not think the two-state solution was the best choice. Hanan Ashrawi, a senior member of the Palestine Liberation Organization, responded: “If the Trump administration rejects this policy (two-state) it would be destroying the chances for peace and undermining American interests, standing and credibility abroad.”

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

INcontext asked Chris Eden, National Director of Bridges for Peace (an organisation of Christians supporting Israel by building relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and around the world) how a two-state solution could influence the region.

“It will depend on what the Palestinian state looks like. If Israel succeeds in achieving one of its main demands for it to be demilitarised, then it could succeed. Israel also recognises that for Palestine to succeed, it will need a healthy economy that will touch the lives of the people. If the West Bank just gains autonomy and Israel is not the ultimate gatekeeper, it will be overrun in days by militant Islam, much in the manner of what happened to Gaza. Egypt and Jordan firstly, then Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States also know that if Israel, the ‘cork in the bottle’, goes, then they will struggle to survive. The Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, not to mention Iran, would see a weak or non-existent Israel as a green light.”

INcontext also asked Dr Daniel Shayesteh, a former Hezbollah commander who became a Christian, what the impact of a one-state solution (Israel only) could have on the region.

“Politically and socially speaking, a one-state solution will not be beneficial for Israel because of its

establishment in democracy. In a one-state plan, the situation will be like the ex-Yugoslavia. Israel believes in democracy, but Muslims do not. Israel does not believe in demographic war, but Muslims believe that as a minority they need to bring forth more children until they get to the majority and then take advantage of democracy by claiming more rights. Then a time for bloodshed will come. I think the door is more open for a two-state solution compared to one-state. One-state may work, if Palestinians join Jordan. But Jordanians have had a lot of problems from Palestinians in the past and it is unlikely for them to want to lose the relative peace they have in their country.”

Asked whether the presidency of Donald Trump is a positive for Israel, Chris Eden says: “Trump is difficult to call because he has no track record as a politician and because he at times has appeared to be irrational. He does, however, seem to be emerging as a ‘master of the deal’. With the Middle East increasingly fractured by the Sunni/Shiite split and the fear of a mightier Iran, Trump may just be able to make deals, to Israel’s advantage, leveraging off this. Trump, I believe, has recognised the one-sidedness [of international diplomacy in support of the Palestinians] and the Palestinian intent to gain a state without negotiation. I believe that Trump’s allusion to one-state was coded language that unless they are prepared to sit down to negotiate, they may end up with a result that wouldn’t suit them. If he reigns in the Palestinians and forces them to sit down and negotiate, this would be good. However, if they do show a willingness to negotiate, then there are a few other serious complications that kick in, like distrust between Hamas and Fatah, the illegitimate leadership of Mahmoud Abbas, the fact that the Palestinian people have never been prepared for peace with Israel, and the theological clash between Islam and Judaism.”

In conclusion, Chris Eden believes that the fight for Israel’s continued existence will intensify. “Israel will be challenged to survive in the face of enemies becoming more powerful by the day, terror on the increase and, of course, the inevitable acquisition of nuclear power by those dedicated to Israel’s destruction.”

PRAY > For God to direct the decisions of Mr Trump and his administration > For the Church in Israel and Palestine to be a voice of peace > For a lasting solution to be found

UPDATE ON CAMPAIGN TO RECAPTURE MOSUL



By Andrew Richards

Before [the Islamic State] arrived in 2014, [Mosul] had around two million residents. Today there are thought to be up to 650,000 in the areas under IS control on the western side of the river. It took

the Iraqi Army three months to conquer the eastern side of the city, and casualties were heavy. IS left behind ruination, libraries burned, the university destroyed, and a city festooned with tunnels and IEDs. Maj Gen Rupert Jones, a commander with the coalition, told the BBC that it could take months to take all of western Mosul. Jonathan Spyer, the director of the Rubin Center at IDC Herzliya, who recently returned from eastern Mosul, says that the Iraqi Army will face many difficulties. “The topography of the west of the city differs with narrow streets and alleyways.” Special forces will have to play a major role, as they did in the east, and there may be a “high rate of attrition”. (*The National Interest*)

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

INcontext Website:

www.incontextinternational.org

Please visit our website for up-to-date information on events around the world.

If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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Looking ahead

The Islamic State (IS) is not simply going to 'give away' Mosul, as was proven by fierce battles against coalition troops that lasted more than two months in other parts of the city. According to sources within the Iraqi security forces, the battle for western Mosul is likely to be tougher than that for the eastern half of the city.

With coalition forces on the verge of taking western Mosul from the Islamic State, the question analysts are asking is not if refugees who fled the city will return, but who will govern them once they have returned? With different factions fighting inside Iraq against the Islamic State (Iraqi security forces, Kurdish Peshmerga, Turkish military, US special forces), the interpretation thereof can be that it is encouraging to see so many (who are otherwise opposed) fighting together against a common enemy. However, once the common enemy is defeated, the question is who will concede to who and whether the war in Iraq will continue between the same factions now united to defeat IS. A likely clash between Sunni and Shia Muslims, Kurds and Turks and even Christians will reopen sectarian fault lines that might prove worse than IS.

Without a doubt, a ruined city awaits returning refugees who will not only be confronted by the physical reconstruction of their neighbourhoods, but also by the task of reconciliation. Returning refugees will be confronted by thousands of IS-sympathiser families, which will force the residents of Mosul to reconcile before starting to build a new future.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The German Evangelical Church says that since 2013, "asylum seekers – either alone or as a family – have increasingly turned to the Christian faith and asked church communities whether they could be baptised." INcontext International confirmed such statements during a research visit to Germany in 2016, where it was found that not only were Muslim refugees turning to Christ, but refugees are largely responsible for the 're-awakening' of the European Church. Hana Reuther, Director of the International Student Advisory at Goethe University, found that the dormant faith of German Christians is being revived through the refugees, saying: "German Christians are isolated in their churches. Because of

the refugees, Christians are experiencing a revival of their faith. Secular Christians are becoming more active in their faith. My perspective is that God is using the refugees to revive the Church. God is challenging the Church, not with the fear of Islam, but challenging its faith as to its worth."

With reports coming out of Europe (especially Germany) of Muslim refugees who fled the war in Syria and the bloodshed of the Islamic State in Iraq converting to Christianity, the hope has always been that these refugees will return to their homes once peace has been established. Since the liberation of Bartella and Queragosh, two majority Christian cities in Northern Iraq, more Christians have started returning than the number that left. *Fides*, a Catholic news service focused on informing and promoting missionary activity, is also reporting that Christian families have started returning to cities in Syria that were previously held by rebels.

Reconciliation and restoration are two Christian values that will make Christians a necessity when it comes to rebuilding Iraq and Syria, when peace eventually comes. The hope is that Christian refugees and Muslim converts will be disciplined, equipped and encouraged to return to Iraq and Syria to restore the Christian Church in a region where secular media said it was eradicated.

As mentioned above, when coalition forces united against IS lose their common enemy, it could well be that groups turn on each other as they try to secure territory. This happened in Afghanistan after the Soviet army was defeated by the American-backed Mujahideen – after the common enemy (the Soviets) was defeated, warlords turned on each other to secure territory they fought for. Whatever the outcome, Christians will play the role of peacemakers in a region that has known nothing other than war. With refugees starting to return, the global Church needs to support the efforts of peace-making Christians who will pay dearly to secure a next generation of believers in the Middle East.

PRAY > For refugees in Europe to encounter loving believers who can disciple them > For a lasting peace to be achieved in Iraq and Syria > For those planning to return to prepare their hearts for rebuilding and restoration efforts

UPCOMING EVENTS



SAT-7 in South Africa: 11-19 March 2017

Rita Elmounayer, who will be visiting South Africa to share about the ministry of SAT-7, has a passion for investing in people's lives—especially with regard to education—through the medium of Christian satellite broadcasts that are able to reach into countless homes and refugee settlements.

Don't miss this opportunity to come hear about how God is using SAT-7 to make His love visible in the Middle East and North Africa.

For more information regarding venues and dates, email francois@sat7.org or [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the SAT-7 website.