

Countering extremism in Indonesia and beyond

Religious Freedom Institute (<https://bit.ly/2KP2a10>) – Between May 8 and May 14, 2018 Indonesia was hit by a wave of ISIS terrorist attacks, including bombings carried out by families—fathers, mothers, and children together. The principal targets were churches and police stations, including the headquarters of the paramilitary Police Mobile Brigade (which is also where Ahok, the former Governor of Jakarta and a Christian, is serving a sentence for blasphemy). In the wave of attacks, thirteen terrorists and fourteen others were killed, and more than 40 were injured.

The Indonesian government's security forces responded strongly. There were some early arrests and then, on May 31, in a series of raids, anti-terrorist squads arrested 41 terror suspects and killed 4 others. These raids came less than a week after the May 25 passage of a new anti-terrorism law that criminalized overseas terror attacks and allowed for longer detention of suspects. The bill had been languishing in parliament for two years amid controversies over how strict it should be and how to define terrorism, but this the wave of deadly suicide attacks persuaded lawmakers the bill should be passed.

But a much more low-key event may signal broader changes in how Indonesia is approaching its effort to combat extremism.

On May 31, Indonesian President Joko Widodo appointed Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf (Pak Yahya) as a member of the Presidential Advisory Council. Pak Yahya is from one of Indonesia's most distinguished Muslim families, is the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim organization, and is the head of Gerkan Pemuda Ansor (ANSOR), NU's young-adult wing, which

has some 5 million members. He is also among the Muslim world's most incisive and outspoken reformers.

NU has long been engaged in ideological combat with Islamist extremism. In May 2017, Anzor called together more than 300 international religious scholars to consider the "obsolete tenets of classical Islamic law" that call for "perpetual conflict with those who do not embrace or submit to Islam." This gathering issued the Anzor "Declaration on Humanitarian Islam," that built on the May 16, 2016, NU-hosted International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL).

The "Declaration on Humanitarian Islam," is far more self-critical than declarations that have come from the Middle East. It argues that there are elements within classical Islam that are problematic and need to be changed. At the press conference announcing the Declaration, Anzor Chairman Yaqut Qoumas stated "It is false and counterproductive to claim that the actions of al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and other such groups have nothing to do with Islam, or merely represent a perversion of Islamic teachings. They are, in fact, outgrowths of Wahhabism and other fundamentalist streams of Sunni Islam."

Pak Yahya reemphasized these themes and expressed them in an even more radical fashion in a July 18, 2017, address to the Council of the European Union Terrorism Working Party, many of whose members would have accused the speaker of Islamophobia if he had been anyone else. He stressed:

"Western politicians should stop pretending that extremism and terrorism have nothing to do with Islam. There is a clear relationship between fundamentalism, terrorism, and the basic assumptions of Islamic orthodoxy. So long as we lack consensus regarding this matter, we cannot gain victory over fundamentalist violence within Islam."

"Within the classical tradition, the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is assumed to be one of segregation

and enmity.”

“Why, no matter how many [terrorists] we kill or put in jail, new recruits are always coming to join them? Here is the fact: the problem lies within Islam itself. Jihadist doctrine, goals and strategy can be readily traced to specific elements of orthodox, authoritative Islam and its historic practice, including those portions of fiqh-classical Islamic law or shari‘ah-that enjoin Islamic supremacy.”

While NU as a whole has not endorsed the “Declaration on Humanitarian Islam,” Pak Yahya told me they are discussing it and he has suffered little criticism for his statements. The arguments that he and Anzor are making are radical, and crucial in the battle with extremism. And they are gaining increasing attention in Indonesia and around the world.

On May 17, 2018, Pak Yahya met with Vice President Pence for the second time. And the fact that Indonesian President Jokowi has now appointed him to his Advisory Council sends a strong signal about Jokowi’s own attitudes.

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RUSSIA: 16 Jehovah’s Witnesses behind bars as of 8

June

HRWF (08.06.2018) – The number of Jehovah's Witnesses deprived of their freedom has been dramatically and rapidly increasing in Russia since the ban of their religion in April 2017.

It can unfortunately be expected that the situation will worsen day after day and that young Jehovah's Witnesses will also be targeted for their conscientious objection to military service, as members of a banned extremist religious organization (!).

Here is an updated list of 16 prisoners as of 8 June 2018. Their pre-trial detention is systematically prolonged until their trial starts.

See below the region they are from, followed by the name of the detainee and birthdate, the date of the arrest, the article of the criminal code and the dates of their pre-trial detention.

Charges

Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1: Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity.

Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2: Participation in the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity.

List of Prisoners

Oryol Region Oryol

Dennis CHRISTENSEN (18-Dec-72)

25-May-17

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 26-May-18 / 1-Aug-18

Republic of Tatarstan Naberezhniye Chelny

Ilkham Shamilevich Karimov (9-Feb-81)

27-Mar-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 29-May-18/ 25-Jul-18

Vladimir Nikolayevich Myakushin (6-Nov-87)

27-Mar-18

Article 282.2(1), (1.1) and (2)

Pre-trial detention: 29-May-18/ 25-Jul-18

Konstantin Matrashov (1983)

27-Mar-18

Article 282.2(1), (1.1) and (2)

Pre-trial detention: 29-May-18/ 25-Jul-18

Aydar Maratovich Yulmetyev (Aug-93)

27-Mar-18

Article 282.2(1), (1.1) and (2)

Pre-trial detention: 31-May-18/ 25-Jul-18

Republic of Bashkortostan Ufa

Anatoliy Sergeyevich Vilitovich (15-Sep-86)

10-Apr-18

Article 282.2(2)

Pre-trial detention: 12-Apr-18/ 2-Jul-18

Murmansk Region Polyarny

Roman Nikolayevich Markin (18-Mar-74)

18-Apr-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 23-Apr-18/ 11-Jun-18

Viktor Fedorovich Trofimov (26-Mar-57)
18-Apr-18
Article 282.2(1)
Pre-trial detention: 23-Apr-18/ 12-Jun-18

Vladivostok Region Vladivostok

Valentin Pavlovich Osadchuk (15-Mar-78)
19-Apr-18
Article 282.2(2)
Pre-trial detention: 23-Apr-18/ 20-Jun-18

Orenburg Region Orenburg

Aleksandr Gennadyevich Suvorov (20-Apr-80)
16-May-18
Article 282.2(1)
Pre-trial detention: 19-May-18/ 14-Jul-18

Vladimir Yuryevich Kochnev (15-Oct-79)
16-May-18
Article 282.2(1)
Pre-trial detention: 19-May-18/ 14-Jul-18

Magadan Region Magadan

Konstantin Nikolayevich Petrov (9-Aug-86)
30-May-18
Article 282.2(1)
Pre-trial detention: 01-Jun-18/ 29-Jul-18

Ivan Grigoryevich Puyda (C.O.)(5-Nov-78)
30-May-18
Article 282.2(1)
Pre-trial detention: 01-Jun-18 30/-Jul-18

Yevgeniy Anatolyevich Zyablov (9-Mar-77)
30-May-18
Article 282.2(1)
Pre-trial detention: 01-Jun-18/ 29-Jul-18

Sergey Liviyevich Yerkin (23-Jun-53)

30-May-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 01-Jun-18/ 29-Jul-18

Tomsk Region Tomsk

Sergey Gennadyevich Klimov (C.O.) (26-Mar-70)

3-Jun-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention 05-Jun-18 04-Aug-18

RUSSIA: Open Letter from 10 of the wives of 16 imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses to President Putin's adviser Mikhail Fedotov

HRWF (08.06.2018) – On 7 June, ten of the wives of the 16 imprisoned JWs in Russia sent an open letter (Russian version: <https://jw-russia.org/news/18060718-345.html>) plea to Mikhail Fedotov—advisor to President Putin and chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights.

Human Rights Without Frontiers has a pdf of the full list of names of JWs with open criminal cases against them, as a result of the home arrests that began in April. In addition to the prisoners, dozens of believers in 11 regions are under house arrest and/or are not permitted to leave the region.

Text of the Open Letter in English

To the Russian Federation Presidential Council For the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights

Honorable Mr. Fedotov! Honorable members of the Human Rights Council!

This open letter to you is a cry of desperation. People who are very dear to us, our husbands, those who feed us, the fathers of our children, peaceable, honest people, who are always ready to help others, are being thrown behind bars for being suspected of reading Bible commandments and praying together with us and our children to the God whose name, as recorded in the Bible, is Jehovah.

As of this day in Russia already 17 individuals are being held in pre-trial detention. One of our fellow believers has been in custody for over a year. Dozens more believers, in 11 regions of Russia, are under house arrest or are forbidden to leave their cities of residence. With each passing day, their number is increasing. Taking into account that in Russia there are 175,000 professing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, we wonder how many more dozens, hundreds or thousands of victims of conscience will it take before the unjust criminal persecution of people for their faith in God is brought to an end.

Under the guise of fighting extremism, many of us, and even our children, have been threatened with weapons by agents of the special forces and ordered to lie face down. Our homes have been raided and searched, our telephones and computers have been seized, so we can't work or live a normal life. Our family photographs, our passports and other personal documents, and Bibles have been confiscated. They are trying to force us to live in fear and shake every time there's a knock at the door or the sound of a siren on the street, as we await arrest merely for our faith. Some believers have already

been dismissed from their places of work after many years of faultless work just because the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is banned in Russia. We cannot find the answers to the questions of why we are being subjected to such harassment in our country, and which religion will be the next to fall victim after us?

The law-enforcement agencies that are persecuting our husbands for their faith in God explain that it is because of the April 20, 2017, decision of the Russian Federation Supreme Court to liquidate all legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

However, both the Russian Federation Ministry of Justice, during the hearing at the Supreme Court, and the Russian Federation Government, after the decision was handed down, officially stated that the court's decision would not result in any violations of the rights of citizens to freedom of worship.

The aforementioned decision of the Supreme Court did not ban the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. It only involved legal entities. So why are the law-enforcement agents acting in contravention of the will of the government of our country? Who in our country benefits from the mass repression of religious believers? Why are our relatives being accused of a serious crime with the prospect of imprisonment from 6 to 10 years for fictitious extremist activity (Article 282.2 of the RF Criminal Code)? Why are the law-enforcement agents mistakenly interpreting peaceful expression of faith on God for participation in an extremist organization?

Honorable members of the Council, please help us to receive answers to these questions.

In the face of such monstrous circumstances, we are afraid for our children's future. The ground has been laid for children to be torn away from parents, whose faith in God has been declared "wrong." News that information on children whose

parents are Jehovah's Witnesses is being gathered in educational and medical facilities is very worrying. It is not surprising that virtually every week whole families of our fellow believers are abandoning everything and fleeing abroad to seek political asylum for the protection of their children.

In return for freedom and a quiet life, we are being invited to disown our faith. This is not just a figure of speech—investigators have directly invited us to sign documents in order to avoid punishment for “extremism.” If not, in their words, no attorney will be able to save us. But we cannot stop believing in God. It is a right that every individual has from birth. The Russian Federation is a multi-confessional state, and we, as citizens of Russia, have the right to expect that our rights will be respected by the state. We are not asking for any special privileges. We are asking for just one thing—please, defend our rights.

Honorable members of the Council! A campaign of terror has been unleashed against an entire religion, one of the largest Christian religions in Russia. Fundamental human rights are being trampled on: the right to freedom of worship and personal inviolability, the right to personal dignity, the right to privacy, the right to the inviolability of the home, to freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, freedom of worship, the right to private property.

If the Russian government does not quickly put an end to this growing campaign of terror, the administration will be faced with a nation-wide human rights catastrophe. We are certain that you have the power to take action now! We ask that you please pass this information on to the President of the Russian Federation, and use all possible legal means to restore the rights of religious believers.

With respect, the wives of men who are being held in custody:

Alyona Vilitkevich (Republic of Bashkortostan)

Anna Zyablova (Magadan Region)
Yulia Klimova (Tomsk Region)
Galina Kochneva (Orenburg Region)
Irina Christensen (Oryol Region)
Svetlana Markina (Murmansk Region)
Tatyana Petrova (Magadan Region)
Anastasia Puyda (Khabarovsk Territory)
Natalia Suvorova (Orenburg Region)
Trofimova Ulyana (Murmansk Region)

France expels controversial Salafist preacher to Algeria

France24 (19.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2F7IvpU> – Controversial Salafist preacher, Imam El Hadi Doudi, who was based in the southern French city of Marseille, was expelled to Algeria Friday morning following a lengthy legal process, according to a French media report.

The 63-year-old preacher – who was born in Algeria and does not have French citizenship – was expelled on Friday, the AFP reported quoting an unnamed French interior ministry source.

The expulsion followed a deportation order issued by the French interior ministry on Tuesday.

But Doudi's expulsion application was suspended pending a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which finally ruled in favour of the deportation on Thursday.

The ruling followed an appeal by the Salafist cleric's lawyer, Nabil Boudi, who argued that his client would be tortured or suffer "inhuman or degrading treatment" if he was returned to

Algeria.

The court granted the French government 72 hours “to gather the additional information necessary to make an informed decision”. Doudi was held in an administrative detention center pending the court’s final ruling.

Sermons targeting women, Jews, Shiites

The imam of the as-Sounna mosque, in the heart of Marseille, was one of the most high profile cases in the French government’s effort to combat radicalisation.

The new de-radicalisation plan announced by French President Emmanuel Macron’s government includes increased surveillance of Muslim clerics accused of hate speech and incitement to violence.

The as-Sounna mosque was closed in December following allegations that Doudi was provoking discrimination, hatred and violence toward an individual or group.

A confidential government investigative report, seen by the New York Times, cited numerous sermons by Doudi, where he preached that Jews are “unclean, the brothers of monkeys and pigs”. Women, the preacher stressed, could not leave their homes without authorisation, and an apostate “needs to be eliminated by the death penalty to protect Muslims”.

In its expulsion application, the French Interior Ministry cited the radical imam’s “deliberate incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence against a particular person or group of persons”, notably women, Jews, Shiites and people committing adultery.

Radical clerics under scrutiny

Following a spate of deadly terrorist incidents since the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks, France has tightened its anti-terror laws while attempting to tackle the spread of Islamist

extremism particularly in French prisons, schools, mosques and Islamic centres.

Between 2012 and 2015, the French Interior Ministry expelled 40 Muslim clerics while another 52 people – including clerics – were expelled over the past 28 months, according to the New York Times.

In 2017, 20 radicalised foreign nationals were expelled from French territory, according to French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb.

Last month, France expelled Mohammed Tlaghi, a substitute imam at a mosque in Torcy, an eastern Parisian suburb, due to radical sermons, under an expulsion order issued on March 2.

The as-Sounna mosque, where Doudi preached, has been closed since December 11, 2017, when the Marseille police department issued a six-month closure order, which was ratified by France's top administrative court earlier this year.

(FRANCE 24 with AFP)

IRAN: 'Returnees' from Al Mustafa Int'l University for foreigners pose a danger to human and state security abroad

HRWF (19.02.2018) – Foreign forms of controversial Islamic teachings introduced in various ways in Muslim majority

countries threaten their traditional culture of tolerance and the peaceful relations between their various religious communities.

Iran attracts and trains foreign Shia theologians to export its theocratic model and Sharia practices which are incompatible with UN human rights standards.

Salafists and Wahhabis backed by Saudi Arabia and other states of the Arabic Peninsula are increasingly disturbing the homegrown peaceful Islam in Indonesia, the Maldives, and other countries in Central Asia.

The implantation of their Islamic universities and other educational institutions in such countries, in addition to the granting of scholarships for foreign education of imams and young students in theology, are part of their diversified strategies to export forms of Islam that are alien to local Islam, challenge the secular nature of some states and the separation of state and religion.

'Returnees' from universities such as Al Mustafa University in Iran pose a real danger to human and state security in their respective countries of origin.

Sentencing 'returnees' to prison terms, as it is the case in Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan, because they have been educated abroad in 'suspicious universities' is a violation of human rights. However it is the right of a state to protect its population against radicalization and foreign ideologies that promote segregation between Muslims and non-Muslims as well as between men and women, discrimination on such a basis, physical punishments, degrading and inhumane treatments, as it is the case in Iran, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia.

Hassan Dai's study entitled by "Iran's global network of Islamic schools public" published by the Iranian American Forum in 2016 highlights the extent of the strategy used by Tehran to export its theocratic system. In his paper, the

author addresses the following issues:

- Foreign clerics in Iran and the creation of Al Mustafa
- Al Mustafa's network: Africa – Al Mustafa School in Congo
- Tuition and support for students and their families
- Number of students and graduates
- Al Mustafa's goal: export of Revolution
- Shiism
- Promoting hatred against Israel
- Al Mustafa, a recruiting pool of Quds force

Human Rights Without Frontiers is presenting below several excerpts from this paper that is available at <http://iranian-americans.com/irans-export-of-islamic-fundamentalism-al-mustafa-global-training-centers-2/>.

Summary

In February 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini and a group of clergymen attached to him, seized the power in Iran. From the onset, Khomeini's regime utilized all the means and tools in its disposal to establish and fortify its brand of fundamentalism in Iran and export it throughout the Islamic world.

For the past 37 years, the Iranian regime has pursued a two-faceted strategy to export its revolution; in one hand, it has created and supported radical armed groups across the Middle East, on top of them the Lebanese Hezbollah. On the other hand, various "Cultural" and "religious" organizations were created in Iran to disseminate the regime's ideology in the Islamic world.

Al Mustafa international university founded in 2007 is one of the most important among these organizations. Funded and controlled by the Iranian regime, Al Mustafa trains foreign Shia clerics, scholars and missionaries. Its main campuses are in Iran and has more than one hundred seminaries, Islamic schools and religious centers around the world. The Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is the highest authority of Al

Mustafa University.

Al Mustafa has currently over 40.000 students, half of them studying in University campuses in Iran. There are nearly 10.000 female students and 3500 teaching staff.

Since 2007, nearly 30.000 clerics and Islamic scholars have graduated from Al Mustafa branches, a good portion of them have been hired by the university as teaching staff or missionaries sent to different countries around the globe.

Al Mustafa's vast global network and its growing army of clerics and missionaries is a formidable tool to generate grassroots support in foreign countries for the Iranian regime's ideology, its foreign policy, its position in the Islamic world and its quest to dominate the Middle East. Al Mustafa is also a recruiting pool for the Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force or other Iranian Institutions responsible for terrorism or military activities abroad.

Number of students and graduates

Al Mustafa does not report the exact number of its students in Iran or in foreign branches. However, by examining Al Mustafa's current and old website available in web archives, news reports or the declarations by the University's executives, we reach the approximate numbers of 40.000 current students of which 10.000 are women. Half of Al Mustafa's students are in Iran campuses. The University has had 30.000 graduates and employs 3500 teaching staff.

For example, Alireza Aarafi, Al Mustafa's President declared in August 2014 that 40.000 people study at the University. In February 2016, the head of "Information Science" department at Shiraz University gave an interview and detailed the number of foreign clerics studying in Iran and declared that 20.000 foreigners study at Al Mustafa campuses in Iran. In a speech on February 2015, President of Al Mustafa declared that 30.000 students had graduated since 2007.

Al-Mustafa has a distinct department for its female students called "Bent-ol-Hoda High Education Institution" with campuses in Ghom, Isfahan and Mashhad. According to an August 2013 report 9000 female students were studying in Al Mustafa, of which 6500 students in foreign branches. According to Hojatoleslam Safouraei, president of Bent-ol-Hoda, the new campus under construction in Ghom will open in the summer of 2016 with a capacity for 2000 female students.

Al Mustafa's goal: export of Revolution

Al Mustafa's vast global network and its growing army of clerics and missionaries is a formidable tool for the Iranian regime to export its brand of Islam and generate grassroots support for the Iranian regime's ideology and assist its quest to dominate the Islamic world.

In his speech to Al Mustafa students and staff on October 25, 2010 in Qom, the Supreme Leader explained the Iranian mandate to spread "pure Islamic thoughts" and liberate the Islamic nation from the jug of global arrogance led by the United States. He emphasized the role that Al Mustafa plays in carrying out this mission: (English translation by Khamenei's official website)

"The first lesson that the Islamic Revolution and the auspicious Islamic Republic taught us was that we should think beyond our borders and turn our attention to the vast arena of the Islamic Ummah. Our magnanimous Imam taught us that our attention should be focused on the great Islamic Ummah. Although Iran was extremely frustrated under the pressure of tyranny and colonialism during the rule of Shah, was being crushed by the pressure, and it needed to be saved but, the essential pressure and historical aggression was focused on the Islamic Ummah.

For several centuries, the great Islamic Ummah, which has been in one of the most strategic locations in the world, was

suffering from weakness, defeat, backwardness, colonialism and material and scientific poverty due to the interference of superpowers, greed of powerful governments and belligerence of the arrogant powers. The attention of our Islamic Revolution was focused on the Islamic world. Its attention was focused on helping the Islamic Ummah get rid of the arrogant powers' hand of oppression and aggression. We learned this from our Imam, and this has been the clear path of the Islamic Republic up until now. Part of the great work is what you are doing. You have gathered here from nearly one hundred countries in order to become familiar with the pure teachings of Islam."

On February 8, 2016, Al Mustafa's vice President declared: "Export of revolution has always been one of the most important goals for the Islamic Republic. Al Mustafa plays a role in preparing the ground and attain this goal. Al Mustafa has used the Islamic soft power in the region and prepare the ground for Iran's hard power (military) to be present in the Middle East and successfully oppose the global arrogance."

Similarly, the dean of language and culture department at Al Mustafa has also declared that "our goal is the export of revolution." In February 2015, the Supreme Leader's representative in Isfahan emphasized that "Al Mustafa has taken effective steps for the export of our revolution."

Al Mustafa, a recruiting pool for Quds force

Since the start of civil war in Syria and the Iranian military intervention to save the Bashar Assad regime, there have been numerous reports about Al Mustafa's students killed in Syria funerals held in Iran for them. In March 2016, one of Al Mustafa's directors declared that "some of the fighters deployed to Syria are the University's students and clerics."

Alireza Tavassoli, the chief commander of Fatemiyon, the Afghanis division of revolutionary guards fighting in Syria who was killed in 2014, was one of Al Mustafa's clerics.

The Iranian revolutionary Guards employs different tactics to recruit new members or fighters for Syrian war. Each years, hundreds of thousands of very young Iranian students are organized in tours labeled as "Caravans of light" (Rahian -e- Noor) and sent to the old Iran-Iraq war battle field where the martyrs are venerated and the cult of martyrdom is promoted. The preachers remind the visitors that the war with Iraq was in fact part of the fight against global arrogance, a fight that continues today. The visitors are told that the martyrs are alive and watching them and asking them to join this holly war against the US and its surrogates.

Iranian regime uses the same tactic to recruit among Al Mustafa students or graduates. Each year thousands of Al Mustafa students from Iran campuses or branches outside Iran are sent to these battle field. This is a report on 700 Al Mustafa students visiting the battle fields and, another report about a 250 students and families. In this report by Iranian press, an Argentinian graduate of Al Mustafa who is teaching at the University branches, is taking a group of Latin American students to the battle fields to "venerate the Martyrs of war between Islam and global arrogance".

As a result of Al Mustafa's ideological teaching and financial incentives provided to the students, a good part of Al Mustafa clerics gradually become unconditional supporters of Iranian regime. It is not surprising that many of them are sent to Syria and other places to assist the Quds force. Al Mustafa students in Iran are also ordered to participate in state-organized rallies such as the protest against Charlie Hebdo magazine for drawing Muhammad cartoon or the rally against Bahrain government.

Sufi sites in Libya under attack

Al Monitor (28.12.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2CbZLhs> – Attacks on Sufi Islamic sites in Libya have left the religious group feeling targeted, as instability in parts of the fragile nation continues following the 2011 revolution that deposed longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi. Sufis often come under criticism from hard-line Salafi Muslims, who oppose their interpretation of Islam for supposedly not comporting with “true” Islam.

“Successive interim authorities since the 2011 uprising and across Libya have [failed to protect](#) Libya’s Sufi religious sites from attacks and destruction by extremist militias,” Eric Goldstein, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch, noted in an HRW press release on Dec. 7. “The unpunished attacks on Sufi mosques are endangering one of Libya’s historic minority communities.”

Tarek Megerisi, a Libyan political analyst and researcher, told Al-Monitor, “Libya’s Sufi community has been under siege ever since the end of the revolution, mainly from Salafi groups who have correspondingly risen in prominence since the revolution.” He noted that Salafi preachers took over a number of mosques in Libya in the immediate aftermath of the revolution and later, as Gen. Khalifa Hifter’s Libyan National Army made gains in Benghazi.

“Salafi militias have destroyed ancient Sufi mosques, which contain shrines, libraries and which are generally considered landmarks of Libya’s Sufi community,” Megerisi said. “Given that Salafi militias are continuing to grow in power across the country, and the constituency of Salafists in Libya is also steadily climbing, the persecution of Libya’s Salafists seems likely to worsen in the near-term future.”

Sufis have become an [easy target](#) for hard-line Muslim militias. Dozens of Sufi religious sites – “including mosques, shrines, tombs, and libraries containing ancient scriptures” – have been destroyed since 2011, according to HRW. Followers of Sufism have also been [kidnapped and killed](#), but their killers have gone unpunished.

Some 20 adherents of Sufism [went missing](#) in eastern Libya in August. The daily Al-Wasat reported in September that the missing were victims of kidnapping.

The latest attack on Sufis, which took place on Nov. 28, occurred the day before a feast to celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. In that episode, unidentified attackers torched the [Zawiyat Sheikha Radiya Mosque](#) in Tripoli. No casualties were reported.

Sufism is a religious practice, tradition, or approach to Islam that varies by region, as opposed to being a branch or sect with universal practices.

"Over the decades, Sunnis in the Maghreb region never even noticed that Sufism was seen as separate [from mainstream Islam]," Jalel Harchaoui, a doctoral candidate in geopolitics at Paris 8 University and a frequent commentator on Libyan affairs, told Al-Monitor. "The distinction came into view recently, mostly as a result of the spread of Salafi groups."

He added, "The latter being ultra-conservative and eager to judge other Muslims, see the [stylistic tradition of Sufism](#) as a perversion of 'true' Islam. The [Sufis'] celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birth, for instance, has long been a perfectly innocuous holiday across the Maghreb. However, Salafists – whether they are of the rigorist or jihadi kind – designate the tradition as a sinful departure from 'true' monotheism."

Libya's minorities came under increasing threat from Salafists in recent years, as Libya became a hub for jihadists seeking to join the Islamic State (IS) in 2015 after the extremist group faced numerous military defeats in Syria and Iraq. That year, IS took over the [city of Sirte](#). A bombing campaign by the US-led coalition eventually pushed its fighters out of the city in December 2016. They have since moved to desert valleys and inland hills to the southeast of Tripoli.

IS is not the only group posing a threat to Sufis. In fact, the security apparatus of the United Nations-backed Government of National Accord is a prime suspect in some of the attacks against them. The Special Deterrence Force (SDF) – a radical Islamist military police unit under the Interior Ministry that nonetheless acts independently – is led by Abd al-Rauf Kara, a man described by Daily Beast contributor Jamie Dettmer as an "[Islamic fanatic](#)."

"He quickly took it upon himself after Gaddafi's toppling to hunt down former regime security officials and to police an unruly Tripoli according to ultra-orthodox interpretations of Islamic principles," Dettmer wrote in 2015. "His Nawasi Battalion [later refashioned as the SDF] became notorious for targeting alleged alcohol

traders and drinkers and drug dealers as well as gays and also single women unaccompanied by male relatives or husbands, even those frequenting the more up-market coffee houses in affluent districts of Tripoli.”

The current government has not denounced any of the attacks on Sufi sites, which some locals believe the SDF to have been behind. In October in Tripoli, a Sufi mosque was attacked in the Ghararat neighborhood during a clash between the SDF and [armed militias](#) that had been accused of drug trafficking.

“A religious scholar with ties to the Sufi community in Tripoli said it was the SDF, which had gained control of the neighborhood, that intentionally damaged the 16th-century Sidi Abu Gharara Sufi mosque,” HRW reported. The SDF released a statement denying that they had attacked the mosque, saying they would deal with those responsible

“It is very possible that Abd al-Rauf Kara’s group is responsible,” Harchaoui said, “but nobody has any proof backing such an accusation.”

See as well: New waves of attacks against Sufi sites (Human Rights Watch, 7 December 2017)

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/07/libya-new-wave-attacks-against-sufi-sites>

Egypt attack: Gunman targets Coptic Christians in church and shop

BBC (29.12.2017) – <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42511813> – Nine people have been killed in two attacks on Coptic Christians in Helwan district, south of Cairo, Egypt’s interior ministry has

said.

Six civilians and a policeman died when a gunman tried to storm a church but was intercepted and arrested, it said.

It said the man had previously attacked a Coptic-owned shop in the same area, killing two brothers.

The so-called Islamic State (IS) has claimed its "soldiers" carried out the church attack.

The interior ministry's account differs from an earlier version of events given by Egypt's health ministry.

The initial report said 12 were dead, and suggested there were two attackers. It said one had been killed, and the other fled but was later captured.

More than 100 Christians have been killed in Egypt in the past year, with most attacks claimed by the local branch of IS militants.

Security forces have reinforced checkpoints in place around the capital in response to the attacks.

They announced plans earlier this week to protect festivities around the New Year and, on 7 January, Coptic Christmas. They include the deployment of rapid-reaction forces, combat troops and jamming equipment

Conflicting accounts

According to the interior ministry statement, the first attack on Friday took place at a household appliances shop. Then the attacker headed to the Saint Mina Coptic church, where he attempted "to trespass the church's perimeter security".

"The security forces have dealt with the attacker and managed to arrest him after he was injured," the ministry said. Forces are on guard around the capital.

But it said that seven people, including an auxiliary policeman, had been killed and four injured as the gunman opened fire at the church.

The attacker also had an explosive device, a machine gun and 150 rounds, it added.

The ministry suggested he was known to security services, saying he was “one of the most active terrorist elements and he carried out several terrorist attacks which resulted in the martyrdom of a number of policemen and civilians”.

However, the interior ministry account contradicts earlier ones from officials and witnesses, who spoke of a higher death toll and more than one attacker.

Video footage has also emerged appearing to show one gunman lying dead at the scene and another alleged attacker fleeing in a red car.

String of attacks

In the wake of Friday’s attacks, President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi offered condolences to family members and vowed to continue “cleansing the country of terrorism and extremism”.

Egypt’s Copts have in the past accused the authorities of making only token gestures to protect them and these incidents will not help calm tensions, our correspondent Radwa Gamal says.

Egypt is a Muslim-majority country and its Christian minority – mostly members of the Coptic Orthodox Church – make up around 10% of the population.

Last Easter, on Palm Sunday, at least 45 people died in twin attacks on Coptic churches in Alexandria and the Nile Delta city of Tanta. At least 29 Copts were killed on a bus en route to a monastery in central Egypt in May, and a Coptic Orthodox priest was stabbed to death in Cairo in October.

The attacks have been blamed on, and in many cases claimed by, Islamists affiliated with IS.

INDIA: HINDU TEENAGER IS ARRESTED FOR ARSON ATTACK ON PRIESTS CAR

British Pakistani Christians (19.12.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2krHMsp> – All 32 Indian Christians from Madhya Pradesh who were arrested for blasphemy and false conversions on Thursday 14th December whilst singing carols were set free from Satna Jail on Friday after intense police questioning. Eight priests who were sent to help release the 32 victims from prison on Friday morning were also arrested despite being victims of violence that resulted in their vehicle being torched.

They have now also been released, however 6 of the 8 priests have been placed on bail with an impending court hearing regarding an alleged forced conversion.

In more promising news an 18-year-old was arrested on Saturday 16th December for setting fire to the vehicle of the 8 priests who were accused by rightwing group Bajrang Dal (Hindu Nationalist Group) of forcing religious conversions.

The incident all began after a group of men linked to Bajrang Dal stormed the venue of a pre-Christmas celebration at Bhoomkar village on Thursday evening, and alleged that religious conversions was being organised there. The event, had been organised for children by the Syro-Malabar Church and had been a tradition for over 30 years.

A mob of over 100 Bajrang Dal activists allegedly assaulted

the Christian groups outside the police station and inside the station right before the eyes of local police officers, but no arrests have taken place for any of the attackers.

A case has been filed against an elderly priest named M George, who teaches at St Ephrem's Theological College and 5 others, following a complaint by a local, Dharmendra Dohar, who alleged that he was illegally converted on December 10 and was paid Rs. 5,000 for it. They were booked under the Freedom of Religion Act and Sections 153-B (disharmony) and 295-A (religious blasphemy) of the Indian Penal Code.

"He was given a holy dip in a pond and his name was changed to Dharmendra Thomas, the complainant said. They also asked him to pray to Lord Christ," Superintendent of Police DD Pandey told press on Friday. A surprising comment considering Catholics do not practice full water immersion for the ritual of Baptism – a practice common in protestant churches.

In an interview on India's NDTV Dharmendra Dohar was asked if he had, indeed, changed his religion, Dharmendra Dohar – who claimed to have been a member of the Bajrang Dal for a year – told reporters, "I can't speak on this... If I do, I will get embroiled in the issue... it will be said that I'm changing my statement". The "group", he said, doesn't want "such people (Christians) to come in here". The comment was noted to be a stark change to his original adamant behaviour and comment at the time of the arrests and Mr Dohar could be seen looking sheepish throughout the interview.

Madhya Pradesh is ruled by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and has strict religious conversion laws. The central Indian state is one of five Indian states where missionaries need permission to try and convert individuals. In order to change religions, citizens must give a formal notice to local administrators at least one month before changing their faith officially.

Wilson Chowdhry, Chairman of the BPCA, said:

“These fortunate Carol singers have been released from prison before Christmas and can now spend time with their families and with God, as they put the nightmare persecution they faced behind them.

“Father George and the other 5 accused under overtly false allegations must now face a trial despite the change of stance from the original material witness, who described a ritual practice that is not pertinent to the Catholic faith. This legal faux pas emphasises the pathetic nature of India’s judicial process.

“The teenager caught being involved in the arson attack must be prosecuted with the utmost severity that is possible. It is the aura of impunity that exacerbates zealot passion and this can only be curbed through the rule of law.

“It raises my ire that no other members of the violent mob have been arrested, the innocent Christian men were brutalised by a mob in excess of 100 hysterical Hindus, who seemed intent on extra-judicial murder. The attack occurred before police yet they were unable to identify any of the perpetrators. I have to summarise, that it probably did not help the investigation when some eyewitnesses noticed that some of the police were complicit with the crime.

“I will be praying for the brave Indian and Pakistani Christians who continue to uphold God and practise their faith, despite the overt persecution they suffer. Their brave example is a reminder to us all that nothing on this earth can terminate God. No man can defeat our sovereign Lord who reigns eternally.”

PAKISTAN: MOURNERS BURY 11 KILLED IN QUETTA CHURCH SUICIDE ATTACK, AS 50 INJURED

World Watch Monitor (18.12.2017) –

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/12/pakistan-bomb-attack/> – Worshippers were lining up to take the Holy Communion when at least two men, armed and wearing suicide vests, attacked Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in western Pakistan's restive city Quetta on Sunday morning. They left at least eleven dead and more than 50 injured, many in a critical condition, unofficial local figures say.

“It was a pleasant morning. We had sung songs and children had presented a Christmas program. Pastor Simon Bashir had finished his sermon and we were moving towards the altar when we started hearing gunfire outside the church,” said Sohail Yousuf. His 13 year-old daughter Mehak lost her life; her 16 year-old sister Wasika is critically ill after an operation in Quetta's Combined Military Hospital (CMH).

Yousuf, a manager in an insurance company, migrated 16 years ago to Quetta from Punjab after his wife, a government schoolteacher, was posted there.

“We bolted all the doors and were praying that God would protect each of us. Then a suicide bomber blew himself up at the main door. The explosion shattered the door and injured many inside. When some rushed outside, they were injured by gunfire as the terrorists were on the church lawn. But soon the situation was brought under control by the volunteer

church security guards and police present there.”

Caritas Executive Director Sheezan William told World Watch Monitor that the first person killed was the church security guard George Masih, who tried to stop the men advancing towards the church.

“I came to know what was happening while the exchange of fire was taking place. I phoned two youths in the choir. I could hear gunfire on the phone and then rushed to the church,” he said.

[Leading Pakistani newspaper ‘Dawn’ also confirms that police intervened after the church security guard scuffled with one attacker.](#) About two hundred congregants were inside the church, beautifully decorated for Christmas, when the terrorists unleashed their attack. [Islamic State \(IS\) has claimed responsibility but provided no evidence for this claim.](#)

“The injured were taken to the Civil Hospital, CMH, Akram Hospital and other private hospitals. Relatives picked up two bodies from the church and took them away, which is why they are not counted in official numbering.”

Retired Brigadier Samson Simon Sharaf, a political analyst who is close to security agencies, told World Watch Monitor the attackers were four in number. “They were equipped with ample ammunition supply and were aiming to take worshippers hostage and kill them one by one, prolonging the scene of terror as much as they could.”

Video footage shows a church security guard was quick to close the door when he saw two men approaching. This provided more time for local security personnel to plan.

“One terrorist was shot in the compound before he could blow himself up inside the church. Meanwhile, the other one rushed to the church entrance where he blew himself up,” said Sharaf.

“The agencies chased the other two who fled, and a search operation is ongoing.

“The incident has taken place close to the sad day in the country’s history, December 16 [when Pakistani forces were defeated in 1971, leading to East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh]. Our enemy keeps reminding us of our history. This time Christians are targeted who stand united with other Pakistanis against the menace of terrorism.”

William added: “A team of about 70 youths is working day and night to provide blood supplies, food or any other assistance to the injured, and coffins for the burial.” He told World Watch Monitor that seven families living in the church compound, including that of Pastor Simon Bashir, were told to vacate their houses. “All of them have moved to relatives until the area is given clearance.”

Al-Jazeera reports Moazzam Jah Ansari, police chief of Balochistan province, as saying: “We have cleared the immediate area around the church, and we are now clearing a peripheral area”.

Balochistan, the largest province of Pakistan, is situated along the Afghan border. The mineral rich, mostly hilly, region – the least populated area in the country – is where an insurgent separatist movement has long been going on. Most Christians in this province have migrated from Punjab but mostly remain unharmed by the separatists, though the separatists are against Punjabis, believing they are doing an injustice to them by controlling their land and resources.

The Quetta Methodist church, established in 1959, came under the control of the Church of Pakistan in 1971 after six Protestant denominations, including the Methodist Church, united as one denomination.

Ten days ago, a seven-year-old boy and two others were killed during a hand grenade attack on the gates of a Christian

colony in Chaman, also in Balochistan, south-western Pakistan.

Punjabi Christians staged a protest, about the way they feel the government does not do enough to protect them against radical Islamic militant extremists, outside the Lahore Press Club a few hours after the Quetta attack.

Last week, the EU Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Jan Figel, was in Pakistan, and took part in the set-up of an inter-faith advisory commission. Its main aim is to help stop misuse of the blasphemy law.

Since 9/11, Christians are the main religious minority that has come under both communal attacks on the pretext of blasphemy, and by terrorist attacks on their places of worship. Immediately after 9/11 there were six attacks on churches, Christian hospitals and educational institutions. Such attacks re-surfaced again in [2013 with the suicide attack on All Saints' Memorial Church in Peshawar](#) province, which is also on the Afghan border. About 90 people died in that incident, including many children.

Then on 15 March 2015, [just before Easter, two churches in a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore](#) came under twin suicide attacks. About 25 people died. In 2016 in Lahore, Punjab – where the largest Christian population lives – [a suicide attack took place on a park, killing mostly Christians as they celebrated Easter](#). This year, security was on high alert at Easter. In March, [Pakistan's military agency, to prevent an attack, killed a husband and arrested his wife, who'd been trained in Syria by IS](#). (She [was later released by security agencies](#).) Security agencies are on high alert for Christmas.

The worst attack in Pakistan's history (which changed the course of the country by triggering new anti-terrorism laws after showing the population how ruthlessly Islamist militant radicals could behave), took place exactly three years ago in Peshawar [when terrorists raided an army public school,](#)

[massacring 141, including 132 children.](#)

List of victims (Source: British Pakistani Christians: <http://bit.ly/2z33cAz>)

Below we have a list of those killed and injured with some images of the survivors you may find these upsetting and should stop reading from here is so: List of People who lost their lives during the blast in Church in Quetta 1. Mehak D/O of Sohail Yousaf 2. Akash S/O Naseem 3. Fazal Masih S/o Malik Masih 4. George Masih 5. Gulzar Masih 6. Sultan Masih S/O Siraj Masih 7. Sona Nazaf D/O Noaf Hameed 8. Madeeha Barkat D/O Barkat Ali List of people who were injured: 1. Ashraf S/O Manzoor 2. Sultan S/O Mizaj 3. Saiqa wife of Sohail 4. Aaliya Naeem 5. Nadia 6. Mekal 7. Saima 8. Sunil 9. Shamim 20. Yasir Naveed 21. Shezadi Shamshad 22. Adil 23. Khushi 24. Salma 25. Hanan 26. Sadaf 27. Jospheen 28. Ayeasha 29. Tina Qaisor 30. Ramish 31. Eman Wali 32. Zeeshan 33. Aksa

OP-ED: ABOUT THE ISLAMIC TOTALITARIANISM

An ideology that wants to radically change the existing nature of a state into a theocracy to be dominated by one religious worldview

An ideology that wants to change the structure of a diverse civil society into a society to be dominated by one religious worldview

An ideology that wants the daily life and the behavior of each individual to be dominated by one religious worldview

is a totalitarian ideology, as was the Communist ideology inspired by the political philosophy of Marx and Engels.

Islamic totalitarianism is a totalitarian ideology inspired by the Quran but it is not a religion.

It divides and fragments the Muslim communities around the world.

The primary “collateral victims” of the fight for power of Islamic totalitarianism are Muslims, who in many countries adhere to an historically peaceful Islam.

Christians are a second category of “collateral victims” of Islamic totalitarianism in Muslim majority countries.

Diverse civil populations in countries where Islam is not professed by a majority are the third category of “collateral victims” of Islamic totalitarianism.

The Islamic totalitarian virus infecting the software of the *ummah* must not infect humankind. An antidote must be administered.

Combating Islamist totalitarianism with ideas, with words and in practice is legitimate. It is obligatory. It is the self-defence of states, of non-Muslim societies and minorities, and of individuals.

Combating groups and individuals, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic universities such as al-Azhar, which promulgate Islamic totalitarian ideologies is a must. This is not Islamophobia. It is a fight for human dignity for all, for equality for all and for human rights for all.

Willy Fautré