

A WORLD IN MOTION



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A vehicular attack on Muslims in London and the killing of a Muslim girl in the US have prompted discussions about Islamophobia in the West.

P2 | IRAQ

The Russian military claims to have killed Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. If this is true, what might it mean for the future of the group?

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Doctors in Syria are desperate for support as they continue working in extreme conditions in the conflict zone. What might we learn from them?

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Project Hero seeks to secure the future of the Church in Syria, as it looks ahead to rebuilding and reconciliation.



FOCUS ON ISLAMOPHOBIA AFTER UK AND US ATTACKS



By Cherolyn Amery

The head of the Met Police and faith leaders joined a vigil on Monday night after the Finsbury Park terror attack. Commissioner Cressida Dick was among hundreds who took part after a van hit worshippers near the Muslim Welfare House mosque and community centre. Ramadan prayers took place on Monday after worshippers broke their fast, but leaders said it was quieter than usual. Darren Osborne, 47, from Cardiff, has been held on suspicion of attempted murder and alleged terror offences. Nine people were taken to three London hospitals after a van struck pedestrians. Two were treated for minor injuries at the scene. Several of the injured are believed to be seriously hurt. (*BBC News*)

Rise in anti-Muslim attacks

As would be expected, the attack generated much outcry as everything pointed to a direct targeting of a Muslim community. Finsbury Park is known for being home to a large Muslim population, and eyewitnesses at the scene reportedly overheard Osborne saying that he wanted to "kill all Muslims". London mayor Sadiq Khan called the attack "an assault on all our shared values of tolerance, freedom and respect", while the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) called for increased security at mosques.

Across the Atlantic, US Muslims were deeply angered by the killing of a 17-year-old Muslim girl on Sunday night (18 June) in Stirling, near Washington DC. The attack on Nabra Hassanen happened near her local mosque, and early assumptions pointed to a 'hate crime'. Police,

however, have since stated that the underlying motivation was more likely 'road rage' and not a specific targeting of Muslims (the working theory is that the suspect entered into a road or traffic dispute with a male teenager in the group that Hassanen was part of, and the suspect took out his rage on her). Many Muslims are outraged by the dismissal of the 'hate crime' aspect of the attack, and Hassanen's father still believes that she was targeted because she was Muslim.

According to the Council on American-Islamic Affairs (CAIR), there were 2,213 "anti-Muslim bias incidents" in 2016 (a 57 percent increase from 2015) and at least 260 "hate crimes targeting Muslims" (a 44 percent increase in the same period). From 2014 to 2016, there was a reported 584 percent increase in hate crimes targeting Muslims. Critics of President Donald Trump say that his campaign rhetoric played a role in this increase. In the UK, a report stated that "anti-Muslim hate crime" increased 200 percent in 2015, and there have been recent spikes after Brexit and after the terror attacks this year (Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena and London Bridge).

Islamophobia in the West

Gallup (an American research company) defines "Islamophobia" as "an exaggerated fear, hatred and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalisation and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life". The term has been used since the 1920s, but became normalised in public vocabulary after a 1997 report by the Runnymede Trust stated that "anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed".

According to the Runnymede report (entitled "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All"), Islamophobia consists of the following eight 'component' views: (1) that Islam is "monolithic" (large, powerful and slow to change);

THE NUMBERS:

MUSLIMS IN THE WEST



2.8 million

The estimated number of Muslims in the UK (approximately 1 in 20)



1921

Believed to be the year in which the first 'purpose-built' mosque in the US was erected



48%

The percentage of Muslim Americans who said they experienced discrimination in 2010



36%

The percentage of Americans who have an unfavourable view of Islam

NEWS HEADLINES



Saudi Arabia's King

Salman has appointed his son, Mohammed bin Salman, as heir, in a major reshuffle. A royal decree removed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, a 57-year-old nephew of the king, as next-in-line to the throne and replaced him with Mohammed bin Salman, 31, who was previously the deputy crown prince.

Prince Mohammed bin Salman has overhauled the kingdom's economy away from its reliance on oil. He also oversees the Saudi-led war in Yemen, as defence minister.



A Pakistani counter-terrorism court has sentenced to death a man who allegedly committed blasphemy on Facebook, the first time someone has been handed the death penalty for blaspheming on social media.

Blasphemy is a highly sensitive topic in Muslim-majority Pakistan, where insulting the Prophet Muhammad is a capital crime for which dozens are sitting on death row.



The European Commission

launched a legal case against Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic for refusing to take in asylum seekers, ratcheting up a bitter feud within the 28-nation bloc about how to deal with migration.

(2) that it is "separate" and has nothing in common with other cultures' values; (3) that it is "primitive" and inferior to the West; (4) that it is a violent and aggressive threat engaged in a "clash of civilisations"; (5) that it is an ideology with a political and military agenda; (6) that criticisms made by Muslims about the West are invalid; (7) that hostility towards Islam justifies discrimination and exclusion of Muslims; and (8) that anti-Muslim hostility is a natural and "normal" practice. The report contrasts these views with an "open" attitude towards Islam, which is marked by respect and a willingness for legitimate disagreement, dialogue and critique.

Analysis done by the Pew Research Centre and the Brookings Institute highlighted the differences in attitude in different parts of the Western world in 2016: Hungary ranked top with a 72 percent "unfavourable view of Muslims", while the US stood at 46 percent and the United Kingdom at 28 percent.

Dalia Mogahed – Director of Research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding – believes that Islamophobia is "a tool of public manipulation to manufacture consent for disastrous wars and for votes" and points to the spikes in Islamophobia before the Iraq war and during electoral seasons. She also says that most Americans admit to not personally knowing a Muslim, and that their views are therefore shaped by the media and politicians. Gallup echoes this possibility – that US media perhaps

creates the impression that the 'Muslim threat' is more prevalent than it really is.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

INcontext firmly believes that Islam as a religion stands opposed the Kingdom of God, and that the Quran offers 'motivations for violence' that create a platform for extremists and terrorists. The Kingdom of God, however, will not be furthered by an Islamophobic mindset among Christians who encounter Muslim neighbours, colleagues and strangers in everyday life. 'Normal' Christians are not likely to instigate violent attacks against Muslims, but Christians whose perceptions of Muslims are shaped by the media instead of by personal encounters are also not likely to actively reach out with love and friendship.

One of INcontext's workers in the Muslim world recently shared how, some years ago, he had a sudden realisation that he had no Muslim friends and that he was living in a 'Christian bubble'. When he intentionally set out to change this, his opportunities to witness about his faith in Christ grew exponentially. This is a challenge for all Western believers to consider.

PRAY > For Western leaders to make wise decisions about social and cultural issues > For the Western Church to engage in honest dialogue with Muslims > For Christians to reach out with love and care to Muslim neighbours

DEATH OF ISLAMIC STATE LEADER?



By Andrew Richards

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi may have been killed in a Russian air strike in Raqqa, which took place following intelligence reports that the [Islamic State, or IS] chief was meeting with commanders to plan the last-ditch defence of the besieged capital of the "caliphate". The defence ministry in Moscow confirmed that an attack had been carried out on 28 May after information was received about the meeting. It continued: "According to the information that is now being checked via various channels, present at the meeting was [IS] leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was eliminated at the strike." (*The Independent*)

The rise and fall of IS

The Islamic State – also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – gained global prominence in 2014 when the group drove the

Iraqi military from key cities in Western Iraq and captured the city of Mosul. Soon after, IS massacred thousands of Yazidis, forcing more than 50,000 to flee to the Sinjar mountains where they were left without food or water. IS publicised these killings (and those of Iraqi troops) on social media, and soon IS became a household name. Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Hezbollah were considered 'moderate terrorists' compared to IS. The group proclaimed a "caliphate" that reached across the Middle East and North Africa to Spain, and thousands of foreigners joined the fight against the West. But today, three years later, IS is on the brink of defeat.

Analysts all agree that the fall of IS is only a matter of time, with the terrorist group continually losing ground against coalition forces in Iraq and Syria. Since the start of the Mosul offensive against the group, IS has carried out more attacks abroad, including a third attack on Britain just weeks ago. Since 2014, they have claimed responsibility for eight attacks in North America, 18 in Europe and three in Australia.

With the Russian military reporting the possible killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the founder and de facto leader of IS), the question is how many innocent lives will still be lost as the group takes a final stand before its "caliphate" is crushed in Iraq and Syria.

NEWS HEADLINES



Islamist militants holed up in a southern **Philippines** town have been cornered and their firepower is flagging, the military said as the five-week battle for control of Marawi City raged on. Despite signs that the insurgents are now on the back foot, Southeast Asian governments are worried that the siege could be just the prelude to further violence as the ultra-radical Islamic State group tries to establish a foothold in their region.



Turkey has offered strong support to Qatar after Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt and several other countries took measures to isolate Qatar, accusing Doha of funding terrorism and fomenting regional instability. Qatar denies the allegations.



Russia, Iran and the United States are drawing new red lines for each other in **Syria**, with Moscow warning Washington it would treat any US-led coalition planes in its area of operations as potential targets after the US air force downed a Syrian jet.

Retaliatory outflows

There are three scenarios that could take place as a retaliatory outflow of IS losing territory in Iraq and Syria. Firstly, we could see an 'implosion' of the group's violence as they take as many down with them as possible inside their self-declared territories. Civilians would be most at risk, and are already being used as human shields against the advancing coalition forces. Secondly, there could be an 'explosion', with IS calling on all its sympathisers and satellite groups to carry out as many attacks as they can against foreign targets. This can already be seen in the upsurge of attacks in Europe. The third scenario – a combination of the former – is the most likely and the most evident.

South Africa at risk?

In this context, could South Africa be at risk for IS attacks? The Terrorism, Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC) seems to think so: "Terrorism is about opportunity, and where the Islamic State can gain propaganda value from an attack, it has proven not to hesitate. Add to this a propaganda message to all supporters of using whatever means available to execute an atrocity, and South Africa's vulnerability to an attack speaks for itself." TRAC continued: "While conventional thinking tends to focus on reasons why South Africa is not vulnerable to an act of terror, the fact that the Islamic State is already recruiting in the country cannot be ignored. Despite popular opinion, South Africa is not subject to a special set of circumstances that forgo our viability as a target. The Islamic State is all about establishing presence and showing strength, meaning that a terror attack in South Africa would be just as effective as one in Europe."

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Although IS is close to defeat, Islamic terrorism is far from defeated. Renewed efforts by the US military (which is sending more troops back to Afghanistan where it declared victory against the Taliban in 2011) shows just how quickly 'defeated' terrorist groups can recuperate and pose an even more dangerous threat.

Because extremism in any form (whether religious or self-interested) is ideological at the core, terrorism will probably never be rooted out. On 17

June, thousands of Muslims gathered in Cologne, Germany, in opposition to terrorism in the name of Islam, putting forth a 'moderate' form that is less violent and threatening. Some suggest that this is a play by extremists to fool the rest of the world into believing that Islam is a 'religion of peace' while innocent blood is spilled in the background in the name of advancing the religion.

Christians should take note of the fact that the Quran does in fact promote Islam as a religion of 'peace'. Remembering this is key to reaching millions of Muslims – it's easier to forgive an 'everyday' peaceful Muslim than a Kalashnikov-brandishing terrorist. When more than one million Syrian refugees entered Lebanon – fleeing either the civil war or IS – the Lebanese Church was faced with the question of how to reach the Muslim refugees for Christ without becoming paranoid by the idea that some might be 'hidden' terrorists. One Christian leader shared his conviction: "If we think of them as refugees, they remain refugees. But if we think of them as children of God, and serve them as children of God, then soon they will become children of God." Regarding the million refugees in Germany, once the Church changed its perspective – seeing opportunity instead of threat – German believers could respond to seeking Muslims by helping them to find real and lasting peace in Christ.

Whether the Russians killed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi or not, the fact that IS was a catalyst for one of the largest geographical movements of people – creating one of the greatest opportunities for missions among Muslims from the Middle East – cannot be denied. The Church in Iraq and Syria was almost destroyed by IS, but in the months ahead, as refugees start returning home, the rebuilding of the Church is perhaps one of the most important opportunities for the possible 'Christianisation' of the Middle East. Millions of disillusioned Muslims are seeking real peace after witnessing death and destruction in the name of Islam, and in Christ that peace is found.

PRAY > For God to bring about an end to the violence of IS > For the global Church to make the most of opportunities created in the wake of IS' onslaught

DESPERATION OF DOCTORS IN SYRIA



By Andrew Richards

A group of Syrian doctors based in rebel-held provinces said that aid had dropped markedly over the last two months because donors were losing interest, a factor that will make it harder for

them to handle government assaults. "Many hospitals are closing because their supporters from outside are bored now because it's the seventh year of the revolution. Many of them don't want to come in anymore," a doctor said. The three-doctor delegation from the Syrian American Medical Society Foundation (SAMS) was in Paris and will travel to the Netherlands and Luxembourg to get commitments for medical assistance in the region. (Reuters)

Huge casualty numbers

The civil war in Syria began with the 2011 uprising against President Bashar al-Assad and a demand

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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for a regime change (inspired by the Arab Spring in the wider region). It has since dragged in various international players that are using the Syrian war as a means of showing off their military influence in the region: Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States (among others). The war has forced more than 11 million refugees to flee the fighting. According to the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 4.8 million have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, while 6.6 million are internally displaced within Syria. Another million have applied for asylum in Europe. Germany (with more than 300,000 cumulated applications) and Sweden (with 100,000), are the EU's top receiving countries.

The UN estimates the number of people killed during the six-year war to be around 470,000 (with an average of 183 people being killed per day). Hospitals have been attacked, and doctors are seen as legitimate targets in rebel-held areas. One doctor stated that for the Syrian government, killing one doctor is equivalent to killing 1,000 fighters. Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), an NGO that has tracked attacks on medical workers during the conflict, said that there have been 454 strikes on medical facilities during the Syrian war thus far, killing 814 medics. PHR further stated that in April 2017 alone, there were 25 attacks on health facilities, equivalent to one every 29 hours.

Desperate doctors

Doctors in rebel-held areas have now even resorted to 'crowdfunding' in an attempt to raise funds for field hospitals. Local doctors say that up to 80 percent of patients are civilians. Despite being unable to provide patients with proper medical care, the poorly-staffed and under-resourced operating theatres are often the only hope for those who have been wounded. Patients often go without anaesthetic, and the lack of antibiotics leave many vulnerable to secondary infections that can lead to death.

John Dautzenberg, an advocacy manager for SAMS, told Reuters that the reason why funding is so scarce is because the new US administration's rethinking on aid distribution is affecting other governments and making it more complicated for non-governmental organisations to get funding. "The biggest threat ... from their policy changes is

scaring away the money as people think that the US is not going to meet its humanitarian financial-assistance commitments so everyone else thinks we don't have to give as much either," Dautzenberg said.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

It is important to remember that even though most news reports focus on doctors in rebel-held areas facing onslaught from the government, this does not mean that doctors working in government-controlled areas do not face the same difficulties. As most Western countries are backing the rebels in Syria, most Western news agencies focus on the rebel-held areas and very little news comes from government territories. As Christians, this needs to be considered when reading or watching news reports from Syria, because it becomes very easy to 'choose sides' without realising there is a bigger picture.

Upon hearing reports like the one above, Christians are prompted to pray – in this case, for the protection of doctors in the rebel-held areas and for their needs to be met. But at the same time, there should also be prayer for doctors in the government areas, who are most likely facing the same challenges. In war, many doctors cannot choose on which side of the line they want to 'fight' – battle lines shift during a war and doctors who are serving in a rebel-held area today could possibly serve in government territory next week.

Doctors who serve in conflict zones despite the difficulties and dangers serve as examples to Christians. As the fighting rages and many soldiers are trying to take lives, doctors are trying to save lives. In the same way, Christians are constantly caught in a spiritual battle with the enemy trying to destroy lives, and believers are called to commit to saving lives in this battle instead of walking through it with closed eyes. In the same way as a doctor in a conflict zone does not choose who lies on his operating table (a rebel or a government soldier), Christians cannot be biased about those to whom they are willing to convey Christ's mercy and love.

PRAY > For doctors in conflict zones to save as many lives as possible > For the global Church to refrain from 'taking sides' > For Christians to engage in the daily spiritual battle

PROJECTS



PROJECT HERO

Helping to secure the future of the Church in Syria

Project Hero focuses on those who **choose to stay** in Syria, who deal with the daily bombing from which others have fled, and who encounter death as part of daily life. The Christian minority has now reached the 'level of extinction', and securing a next generation of believers in Syria is a priority for the global Body of Christ. Besides helping

Christians in Syria, this project also focuses on preparing for the eventual **reconciliation, reconstruction** and **restoration** of Syria.

If you would like to get involved in this project or would like to know more, please contact Gustav (gustav@incontextministries.org) or [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the website.