Islamic Extremism and Coptic Christians in Egypt

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Retaliation, Terrorism, and the Position of Coptic Christians in Egypt

As a retaliatory measure, the Egyptian army carried out an air raid on the training camps of jihadists in Libya. The Egyptian media reported that the purpose of the air raid was to secure six camps in the coastal city of Derna.

Christians make up about 10 per cent of Egypt's population and have recently been victims of attacks by Islamic extremists. In early April 2017 alone, as a result of a double terrorist attack in two Coptic churches on Palm Sunday (Palm Sunday in the Russian Orthodox Church – Ed.), more than 45 people were killed, and many believers were wounded. Responsibility for the attack was then claimed by the terrorist organization "Islamic State" (IG).

"Islamism is not a fashion; it is an ideology that has its roots in some of the attitudes and foundations of Islam itself," Georgy Mirsky emphasized. He dispelled the two myths that now prevail in the minds of people. First, the terrorists are not beggars, destitute people who went to war in despair to earn their living. However, such incidents are mostly among ordinary militants. However, most of the terrorist Islamists are educated people from well-to-do families who have a good job, including the intelligentsia. For example, teachers and doctors. That is, the fact that poverty leads to terror is a myth. The second myth is that Islamist organizations were created by the United States. This is not quite true. The Americans supported the already existing Al Qaeda, which was created by Bin Laden after the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops. "Do not look too simplistic about things," the professor emphasized.

Regional Attacks and the Expansion of Religious Extremism

Today, among the headlines of the media, there are periodic reports of terrorist attacks. So, the other day, the militants of the Somali terrorist group "Al-Shabab" seized a bus in the north of Kenya and shot 28 non-Muslim passengers. Earlier this year, a car bomb exploded in the market in the city of

Maiduguri in northern Nigeria. It killed 30 people. The radical group “Boko Haram”, which is fighting for the creation of an Islamic state in northern Nigeria, is suspected of the terrorist attack.

But what is the power of Islamism, and why does it force the people professing it, among whom there are a lot of young people, to become terrorists and go to their deaths?

“I think that Islam is the most powerful religion in terms of familiarizing and attracting people to it. This is confirmed by the fact that Islam is adopted by young people in France and Germany. For Muslims, their nationality is not so important; the main thing for them is that they are Muslims, “the speaker noted. – Islam is not just a religion. This is the basis of an entire civilization, a way of life. In addition, there should not be much thought or philosophy. Everything is simple – that’s evil, that’s good.” And the Western world, with its immoral scale of values, as ideologists of Islam believe, challenges him, disintegrates Islam. On the other hand, in the third Surah of the Quran, Allah, referring to Muslims, calls them “the best of the communities that are created for the human race.” “Muslims are accustomed to considering themselves a special community as if the chosen part of humanity. And justice requires that Muslims occupy a higher, dominant place in the world. Reality shows quite the opposite: in the world they rule, others set the tone. Strength, power, influence – not the Islamic community and the West, “- said the scientist.

Support for the Islamic State and the Appeal of the Caliphate

These are two principal reasons why the majority of the Muslim population supports the group “Islamic State”, which announced the establishment of a caliphate in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, the scientist believes(U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2023). However, some Arabs do not approve of their bloody bacchanalia. On the other hand, IG’s militants are Sunni and radical against the West, in particular against the United States. Of the 21 Arab countries, 20 are Sunni. “IG plans are defined, Damascus should become the capital of their state,” said George Mirsky, “because, as they say, Damascus is” the heart of the Arab world. ” Plus, the mutual hatred and confrontation between Shiites and Sunnis contribute to the “treasury of terror”. At the same time, some Muslims are suppressed by fear. If they start opposing the IG now, they will immediately be declared “the fifth column”, “the CIA hand,” and there’s no mercy there.

What are the prospects for the existence of IG in the Middle East? “Neither the countries of the Western coalition led by the United States nor Turkey nor Iran will send their infantry to fight with the IG,” the scientist is convinced. “They are only able to stop the channel of dumping Iraqi and Syrian oil, which are cheaply sold by militants. I only hope that the atrocities of the militants will restore the Sunni tribes in Iraq against them, as it was after the Americans last invaded Iraq.”The scientist recalled that radical Islamist jihadists withdrew from the ranks of Al-Qaeda, which began its bloody war against the Soviet Army. The second generation fought against the Americans, creating an al-Qaeda group in Iraq.” Then, towards the end of the last decade, the outrage against civilians restored

even the very Sunnis against the jihadists, to whose aid they had arrived. Many Sunnis decided then that “America is bad, but Al Qaeda is even worse.” There was a paradoxical alliance between yesterday’s enemies – Sunni militants and the US military. “Al Qaeda in Iraq” lost, but it was rescued by the war in Syria.

“However, even if this caliphate, which the IG creates, does not mean that Islamism will die. Because it’s not a fever and the flu, it’s a cancerous tumour that originated in the most Muslim body, “Georgy Mirsky said. Scientists have to investigate why this tumour originated in this religion. Why was it in Islam that the existence of this monster became possible? It cannot be solved by military means or by propaganda from the outside world. “Only through the restructuring of the Islamic community, only by understanding that this is a dead end, that it is destroying the Islamic community itself and harming Islam. In many countries of the world, the word becomes equivalent to the word terrorist, and understanding this can eventually lead to drastic changes, “the scientist concluded.

Egypt’s Strategic Position and the Vulnerability of Eastern Christianity

90% of all Eastern Christians are Egyptians, recalls Mark Fromage, director of the “Helping the Church in Need” organization, which supports Christians around the world. Egypt is a bridge between the Middle East and Africa, which can allow a caliphate so desired by the Islamists.

Sunday’s terrible terrorist attacks in the two Egyptian temples were not the first and are unlikely to be the last. Forty-four dead and more than a hundred wounded in Tante and Alexandria joined the long list of martyrs of this country and church (she, by the way, calls herself a church of martyrs).

President Fattah al-Sisi immediately imposed a state of emergency for three months. This is a powerful signal towards the Christian community, as well as a sign of a fair assessment of the situation: Egypt is indeed at war! The “Muslim Brotherhood”, “Islamic State” and other Islamist groups (banned in Russia – ed.) declared war on it.

Territorial Control, Homogenization, and the Strategy of Extremist Movements

They set a lot of tasks for themselves, but the main thing is to take power into their hands and recreate the caliphate. In addition to military and terrorist operations to control the territory, their strategy implies the homogenization of the population: it should not only be Muslim but support the radical Islam promoted by these groups. This implies the treatment or expulsion of religious minorities, including, of course, Christians.

The terror of the IG and associated Islamist groups implies, among other things, the liquidation of the

Christian presence in the Middle East. In Iraq and Syria, their plans have already advanced far. Now Egypt's turn has come, where the attacks seem to be just beginning. But why is Egypt just now?

The increased pressure on the IG in Syria and Iraq pushes it to step up activities in Egypt (U.S. Department of State, 2023). The idea has always been to form a bridge between the Middle East and Africa through Libya (the destruction of the country by our hands has played into their hands) or through the Sahara-Sahel. Egypt is still an obstacle on this path.

Coptic Demography and the Political Status of Egyptian Christians

In addition, the country is a huge reservoir of Eastern Christians. The majority of Egyptian Christians are Copts: we are talking about 14 million believers, that is, 15% of the population, although there are different opinions about specific figures. The government has recently claimed that Christians account for 2-3% of the population. Thus, it sought to belittle their presence and, consequently, representativeness. Often a 10% figure is taken as the basis (the average is between 3% and 15%), but the question is why we should accept the state farce and not believe the parish lists.

In the rest of the Middle East, there are barely 2 million Christians. Thus, 90% of Eastern Christians are Egyptians. This explains the fact that they are increasingly becoming a priority objective of the Islamic State. The strategy of their elimination implies intimidation with terrorist attacks, which carries a clear message: convert to Islam or collect suitcases. In addition, this can drag them into escalating violence, as a result of which they will, in any case, become losers.

Despite the official support of President Fattah al-Sisi and the protection of most churches, the apparent ineffectiveness of the measures taken by Christians is increasingly irritating. If angry Christians eventually rebel against the Egyptian authorities, the IG will kill two birds with one stone: it will weaken the Egyptian government, whose authority it wants to take back, and will speed up the disappearance of Christians whose reaction will cause an upsurge in their aggression.

Discrimination, Future Violence, and the Need for Religious Protection

Thus, as it is easy to guess, these acts of terrorism will not be the last, and the pressure on Christians in Egypt will only increase, given that the situation is already tense. Let's give one more figure: only 1.5% of Egyptian civil servants are Christians. Given that the public sector accounts for the majority of jobs, this means that you have ten times less chance of finding a job if you are a Christian.

Be that as it may, Egypt, more than 700 times mentioned in the Bible, is the place of the first Passover and served as a refuge for the holy family. Therefore, there is a special blessing in the

country. The Church of Martyrs can rely on centuries-old traditions of faith so as not to fall into the trap of aggression and even more clearly demonstrate the love of Christ.

References

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