

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



Happy Birthday, Israel!

Israel is celebrating her 70th birthday this week (their calendar is a 360 day year so it varies from year to year). Here in 2018, they are celebrating as you read this.

We have seen God’s miraculous hand in so many ways over the years - they are a prophetic miracle.

If you haven’t been there, try and make it this October with CCA!

You will be so glad you did. Call the office for information.

Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. — Ezekiel 11:17

Israel to celebrate 70th birthday with 70-hour spectacle

timesofisrael.com

Israel will celebrate 70 years of independence this year, and Culture Minister Miri Regev on Monday promised a massive party, as she revealed some of the plans for the anniversary events.

“I thought it would be appropriate to implement a concept of ongoing events, beginning with the Independence Day ceremony on Wednesday and ending on Saturday evening: 70 hours of Israeli festivity that will bring citizens together across the country in varied and joyous events,” Regev said at a press conference where she unveiled the official logo for the nation’s 70th anniversary to be held under the tagline “A Legacy of Innovation.”

“You won’t be bored,” she promised.

Regev said the annual state ceremony at Mount Herzl on April 18 will be accompanied by an official song to celebrate Israel’s 70th, followed by the largest fireworks display in the country’s history.

April 19 will feature a “light parade” honoring Israeli innovation, the annual International Bible Quiz, and the Israel Prize ceremony, among other events.

On Friday, April 20, street parties will be held throughout the country in homage to the spontaneous hora dances that erupted in streets after David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the state on May 14, 1948. This will be followed by public Shabbat services.

Official events will end Saturday night with a musical event that Regev promised will represent a soundtrack of Israeli society.

Hadashot news said that the cost of the celebration would be NIS 100 million (\$30 million), but noted that this was less than the NIS 160 million (\$47 million) spent on Israel’s 60th Independence Day.

Regev also restated her desire to bring back the annual Israel Defense Forces military parade, which had been the centerpiece of celebrations during the nation’s first two decades of independence. She said she had asked Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman to consider authorizing it.

The parades were discontinued in 1968 due to their high cost, though one more parade was held in 1973 on the 25th Independence Day.

Note for the following article: “SADAT” is Erdogan’s version of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard army. It’s a private military contractor, sometimes referred to as “hybrid warfare”. Keep an eye on this.

Erdogan’s Shadow Army: The Influence of SADAT, Turkey’s Private Defense Group

Turkey’s SADAT defense group is heavily involved in Ankara’s training of Syrian Sunni rebels for the fight against Assad.

BY JONATHAN SPYER APRIL 16, 2018 jpost.co.il

In the collapsed and fragmented space that constitutes much of today’s Middle East, the key to success increasingly lies in the ability to combine political strategy with military muscle, under a single banner and in a single structure.

Examples abound.

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is today the foremost practitioner of political and revolutionary warfare in the region. Its skills in this regard are the primary reason for the situation in which Iran today controls Lebanon and has a dominant hand in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Turkey is the latest country to enter this crucial, if shadowy, field.

The SADAT Defense Consultancy, founded in 2012 by former Brig- Gen. Adnan Tanriverdi, is Ankara's instrument in this area. Its activities are testimony both to the changing nature of the Turkish state, and to the process by which power and influence are currently built and held in the Middle East.

To understand the role that SADAT is set to play, let's first take a look at the advantages that similar structures afford the states that utilize them.

The IRGC, unlike the Iranian conventional armed forces, or "Artesh," is commanded by people absolutely loyal not to the state, but to the governing regime and its goals.

These are "political soldiers," notably available for mobilization both in defense of the regime at home, as well as in the furtherance of its goals abroad.

The proxy party-militia structures which the IRGC excels at creating and controlling in turn have the advantage of informality, and deniability, when compared with conventional forces. They permit Tehran to support and engage in paramilitary and terrorist activity globally – attacks on Jewish civilians in Burgas and Buenos Aires, assassination of Kurdish politicians in Vienna and Berlin, etc. – while continuing to take its place in the halls of diplomacy and trade as a supposedly conventional member of the international community.

The IRGC remains the exemplar for this type of warfare. Other countries have been slower to develop structures able to perform a similar function. But the gaps are closing.

The Russians, predictably, have entered the game over the last half-decade. Irregular "volunteers" were the Kremlin's preferred tool for sparking the ferment in Donetsk and Lugansk provinces of eastern Ukraine which led to the Russian conquest of these areas in 2014. Military contractors connected to Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner company have played a crucial role as auxiliaries and deniable ground cannon fodder for the Russians in Syria.

Many of the individuals engaged with this company are themselves veterans of the fight in Ukraine.

SO, TO SADAT: According to its website, the company's mission is to "establish a defensive collaboration and defensive industrial cooperation among Islamic countries to help [the] Islamic world take the place where it merits among superpowers by providing consultancy and training services."

The Turkish version of the website sounds a little less like a run-of-the-mill private military contracting firm. Western states are described as "imperialist," "crusader" countries.

Tanriverdi is an artillery officer who later specialized in asymmetric warfare. A former head of the Home Front Command in Northern Cyprus, he was expelled from the army because of his Islamist convictions in 1997. His ties to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the circles of the ruling AKP are of long standing.

A recent analysis by longtime Turkey-watcher Michael Rubin for the American Enterprise Institute noted eyewitness reports of armed SADAT personnel involved in the suppression of the coup attempt of July 2016. The failed coup heralded the beginning of a comprehensive attempt by the Turkish president to remake the Turkish Armed Forces along lines more amenable to himself.

As part of this process, hundreds of officers dismissed for Islamist leanings are being reinstated, and Tanriverdi was himself appointed chief military adviser to the president in late 2016.

SADAT has been heavily involved in Turkey's training of Syrian Sunni Arab rebels for the fight against

Assad. The company established a number of facilities in the Marmara region for this purpose at the beginning of the Syrian war. According to a 2012 report in the oppositionist Aydinlik newspaper, at least one of these training facilities was located at a Turkish military base in the Golcuk district of Kocaeli, formerly maintained as a training center by the Turkish Navy.

The Syrian rebellion in northern Syria is today able to survive only because of Turkey's support. SADAT has played a key role in the development and facilitation of this relationship.

Tanriverdi does not deny SADAT's contacts with the Free Syrian Army, but in a July 2016 article in Cumhuriyet he was quoted as noting that both the Turkish state and the US supported the Syrian opposition, and that SADAT's contacts were carried out with the knowledge of the Turkish authorities.

Of course, the term "Free Syrian Army" is a wide one, and considerable evidence exists to suggest that elements of the Turkish state were directly offering assistance to the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra at certain stages during the war in Syria.

With crucial elections approaching in 2019, there are widespread fears in opposition circles that the government is training militias for use to intimidate government opponents.

One opposition politician, Meral Aksener, founder and leader of the nationalist Good Party, told a leftist newspaper that SADAT was behind these training camps. The company denied the allegations.

Unsurprisingly, there is an Israel angle to SADAT's activities.

In an article quoted by MEMRI, Tanriverdi described Israel as "the outpost of the new crusade and a dagger in the heart of Islam." In the article, Tanriverdi envisions the equipping and training of a Palestinian conventional army which would, in partnership with a united army of Islam, defeat and destroy Israel.

Turkish academic Cemil Tekeli was arrested in January by Israeli authorities and deported from the West Bank because of suspicions that he was assisting Hamas in money-laundering.

Tekeli is a close associate of Tanriverdi, according to a report in Makor Rishon, which published a picture of the two together.

So – engagement in assisting proxies abroad, providing muscle for a repressive political strategy at home and planning war with Israel. Erdogan is engaged, according to many, in a historic project of dismantling the republic created by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk nearly 100 years ago and replacing it with a new, Islamic entity. This new entity will require new institutions.

The shadow warriors of SADAT appear to be in the process of establishing one of the most notable of these.

The writer is a research fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies.

Syria: Fighting over the Corpse

by Shoshana Bryen

April 10, 2018 at 5:00 am

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/12139/syria-partition>

The aggressive partition of Syrian territory by Russia, Iran, Turkey and ISIS, has security implications for the United States and our regional allies that cannot be ignored.

The U.S., its allies and its adversaries should understand that President Trump intends to push back on Syria's criminal behavior, Iran's regional threat posture, and Russia and Turkey's delusions of empire.

The Syrian government's chemical attack on civilians in the rebel-held suburb of Douma this weekend is the complete responsibility of the war criminal Bashar Assad, his Russian bedfellows, and his Iranian bankers. However, the fact that President Trump had announced that the U.S. is nearly finished its mission to defeat ISIS (which is questionable) and wants to leave Syria quickly may have encouraged the others to speed up their efforts to divide Syria's corpse.

An independent country for only two years longer than the State of Israel, Syria has reverted to its prior status as space across which the competing interests of bigger empires and armies are played out. President Trump claims to be uninterested in who rules Damascus -- which is wise of him -- but the aggressive partition of Syrian territory by Russia, Iran, Turkey and ISIS has security implications for the United States and our regional allies that cannot be ignored.

Syria -- as land -- has had many masters:

Persia's Cyrus the Great beginning in 539 BCE.

Macedonia's Alexander the Great in 333-332 BCE.

Rome's Pompey the Great captured it in 64 BCE.

The Byzantine Empire in 395 CE.

The Muslims arrived in the mid-7th century -- the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, the Ayyubid, Zingid and Hamdanid Dynasties.

Crusader states followed by Assassins, Mamluks, and Mongols until the Ottoman Empire conquered the space in 1516 CE.

The French after WWI.

The only ever independent Syria was established in 1946.

Today, Russia claims that the Syrian government controls 85% of the country, but although it can (with cover from its allies) drop poison chemicals on civilians in much of the country, Damascus does not and cannot govern 85% of anything.

Russia props up and abets the criminality of the Assad regime, maintaining positions along the northeastern part of the coast where it has two naval bases and an airbase in generally secure Alawite territory. According to White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders, "It is also now clear that Russia has betrayed its obligations to guarantee the end of the Syrian regime's chemical weapons program."

Russia props up and abets the criminality of the Assad regime in Syria.

Turkey occupies a slice of northern Syria as part of its effort to kill as many Kurds as possible. The Kurds had two unconnected areas in which they are the majority -- Turkey now pretty much controls one; the Kurds hope the U.S. will protect them in the other, or they may turn to Iran for help against Turkey.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) manages 80,000+ militiamen in Syria, partially comprised of Syrians but with large Lebanese Hezbollah units and Shiite mercenary groups of Pakistanis and Afghans. Iran is said to control more Syrian soldiers than the Syrian government. And there are still Sunni anti-government forces, whether the U.S. supports them or not.

ISIS still has about 3,000 fighters straddling the area between Syria and Iraq -- enough to do damage.

The triumvirate of Russia, Iran and Turkey met last week to assert their interests, announcing that their troops would remain in the country for the foreseeable future in what is most appropriately known as imperial occupation.

President Trump has been clear that Iran's land-grab across Iraq and Syria -- plus its proxy state in Lebanon governed by Hezbollah -- poses a threat to American interests and allies. Defense Secretary James Mattis declined to rule out retaliation for Syria's weekend chemical strikes. Israel has been explicit about its determination to prevent Iran from creating a permanent presence in Syria, and backed it up with an airstrike this weekend. (It was reported that Washington, but not Moscow, was notified in advance.)

As the U.S. has no designs on the control of Syrian territory, although the U.S. might change its mind, it should limit its interference on the ground to:

Punishing Syria for violating the international consensus against the use of CW;

Protecting its Kurdish allies;

Helping Israel ensure that Iran cannot establish a "Shi'ite crescent" by physically linking its presence in Iraq to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hezbollah bases close to the Israeli border should be treated as if they are Iranian bases.

This is not the time for the United States to be suggesting that its interest in the ramifications of Syria's demise has flagged. Rather, the U.S. its allies and its adversaries should understand that the president intends to push back on Syria's criminal behavior, Iran's regional threat posture, and Russia and Turkey's delusions of empire.

Shoshana Bryen is Senior Director of the Jewish Policy Center.

Red Letter Christians Redefine Christianity

By John Ellis April 10

Tony Campolo, Shane Claiborne, and other "Red Letter Christians" recently held a two-day event called a Red Letter Revival. Unlike the Church's great revivals of the past that called sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus, the Red Letter Revival's objective was to protest toxic evangelicalism. To put a finer point on it, the Red Letter Christians believe that if you're a conservative Christian, you're toxic.

Religion News Service reports that during the event's version of an altar call, Campolo asked, "Are you ready to say 'I'm going to commit myself to Jesus? I'm going to be committed to the poor? I'm going to stand up for the refugee? I'm going to speak for those who feel oppressed by our society?'"

Referring to themselves as evangelicals on the margin, Red Letter Christians treat the Bible as if it's a buffet—they take what they like and ignore whatever they don't like. In doing so, they've constructed a new, false religion and yet still retain the word "Christian" in the title. Sadly, Red Letter Christians are

leading people to hell by ignoring humanity's main problem. They defend themselves by claiming that they focus on the words of Jesus—words that are often printed in red in many Bible translations. Except, to prioritize the words printed in red ignores the revelation found in John 1:1 that Jesus is the Word. The entire Bible reveals God and His plan to redeem sinners back to Himself.

The Bible teaches that humans are personally separated from God because of their individual sin against God. Red Letter Christians embrace identity politics and believe that humanity's greatest problem is estrangement from each other. This is why they focus on social justice issues at the expense of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Red Letter Revival was nothing more than a platform for progressive causes. RNS explains that "sermons and slam poems at the revival included lengthy discussions of political topics, such as sexuality, white supremacy, and mass incarceration. There were also multiple condemnations of Christian nationalism, which the Rev. Brenda Brown-Grooms, a pastor from Charlottesville, Va., declared 'apostasy.'"

The event also included diatribes against the Second Amendment. More concerned with identity politics than truth, "the speaker and workshop lineup itself functioned as a de facto critique of white evangelical Protestantism, featuring voices often underrepresented in evangelical circles—women, Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and LGBT people."

Because Red Letter Christians refuse to acknowledge humanity's greatest problem, the Red Letter Revival failed to hold out the hope of the good news of Jesus Christ. Failing to call sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus make the claim to be a "revival" laughably dangerous.

I guess it's too much to ask progressives to be honest about who they are. Appropriating the name of Christianity in order to attack conservatives and promote social justices causes is patently dishonest and is leading people to hell.

Russian TV Mockingly Prepares for War with US, Instructs Citizens to Buy Water and Gas Masks

BY CRISTINA MAZA 4.11.18 newsweek.com

Updated | Claiming that some Americans are preparing for a coming war with Moscow, Russian state-owned television explained to the country's residents how to stock their bunkers with water and basic foodstuffs in case a war breaks out.

Warning that the potential conflict between the two superpowers would be "catastrophic," an anchor for Russia's Vesti 24 showed off shelves of food, recommending that people buy salt, oatmeal and other products that can last a long time on the shelves if they plan to hide in a bunker. Powdered milk lasts five years, while sugar and rice can last up to eight years, the newscaster explained before showing videos of pasta cooking in a bomb shelter.

The beginning of the program had a mocking tone about war fears, as pictures of nuclear explosions played in the background. A newscaster said the "real panic isn't here but across the ocean," suggesting that Americans are terrified of a war with Russia.

Nonetheless, the channel's newscasters also displayed charts explaining how much water people need

to store for drinking, washing their face and hands and preparing food every day—and how that amount changes depending on the temperature of a person's bomb shelter. The program also recommended that people stock up on gas masks and read guides on how to survive war. The instructions are for "people who succumb to panic and decide to spend all their savings," the anchor said.

The program aired just one day after sources told Newsweek that "there is a major war scare" in Moscow as President Donald Trump prepares to strike Syria in retaliation for the use of chemical weapons against civilians over the weekend. The Trump administration has said that it believes Syria's Russian-backed president, Bashar al-Assad, was responsible for the attacks and that it plans to ensure that Assad pays the price. Russian military forces have responded by saying that Moscow would meet fire with fire and will shoot down any U.S. missiles.

"If there is a strike by the Americans, then the missiles will be downed and even the sources from which the missiles were fired," warned Alexander Zasytkin, Russia's ambassador to Lebanon, during an interview on Tuesday with a television station linked to Hezbollah