

Newsbytes

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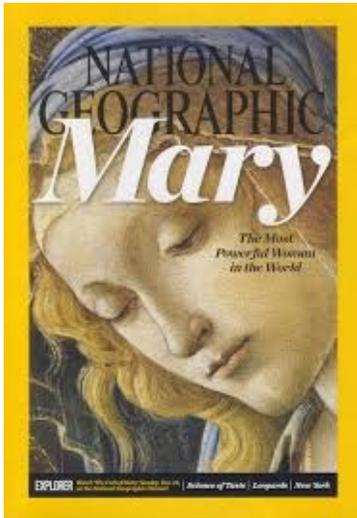
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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

National Geographic Dubs Virgin Mary “World’s Most Powerful Woman”

ABC



She's inspired countless works of art, millions visit her shrines every year, and National Geographic has named her the most powerful woman in the world. She's the Virgin Mary.

In its December cover story, the magazine explores the influence of Mary, including the apparitions she is said to have appeared in and the miracles she is said to have bestowed.

There have been 2,000 reported sightings of the Virgin Mary since 40 A.D., according to Stanford University graduate Michael O'Neill, who documents them on his website Miracle Hunters. These include apparitions to both future saints and ordinary people. The Catholic Church has a strict process for making these sightings official, so only 16 apparitions have been recognized by the Vatican.

One of the most significant modern sightings is in Medjugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where six children were said to have seen the Virgin Mary in 1981, telling them to spread the message to pray more often and repent sins. Since then 30 million faithful have made the pilgrimage to Medjugorje, many of them seeking the miraculous healing said to come in her aftermath.

Events like these, writer Maureen Orth asserts, are what makes her worthy of the "most powerful woman" title.

"No other woman has been as exalted as Mary," wrote Orth. "As a universal symbol of maternal love, as well as of suffering and sacrifice, Mary is often the touchstone of our longing for meaning."

Syrian war as testing ground for Russia's latest sea and air weapons

Special Report Debka.com

Like other manufacturers of advanced military weaponry, Russia has sought - and found in the Syrian conflict - a live battleground for testing and exhibiting its latest and most advanced tools of war. The two most sophisticated Russian armaments on full operational display in recent weeks are the Kalibr NK cruise missile and the Sukhoi Su-34 Fullback fighter-bomber.

Western sources commented Sunday, Dec. 13: The cruise missiles launched from a Kilo-class submarine provided visible proof of how President Vladimir Putin is using his intervention in Syria as a showcase for Russian military prowess.

In terms of flexing muscle, the Kalibr NK subsonic cruise missile, or as it is known in the West, the SS-N-30As, takes the prize. Its debut launch from a warship in the Caspian Sea on Nov. 20, not only hit Islamic State and rebel targets, but allowed Russian warships to show their paces in delivering long-range missiles, capable of carrying conventional or nuclear warheads, to targets at a distance of between 990 km (620 miles) and 1,467 km (923 miles) away.

It also conveyed the message to NATO that nuclear cruise missiles fired from Russian Black Sea Fleet warships were capable of reaching any target in Europe.

To counter this message, American and other Western military sources claimed that the Kalibr missiles had missed their mark, either crashing in Iran or blowing up prematurely in mid-air. They hoped to temper the strong impression conveyed to European governments, which suddenly felt exposed to a nuclear-capable missile threat from the Black Sea region as well as from Russian fleet bases in the Baltic Sea port of Kaliningrad, which had just received brand-new Kalibr missile shipments.

On Dec. 9, the commander of US forces in Europe, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, addressed this situation. He said that Russia had indeed transferred ballistic missiles to its Kaliningrad military enclave and conducted nuclear strike drills. He also said: "There is a significant amount of capability in Kaliningrad, including anti-ship weapons, air defenses, and electronic warfare equipment."

Gen. Hodges spoke the day after the second Russian missile barrage targeted Syria - 17 days after the first. This time, the Kalibr cruise missiles were launched from a Kilo-class submarine, the Rostov-on-Don, which had meanwhile sailed into the eastern Mediterranean. This round too hit their targets, and also conveyed a dual message:

1. The Russians are capable of firing advanced cruise missiles from submarines as well as surface warships, and
2. Russia has established a chain of warships and missiles running 2,500 km from Kaliningrad in the north to the eastern Mediterranean, via the Black Sea.

To boost the air power Moscow is investing in the Syrian war, Russian has brought over half a dozen Sukhoi Su-34 Fullback warplanes. This fighter-bomber is designed primarily for striking ground and naval targets. It excels in destroying small moving targets. Under the conditions in Syria, The Su-34's rare ability to pinpoint small ISIS or rebel convoys as well as big ones is especially apposite.

This is a brand new warplane, DEBKAF's military sources report, which entered the service of the Russia air force only two years ago. It is being tested in Syria for the first time in real combat conditions. So far, the SU-34 has stood up to Russian expectations. They are now testing it further to find out if it can replace the older Su-24 fighter bombers.

Historic Vatican accord with "Palestine" takes effect

By AFP

2 January 2016 | UPDATED: 11:11 EST, 2 January 2016

The Vatican's first accord with the Palestinians -- an agreement that Israel has attacked as counter-productive to the Middle East peace process -- has come into force, the Holy See announced Saturday.

The accord covers the operation of the Church in areas of the Holy Land under Palestinian control but its significance has been seen in broader terms as a symbol of growing international backing for a Palestinian state.

The Vatican signed the accord in June, just over two years after the Roman Catholic Church recognised the Palestinian territories as a sovereign state

"With reference to the Comprehensive Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Palestine, signed on 26 June 2015, the Holy See and the State of Palestine have notified each other that the procedural requirements for its entry into force have been fulfilled," a Vatican statement said.

"The agreement... regards essential aspects of the life and activity of the Church in Palestine, while at the same time reaffirming the support for a negotiated and peaceful solution to the conflict in the region."

In June, the Vatican hailed the agreement, which includes provisions to protect the rights of Christians, as a model for other Arab and Muslim states in their relations with Christian minorities facing increasing persecution in the Middle East.

Israel attacked the accord as premature and counterproductive to efforts to get the Palestinians to resume direct negotiations with the Jewish state.

The Vatican's recognition of the state of Palestine -- joining dozens of others -- followed a November 2012 vote in favour of recognition by the UN General Assembly.

The Church has had diplomatic relations with Israel since 1993 but has yet to conclude an agreement on Christian rights there. Negotiations on the subject have been running since 1999 but have repeatedly run into deadlock over the status of Jerusalem.

The Bundy Militia's Particular Brand Of Mormonism

posted by Marsha West on January 6, 2016
bereanresearch.org



Captain Moroni, alleged commander of the Nephite forces, by Josh Cotton. Photo courtesy Wikipedia

In the headlines for several days is Burns, a small town in rural Oregon where a standoff between an armed militia and the United States Federal Government is in progress. The leader of the militia is Ammon Bundy, along with his brother Ryan and several other militia members who are believed to be from Arizona and Nevada.

When the Bundy militia took up arms against this nation, they declared the United States to be irredeemable and its government to be illegitimate.

Yesterday on The Briefing, Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, commented:

what many in the media have missed is what is there right before our eyes, and that is this, there is a very interesting theological dynamic and a theological worldview behind this militia and its members. The first key, the first clue to understanding this, is the fact that the spokesman for the militia identifies himself as Captain Moroni. Anyone with the slightest familiarity with the book of Mormon, with Mormon history and theology will recognize immediately the name Moroni.

Mohler points us to a piece John Sepulvado wrote for Oregon Public Radio where we learn just who this Captain Moroni is and what's behind the militia's worldview. Sepulvado writes:

"I'm Captain Moroni, from Utah."

That's how one militiaman at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge responded to OPB's Amanda Peacher when she asked for his name.

That name is not a silly response to deflect responsibility: In many ways, it encapsulates a deeply intertwined anti-federal sentiment mixed with Mormon symbolism. Captain Moroni is a crucial figure in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He's also a heroic figure for anti-federalist extremists.

In the modern day west, Captain Moroni has become one of several powerful symbols for the Bundy militia's

anti-governmental extremism.

Who Is Captain Moroni?

According to LDS scripture, Captain Moroni took command of the Nephites when he turned 25. Moroni innovated weaponry, strategy and tactics to help secure the safety of the Nephites, and allow them to worship and govern as they saw fit.

In LDS texts, Moroni prepares to confront a corrupt king by tearing off part of his coat and turning it into a flag, hoisting it as a “title of liberty.” This simple call to arms inspired a great patriotism in the Nephites, helping to raise a formidable army. Vastly outnumbered, the corrupt king fled. According to the Book of Mormon, Captain Moroni continued to push for liberty among his people.

“And it came to pass that Moroni was angry with the government, because of their indifference concerning the freedom of their country.”

An Embrace Of The “Title of Liberty”

During an April 2014 standoff with federal officials, supporters and members of the Bundy militia cited Book of Mormon passages centering on Captain Moroni. There were also several flags quoting Captain Moroni’s own writing on his “title of liberty.” Often next to American flags, these banners read “In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children.”

Cliven Bundy – the Nevada Rancher who called on militia and anti-government forces to help him in the showdown with the Bureau of Land Management – cited his own Mormon faith as a reason for what he viewed as a favorable outcome. As quoted by the Salt Lake City Tribune:

“If the standoff with the Bundys was wrong, would the Lord have been with us?” he asked, noting no one was killed as tensions escalated. “Could those people that stood (with me) without fear and went through that spiritual experience ... have done that without the Lord being there? No, they couldn’t.”

READ THE ENTIRE REPORT:

<http://www.opb.org/news/article/explainer-the-bundy-militias-particular-brand-of-mormonism/>

Iran’s Martyrdom Machine Springs to Life

Saudi Arabia's execution of a Shiite cleric has put the Middle East on edge -- and set up Tehran for its favorite role.

BY PHILLIP SMYTH JANUARY 5, 2016

Riyadh rang in 2016 with the executions of 47 people, its largest mass execution in over 35 years. Amid detainees accused of supporting al Qaeda was one figure with a far different pedigree: Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, a dissident Saudi Shiite cleric, who had been imprisoned by Riyadh since July 2012. His death has already rocked the fragile geopolitical order in the Persian Gulf: While the Saudis have likely used this crisis to push their own cynical goals, Iran is also attempting to reap the benefits of Nimr’s execution.

Understanding how Tehran plays a role in fostering crises of this nature is important. The Islamic Republic sees itself as engaged in a long-term struggle for control of the region’s Shiite community, which represents a tool for Iran to counter its main Sunni regional foes and promote its theocratic absolute velayat-e faqih, which forms the basis of Iran’s clerical rule, and so-called “Islamic Resistance” ideologies.

So how did a Saudi Shiite sheikh who was a “second-tier political player,” in the words of one U.S. diplomat, become the centerpiece of a regional crisis with sectarian dimensions? And how did his detention and execution come to assist Tehran?

After Nimr’s arrest by Saudi authorities on terrorism charges that included seeking “foreign meddling,” and

particularly following his 2014 death sentence, Iran and its proxies regularly issued threats to the Saudis, vowing dire consequences if they killed him. Iran's elevation of a cleric who found most of his support among radical youths helped legitimize radical policy options in line with existing Iranian strategy. In much the same way that the defense of the Sayyidah Zaynab shrine south of Damascus, Syria, has been used as a religious legitimization for Iran to pull in Shiite jihadis to preserve the rule of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Nimr's imprisonment was cast as the cause célèbre for the Islamic Republic's campaign against Riyadh.

We've already seen this dynamic in action, as a spokesman for the Iranian government said Saudi Arabia will "pay a high price" for Nimr's execution. Then, as police looked on, Iranian mobs ransacked the Saudi Embassy in Tehran and the Saudi Consulate in Mashhad. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei went even further, saying that the Saudis would suffer "divine revenge" for Nimr's death.

Ever since Tehran started beating the drum over Nimr, its Shiite Islamist proxies across the Middle East have followed suit.

Iran's other proxies in the region have adopted a similar stance. Starting in July, Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, another Iranian-sponsored Shiite militia in Iraq, ran a promotional video to show support for Nimr, and Lebanese Hezbollah pushed solidarity campaigns for the Saudi cleric.

Following Nimr's execution, Iran's allies in the region issued nearly matching statements condemning Saudi Arabia and at times blaming the United States for the cleric's death. Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraq's Asaib Ahl al-Haq, the Badr Organization, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, Kataib Hezbollah, and Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada are just some of the Iranian-backed and ideologically loyal Shiite militias that toed Iran's line on the issue.

The Iraqi Shiite militias loyal to Iran claimed they would retaliate against Saudi Arabia at a time and place of their choosing. Kataib Hezbollah later announced that the execution had given it the "green light" to target Saudi interests in Iraq. These Iran proxies also amplified threats by shadowy organizations: Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, an Iraqi Shiite militia and Iran proxy active in Iraq and Syria, for instance, claimed that an otherwise unspecified "Resistance in Qatif" had threatened to attack the Ras Tanura refinery, an important oil port in Saudi Arabia's majority Shiite Eastern Province.

The campaign has not simply been limited to mere threats. In mid-December, around 26 Qatari hunters — some of whom are members of the Qatari royal family — were kidnapped by some 100 armed men on the Iraq-Saudi border. While nine were released, the rest are still being held by the gunmen. One of the conditions for the detained Qataris' release had been the Saudi government's release of Nimr. (Kataib Hezbollah has been accused of kidnapping the Qataris, but has denied it.)

Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, which sits on the Persian Gulf and is a vital economic hub for Saudi Arabia, plays a major role in Iran's sectarian vision. This is the region where the kingdom pumps most of its oil — and even relatively limited strife there, or an attack on its oil facilities, could represent a significant threat to the Saudi economy.

The area was Nimr's home, and its Shiite majority has suffered various forms of discrimination by Saudi Arabia's Sunni state. Shiites of this region also often link themselves historically and socially to Bahrain's Shiite community. Like the Saudi Shiites, Bahrain's Shiites have also protested their Sunni-led government and have suffered discrimination under the rule of the Khalifa family, which is closely allied with Riyadh.

These populations' sense of being oppressed, both real and imagined, represents a win-win situation for Iran. Harsher Saudi or Bahraini repression of their Shiite populations will mean a greater chance that more Saudi and Bahraini Shiites will eventually come to view the Islamic Republic as a true partner or protector. Even before Nimr's execution, he had become a symbol for radical Shiite Bahraini militants — who, according to the U.S. intelligence community's 2014 Worldwide Threat Assessment, received aid from Iran — and a symbol to justify their violent tactics.

Still, Iran's use of Nimr's case also had other ideological goals beyond basic power projection and winning over Shiite communities in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. While stoking deep-seated notions of Shiite oppression, Iran simultaneously aims to counter its Shiite competition. Tehran has worked hard to usurp and utilize the influence of other religious leaders — for example, exploiting Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's words and images to acquire

Shiite recruits to fight in Syria or support Iran's proxy militia efforts in Iraq, despite Sistani's opposition to embroiling Iraqis in Syria's war and disagreements with the basic tenets of Iran's regime.

Nimr, rather than being a radical cleric who completely toed Tehran's line, also offered some differing opinions on major issues. Now, it serves Iran's purposes to posthumously anoint him a "martyr" to its cause.

As Mark Twain once wrote, "Sometimes a man's make and disposition are such that his misery-machine is able to do nearly all the business." Right now, the region's misery-machine is in full motion — and it is cranking out a future of crises ready to be manipulated by all sides.

It's ba-a-ck! Mein Kampf returns to Germany

Posted By Bob Unruh On 01/09/2016

"Mein Kampf," Hitler's notorious writings about his political ideology, out of print since the 1940s, has returned to print in Germany, with some lauding the accomplishment as a way to understand better the Nazi thinking and agenda.

Others say that's just bunk.

Jan Markell, of Olive Tree Ministries, worked with Holocaust survivor Anita Dittman to create a book and movie, both titled "Trapped in Hitler's Hell," that describes that era in Germany.

"Will the ghost of Adolph Hitler never die?" she told WND. "Likely not as anti-Semitism never dies. Satan keeps it alive as he thinks he can actually destroy the Jewish people and upset the end-time plan of God. He will be surprised. He can harm the 'apple of God's eye,' but he cannot destroy them."

The new book, actually a text in two volumes, hit shelves in Germany starting Friday, published by the Munich-based Institute for Contemporary History.

"It is as though Germany has lost its mind," Markell told WND. "First they welcome in thousands of Islamic refugees who are raping and pillaging. Now they bring back to life words that nearly destroyed Europe a generation ago."

Andreas Wirsching, of the Institute for Contemporary History, said the annotated edition will allow for the "demystification" of the Nazi era product.

(See "Trapped in Hitler's Hell," the book and movie that resulted when Jan Markell of Olive Tree had a conversation with Holocaust survivor Anita Dittman about her experiences.)

"Champions of this say it will provide a greater understanding of the Nazi era," Markell said. "We have a full understanding of it. There are legions of books and movies about it plus historical publications. It was a demon-inspired time and a precursor to the Islamo-Nazi movement of today. Radical Islamists have brought back this era.

"We're at a time in history where people want a break from bad news. I am told daily by my ministry followers that they are 'unplugging' from the news because it is so dismal. To bring back this book from hell is to throw gasoline on the fires of this kind of sentiment that wants to detach from dark news."

She continued, "I am a student of the Holocaust and I really believe in keeping this era on the minds of people! I have written a book about this time in history, published by WND. But this is no way to keep the memories alive! Let's celebrate the lives of those who are still alive, those who liberated them, and honor the greatest generation in more productive ways."

The Times of Israel reported that the publication came about because the copyright held by the German state of Bavaria, which had withheld permission for its publication, expired at the end of 2015.

World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder said it would be better to leave the book “where it belongs: the poison cabinet of history.”

What do YOU think? Sound off in today’s WND Poll on republication of Hitler’s ‘Mein Kampf’.

And Charlotte Knoblich, head of Munich’s Jewish community and commissioner for Holocaust memory at the World Jewish Congress, said the project is a slap in the fact to Holocaust survivors’ associations worldwide.

“The fact is, just dealing with the book raises interest in it – and that interest, for many, is not in the commentary but in the original text,” she told the Times.

The report said those supportive of discussing “Main Kampf” in schools include German education minister Johanna Wanka, who is of the same political party as Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Producer of New A&E Show on Antichrist: 'People Feel Like These are the End Times'

By Mark Judge | January 7, 2016 cnsnews.com

This March A&E will premier “Damien,” a drama about the Antichrist. It is based on the 1977 film “The Omen,” and is one of three new shows that depict the devil and demonic possession. The others are “Lucifer” (Fox) and “Outcast” (Cinemax).

When asked by the Hollywood Reporter why there is renewed interest in the Antichrist, Glen Mazzara, the showrunner of “Damien,” said he thought it was because there is increased anticipation that we may be living in the end times, the Biblically prophesied final years before the end of the world and the return of Jesus Christ.

From the Hollywood Reporter:

"The devil has always been very sexy," Mazzara told THR following his time in front of the press Wednesday at the Television Critics Association's winter press tour. "There's something in the air that people feel like these are the end times, in some way. There's an anxiety about what's happening all around the world and some of these shows — like Lucifer may take a comic approach — we're taking a hopefully more thoughtful, thematic approach to that material. There has been a lot of post-apocalyptic shows out there now and we're the show that's about the question: "Can you stop it?"

(Talk about your deception: Even as an unbeliever I never believed such nonsense.. Crazy. – MD



China Meltdown Crushes World Economy

by BREITBART NEWS7 Jan 2016505
Andrew Walker at the BBC reports:

A slump in Chinese shares has prompted stock markets across Asia, Europe and the US to fall sharply. Why is this so significant? What’s behind the fall in China?

The wider story is that China’s economic growth is slowing and

there are concerns that the transition to a slower and more sustainable rate of growth might be disruptive.

That was true of the period of several weeks of volatility the market experienced after it peaked in June last year.

It's true this time too and the link is perhaps rather more direct now.

Why? Because the immediate sparks for the latest bout of instability were warning signs about the wider economy.

The first day when trading was suspended, figures showing a continued decline in manufacturing were one of the factors that set things rolling downhill. On the second day of suspension it was the sliding currency which raised concerns about whether it was a sign that the economy was slowing down more sharply than thought.

What does this mean for the rest of the world?

The direct financial impact of lower share prices in China is moderate. There is not enough foreign investment in the Chinese market for it to be a major problem. The London consultancy Capital Economics has said foreigners own just 2% of shares

The issue is more about whether the financial turbulence shines a light on wider issues about the economic slowdown in China: is the economy heading for what's called a "hard landing", too sharp a slowdown?

China is now such a big force in the global economy that it would inevitably affect the rest of the world. It is the second largest economy and the second largest importer of both goods and commercial services.