

## Wiping out the Christians of Syria and Iraq to remap the Mid-East: Prerequisite to a clash of civilizations?

By Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya

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### Wiping Out the Christians of Syria and Iraq to Remap the Mid-East: Prerequisite to a Clash of Civilizations? (I)



[Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya](#)



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Historically, the Levant is the birthplace of Christianity and the oldest Christian communities have lived in it and the entire Fertile Crescent since the start of Christian history. Early Christians called themselves followers or people of «the Way» before they adopted the term Christian; in Arabic their antiquated name would be «Ahl Al-Deen». [1] Traces of this original name are also available in the New Testament of the Bible and can be read in John 14:5-7, Acts 9:1-2, Acts 24:4 and 14. From the Fertile Crescent these Christian communities spread across Africa, Asia, and Europe. Since that time the ancient communities of Christians, many of which still use the Syriac dialects of Aramaic in their churches, have been an integral and important part of the social fabrics of the pluralistic societies of Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran. Nevertheless, the Christians of the Levant and Iraq are now in the cross-hairs.

Deceit and mischief has been at play. It is no coincidence that Egyptian Christians were attacked at the same time as the South Sudan Referendum, which was supposed to signal a split between the Muslims in Khartoum and the Christians and animists in Juba. Nor is it an accident that Iraq's Christian, one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, began to face a modern exodus, leaving their homes and ancestral homeland in Iraq in 2003. Mysterious groups targeted both them and Palestinian refugees... Coinciding with the exodus of Iraqi Christians, which occurred under the watchful eyes of US and British military forces, the neighborhoods in Baghdad became sectarian as Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims were forced by violence and death squads to form sectarian enclaves. This is all tied to US and Israeli project of redrawing the map.

The Christian communities of the Levant and Iraq have long distrusted the US government for its support of Israel, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and fanatical militants with anti-Christian leanings. Lebanon's Christians have also been weary of US support for Israeli expansion and ideas about resettling Palestinians into Lebanon. There is also a widely held belief that the US and Israel have been involved in a policy to remove or «purge» the Christians from Iraq and the Levant in some type of Zionist-linked resettlement plan. Since the US-supported anti-government fighters started targeting Christian Syrians, there has been renewed talk about a Christian exodus in the Middle East centering on Washington's war on Syria.

#### **Silencing the Ancient Church Bells of Sham and Shinar**

Christian Arabs and both the Assyrian and Armenian ethnic communities, which are overwhelmingly composed of Christian, inside Lebanon and Syria have been in the crosshairs. From Homs and Maaloula to Kessab, Syria's Christians have been under siege. Various ecclesiastic councils or synods have expressed concerns as have Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I, the Vatican or Holy See, Russian Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow Cyril (Kirill) I, Armenian Apostolic Catholicos Aram I, the Maronite Greek Catholic Patriarchate in Lebanon, Jerusalemite Greek Orthodox Archbishop Theodosios (Attallah) Hanna of Sebastia, the Anglican See of Canterbury, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, the Free Patriotic Movement of Lebanon's Michel Aoun, the World Council of Churches, and various interfaith bodies. Even US celebrities Cherilyn Sarkisian (Cher) and Kimberly Kardashian joined the chorus and voiced their concerns about Syria's Christians after the Turkish government perfidiously helped Al-Nusra overrun the predominately Armenian town of Kessab in Latakia Governate on March 24, 2014. [2]

Inside Syria, Maronite Greek Catholic Archbishop of Damascus Samir Nassar, Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregory III Laham, Antiochian Greek Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius IV, and Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas have all condemned the violence. The leaders of Syria's other faiths, Druze Sheikh Al-Aql Hamoud Hennawi, Sunni Grand Mufti Ahmed Badreddin, and Ashari Imam Mohammed Said Ramadan, have joined the Christian leaders in their calls for peace and condemnations of Washington's war on Syria. These leaders have risked their lives and the lives of their loved ones by taking

these positions. Sheikh Ramadan, who was also an ethnic Kurd, was murdered while he was teaching in a mosque for his backing of the Syrian government on March 21, 2013. Patriarch Ignatius IV had his brother kidnapped in Aleppo whereas Grand Mufti Hassoun had his twenty-two year-old son murdered on his way to university in Idlib. Despite the threats, all these figures have spoken against the insurgency as a cancerous threat to coexistence in Syrian society and the broader region. Melkite Patriarch Gregory III Laham has very vocally said that his country is being attacked by bandits and terrorists under the fiction of a revolution that seek to destroy the Christians and all Syria. [3]

The Christian communities of Syria, which constitute at least 10% of the Syrian population, have been systematically targeted; their churches have been attacked and desecrated; their priests, monks, and nuns murdered; and generally discriminated against by the anti-government forces that the US, UK, France, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and their allies support. The objectives of establishing this exodus are reflected by the anti-government chants: «Alawites to the ground and Christians to Lebanon!» What this chant means is that Syria is no longer a place where either Alawis or Christians can live.

### **America's Foot Soldiers and the Rape of Christians in Syria and Iraq**

Fides News Agency, the official news agency of the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church, has reported that the so-called religious leaders of the anti-government fighters declared it lawful for the anti-government fighters to rape «any non-Sunni Syrian woman» that they desired; the declarations of these corrupt pastors have been used to justify the rape, humiliation, torture, and murder of women and girls in towns and territory captured by groups like the so-called Free Syrian Army, Jabhat Al-Nusra, and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah fi Al-Iraq wa Al-Sham (ISIL/DAISH). [4] Here is the account given to the Fides News Agency by two priests about what was done to one fifteen year-old Syrian Christian girl in Homs Governate after the anti-government fighters took control of it:

The commander of the battalion «Jabhat al-Nusra» in Qusair took Mariam, married and raped her. Then he repudiated her. The next day the young woman was forced to marry another Islamic militant. He also raped her and then repudiated her. The same trend was repeated for 15 days, and Mariam was raped by 15 different men. This psychologically destabilized her and made her insane. Mariam, became mentally unstable and was eventually killed. These atrocities are not told by any «International Commission» say to Fides two Greek-Catholic priests, Fr. Issam and Fr. Elias who have just returned to town. [5]

These same US-supported multinational insurgent groups have begun to do this to Iraqi Christians too. «On June 12, [2014,] only two day after capturing Mosul and other territories in Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria issued a decree ordering the people to send their unmarried women to 'jihad by sex'» and made a decree ordering that unmarried women sexually be offered to their fighters for fornication. [6] The following account, which was confirmed by the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights and reported by the Assyrian International News Agency, deals with Mosul after its takeover by the insurrectionary forces entering Iraq from Syria on June 25, 2014:

A Christian father who watched his wife and daughter get brutally raped by members of the militant group, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) because he couldn't pay them a poll tax in Mosul, Iraq, killed himself under the weight of the trauma this past weekend. [7]

The molestation and rape of Christian women and girls as sex objects has not limited to Christians alone. Syrian women and girls, regardless of their faiths, that have been captured by the anti-government forces are being raped and molested. Muslims, Christians, and Druze are all equally at risk. These perverted acts are being encouraged by corrupt clerics issuing legal opinions and decrees (fatwas) that support rape and womanizing.

These twisted legal opinions and decrees being issued include calls for foreign women to become concubines to the anti-government fighters in Syria in what is disgracefully called a «sexual holy struggle» (jihad al-nikah). The Tunisian government was even prompted to react in mid-2013 to these calls for sexual offering, because they were exploiting young Tunisian girls. [8] Tunisian Minister of Religious Affairs Nouredine Al-Khadimi condemned the corrupt and ignorant clerics and individuals behind the calls, insisting that they had nothing to do with Muslim teachings:

The minister's statements came after the spread of an anonymous «sexual jihad» fatwa on the Internet calling on young women to support opposition fighters in Syria by providing sexual services. According to media reports and mujahideen who returned to Tunisia after participating in jihad in Syria, 13 Tunisian girls headed to the battlefield in response to the «sexual jihad» fatwa. [9]

«After the sexual liaisons they have [in Syria] in the name of 'jihad al-nikah' — (sexual holy war, in Arabic) — [these girls] come home pregnant», Tunisian Interior Minister Lotfi bin Jeddou testified to Tunisian legislators months after Al-Khadimi's condemnations, explaining that the misguided girls could have over a hundred partners. [10]

### **Targeting Bishops, Priests, Monks, and Nuns: Besieging the People of «The Way»**

Since the start of the fighting, Christian spiritual figures have been targeted in one way or another. There are the cases of Greek Orthodox Archbishop Sayedna Paul (Boulos) Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan Mar Gregorios John Abraham (Yohanna Ibrahim), which were kidnapped near the Turkish border, on April 22, 2013. Their driver, a Christian priest himself, was killed instantly for protesting the two Christian metropolitans for refusing to let them leave their car. A fourth person in the car, Fouad Eliya, managed to remain free (and explain what happened). [11] The Turkish government is directly involved in the kidnapping of the two Orthodox Christian bishops. The Turkish newswire Dogan News Agency (Dogan Haber Ajansı) reported on July 23, 2013 that the murders or, using the report's words, «assassins» of the two Syrian bishops were arrested in Konya. [12] The arrest happened to be of anti-Russian fighters from the North Caucasus, which corresponded to Foud Eliya's account that Boulos Yazigi and Yohanna Ibrahim were taken by North Caucasian militants dressed like Taliban militants from Afghanistan. [13]

Grand Mufti Hassoun revealed that Turkish-trained Chechen fighters were dispatched by Ankara to kidnap Sayedna Boulos Yazigi and Mar Gregorios, because of two important reasons. According to Sheikh Hassoun, the first reason is that Metropolitan Gregorios was asked by Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas to head a church committee to begin the process of reclaiming the vast holdings of the Syriac Orthodox Church that the Turkish government had confiscated during its persecution of Syriac Orthodox Christians. [14] In a meeting between Prime Minister Erdogan and Mar Gregorios, the Turkish government asked that the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch establish an eparchy (an ecclesiastical province or administrative division of the church with a metropolitan) in Turkey and to even relocate its patriarchate from Damascus to Hatay (Antioch), but Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim refused and said that the patriarchate of the Syriac Orthodox Church will never change locations, that Syriac Orthodox Christians recognized Levant as one unified land, and that a bishop would be assigned to Turkey when the Syriac Orthodox Church's properties were returned by the Turkish government, which angered Turkish officials. [15] The other reason that the Orthodox Christian cleric was targeted was that he was reconciling anti-government fighters peacefully with the Syrian government in Aleppo Governorate, which upset Turkey and its allies. [16]

Other cases include that of Father (Abouna) Fadi Jamal Haddad, an Antiochian Greek Orthodox priest acting as a mediator in Qatana during the fighting, who was tortured and shot in the head after he tried to mediate the release of a doctor that was being ransomed for money, Father (Abouna) Francois Al-Mourad, a Catholic priest of the Franciscan Order, who was shot for preventing fellow Christians and Syrians from being hurt by the anti-government fighters, and Father Frans van der Lugt, a Dutch priest of the Jesuit Order working in Homs. When Abouna Fadi went to pay insurgents for the doctor they abducted, they kidnapped him too; they would later kill the Christian priests and leave him on the side of the highway, «horribly tortured and [with] his eyes gouged out», where his body would be found on September 25, 2012. [17] According to the Franciscan Order's representatives in Syria, the insurgents «broke into the convent, looted it and destroyed everything. When Fr. François tried to defend the nuns and other people, the gunmen shot him dead» on June 23, 2013. [18] The insurgents murdered Father Frans van der Lugt on April 7, 2014. This is an account of the circumstances behind his murder:

Wael Salibi, 26, recalled how when the Christian area in Homs was taken over by rebels, 66,000 of the faithful «left their home, and just few of them stayed there. He was the only priest, he stayed in his church.»

«Just months before he died, he said 'I can't leave my people, I can't leave my church, I am director of this church, how can I leave them?」 Salibi told CNA on April 11.

Salibi, who hails from the now-ravished city of Homs, grew up as a close friend and pupil of Fr. Frans, who was brutally killed on April 7. Days before his 76th birthday, an unknown gunman entered his church, beat him and shot him in the head. [19]

In Hasakah (Hasce) many of the Christian Syrians fled, but almost 30,000 stayed as internal refugees. The Syrian Christians who belonged to the Chaldean Catholic Church, Syriac Orthodox Church, Syriac Catholic Church, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, and the Armenian Catholic Church collectively asked the world for help and to put an end to the fighting, in an appeal that went unheard, in late-2012; they have suffered from persecution, lawlessness, kidnappings, ransoms, murders. One Christian from the area stated the following to Fides News Agency that Al-Nusra was targeting «all young people who were born between 1990 and 1992. They look for them, accuse them of being soldiers for the national service and kill them cold-bloodedly. They want to terrorize young people to prevent them from enlisting.» [20]

Another example of the assault on the Christian community is Al-Nusra's assault on the town of Maaloula. Maaloula is one of a few villages maintaining an old dialect of Aramaic, known as the language of Jesus of Nazareth. Many Christian structures and historic sites fill the Syrian town, but the Melkite Greek Catholic Saint Sergius (Mar Sarkis) Monastery and Antiochian Greek Orthodox Saint Thecla (Mar Taqla) Monastery stand out. The town became the scene of fighting between Al-Nusra and the Syrian Arab Army and switched hands between the insurgents and Syrian government four times between late-2013 and mid-2014. Many of Maaloula's residents, both Christian and Muslim alike, became trapped in their homes and local buildings, including forty Greek Orthodox Christian nuns and the orphans they were looking after, which sparked panic in the Christian populations of Syria and Lebanon. Hence the strong backing of Bashar Al-Assad's government by all of Syria's minorities and the expression of these type of sentiments were nearly universal among Christian Syrians: «'They're coming after us,' Odette Abu Zakhm, a 65-year-old woman in the congregation who lives in the nearby historic Christian district of Bab Touma. 'All they do is massacre people, all they know is killing.'» [21] Not only were the nuns held hostage by Al-Nusra, but the anti-government fighters desecrated absolutely all of Maaloula's shrines and Christian, stole its historic artifacts for sale in the black market, and scattered the partially Aramaic-speaking population of the town. Eyewitnesses who escaped Maaloula give below:

[The insurgents] tried to change the religious and architectural-historical look of the ancient Christian town entirely: completely destroying some churches, the militants brought down all bells from other ones. The fate of two other world-famous monuments of Ma'loula was no less tragic: extremists blew up the statue of Christ the Savior, which had stood at the entrance of St. Thecla Convent, as well as the statue of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, which had stood close to the Safir hotel, the latter of which served as the main shelter for Takfirists for many months. [22]

Easter, in 2014 was a special time for Maaloula. Around Easter, the Syrian government regained the town. Maaloula was finally secured and residents were returning. «The display of hatred was clear — the houses are totally destroyed, the whole village was destroyed. I can't describe the amount of damage to the village», a returning resident by the name of Lorain told the press about what the insurgents did. [23] President Al-Assad visited too. Al-Assad himself came to visit it as a sign of the Syrian government's commitment to its entire population regardless of their faith or ethnicity. Both the Western rite and Eastern rite Christian celebrations of Easter, respectively using the Gregorian and Julian calendars, fell on the same date: April 20, 2014.

*(To be continued)*

**NOTES**

- [1] The term Christian is akin to the term Mohammedian, which was once used to describe Muslims. It was a name originally used as a derogatory term by non-Christians to identify the followers of Jesus of Nazareth and «the Way» by non-Christians, but would eventually be accepted and adopted by many of the Christians; the Arabic word «deen» means «way» and not religion as it is commonly substituted for.
- [2] Pinar Tremblay, «Armenian-Americans blame Turkey for Kassab invasion, Al-Monitor, April 3, 2014.
- [3] «Syria has been reduced to banditry and anarchy, says Gregory III Laham», Vatican Insider, May 4, 2012.
- [4] «13 Syrian Christian Women Raped and Killed by Islamists» Pravoslavie, April 5, 2013; «Rape and atrocities on a young Christian in Qusair», Fides News Agency, July 2, 2013; Stoyan Zaimov, «Syrian Christian Mother Reveals Stories of Rape, Church Attacks in Streets of Damascus», Christian Post, October 17, 2013; Jamie Dettmer, «Syria's Christians Flee Kidnappings, Rape, Executions», Daily Beast, November 19, 2013.
- [5] «Rape and atrocities», Fides, op. cit.
- [6] «ISIS in Mosul Orders Unmarried Women to 'Jihad By Sex,» Assyrian International News Agency, June 21, 2014.
- [7] Leonardo Blair, «Christian Father Commits Suicide After ISIS Members Rape Wife and Daughter in Front of Him Because He Couldn't Pay Poll Tax», Christian Post, June 25, 2014.
- [8] Mohammed Yassin Al-Jalassi, «Tunisians Raise Alarm on Fatwa Encouraging 'Sexual Jihad,» Al-Monitor, March 27, 2013.
- [9] Ibid.
- [10] «Sex Jihad raging in Syria, claims minister», Agence France-Presse, September 20, 2013.
- [11] Dikran Ego, «Turkey's Role in the Kidnapping of the Syrian Bishops», Assyrian International News Agency, February 1, 2012.
- [12] Ismail Akkaya, «Suriyeli metropolitlerin katil zanlıları Konya'da yakalandı» [«Syrian metropolitan's alleged assassins were caught in Konya»], Dogan Haber Ajansı, July 23, 2013.
- [13] Dikran Ego, «Turkey's Role in Kidnapping», AINA, op. cit.
- [14] Grand Mufti Hassoun explains this in a video released by the Stockholm-based Syriac Foundation on May 4, 2014.
- [15] Ibid.
- [16] Ibid.
- [17] «Fr. Fadi Jamil Haddad: Priest, Trusted By All, Martyred in Syria», Pravmir.com, October 28, 2012: .
- [18] «Custos of the Holy Land: Fr François Mourad killed by Islamist insurgents in al-Ghassaniyah», AsiaNews.it, June 25, 2013: .
- [19] Elise Harris, «'I can't leave my people': Priest killed in Syria hailed as martyr», Catholic News Agency, April 15, 2014.
- [20] «Appeal from the people of Mesopotamia, left to themselves», Fides News Agency, January 17, 2013.
- [21] Lee Keath, «Seizure of nuns stokes Syrian Christian fears», Associated Press, December 8, 2013.
- [22] «All Shrines of Ma'loula Either Destroyed or Desecrated», Pravoslavie, January 13, 2014.
- [23] Firas Makdesi, «Syria's Assad pays Easter visit to recaptured Christian town», Reuters, April 20, 2014.

Part II: August 2014

<http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2014/08/01/wiping-out-christians-syria-iraq-remap-mid-east-prerequisite-clash-civilizations-ii.html>

Wiping Out the Christians of Syria and Iraq to Remap the Mid-East: Prerequisite to a Clash of Civilizations? (II)



[Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya](#)



August 1, 2014

### [Part I](#)

The first part of this article discussed the targeting of Christian Syrians and Iraqis. It detailed how their ancient communities, churches, and clerics have all come under fire and persecution by the US-supported insurgents that are ravaging both Syria and Iraq. The second part will explain the rationale behind this and how it is tied to the strategic goals of the US and Israel to redraw the map of the Middle East and North Africa. [1]

There is an attempt to cordon off the Arabs and create distinctive and sharply delineating lines. These lines of delineation are replacing the seamless lines of transition that exist in places like the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans. Under this scheme, there can no longer be a melding transition between societies and countries. What is being staged is the creation of an exclusively Muslim region in Syria and the Middle East— excluding the citadel of Israel — that will be in turmoil because of fighting within the Sunni majority and between the Sunni Muslims and the Alawites, Twelver (Jaffari) Shiites, Zaidi Shiites, and Ibadis.

#### **Bkerké's Maronite Patriarchate Senses the Danger to the Levant's Christians**

Amidst the Arab Spring and the start of the problems in Syria, the Maronite Greek Catholic Syriac Church of Antioch, which is simply called the Maronite Church (after Saint Youhana Maroun, its patron) and the largest of the autonomous Eastern Catholic Churches, appointed a new patriarch on March 15, 2011. The new Maronite patriarch, Mar Beshara Peter (Boutros) Al-Rahi, would shift the underlying politics of the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerké (and Dimane in the summer) towards a new direction from that of his predecessor Cardinal Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, who heavily favoured the bigoted warlord Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces Party and the Hariri-led March 14 Alliance.

Cardinal Nasrallah was at odds with Damascus and he even refused to visit the Maronite communities inside Syria on church missions himself when he headed the Maronite See, because he said that his visit would signal his approval towards the Syrian regime's actions inside Lebanon. Cardinal Nasrallah's supporters would pointed out, in his support, that he also refused to legitimize Israel by personally visiting it whereas Patriarch Al-Rahi decided to join Pope Francis I and his delegation in 2014 for a meeting with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the figurehead primate of all the Eastern Orthodox Churches, in Jerusalem to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI's meeting with Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I in 1964. Inside Lebanon, Sfeir either had a tense relationship or was at odds

with Hezbollah, Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, Suleiman Frangieh's Marada Movement, and the rest of the March 8 Alliance too. Mar Nasrallah's unyielding positions created divisions among the Maronite Christians and he began to be increasingly opposed by other Maronite bishops, which believed he was endangering the Maronite and Christian positions in Lebanon through his policies. It was even alleged that the Holy See or Vatican intervened and nudged Boutros Sfeir to resign vis-à-vis Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, the Argentine prefect overseeing the congregation of Eastern Catholic Churches for the papacy, and when Cardinal Nasrallah himself went to Rome to visit Pope Benedict XVI and to unveil a statue of Youhana Maroun in Vatican City. These accounts, however, were dismissed by his Maronite supporters as the malicious rumours of his opponents.

Upon his election into the Maronite Patriarchate by the Synod of Maronite Bishops, Cardinal Beshara reversed his predecessor's personal policies by taking a stand in support of Lebanon's Hezbollah and its ally Syria. Hezbollah, which had frozen meetings with the Maronite Patriarchate under Boutros Sfeir's leadership, sent a delegation led by senior Hezbollah parliamentarian Mohammed Raad to Bkerké to open a new chapter by renewing dialogue. [2] He also expressed his renewed fears about a purging of Christians in the Levant and the Middle East. In the past he and other Maronite leaders had fears that the Saudi-supported Hariri family could eventually devastate the Christians in Lebanon through its support of fanatical organizations and militias that openly support Al-Qaeda and have anti-Christian tendencies. In 2011, Beshara was warning against the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. [3] Moreover, Patriarch Al-Rahi, like many other Christian spiritual leaders in Lebanon and Syria, recognized the threat that the insurgence afflicting Syria posed towards all Levantine Christians. Like Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement, Patriarch Al-Rahi also realized that the insurgents would eventually attack Lebanon, if they successfully took over Syria.

Al-Rahi's support for Hezbollah and Syria became clear when he met French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the Élysée Palace on September 5, 2011. Sarkozy and he had disagreements about regime change in Syria. Patriarch Al-Rahi argued that the Syrians should be left alone and that Syrian polity should be allowed to reform without foreign interference from France and its allies. [4] Nicolas Sarkozy was also told by Patriarch Al-Rahi that the real threat to Lebanon was Israel and that Tel Aviv needed to be neutralized if France was sincere and legitimately wanted Hezbollah's paramilitary forces to disarm. [5] It was maintained in Lebanon, in the course of the exchange between the two men, that Sarkozy told Beshara that the Christians of Lebanon and Syria could immigrate to the European Union as consolation. This was later denied in a statement released on behalf of the Élysée Palace by the French Embassy in Beirut on September 23, 2011. [6]

Al-Rahi was instantly criticized by the Hariri-led March 14 camp whereas he was thanked by Syria's Christian and Muslim spiritual leaders, which even visited him as part of an interfaith delegation upon his return to Lebanon. [7] Although they were supposed to visit him after he was elected as the spiritual leader of the Maronites, the Syrian interfaith delegation's visit had been postponed due to the crisis in Syria. [8] Nonetheless, the Syrian interfaith delegation, accompanied by Syria's ambassador to Lebanon, took the opportunity to signal its gratefulness by calling on the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerké. [9] Hezbollah, the Free Patriotic Movement, the Amal Movement, and March 8 applauded Beshara upon his arrival to Beirut from Paris and during his visit to South Lebanon. Prime Minister Najib Al-Mikati and President Michel Suleiman also expressed support for Al-Rahi's position in France. [10]

### **A Christian-Muslim Divorce and the Destruction of the «Levantine Cleft»**

The New York Times began to assert in 2012 that «Syria's pluralistic society, which once rose above sectarian identity in a region often characterized by a homicidal assertion of religious belief, is now faced with civil disintegration and ethnic cleansing». [11] The Maronite Patriarchate and the Christian communities of the Levant realized that what was at stake in Syria was much more than about the Syrian government. The things that were really at stake were the continuation of the ancient Christian presence and the coexistence of Christians with Muslims, Druze, and Jews which the Israeli and US governments were trying to demolish with the aim of creating sectarian states that would be in line with the so-called «clash of civilizations».

Syria is viewed by advocates of the clash of civilizations paradigm as what is called a «cleft nation». Cleft nations like Lebanon, Syria, and Bosnia (as well as the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union) are merging points between supposedly different civilizations. These nations and their societies help blend the different civilizations together and, hence, these cleft nations can obstruct a clash of civilizations by bridging different civilizational entities. The purging of Christian Syrians and Christian Iraqis, like Israeli and Zionist attempts to make Jewish Iranians leave their Iranian homeland, is aimed at sociologically and politically reconfigure the Middle East as a crossroad of different civilizations and as a merging point for the monotheistic Abrahamic faiths and their followers and confessions. [12] It also denies the fact that Western Christians, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Jews really belong to one civilization. Moreover, this project's nefarious aims include unknotting or de-blending Syria and the Middle East as pluralistic societies, social mosaics, and historic merging points between Christians and Muslims.

This Christian-Muslim divorce and project to redraw the map is why the corrupt Sarkozy's offer to relocate the Levantine Christian to the European Union was no gracious offer whatsoever. It was dually a slap in the face of all Christendom and all Arabdom by the same powers that have deliberately created the conditions to assault the ancient Christian communities of Syria. Resettling the Christian communities outside of the region and/or demarcating them into sectarian enclaves is meant to delineate the Arab nations along the lines of exclusively Muslim nations, This falls into accordance with both the Yinon Plan and the geopolitical objectives of Washington to control Eurasia by constructing a clash of supposedly different civilizations.

## NOTES

[1] Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, «Plans for Redrawing the Middle East: The Project for a 'New Middle East,» Global Research, November 18, 2006.

[2] «Hizbullah Delegation Visits Bkirki and al-Rahi: We Haven't Tackled Issue of Arms,» Naharnet, March 18, 2011.

[3] Hussein Dakroub, «Rai defends stance on Syria, weapons,» Daily Star, September 12, 2011; Jean Aziz, «Christians of the Levant Say France Is Plotting to Displace Them,» Al-Monitor, January 7, 2013.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] «France denies Sarkozy said no home for Christians in region,» Daily Star, September 23, 2011.

[7] Bkirki: Syrian Delegation's Visit Aimed at Bridging Gap between Sects,» Naharanet, September 29, 2011; «Patriarch al-Rahi, Damascus Mufti Discuss Syrian-Lebanese Relations and Bolstering Islamic-Christian Fraternity,» Syrian Arab News Agency, September 29, 2011.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Hussein Dakroub, «Raid defends Syria,» op. cit.

[11] Kapil Komireddi, «Syria's Crumbling Pluralism,» New York Times, August 3, 2012.

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Yossi Melman, «Iranian Jews blast offer of cash for immigrating to Israel,» Haaretz, July 14, 2007.