



SYRIA MILITANTS CLAIM CHRISTIANS AGREED TO PAY TAX

February 27, 2014 My Way News reported: "Militant fighters should not impose an Islamic tax on Christians in Syria, a radical Jordanian preacher facing terrorism charges said Thursday, days after an al-Qaida breakaway group in Syria claimed Christian leaders under its control agreed to pay the tax in return for protection.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant said in a document that its first "Aqed al-Thima," Arabic for protection pact, was reached in a meeting last Thursday with 20 Christian leaders in the northern province of Raqqa, a bastion for the Islamic State.

The authenticity of the two-page document circulating online since Wednesday could not be independently verified, but such issues have stoked fears in Syria's Christian minority community that they are being targeted by extremists among the fighters seeking to oust President Bashar Assad.

The document bore a stamp the group uses in other statements posted on militant websites and the signature of 20 people it said were the Christian leaders. The signatures were blotted out on the request of the signers, according to the document, and were signed by a representative of its leader, called the emir.

It said the Christian leaders opted for paying the tax when they were asked to choose one of three options: convert to Islam, remain Christian and pay the tax or "refuse and be considered warriors who will be confronted with the sword of the Islamic State."..."

ISRAELI POLICE AND PALESTINIANS CLASH ON TEMPLE MOUNT

February 26, 2014 BBC News reported: "Israeli police have clashed with Palestinian protesters on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. A police spokesman said about 20 youths threw stones and fireworks at officers from the holy site, known to Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary). Police then entered the compound and arrested three people, he added.

The unrest came as the Israeli parliament prepared to debate a motion calling on Israel to 'realize its sovereignty over the Temple Mount'. Moshe Feiglin, a right-wing member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party who tabled the motion, wants restrictions on Jewish visitors to be lifted. They are currently barred from praying or engaging in other religious activities there.

Although no vote was expected, the Islamic Waqf - the trust that has overseen the site since Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 Middle East war - expressed concern and said there had been 'Jordanian contacts with Israel to prevent any moves' affecting its status..."



'THE IMPERIAL PRESIDENCY'

February 26, 2014 freebeacon.com reported: "Members of Congress and constitutional law experts testified before the House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, warning that the legislative branch is in danger of ceding its power in the face of an "imperial presidency."

The hearing, "Enforcing the President's Constitutional Duty to Faithfully Execute the Laws," focused on the multiple areas President Barack Obama has bypassed Congress, ranging from healthcare and immigration to marriage and welfare rules.

Jonathan Turley, Shapiro Professor of Public Interest Law at George Washington University, testified that the expansion of executive power is happening so fast that America is at a "constitutional tipping point."

"My view [is] that the president, has in fact, exceeded his authority in a way that is creating a destabilizing influence in a three branch system," he said. "I want to emphasize, of course, this problem didn't begin with President Obama, I was critical of his predecessor President Bush as well, but the rate at which executive power has been concentrated in our system is accelerating. And frankly, I am very alarmed by the implications of that aggregation of power."

"What also alarms me, however, is that the two other branches appear not just simply passive, but inert in the face of this concentration of authority," Turley said. While Turley agrees with many of Obama's policy positions, he steadfastly opposes the method he goes about enforcing them.

"The fact that I happen to think the president is right on many of these policies does not alter the fact that I believe the means he is doing [it] is wrong, and that this can be a dangerous change in our system," he said. "And our system is changing in a very fundamental way. And it's changing without a whimper of regret or opposition."

Elizabeth Price Foley, a law professor at Florida International University College of Law, agreed, warning that Congress is in danger of becoming "superfluous."

"Situations like this, these benevolent suspensions as they get more and more frequent and more and more aggressive, they're eroding our citizens' respect for the rule of law," she said. "We are a country of law and not men. It's going to render Congress superfluous."..."

MERKEL IN JERUSALEM: IRAN NOT JUST A THREAT TO ISRAEL

February 25, 2014 Ynetnews.com reported: "Germany views Iran as a potential threat not just to Israel, but also to European countries, Chancellor Angela Merkel said Tuesday at a news conference in Jerusalem with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But she stopped short of endorsing her host's demand that Tehran give up all sensitive nuclear projects under any negotiated deal with world powers.

Germany is Israel's most important ally in Europe, where the Netanyahu government frets it is losing support given troubled peace talks with the Palestinians. That makes Merkel's views a bellwether of European sentiment on Middle East issues.

'We see the threat not just as a threat for the state of Israel but as a general threat for Europe as well,' she said at the joint news conference, adding that Germany would pursue international talks with Iran on its nuclear activities..."

NORWAY FACES DANGER FROM SYRIAN JIHADISTS

February 25, 2014 Arutz Sheva reported: "Norway's intelligence agency said Monday that it fears an increased 'terrorist threat' to its country due to dozens of Norwegian nationals fighting in the Syrian conflict, AFP reported. At least 40 or 50 people with links to Norway have fought, or are currently fighting, with forces opposed to the Bashar Al-Assad regime and run the risk of returning as seasoned radical fighters, the Norwegian Intelligence Service (NIS) wrote in its annual threat assessment report.

'We conclude that the threat has already increased and will continue to increase throughout 2014,' the head of NIS General Kjell Grandhagen said, adding that these 'jihadists' are often in the most radical Islamic groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and the Al-Nusra Front.

The NIS estimates that about 2,000 rebel fighters have travelled from Europe to fight the Syrian regime but did not reveal how the figure was calculated, according to AFP.

Norwegian daily Verdens Gang also reported Monday that about a dozen women have left Norway for Syria to join rebel groups. In late 2013 the fate of two teenage girls of Somali origin hit the headlines in Norway when they left to join a jihadist group in Syria and were located weeks later by their father who brought them home.

According to figures released earlier this month, over 75,000 foreign nationals have been fighting in the Syrian civil war..."

ISRAELI WARPLANES 'STRIKE EASTERN LEBANON'

February 25, 2014 BBC News reported: "Israeli jets have carried out air strikes in eastern Lebanon near the border with Syria, Lebanon's state news agency says. Israel's military has not commented although an Israeli security source quoted by Reuters said there had been 'air force activity in the north'.

Lebanon's national news agency said the air raids took place near the village of Nabi Sheet in the Bekaa Valley. The Lebanese militant Hezbollah group has a strong presence in the valley.

Correspondents say Lebanon's eastern border is frequently used by smugglers and Israeli planes have targeted the area several times in the past two years. Security sources say the targets may have been trucks of weapons from Syria destined for Hezbollah..."



'I'M READY TO ACCEPT PALESTINE, WHY NOT ISRAEL?'

February 24, 2014 Arutz Sheva reported: "Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu spoke on Sunday night, emphasizing that the Palestinian Authority's (PA) refusal to recognize Israel as the Jewish state is the fundamental factor preventing peace. 'Recognition of the Jewish state is a necessary condition for peace,' remarked Netanyahu.

Speaking to a German television channel in advance of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Israel visit on Monday, Netanyahu praised US Secretary of State John Kerry's efforts to push through a peace deal between Israel and the PA.

'The only way to achieve peace is to express support for Kerry's efforts,' claimed Netanyahu. 'Together with the Palestinians, and at their head PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, we have to sit at the table and reach an agreement.'

'I'm ready to accept their existence in their country, why don't they accept me?' asked Netanyahu, stressing that the refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state is a major roadblock to peace.

'The obstacle of the peace talks is this principle (of recognition), and not the issue of Israeli building in settlements that gets such wide criticism in the West,' argued Netanyahu. He further denied claims that construction is a key problem, saying it's an issue that 'will be solved in the talks' framework.'..."

EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT RESIGNS

February 24, 2014 VOA News reported: "Egypt's interim prime minister Hazem el-Beblawi says his Cabinet has resigned. He announced the development in a televised address Monday, but did not specify a reason.

The military-backed interim government has been running Egypt since the army ousted president Mohamed Morsi last July. Egypt plans to hold a presidential election in April followed by a vote for a new parliament, as part of its post-Morsi transition plan..."

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