

A WORLD IN MOTION

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Twin church bombings, claimed by the Islamic State group, killed more than 46 people and injured scores more in the Nile delta region.

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An alleged chemical attack in rebel-held Khan Sheikhoun resulted in widespread international condemnation and a US tactical strike.

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The US and Chinese presidents, described as the world's two most powerful men, met for the first time and discussed a range of important issues.


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Business as Mission (BAM) one-day seminars are being held in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in May.




THE NUMBERS:

PALM SUNDAY ATTACKS




09.04.2017

The date of the twin bombings of Coptic churches in Egypt




46

The number killed (28 in Tanta and 17 in Alexandria)



126

The number of casualties (78 in Tanta and 48 in Alexandria)



3-months

The initial duration of a declared state of emergency

TWIN SUICIDE BOMBINGS TARGET COPTIC CHRISTIANS



By Andrew Richards

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced a three-month state of emergency following twin church bombings by the Islamic State group that killed more than 46 [Coptic Christians] on Palm Sunday, the deadliest attacks on the minority in recent memory. The attacks in the Nile Delta cities of Tanta and Alexandria followed a Cairo church bombing in December and came weeks before a planned visit by Catholic Pope Francis intended to show support for Egypt's Christian minority. (NEWS24)

Countermeasures proposed

Shortly after announcing the three-month state of emergency, Mr Sisi said he would form a new 'supreme council' to counter terrorism and extremism in the country. "We have to pay attention because of Egypt's future. We know this is a big sacrifice but we are capable of facing it. The attack will not undermine the resolve and true will of the Egyptian people to counter the forces of evil, but will only harden their determination to move forward on their trajectory to realise security, stability and comprehensive development," he said.

Islamic State claims responsibility

In a statement issued on the Telegram messaging platform, the Islamic State (IS) identified the bombers as Egyptian nationals (this, however, is not yet confirmed by Egyptian authorities). IS warned of more attacks, saying: "The Crusaders and their apostate followers must be aware that the bill between us and them is very large, and

they will be paying it like a river of blood from their sons, if God is willing."

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The attacks have caused obvious fear in the hearts of many, both Christians and Muslims, concerning further attacks by extremist groups. Yet those directly affected, the Copts of Egypt, vow that they will not run, even if staying puts their lives at risk. "We are very upset about the attacks, but we are Christians and it will not stop us from going to church. Even if it costs us our lives," said one Christian who responded to the bombings. Another Copt responded by claiming their legitimacy as citizens of Egypt: "Some say we Copts are the main citizens of Egypt, and we will keep being the original ones, even with all that is happening." Pope Tawadros, leader of the Coptic Church, said that "these acts will not harm the unity and cohesion of the people."

Even though Church leaders across the world have condemned the attacks, an Egyptian Christian leader said: "Events like these confront nominal Christians about their faith, and in times like these, people tend to turn back to Jesus. Such attacks also confront non-believers regarding the value system within their own faith."

There is a wave of prayer towards Egypt and from Egypt, not only for the comfort of the Church, but also to expose the deception of Islam. "God can use these attacks [against the Church] to reveal His truth to many," said one Christian.

As we prepare ourselves for the coming Easter weekend, let's celebrate the joy of the gift of eternal life through the pain and suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. But let us also not forget those who are paying an immense price for following Jesus. Scripture says that when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. Please stand with us in prayer as we support our brothers and sisters serving the Lord in areas where the cost for one's faith comes at a very high price.

PRAY > For Egypt's government to respond in meaningful and effective ways > For believers impacted by the blasts to be healed and comforted > For strength and wisdom for Christian leaders, that they can lead the way in bringing healing and reconciliation between different groups in their communities



Arab leaders said on 29 March, at the end of a one-day summit in Jordan, that they would be ready to have an historic reconciliation with Israel, in return for its withdrawal from land it occupied in the 1967 war and if it guaranteed the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.



Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri said **Lebanon** was close to "breaking point" due to the strains of hosting 1.5 million Syrian refugees, and he feared unrest could spiral from tensions between them and Lebanese communities. Refugees who fled the six-year-long conflict in neighbouring Syria make up a quarter of Lebanon's population, and most live in severe poverty in makeshift camps across the country and city slums.



A blast in a St Petersburg train carriage on 3 April that killed 14 people and wounded 45 was carried out by a suspected suicide bomber with ties to radical Islamists, **Russia's** Interfax news agency cited a law enforcement source as saying. Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was in the city when the blast struck, visited the scene of the explosion and laid a bunch of flowers at a makeshift shrine to the victims. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

US RESPONDS TO CHEMICAL ATTACK IN SYRIA



By **Donnelly McClelland**

Medical charity *Doctors Without Borders* (*Medecins sans Frontieres*) said that the Syrian victims of an alleged chemical attack in rebel-held Khan Sheikhoun may have been exposed to nerve agents as well as suspected chlorine gas, as calls for the perpetrators of what is thought to be one of the worst uses of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war to date to be brought to justice grow. At least 52 adults and 20 children were killed in the attack in Idlib province on [4 April] in what United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said showed "war crimes are going on in Syria (and that) international humanitarian law is being violated frequently." Syria's rebel groups and the international community have been quick to condemn the Syrian government for the attack, which both Damascus and its allies in Moscow have denied carrying out. (*The Independent*)

Background

The 4 April attack bore stark similarities to the previous government-linked chemical strike on the outskirts of Damascus in 2013, when more than 1,400 residents were killed with what is thought to have been the same nerve agent, possibly sarin. In response to that attack, the international community faced a choice: direct military intervention, or wringing a promise out of President Bashar al-Assad that he would destroy any remaining chemical stockpiles. After much debate, which became quite heated at times, the United States opted for the latter. Former US President Barack Obama and other Western leaders had declared that the use of chemical weapons would be a "red line" that would prompt outside intervention.

Under the threat of US military action after the Damascus attack, Syria signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013 and was supposed to have handed over all its chemical stocks as part of a Russian-brokered deal. It now appears that this was not the case.

To date, 192 nations are signatories to the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, and more than 90 percent of the world's pre-existing chemical weapons stocks were believed to have been destroyed by the end of last year (2016).

The attack – what is known

According to opposition groups and Western powers, Syrian government warplanes attacked Khan Sheikhoun, about 50km south of the city of Idlib, early on 4 April. Hundreds of people, many of whom were sleeping at the time, displayed symptoms that pointed to a reaction to a nerve agent.

The next day, the World Health Organisation said that the likelihood of chemical involvement was "amplified by an apparent lack of external injuries reported in cases showing a rapid onset of similar symptoms, including acute respiratory distress as the main cause of death".

Syrian and Russian explanation

A state-published statement from the Syrian military included a flat denial of the use of "any chemical or toxic substance" in the attack, insisting that the military "has never used them, anytime, anywhere, and will not do so in the future".

President Assad's ally, Russia, said the Syrian air force had struck Khan Sheikhoun but the target had been "a large terrorist ammunition depot" and maintained that a 'conventional' weapons strike by the government had accidentally hit a stockpile of chemical weapons that belonged to rebels or terrorists.

A British chemical weapons expert countered Russia's claim. "If you blow up sarin [the suspected nerve agent used], you destroy it," Hamish de Bretton-Gordon told *BBC News*, calling the Russian claim "completely unsustainable and completely untrue".

Other experts have pointed out that sarin and other nerve agents are usually stocked in a "binary manner", meaning that they "are kept as two distinct chemical precursors that are combined just before use, either manually or automatically inside a weapon when launched" (*BBC News*).

But not everyone is convinced and questions remain, particularly in terms of motivation.

Possible motives

Why would Syria's president use nerve gas? Many are puzzled by this. According to *Politico*, US officials and Syria experts continue to debate Mr Assad's reasoning behind ordering a chemical attack that would guarantee international outrage. He may have been hoping to terrorise his opponents, or he might have been testing the Trump administration's limits for his military actions. There was also a theory that Mr Assad had not ordered the strike at all, and that a 'rogue' military commander may have been behind it, without Mr Assad's knowledge.

NEWS HEADLINES



The Islamic State group now controls less than 7% of Iraq, down from the 40% it held nearly three years ago, an Iraqi military spokesman has said. Iraqi forces backed by US-led air strikes and other support are now battling the IS inside the second city of Mosul, after retaking much of the other territory the group had seized.



North Korea is vowing tough counteraction to any military moves that might follow the US move to send the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier and its battle group to waters off the Korean Peninsula. The statement from Pyongyang comes as tensions on the divided peninsula are high because of US-South Korea wargames now underway and recent ballistic missile launches by the North.



The White House has granted the **US** military broader authority to carry out strikes in Somalia against Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabaab militants, the Pentagon said, the latest sign President Trump is increasing US military engagement in the region. The head of US forces in Africa said that greater ability to fight the militants would lead to more flexibility and quicker targeting.

Several concluded that Mr Assad was simply acting out of desperation, and believe that chemical weapons were "a response of cold-blooded convenience" (*Politico*).

The fact that Mr Trump and his advisors could not initially reach a consensus on the motivation complicated the decision-making on the way forward, but according to an administration official, "not to the point of stopping us from doing anything".

Reaction and response

The Khan Sheikhoun attack immediately generated widespread international condemnation and public revulsion, and the United Nations has pledged to investigate it as a possible war crime, something that Russian president Vladimir Putin welcomed.

The US, meanwhile, retaliated by launching 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles on 6 April in a strike targeting the Syrian air base where the chemical attack is thought to have originated.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

US Senator Marco Rubio (and other Republicans) used religious language to justify the military strikes on Syria. Rubio tweeted a verse from Proverbs 11v21: "Be sure of this: the wicked will not go unpunished." He was not alone in his religious overtones – Mr Trump explained his decision to attack by invoking God's name multiple times, including: "We ask for God's wisdom as we face the challenge of our very troubled world. We pray for the lives of the

wounded and for the souls of those who have passed."

But there are those who question whether the US should have engaged in a retaliatory strike, and questioned Mr Trump's assertion that the strike was for America's own defence of national interests. There are also those who maintain that the strike was simply a show of force on the part of the US, after years of dwindling influence in the Middle East, and in light of Russia's prominent role therein.

Christian ethicist Roger E. Olsen responded to the military strike as follows: "I believe it is possible to be a Christian and support, if not applaud, this aggressive and even very violent act—not as something righteous but as something necessary and therefore right, since it has been done to protect weak, vulnerable and defenceless people." But he also states: "The Church should not actively support or applaud any government's violent aggressions. It should be an alternative community to the violence of the world."

In conclusion, Olsen asks how Christians should respond to such military strikes, and suggests that it should be in prayer and witness: "prayer for peace and witness by example of how it is possible for people of extremely different kinds to live in peace with each other".

PRAY > For leaders involved in the Syrian conflict to take decisive steps towards ending the protracted war > For Syrian believers to continue reaching out to their non-believing neighbours

US AND CHINESE PRESIDENTS MEET



By Cherolyn Amery

US President Donald Trump has accepted his counterpart Xi Jinping's invitation to make a visit to China, said Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Mr Trump hosted the Chinese president for a two-day visit at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida [on 6-7 April]. "Both the atmosphere and the chemistry between the two leaders was positive... all of us are feeling very good about the results of this summit," said Mr Tillerson. Mr Trump said he believes he made "tremendous progress" in the US-China relationship during talks with Mr Xi. (*BBC News*)

Significance of the meeting

Much has been made of the importance of this first official meeting between the presidents of China and the US, even though nothing

substantive came of it. Analysts have described the two leaders as the "world's most powerful men" and the relationship between the two countries (the two leading global economies) as the most important bilateral relationship in the world.

During his campaign, Mr Trump did much 'China bashing'. The meeting, however, indicated that Mr Trump had decided to take a more politically sensitive stance. From China's point of view, many were watching to see how Mr Trump treated Mr Xi – China is very 'status conscious', and some of Mr Trump's past behaviour or statements would have been considered very offensive. However, the fact that Mr Trump invited Mr Xi to his personal Florida resort was considered meaningful in a positive way, and the US president avoided 'lapses in protocol' that could have embarrassed the Chinese leader. Richard Heydarian, a specialist in Asian geopolitical/economic affairs, wrote in an opinion piece for *Al Jazeera* that Mr Trump "managed to catch his Chinese counterparts by surprise" and showed himself to be something of a "deceptively flamboyant sphinx with many tricks up his sleeve".

From Mr Trump's perspective, a 'win' with China would help to make up for some of his 'losses' in recent weeks (e.g. the failed travel bans and healthcare proposal). For Mr Xi, it was important to

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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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boost his position at home – showing that he had the strength to 'handle' Mr Trump (and to protect Chinese dignity) and the diplomatic flexibility necessary to maintain good relations with the US (China's rise in power has been rooted in peaceful trade, and they would not want unnecessary conflict with the US). With declarations that the meeting was 'successful', it would seem that both left with their pride and positions intact.

Key issues under discussion

A range of issues were discussed during the meeting, but two matters were of greatest importance: the US trade deficit with China (the amount by which the country's imports exceed their exports), and the escalating tensions with North Korea.

Many of Mr Trump's votes were won on the back of his promises to improve the US economy and to create more jobs in America, and achieving a stronger economic position with China would go a long way in terms of fulfilling those promises. But it's a complex issue: any 'trade war' would be detrimental for both countries, and trade with China accounts for approximately 2.6 million jobs in the US. According to analysts in Beijing, Mr Trump may be using threats of a trade war to gain cooperation from China in other areas.

Concerning North Korea, an ally of China, Mr Trump has called for Mr Xi to implement stronger diplomatic pressure and sanctions to curb North Korea's aggressive nuclear ambitions and threats. According to Heydarian, this would not necessarily be easy or straightforward for China: a North Korean collapse could create a huge humanitarian crisis, nuclear and biological weapons could fall into unknown hands, and South Korea (a US ally) could grow in power.

For many, the fact that US airstrikes against the Syrian regime happened during the meeting was a highly strategic move and a display of strength that signalled Mr Trump's willingness to make unilateral decisions that opposed China's position (China currently sides with Russia in support of the Syrian regime). An underlying message was that the US may be willing to do the same thing to North Korea if China does not actively intervene.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The relationship between China and the US is complicated, as the two nations are simultaneously potential adversaries and strategic partners. Aside from some open conflict (e.g. the Korean and Vietnam wars), relations between the two nations have generally been stable. Differences regarding issues of human rights, democracy and freedom have largely been set aside in the interest of mutual political, economic and security agendas.

From a missions point of view, it would be good for this cooperation to continue. With the US still the primary 'sending nation' in the world, and the Chinese Church sending out a growing mission force with ever-increasing access to 'closed' countries, it would be in the interest of the global Church for both of these nations to continue to prosper. And while the recent meeting left many questions, this much is certain – that beyond the political agendas of global leaders, God will be working things out for the extension of His Kingdom.

PRAY > For the leadership of the US and China to make wise decisions concerning their countries' futures > For believers in both nations to continue the vital outreach work to which the Lord has called them

UPCOMING EVENTS

BUSINESS AS MISSION (BAM)

"Business as mission is not 'business as normal'. Neither is it 'missions as normal'." (Larry Sharp)

Christians working in the business sector are invited to come hear more about God's heart to integrate business and mission in these one-day seminars.

Whether you are the owner of a large or small business or are a business employee, you have the ability to greatly impact the mission field – we want to share how. Come hear stories of how God is using business to impact the nations and discover how business can be used to build God's Kingdom at home and around the world (beyond just financial support). INcontext will be hosting two international speakers working fulltime in the *Business as Mission* field.

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If you have any questions about these seminars, please contact Gustav (gustav@incontextministries.org). To register, please [CLICK HERE](#).