

Newsbytes

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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

Russia to hold Mediterranean drills as Syria tensions rise

Moscow to deploy 25 ships, 30 jets for exercises focused on anti-air and anti-submarine defense

30 August 2018

MOSCOW — Russia has announced major military drills in the Mediterranean Sea amid growing tensions over a rebel-held enclave in Syria.

The Defense Ministry told Russian news agencies on Thursday that Russia will deploy 25 ships, including a missile cruiser, and 30 jets for the maneuvers in the first week of September. The military says the drills will focus on anti-air and anti-submarine defense.

It says Moscow has notified international organizations of the drills, which may make it dangerous for aircraft and ships to operate in the area.

The drills were announced after NATO reported a Russian naval buildup in the Mediterranean.

Russia has provided crucial military support for Syrian government forces, which are expected to mount an offensive in the northern Idlib province, the last major rebel stronghold in the country.

California legislator shelves bill to ban paid 'gay conversion therapy' for adults

Melanie Mason August 31

Assemblyman Evan Low (D-Campbell) has halted his effort to designate paid "conversion therapy" as a fraudulent business practice under the state's consumer protection law. (Rich Pedroncelli / AP)

The author of a high-profile measure to curb paid "conversion therapy," which purports to change a person's sexual orientation, said he is shelving his bill Friday in hopes of finding consensus with religious communities that vigorously opposed the proposal.

The bill by Assemblyman Evan Low (D-Campbell), which would have designated paid "conversion therapy" services as a fraudulent business practice under the state's consumer protection law, easily cleared prior legislative hurdles thanks to large Democratic majorities in both chambers, as well as a handful of

Republican votes.

But after religious groups assailed the proposal, calling it a threat to their right to practice their faith, Low went on a listening tour to meet with clergy across the state. Low ultimately decided to pull Assembly Bill 2943 before final approval in the Assembly, he said.

“I believe we are on the side of the angels on this issue,” Low said. “Having said that, in order to get it right, why wouldn’t we want to engage in meaningful, thoughtful, transformational relationships and conversations?”

Gay 'conversion therapy' services would be banned under measure advancing in California »
The measure set off an unusually personal debate in the Capitol. Low, who is gay and is chairman of the legislative LGBTQ caucus, spoke emotionally about how he had considered the practice as a teen, closeted and wishing he were straight.

“There’s nothing wrong with me,” he said in an April speech on the Assembly floor. “There’s nothing that needs to be changed.”

“Conversion therapy,” also known as “reparative” or “reorientation therapy,” is opposed by medical groups including the American College of Physicians and the American Psychological Assn., which cite a lack of evidence of the practice’s efficacy and potential harm to a patient’s mental health. California banned the practice for minors in 2012. Thirteen other states and the District of Columbia also prohibit it for minors.

Low’s measure would have expanded that ban by designating the sale of services to change someone’s sexual orientation a “deceptive business practice,” opening counselors and others who perform them to lawsuits.

The bill was staunchly opposed by practitioners and adherents of “conversion therapy,” who argued it deprived adults of the choice to pursue such a practice. Others said the measure infringed on religious practices and could even be used to ban the Bible or other printed materials. The bill was amended to clarify that only services, not goods, would be subject to the law.

Still, faith leaders considered the bill’s language to be overly broad, sparking fears that pastors or church counselors could be subject to lawsuits if they ministered to people grappling with their sexuality.

“If I pray with this person, is that going to come back on this church?” said Kevin Mannoia, chaplain at Azusa Pacific University, an evangelical Christian college in Azusa.

In the face of intense pushback, Low said he was inspired to meet with religious leaders, including Mannoia, to hear their concerns. He was struck by how many pastors told him they did not personally support “conversion therapy,” but had fears of the bill’s broader implications.

In an op-ed in the Orange County Register this week, Mannoia stated that position publicly, stating that “reparative therapy is without evidence as to its efficacy and is inconsistent with Christian living.”

“The breadth of the language in AB2943 will limit the ability of California’s pastors to engage fully with the real struggles of their people,” he wrote. “Mr. Low has said that is genuinely not his intent. I am hopeful that he and the LGBTQ Caucus may still collaborate with churches and institutions to preserve their freedom of ministry while at the same time protecting LGBTQ people from harm.”

That declaration, Low said, “demonstrated good faith.”

“Maybe there’s something here,” Low said. “Could this be an opportunity for transformational change, in which you can get outside of the typical culture wars and come together and work with them to craft language that they might be able to support?”

Low acknowledged his decision was unconventional, when he almost certainly had the votes to win final approval.

“Some would say this is crazy,” he said. “Why would you pause when you don’t need to, when you’re in the driver’s seat?”

Low said he had no signs of opposition from Gov. Jerry Brown. Neither did Rick Zbur, executive director of Equality California, the LGBTQ advocacy group that co-sponsored the bill, who expressed confidence that Brown — whom he called “the most pro-LGBTQ governor in the state’s history” — would sign it. Brown’s office said it does not comment on pending legislation.

Zbur said he believed the bill clearly would not ban the Bible or otherwise impede religious practice, as opponents had feared.

Still, he said additional time would let them “tinker with the bill to make very clear that these false assertions the other side is making are not accurate.”

The news of Low’s decision was lauded by opponents to the measure. Jonathan Keller, president of the socially conservative organization California Family Council, said his group was “inexpressibly grateful” to Low for listening to religious communities.

“People of faith across California and around the nation care deeply about our family, friends, neighbors and coworkers who identify as LGBTQ,” Keller said. “AB 2943 would have tragically limited our ability to offer compassionate support related to sexual orientation and gender identity, and even to preach Jesus’ message of unconditional love and life transformation.”

Mannoia, who once served as president of the National Assn. of Evangelicals, said the bill’s setback left him both pleased and “burdened,” knowing the heat Low may face from his allies. But he said he felt confident faith leaders and LGBTQ rights advocates could thread the needle on this issue in future legislating attempts.

Entertaining Churches Gone Wild

by David Fiorazo on August 28

There are some bizarre, outrageous, and flat-out unbiblical things going on in lots of churches. One so-called church sells beer, another worships Mother Earth, others use secular music during worship, others ordain gay leaders, and still others offer yoga. People are free to do whatever they want to try and make God fit their ideas and to offer services that cater to the desires of their congregations, but is this what church is supposed to be?

What happened to the emphasis on teaching God’s word of truth including sin and repentance, justification, God’s wrath, prophecy, future judgment, and sanctification?

Last week I reported on one of the most heart-wrenching stories I’ve tackled in quite some time. The Roman Catholic Church is reeling from the massive scandal involving homosexuality among priests and the rampant cover-up of sexual abuse that has continued for many decades.

But many Evangelical and Protestant churches have leadership problems of their own. This includes the progressive, seeker-sensitive Willow Creek Church in Chicago whose lead pastors and elders resigned in light of the Bill Hybels allegations of sexual harassment.

Countless churches seem to have lost focus and have gotten off track. We have lost our reverence for a holy God, and practically abandoned the once-solid foundation of the teaching of Scripture which is the primary purpose of the church.

Many conferences and church services today barely resemble the early church and what the Bible teaches, let alone point to Jesus Christ. Some people create gods and church services to suit their own interests while others rewrite Scriptures to justify their lifestyles.

Last month in St. Louis, a controversial conference took place called “Revoice,” apparently aiming to normalize homosexuality and affirm those claiming to be “LGBTQ Christians.” Can you say, oxymoron?

Christian talk show host Janet Mefferd called for the unbiblical movement to be repudiated, saying:

“Revoice is incremental gay activism, designed to eventually lure conservative evangelicals into accepting ‘gay Christianity.’”

Next, there’s a progressive church in Santa Cruz, California that not only sells beer, but plans to donate proceeds to big abortion business, Planned Parenthood. Maybe the consumption of alcohol helps the pastor’s sermons sound better. This is a guy who preaches that Jesus was a Palestinian “killed by white supremacy.”

And who can forget our expose back in May on the San Francisco church that hosted what they called a “Beyoncé Mass?” It was quite an interesting take on worshipping, “Our Mother who is in heaven,” and endorsing Beyonce as a role model for young girls.

Then there’s a church in Atlanta that put a new twist in their Sunday morning worship show by adding scantily-clad aerialists as a regular part of their services. ‘Why in the world?’ you may ask. Self-appointed “Apostle” Bryan Meadows actually said:

“Because they shouldn’t have to go to the circus to use the gifts that God gave them!”

Just one more or we’d be here all day. Serita Jakes, wife of controversial, megachurch minister, T.D. Jakes, gleefully posted photos on social media of women doing yoga at the church during a women’s event on wellness.

Never mind the practice of yoga is a rooted in Hinduism, a 5,000-year old polytheistic religious system. Its purpose is to bypass the mind and yoke or “unite” a person’s spirit with the Hindu god, Brahman.

Heather Clark at Christian News Network reminds us:

“... Even the traditional Hindu greeting, Namasté, that is said at the end of yoga classes, is spiritual. When translated, it means, ‘The god in me bows down to (or salutes) the god in you.’”

The Spirit of Christ bows down to no one; He alone is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the only true, living God who is worthy of our true worship.

Romans 8:9 states:

“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

And Exodus 20:3 states:

You shall have no other gods before Me.

Prior to building one of America’s first mega-churches, author, pastor, and motivational speaker, Robert Schueller literally went door to door in the 1970s in Orange County, California, and asked people what they wanted in a church. Not what lost, hurting sinners need, but what they ‘want.’ This of course, has led to the “mega-church” and emergent church movement.

Men focused on church growth took a cue from Schueller and the rest is history. This has been a recipe for disaster in the American church, and it has led to well-deserved comparisons with the lukewarm church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3, and a better understanding of why Paul wrote a second letter to Timothy. In the last days, men would be:

“...treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power...” (2 Timothy 4:4-5)

Rather than be active participants in learning and sharing God’s Word, too many church members have been conditioned to sit back and listen to a program or presentation, and perhaps to a bunch of funny stories or analogies instead of being challenged by sound doctrine and the harder teachings of the Bible. Then there’s the music. Lots of talented praise teams are themselves being praised for performing entertaining, although often heartfelt music rather than leading the people to the Throne in the worship of a holy God.

A.W. Tozer once said:

“The church that can’t worship must be entertained. And men who can’t lead a church to worship must provide the entertainment. That is why we have the great evangelical heresy here today—the heresy of religious entertainment.”

We need to get back to the basics.

True disciples of Jesus Christ in the early church focused on four primary things: teaching the word of God with a focus on Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection, prayer, communion, and fellowship with other Christians (Acts 2:42). They made disciples and they went out and shared the good news. They didn’t care about the approval of people – they sought to obey God. Their faith in Christ cost most of them their lives.

Today, too many churches use entertaining concepts and gimmicks to attract people, but then a new problem arises: in order to keep them in the comfy seats (and giving their tithes), you need to avoid controversial issues and often dilute the gospel so they won’t be offended.

What happens when you give people what they want instead of what they need which is Christ and His truth? Rather than being fed and equipped, countless hungry souls are walking out of many American churches feeling empty and unprepared to do God’s work. This must change.

China Targets US And Taiwan With Large Scale Military Buildup

A new Pentagon report to congress in August details how China has begun training its long-range bombers for attacks on the United States and Taiwan as well as continuing both to expand and modernize its ground forces.

Representing a significant change in Chinese military doctrine that was previously focused on defensive operations close to China's borders, the focus is increasingly becoming a projection of power over the Pacific.

The report explains that "Over the last three years, the PLA (People's Liberation Army) has rapidly expanded its overwater bomber operating areas, gaining experience in critical maritime regions and likely training for strikes against US and allied targets."

As part of this preparation, six Chinese H-6K bombers flew in August through the Miyako Strait southwest of Japan and then made a course correction to fly north, passing east of Okinawa and 47,000 US military personnel in a demonstration of their range. The US has also issued official diplomatic warnings to China for what appear to be mock nuclear bombing runs on Guam, the home of a major US base in the region.

Closer to the Chinese mainland, US carrier battle groups, bombers and strike craft would come within range of the world's most potent long and medium range rocket force. With thousands of precision shore-ship rocket batteries ready to counter American naval power and Taiwanese defenses, the shift to increase their forces with long range bombers was the next logical step.

The report indicates that in just one year, 2017 compared to 2016, China increased its arsenal of bombers and strike aircraft from 400 to 530. Heavy transport and in-air refueling aircraft also saw 15 new planes added to their fleet.

It is hard to say where China intends its next territorial expansion, but after resolving its recent land dispute with India, the unprecedented construction of militarized artificial islands and the quick expansion of naval and air power, the evidence points to either Taiwan or the South China Sea. China also added 55 coast guard vessels to its fleet in 2017 as it continues to ramp up tensions with both Taiwan and the bevy of countries staking claims to the South China Sea.

President Xi, in his newly consolidated position of power, has set the year 2050 as the goal for China to complete its decades-long process of military modernization and become the preeminent military power in the world. The recent Pentagon report also revealed that China added 65,000 active military personnel to its armed forces and 400 tanks, even as it modernized its military organizational and command structure.

The report also presented to Congress China's use of space-based early warning systems for nuclear defense, increased nuclear readiness capabilities (including four new nuclear missile submarines and an unknown number of attack subs) and hunter-killer satellites capable of destroying US and allied satellites used for GPS, communication, navigation and weapons guidance.

Is it any coincidence that China has also stepped up its rhetoric concerning Taiwan, pressuring airlines, hotels and banks to recognize it as part of China? Or that it has lured away 5 more countries that previously recognized Taiwanese sovereignty, leaving only 17 nations still loyal to Taiwan? The latest was the small nation of El Salvador that turned its back on Taiwan in exchange for Chinese infrastructure

investment.

The manpower added to the world's largest military in 2017 alone is larger than the entire active duty militaries of either Canada, Iraq or Chile, each of which comes in at under 65,000 troops.

China already has the capability easily to overwhelm several of its smaller regional neighbors and could conceivably take Taiwan now, but it knows that the United States would not sit idly by and watch it happen. Thus, its focus on countering US military power and projecting its strike capabilities far out into the Pacific towards US carriers and bases.