

Sectarian War Flames Across Arab World

by Hussein Askary

Aug. 23—The Arab world is descending at breathtaking speed into a hell of sectarian religious wars. Foreign intervention in the region by the former and current U.S. administrations, and the permanent Anglo-Saudi alliance's manipulation of religious, ethnic, and terror groups, have brought the region to what many observers fear is a point of no return.

The Aug. 23 attack in Tripoli, Lebanon, against Sunni-Salafi mosques during the Friday prayers, following the car-bomb attack on a Shi'a neighborhood in Beirut on Aug. 15, has the earmarks of a "third party" intervention to set Shi'a-Sunni civil wars on the front burner.

This was the same tactic used in Iraq in 2006, when Shi'a mosques were blown up by unidentified, but clearly professional, special forces, and later, Sunni mosques were targeted to give the impression that that was a retaliation from the Shi'a side. In November 2006, then-U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney visited Saudi Arabia and discussed with King Abdullah the creation of a "Sunni Triangle" consisting of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, to encounter the "Shi'a Crescent" of Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Alawite-run Syria, and the Shi'a-dominated government in Iraq. This arrangement started the bloodiest sectarian carnage ever witnessed in Iraq.

Today, leading Lebanese political groups are urging restraint, and a statement by Hezbollah's parliamentary caucus on the Aug. 15 bombings went beyond finger-pointing at rival Muslims to blame "regional intelligence services," which could only refer to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Hezbollah said, "This terrorist blast was engineered by regional intelligence services that are benefitting from the policies of incitement adopted by some March 14¹ factions. These groups are investing in terrorist *takfiri*² organizations to carry out their plans." These Sunni

fanatics have targeted Lebanon, Hezbollah continued, because of the "catastrophic failure of these *takfiri* groups to achieve the goals set out for them in Syria." Therefore, their failure "has forced their handlers to use them inside Lebanon instead."

The Lebanon-based newspaper *al-Akhbar* noted that the Hezbollah statement "points the finger in the direction of Saudi Arabia and its chief of intelligence, Bandar bin Sultan."

From Pakistan to Morocco

It is not just Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq that are aflame: The sectarian madness is spread all over the Islamic world, from Pakistan all the way to Morocco, which is very far from the center of events.

For example, in Friday prayers in Moroccan cities on the day of Eid al-Fitr, which is supposed to be the celebration of the end of Ramadan, and a time for joy and reconciliation, preachers cursed the Shi'a sect with very ugly language. The irony is that there are no Shi'a Muslims in Morocco to speak of, but the fomenting of anti-Shi'a sentiments by certain preachers is all related to what is going on in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. The Saudi ultra-orthodox Wahhabi movement is gaining ground in Morocco, and the government is turning a blind eye to its growth and to Moroccan youth who going to Syria and Iraq for jihad, because the King of Morocco has committed himself to the anti-Assad operation, and is in need of Saudi money and oil.

The sectarian violence has also set off the alarm bells in Egypt. The sectarian, barbaric slaughter on June 23 of a Shi'a cleric, Hasan Shahata, an Egyptian who had converted to Shi'ism, and three of his followers, contributed to getting millions of Egyptians into the streets to overthrow the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government on June 30. Citizens, and obviously the military, were horrified that the MB and the Wahhabi extremists mean what they say about anybody they designate as *kafir*—i.e., such a person can be killed.

A few days earlier, the Egyptian people had received a similar shock. At the pro-Syrian-rebel rally in Cairo and attended by then-President Mohammed Morsi, some Salafi clerics not only attacked the Shi'a in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, but one of them (Mohammad

1. Saudi-ally Saad Hariri's group in Lebanon.

2. A *takfiri* is a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of being an apos-

tate, or *kafir*. Traditionally, this is only done following strict legal procedures, but some Salafist groups have taken it upon themselves to do it on their own.

Abdel Maqsood) said that every Egyptian who would come out against Morsi for a planned demonstration on June 30 is a *kafir*; he led a prayer calling on God to destroy them and save the Morsi government. The call was received with wild acclamation by the frenzied mob, and Morsi called on the youth to go to Syria for jihad.

The rally triggered a massive media campaign that evening, where horrified commentators showed videos of the rally and told viewers that the kind of slaughter being carried out by the same people in Syria against Alawites, Christians, and even Sunnis who support their government. Such a slaughter, which was encouraged that night by the President of Egypt, will be no more “lawful” in Egypt than it is in Syria.

Two days earlier, a large gang of Salafi clerics had gathered in Cairo, chaired by Qatar-based Yousuf al-Qaradhawi, and declared Alawites and other Shi’a to be non-Muslims who should be fought. They also declared that jihad in Syria was a duty.

It was from fear over Egypt being turned into another Syria or Iraq, that the millions went out to the streets against Morsi, and the army backed them. Morsi was ousted from the Presidency on July 3.

Behind the Scenes

Why did the Saudis, and the Egyptian Salafist party al-Nour, back the ouster of the Sunni MB government? The Saudis want to have Egypt under control, and dependent on their support, to ultimately destroy it. They could not support the Muslim Brotherhood, which was so stupid and clumsy that they wanted to take over Egypt in one bite, a blunder that backfired massively.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey is hysterical, because the Saudis do not have him on board with their plans. The Saudis work permanently with the British only; everyone else is a non-permanent ally. Economically, Turkey is about to face the Icelandic treatment, as the lira carry trade and Saudi/Qatari hot money are about to leave. The tourism sector, which was the largest growth factor, in addition to financial markets, in recent years, is also threatened by the recent developments in Turkey and the region.

The situation in the region is verging on a dark age, and the worst aspect of it is the religious warfare. Unless there is a move to destroy the Anglo-Saudi alliance, have Obama put under control, and reach an arrangement with Russia and China to stabilize the region, things will slide further into Hell.

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