

Newsbytes

The First Watch

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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

Is Syria simply a staging area for Ezekiel 38? Land a little early so you can get your intel straight and rest up for judgment? – M

Turkey Poised to Roll Into Syria

10.7.17 worldview.stratfor.com

Weeks after Turkish forces started to deploy in large numbers along the border with Syria, adjacent to the province of Idlib, Ankara appears to be on the verge of launching yet another significant military operation into the war-torn country. Unlike Operation Euphrates Shield, which targeted lands occupied by the Islamic State, the upcoming operation into Idlib will be directed toward lands occupied by Syrian rebels. As befitting a convoluted conflict such as Syria, Turkey's advance into Idlib will be assisted by other Syrian rebel groups trained over time by Turkey in neighboring Aleppo province.

And according to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's latest statements, they will be supported by Russian aviation.

Given that Turkey has for years directly supported rebel factions in Idlib in their fight against Russian- and Iranian-backed loyalist forces, the prospect of Turkish forces advancing into Syria under Russian air cover appears jarring at face value. The signs of a significant shift in direction by Turkey on Syria, however, have been visible for some time. The first indication was the Turkish abandonment of the rebel defense of Aleppo in favor of Operation Euphrates Shield in late 2016. This occurred amid steadily improving ties between Ankara and Moscow despite both sides maintaining opposite positions on the Syrian civil war, at least in principle.

There were also increasing signs throughout 2017 of a significant drop in the flow of Turkish supplies to key rebel factions in northern Syria, particularly in Idlib. Turkey instead focused its resources on developing the capabilities of its Syrian rebel proxies that were directly under its management as part of Operation Euphrates Shield in northern Aleppo province.

The biggest shift in Turkey's stance, however, came through the Astana process, where Turkey negotiated at length with Russia and Iran in a number of negotiation rounds in the Kazakh capital on the setup of "de-escalation" zones in Syria. These talks enabled the establishment of a "de-escalation" zone in Idlib, on whose borders Turkish troops are now poised alongside their rebel allies from Operation Euphrates Shield.

Turkey's shifting position over the past 18 months that is now culminating with a military operation into

rebel-held lands can be explained by three overarching factors. The first is the dawning realization in Ankara that the rebels it supported were on the losing end of a conflict with Iran- and Russia-backed loyalist forces. Every major loyalist victory that bolstered Syrian government control in northern Syria, in turn, diminished Turkey's ability to influence events in the country.

The second factor was the growing power of independently minded rebel groups such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in northern Syria, particularly in Idlib province. As rebel forces suffered successive defeats and despaired from ever receiving enough external support to match the level of direct backing Iran and Russia gave loyalist forces on the battlefield, they became increasingly prone to defect and turn to the better resourced and organized hardline groups such as the al Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. This trend has only accelerated in recent months with the end of the CIA program that supplied rebel groups in Syria with key weaponry such as anti-tank guided missiles. Unlike the Syrian groups supported by Turkey — and previously by the United States — in northern Syria, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has no compunction in upholding its own interests over Ankara's. Indeed, in recent months, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has even monopolized control over Idlib province by cracking down on Turkish-backed rebel groups. For Turkey, the rise of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in Idlib threatens to entirely remove what little influence it has remaining in the province.

Finally, and most important, Turkey has consistently prioritized its goal of undermining and pushing back against Kurdish empowerment in Syria over its desire for regime change in Damascus. Before the United States started to provide significant support to the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces in 2015, and before the loyalists started to regain momentum in the conflict that same year, Turkey could undermine the Kurds and pursue regime change in Damascus through its support of rebel forces.

However, as the U.S.-backed Kurdish forces spread their control over northern Syria and as the rebel hold was reduced through consecutive loyalist offensives, Turkey could no longer rely on weakened and distracted rebel forces to act as a bulwark against the Kurds, much less topple the regime of Syrian President Bashar al Assad. To that end, Ankara has increasingly prioritized an improved relationship with Moscow in the hopes that the influence leveraged through that relationship would allow it to counter the emboldened Kurds. For instance, Turkey still can hope to translate a cooperative mission in Idlib with the Russians into an opening for a subsequent operation against the Kurdish forces of the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Afrin canton, which are thus far insulated by a Russian presence.

A Turkish operation into Idlib province is nevertheless not without considerable risk. Indeed, there is even a possibility that it could backfire on Ankara. First, there is still no guarantee that such an operation would translate into increased Russian assistance against the YPG and predominantly Kurdish Syria Democratic Forces. Moscow, after all, has maintained its ties with the Syrian Kurds and has even blocked Turkish operations against the Kurds in the past. Further, Turkey and its local rebel allies may find themselves going up against very determined resistance from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham fighters, many of whom are locals, and operating in terrain that is geographically more challenging than that faced by Turkey and its proxies during Operation Euphrates Shield. Turkey, however, appears determined to tolerate the risks as it seeks to expand its presence and control in Syria in pursuit of its greater objectives.

This next article may surprise some, it does not surprise me at all. We never cared for Chan here at CCA and always thought his doctrine was slippery. But for some this will be a surprise...yet another celebrity pastor driving in the wrong direction...MD

Francis Chan and Todd White Headline Upcoming IHOP Festival of False Teaching

Marsha West October 11 bereanresearch.org

The *Museum of Idolatry* (Mol) includes a video trailer that promotes International House of Prayer's (IHOP) annual convention, Onething 2017. In the video we see IHOP- KC founder Mike Bickle shouting to the crowd: "God is raising up a church that is going to be prepared to be the vessels of His glory, to release His glory into the earth this very hour of intense darkness..." So, those who attend Onething will come away prepared to "release God's glory into the earth"? Is there a verse to back this up? asks museum curator, Steven Kozar. Why should we be concerned about a gathering of young people who want to get together to celebrate God? For one thing, IHOP's teaching is built on a contemplative foundation and because of this, much deception has occurred. (Source)

In this piece over at Mol, Kozar deals with Francis Chan's return to Onething and his association with Mike Bickle, Todd White and other NAR wolves:

Francis Chan has been a very respected Evangelical pastor and author for over a decade now, but he has taken a very deliberate turn towards the "Signs and Wonders" New Apostolic Reformation-version of Christianity in recent years. Chan does not teach the extreme Word of Faith doctrine at all, in fact, he's been really clear about wanting to stay away from man-centered false teaching altogether. He is to be commended for much of his Bible-based teaching, but that makes it even harder to understand his willingness to partner with IHOP and Todd White.

Here's a disturbing article that documents his slide towards the doctrinally apostate church: *Francis Chan Endorses the Apostate NAR Movement*. Francis Chan has been known as someone who has given away most of his income to very charitable causes. He even has a Master of Divinity from the very conservative Master's Seminary where he would have been taught the exact opposite of the New Apostolic Reformation/Word of Faith doctrine that IHOP and Todd White promote. Todd White is happy to make large piles of money and live in a gigantic mansion; how does Chan feel about that? Todd White claims that he can "claim someone who doesn't believe and there's no way they can get out of it." How does Francis Chan feel about Todd White claiming to have the ability to sovereignly elect people?



New Earbuds From Google Can Translate 40 Languages In Real-Time

(the universal translator of Star Trek is here!)

Elijah Nouvelle/AFP/Getty

IF YOU have a Google Pixel phone, you will soon be able to speak 40 languages. All you need is a pair of the earbuds Google announced last week in San Francisco. These can be used to make phone calls and listen to music – but they also provide on-demand two-way translation.

To talk in one of the supported languages, you use the earbuds to access Google Assistant and the

Google Translate app. Pressing on the earbud and saying “let me speak German”, for example, initiates translation of your speech into German, playing the results on the phone’s speakers. Translated replies are heard via the earbuds.

“It’s like you’ve got your own personal translator with you everywhere you go,” wrote Pixel Buds product manager Adam Champy in a blog post. It’s not quite your own – the actual translation happens in a Google data centre – but the voice speaking the translated words is processed on your phone.

The earbuds, which will ship next month for £159 in the UK, aren’t yet available for testing, a Google spokesperson told New Scientist. That means it’s not yet clear how comfy the earbuds are or whether their 5-hour battery life is adequate. Existing tech already does a similar job, including the Google Translate app and Skype Translator. So if the earbuds don’t improve on the experience, they might not stick around.

This article appeared in print under the headline “Google’s in-ear translator buddy”

Israel Prepares to Exit UNESCO, Following U.S.

by TheTower.org Staff | 10.13.17

Israel has announced preparations to withdraw from the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), just hours after the United States said it would leave the organization over “continuing anti-Israel bias.”

The Times of Israel reported Thursday that Netanyahu’s office had released a statement, saying that “The prime minister instructed the Foreign Ministry to prepare Israel’s withdrawal from the organization alongside the United States.”

Netanyahu said he “welcomes the decision by President Trump to withdraw from UNESCO.” The Prime Minister added that “This is a courageous and moral decision because UNESCO has become the theater of the absurd and because, instead of preserving history, it distorts it.”

Earlier on Thursday, Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, Carmel Shama-Hacohen, said he would recommend to the prime minister to sever ties with the organization immediately. According to Shama-Hacohen, in recent years, UNESCO has become “an absurd organization that has lost its way in favor of the political considerations of certain countries” and that his “personal recommendation to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is to follow suit and immediately withdraw.”

This sentiment was echoed in a statement released by UN ambassador Nikki Haley, following the U.S. Department of State’s formal notification. Haley said that “the purpose of UNESCO is a good one,” but “unfortunately, its extreme politicization has become a chronic embarrassment.”

Haley cited UNESCO’s decision in July to declare the old city of Hebron in the West Bank as a Palestinian world heritage site. According to her, it was “the latest in a long line of foolish actions, which includes keeping Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad on a UNESCO human rights committee even after his murderous crackdown on peaceful protestors.”

Haley added that “US taxpayers should no longer be on the hook to pay for policies that are hostile to our values and make a mockery of justice and common sense.”

Over recent years, UNESCO has come under fire for politicizing its mandate, betraying the original purpose of the organization. Time and again, the organization adopted anti-Israel resolutions, drafted by Arab member states, denying the Jewish people's connection to the land of Israel.

Four out of the nine nominations for the new UNESCO director-general position came from Arab countries, Qatar, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt. Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari, Qatar's candidate for succeeding Irina Bokova, has been accused of spreading anti-Semitic material, both in an official and private capacity. On Friday, Hamad bin Abdoulaziz Al-Kawari was defeated

So, is this good news, below? Of course it seems so. I hope it is. There is a potential dark side to this...think about it...never take anything at face value anymore but critical thinking is needed here:

Shift Towards Bringing Bible, God & Houses of Worship Into Public Arena

10.06.17

Religious movements and values are increasingly making their way into public life in the US as lawmakers introduce legislation to earmark federal funds for houses of worship and students bring their Bibles to school, signaling a new age in the interaction between 'church' and 'state' in America.

While the role of religion in public life has long been controversial among advocates for the separation of Church and State who consider these trends to be an encroachment on the U.S. Constitution, recent months have seen a shift towards bringing the Bible, God, and houses of worship into the public arena. Both in politics and education, religious supporters are requesting legitimacy in public life, and legislators are listening.

Meanwhile, religious movements such as "Bring Your Bible to School Day," which attracts hundreds of thousands of students across the nation each year, also aim to engage religion in public arenas. Surprisingly, the general shift towards accepting this trend has received widespread bipartisan support, backed by the U.S. Supreme Court, the President of the United States, Senate Republicans, and even several Democrats.

While these groups do not agree on much, when it comes to supporting houses of worship and enforcing freedom of religion, a rare consensus, perhaps signaling a new age in the interaction between religion and public life, is beginning.

In the wake of the recent major natural disasters in Texas and Florida, on September 19th, Senate Republicans Ted Cruz (R-TX), Roy Blunt (R-MO), Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn (R-TX), and James Lankford (R-OK) introduced the Federal Disaster Assistance Nonprofit Fairness Act, which would make houses of worship eligible for routine federal disaster aid. The proposed legislation seeks to permit religious institutions to receive federal relief, easing recovery efforts after a natural disaster.

The bill has 18 cosponsors, 17 Republicans and Democratic Representative Grace Meng (D-NY), who argue that because houses of worship play an essential role in the daily lives of nationwide communities, they should receive public funding for rebuilding when disaster strikes. Often, they say, such religious institutions offer invaluable education, enrichment, and social activities that are essential for community building.

US President Donald Trump, who called for a day of prayer after Hurricane Harvey devastated Houston, chimed in on the conversation, tweeting in support of the bill.

In a rare agreement between President Trump and black lawmakers, members of the Congressional Black Caucus, a group with 48 Democratic and one Republican lawmaker, agreed that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should fund houses of worship to assist the victims of hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

Religious institutions are generally unable to receive grants from the FEMA Public Assistance program unless their facilities are primarily used for “educational, utility, emergency, medical [...] custodial, or essential services of a governmental nature.” Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO) argued, however, that these primary uses are often the case for houses of worships, which “provide vital support during natural disasters including food, comfort, shelter and much more.”

Adversaries maintain that building churches, synagogues, and mosques would breach the First Amendment’s protection of separation of church and state. “Our hearts are with those suffering in the wake of the hurricanes and we want to support them. But we also want to protect the Constitution and the religious freedom values that protect all of us,” said Maggie Garrett, legislative director for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

But according to the sponsors of the bill, there is precedence in Congress and the Supreme Court for enacting “legislation providing financial assistance to religious nonprofit institutions, including houses of worship, on terms equal to other eligible non-profit institutions.”

Under the Stafford Act, houses of worship are ineligible for FEMA grants for the repair, reconstruction, or replacement of private nonprofit facilities. “Religious non-profit organizations, including churches, synagogues... and community centers should not be excluded from federal disaster assistance just because they are faith-based,” Cruz said in a statement.

In addition to seeing a shift towards religion in political arenas, the United States is also seeing a public shift in educational settings. Christian group “Focus on the Family” sponsored “Bring Your Bible to School Day” on October 5th in a campaign that encourages kids to exercise their First Amendment rights by bringing their bibles to school. Last year, over 356,000 joined the movement by signing up for the event online.

Established in 2014, Bring Your Bible to School Day was initially intended to counteract the Unconstitutional ban of Bibles from educational settings. Organizers said they planned the day in response to a Florida boy whose teacher said he couldn’t read the Bible in her classroom during free reading time.

But according to the U.S. Department of Education, the Constitution protects students’ right to pray and read from religious texts during non-instructional time. Although many schools consider the topic of religion in public schools to be controversial and even offensive, limiting this would be considered a breach of religious speech.

The future of surveillance is hidden in airport ads

'Minority Report' wasn't supposed to be a documentary.

Public anonymity is quickly becoming a thing of the past. Coming soon to an airport in Dubai is an artsy, colorful video security and customs tunnel that scans your face, adds you to a database, indexes you with artificial intelligence and decides if you're free to leave -- or not.

By the end of summer 2018, Dubai International Airport's Terminal 3 will have replaced its security-clearance counter with a walkway tunnel filled with 80 face-scanning cameras disguised as a distracting immersive video.

Travelers' eyes will roam the enclosed tunnel and its virtual shimmering aquarium as they head to their gate, while their biometric data is seamlessly collected, compared and stored ... somewhere, under unknown terms and conditions. According to officials presenting the security and customs tunnel at the 37th Gulf Information Technology Exhibition (GITEX) Technology Week at the World Trade Centre in Dubai, its video shows will not be limited to chicken of the sea. The airport plans to also distract its very captive audience with desert scenes, majestically galloping white horses, or ... advertisements.

"The fish is a sort of entertainment and something new for the traveler but, at the end of the day, it attracts the vision of the travelers to different corners in the tunnel for the cameras to capture his/her face print," Maj. Gen. Obaid Al Hameeri, deputy director general of Dubai residency and foreign affairs, told press.

Travelers are expected to "register" their faces at kiosks throughout the airport so they may travel. The tunnel will replace the terminal's security control desk. "At the end of the tunnel," The National reported, "if the traveler is already registered, they will either receive a green message that says 'have a nice trip' or, if the person is wanted for some reason, a red sign will alert the operations room to interfere." You can watch a video of its reporter's walkthrough [here](#).

Australia is currently considering the same thing, filtering passengers through a tunnel that seamlessly captures their biometrics (facial scanning) as they go through the airport.

The "virtual aquarium tunnel" was four years in the making and debuted this week at GITEX. Other stars of the GITEX innovation conference included a flying autonomous taxi and drone motorcycle for police. This year the theme at GITEX is "Reimagining Realities," with a focus on smart cities.

The best dystopian fiction frightens because it shows us our future in a hideous funhouse mirror; we know it's based on reality, yet its contortions are too despotically insane to seem possible. Such was the vibe in the sci-fi film *Minority Report* and its memorable scene of Tom Cruise continually being recognized and served intrusive personalized ads as he's desperately trying to escape a smart city of the future. To avoid the intertwined systems of tailored advertising based on his identity and having his movements tracked and sent to police, he gets surgery from a black-market doctor.

Maybe, like today's social-media sites like to tell us, the science-fiction dystopia of *Minority Report* was just trying to make his advertising experience better. But considering that the Dubai International Airport is already talking about its security scanner as an advertising surveillance tunnel, it feels like science fiction is letting our current world off the hook by comparison.

You have to wonder where this is leading, all dystopian things considered. I mean, are they being considered? We know that Facebook, ever servile in its advertising greed, has created the world's largest database of biometric identity by way of its nonconsensual facial-recognition program

performed on all its users. And this is where we have the first clear instance of law enforcement and advertisers mingling in a facial scanning, AI-run security network. And that, according to Maj. Gen. Obaid Al Hameeri, surreptitious retinal scanning will be added to the 80-camera tunnels in the near future.

It's scary because dystopian science fiction is supposed to be a cautionary tale. Blade Runner was meant to be far-out sci-fi about the brutal contradictions of identity ownership and creating a disposable, trackable working class.

Yet here we are. Even one of the inventors of facial recognition is agonizing about his Frankenstein's monster. "It pains me to see a technology that I helped invent being used in a way that is not what I had in mind in respect to privacy," said Joseph Atick, who helped create facial recognition in the 1990s.

"I can no longer count on being an anonymous person," he told Daily Beast, "when I'm walking down the street." Atick has called for regulations to protect the privacy of citizens because without it, Americans are left with "a myriad of state laws," he said. "And state laws can be more easily manipulated by commercial interests."

We don't know who the airport's officials are who will be accessing the facial-recognition data, which database sharing is in the background or what safeguards will be in place to prevent misuse. Dubai's government arms are also no stranger to being hacked.

On one hand, the point of the aquarium surveillance tunnel, they tell us, is to streamline the security experience -- to make it "smarter." It's not like travelers will have a choice in the matter, but the rubric is that security and convenience outweigh privacy and personal security in the heat of the moment every time. The TSA is living proof of that; good luck finding an American that will tell you the TSA is convenient and efficient. Though when it comes to data security, when last we checked, the TSA was failing spectacularly at that, too.

Half the people I've talked to about the aquarium tunnel are profoundly excited about this futuristic convenience. Security professionals one and all, they are not deterred by the lurid bait-and-switch attention-for-surveillance aspect. Nor are they disturbed by the implications of inevitable database-security madness that will surely ensue or troubled by questions of accuracy (the FBI's face recognition is only 85% accurate and has trouble with black faces).

Are they jaded after riding from breach to breach, year after year, watching the effects of companies collecting our information only to squander it by giving it less importance than happy advertisers? Or are they just yearning for cities of the future and their magical conveniences?

I can't fault them for either reasoning. Yet I still can't shake the sense that Philip K. Dick, he of the Minority Report and the Blade Runner, was trying to tell us something.