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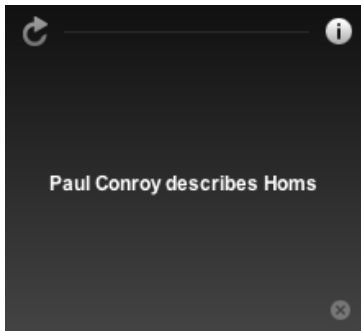
Robert Fisk: The fearful realities keeping the Assad regime in power

Nevermind the claims of armchair interventionists and the hypocrisy of Western leaders, this is what is really happening in Syria

ROBERT FISK | SUNDAY 04 MARCH 2012

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In my 1912 Baedeker guide to Syria, a page and a half is devoted to the city of Homs. In tiny print, it says that, "in the plain to the south-east, you come across the village of Baba Amr. A visit to the arcaded bazaar is worthwhile - here you will find beautiful silks. To the north of Homs, on a square, there is an artillery barracks..." The bazaar has long since been demolished, though the barracks inevitably passed from Ottoman into French and ultimately into Baathist hands; for 27 days last month, this bastion has been visiting hell on what was once the village of Baba Amr.

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Cable's "compelling vision" in full

To my surprise, my campaign against cliché turns out to inform political judgements. Clichés really ...



Once a Roman city, where the crusaders committed their first act of cannibalism – eating their dead Muslim opponents – Homs was captured by Saladin in 1174. Under post-First World War French rule, the settlement became a centre of insurrection and, after independence, the very kernel of Baathist resistance to the first Syrian governments. By early 1964, there were battles in Homs between Sunnis and Alawi Shia. A year later, the young Baathist army commander of Homs, Lieutenant Colonel Mustafa Tlas, was arresting his pro-regime comrades. Is the city's history becoming a little clearer now?

As one of the Sunni nouveaux riches who would support the Alawi regime, Tlas became defence minister in Hafez al-Assad's Baathist government. Under their post-1919 mandate, the French had created a unit of "Special Forces" in which the Alawis were given privileged positions; one of their strongholds was the military academy in Homs. One of the academy's most illustrious students under Hafez al-Assad's rule – graduating in 1994 – was his son Bashar. Bashar's uncle, Adnan Makhlof, graduated second to him; Makhlof is today regarded as the corrupting element in the Assad regime.

Later, Bashar would become a doctor at the military Tishreen Hospital in Damascus (where today most of the Syrian army's thousands of victims are taken for post-mortem examination before their funerals). Bashar did not forget Homs; his British-born Sunni wife came from a Homs family. One of his closest advisers, Bouthaina Shabaan, comes from Homs; even last year the city was too dangerous for her to visit her mother's grave on the anniversary of her death. Homs lies deep in the heart of all Syrians, Sunni and Alawite alike. Is it surprising that it should have been the Golgotha of the uprising? Or that the Syrian authorities should have determined that its recapture would break the back of the revolution? To the north, 30 years ago, Hafez Assad created more than 10,000 "martyrs" in Hama; last week, Homs became a little Hama, the city's martyrdom predicted by its past.

So why were we so surprised when the "Free Syrian Army" fled the city? Did we really expect the Assad regime to close up shop and run because a few hundred men with Kalashnikovs wanted to stage a miniature Warsaw uprising in Homs? Did we really believe that the deaths of women and children – and journalists – would prevent those who still claim the mantle of Arab nationalism from crushing the city? When the West happily adopted the illusions of Nicolas Sarkozy, David Cameron and Hillary Clinton – and the Arab Gulf states whose demands for Syrian "democracy" are matched by their refusal to give this same democracy to their own people – the Syrians understood the hypocrisy.

Were the Saudis, now so keen to arm Syria's Sunni insurgents – along with Sunni Qatar – planning to surrender their feudal, princely Sunni power to their own citizens and to their Shia minority? Was the Emir of Qatar contemplating resignation? Among the lobbyists of Washington, among the illusionists at the Brookings Institution and the Rand Corporation and the Council on Foreign Relations and all the other US outfits that peddle New York Times editorials, Homs had become the new Benghazi, the start-line for the advance on Damascus.

It was the same old American dream: if a police state was ruthless, cynical and corrupt – and let us have no illusions about the Baathist apparatus and its panjandrum – then its opponents, however poorly armed, would win; because they were the good guys. The old clichés clanked into focus. The Baathists were Nazis; Bashar a mere cipher in the hands of his family; his wife, Asma, variously an Eva Braun, Marie Antoinette or Lady Macbeth. Upon this nonsense, the West and the Arabs built their hopes.



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Sketch: When MPs prefer the call of the cheese to the call of the Commons

Students of British politics should note that Prime Minister's Questions is held before lunch is ser...



Lib Dem disappointment, what do they stand for, Lembit and Vince

It's one of those good mornings when BBC Somerset call and ask me to go on air to talk politic...

The more Sarkozy, Cameron and Clinton raged against Syria's atrocities, the more forceful they were in refusing all military help to the rebels. There were conditions to be met. The Syrian opposition had to unite before they could expect help. They had to speak with one voice – as if Gaddafi's opponents did anything like this before Nato decided to bomb him out of power. Sarkozy's hypocrisy was all too obvious to the Syrians. So anxious was he to boost his chances in the French presidential election that he deployed hundreds of diplomats and "experts" to "rescue" the French freelance journalist Edith Bouvier, hampering all the efforts of NGOs to bring her to safety. Not many months ago, this wretched man was cynically denouncing two male French journalists – foolhardy, he called them - who had spent months in Taliban custody in Afghanistan.

French elections, Russian elections, Iranian elections, Syrian referendums – and, of course, US elections: it's amazing how much "democracy" can derail sane policies in the Middle East. Putin supports an Arab leader (Assad) who announces that he has done his best "to protect my people, so I don't feel I have anything to be blamed for... you don't feel you're to blame when you don't kill your own people". I suppose that would be Putin's excuse after his army butchered the Chechens. As it happens, I don't remember Britain's PM saying this about Irish Catholics on Bloody Sunday in 1972 – but perhaps Northern Ireland's Catholics didn't count as Britain's "people"?

No, I'm not comparing like with like. Grozny, with which the wounded photographer Paul Conroy drew a memorable parallel on Friday, has more in common with Baba Amr than Derry. But there is a distressing habit of denouncing anyone who tries to talk reality. Those who claimed that the IRA would eventually find their way into politics and government in Northern Ireland – I was one – were routinely denounced as being "in cahoots with terrorists". When I said in a talk in Istanbul just before Christmas that the Assad regime would not collapse with the speed of other Arab dictatorships – that Christian and Alawite civilians were also being murdered – a young Syrian began shrieking at me, demanding to know "how much you are being paid by Assad's secret police"? Untrue, but understandable. The young man came from Deraa and had been tortured by Syria's mukhabarat.

The truth is that the Syrians occupied Lebanon for almost 30 years and, long after they left in 2005, we were still finding their political claws deep inside the red soil of Beirut. Their intelligence services were still in full operation, their power to kill undiminished, their Lebanese allies in the Beirut parliament. And if the Baathists could smother Lebanon in so powerful a sisterly embrace for so long, what makes anyone think they will relinquish Syria itself easily? As long as Assad can keep Damascus and Aleppo, he can survive.

After all, the sadistic ex-secret police boss Najibullah clung on as leader of Afghanistan for years when all he could do was fly between Kabul and Kandahar. It might be said that, with all Obama's horses and all Obama's men on his side, this is pretty much all Hamid Karzai – with his cruel secret police, his regime's corruption, his bogus elections – can do today. But that is not a comparison to commend itself to Washington, Paris, London, Doha or Riyadh, or even Istanbul.

So what of Bashar Assad? There are those who believe that he really still wants to go down in history as the man who gave Syria its freedom. Preposterous, of course. The problem is that even if this is true, there are those for whom any profound political change becomes a threat to their power and to their lives. The security police generals and the Baathist paramilitaries will fight

to the death for Assad, loyal to a man, because – even if they don't admire him – they know that his overthrow means their own deaths. But if Assad were to indicate that he intended to "overthrow" himself – if the referendum and the new constitution and all the "democratic" changes he talks about became real – these notorious men would feel both fear and fury. Why, in this case, should they any longer remain loyal?

No, Bashar Assad is not a cipher. He is taking the decisions. But his father, Hafez, came to power in 1970 in a "corrective" revolution; "corrections" can always be made again. In the name of Baathism. In the name of Arab nationalism. In the name of crushing the al-Qa'ida-Zionist-Islamist-terrorist enemy. In the name of history.

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fahaba

if nation decided to keep their dignity,irrespective to the price they are paying ,will win eventualy.
zionist nuclear bombs will not save them,it is against them whe 1/2 bbillion comming to jerusalem,west at that time will be with muslims as we can see now,dispite the murduck's media;which lost its glitter on the service...
well done fisk.....
who make money is the one who do mischeif....
shame on them,the son of the devil.....

go to the history of dustbin....with all the zionst dictotors in the world,it is god wish to strated in the M.E as the history teach us along thousands of years. as all prophets came from that land...!

9 hours ago

Like Reply



alexandre2

You would never know from this that Bloody Sunday was one isolated incident - thirteen people were regrettably killed and there were extensive public enquiries. Army tactics were immediately aktered so that no such incident occurred again. To juxtapose this with Grozny where thousands died over a long period, without any sign of concern ir responsibilityby the authorities is absurd. As for cannibalism and the crusades - what is the relevia to modern Syria? Would you include the Normans' devastation of much of Northern England (less that a century before the crusades) is an article about modern Britain? Would you introduce references to the mass murder of the Cathars in the Albigensian Crusade in Southern France into an article about the current French election? So why in the M/E do we keep having to hear about the Crusades? Finally, for those who might answer this, saying that US policy is somehow a continuation of the Crusades, I would only pooint out that this would negate the supposed zionist influence on US policy given that massacres of Jews by Christians (across Europe as well as in the Middle East) were a defining feature of the Crusades.

1 day ago 5 Likes

Like Reply



Hizb

may be i got it wrong only 2700 years into diaspora

1 day ago

Like Reply



Hizb

To current defendants of the status ques, in Al-Quds. Prepare yourself for another 3500 years of diaspora.Since GOD who expelled u from Abraham-ic AlQuds, is still there.

1 day ago

Like Reply



marieleroux

What is "Abraham-ic AlQuds"?

19 hours ago in reply to Hizb

Like Reply



marieleroux

I know who Abraham was, from the Bible, the Jewish people's holy book, from where that Arab in Arabia, 1,500 years after Judaism and 650 after Jesus got "inspiration" (no copyright at that time) to invent a new religion where all

"prophets" are Jews, all from the Bible.
But what is AlQuds?

18 hours ago
in reply to marieleroux

Like Reply



scartoon

Abraham was not a Jew. He was a Chaldean, born in Ur, in southern Iraq. There were no Jews/Hebrews in Abraham's time. God--who seems to appear only to certain preferred people--told Abraham to go to the Land of Canaanites and take it. God the imperialist, God the racist, God encouraging the theft of Canaanite's native land and handing it over to a Chaldean from Ur. I don't understand why the Monty Python gang missed this plot.

16 hours ago
in reply to marieleroux

Like Reply



marieleroux

Exactly, but all that we know about Abraham comes from the Jewish holy book, the Bible. He is the father of the Jewish people. Some say he is also the father of the Arabs, because he did his maid and she got pregnant. I believe the Arabs descend from Abraham also, because it is written in the Bible that they would be many and violent.

There were no Jews/Hebrews in Abraham's time, as there was not country called Iraq, the one you mentioned, and no Arabs either, even less Muslims, for this religion was invented 1,500 years after Judaism, 650 after Jesus.

The Cannanites are not around to complain, they are extinct, but the Argentinians want their islands back and the Afghans want the British army of professional soldiers and Gurkha

mercenaries to stop killing them.

14 hours ago
in reply to scartoon
Like Reply



Hizb

Abraham-ic AlQuds. is the sacred land where most of GOD's prophets, children of Abraham, Prophet who Jews killed or attempted to. or played havoc in their messages with intentional falsifications. Those Jews who worshiped the Calf. Hence GODS expulsion of those Jews from the sacred land. The good Jews has accepted the Messayeh and became Messiahs and later Muslims.

17 hours ago
in reply to marieleroux
Like Reply



marieleroux

What is "Abraham-ic Al Quds"? Where is that?

13 hours ago
in reply to Hizb
Like Reply



marieleroux

When Jews worshiped the Calf you, Arabs, were worshiping stones and other animals in Arabia. Hundreds of years after Jews started worshiping God, the one and only, the True One (not the Allah Mohamed invented), the Arabs were still making human sacrifices to stone gods in Arabia.

Tell me Hizb, why are all the "prophets" in the Koran Jewish prophets, kings, patriarchs and rabbis, like Isayah, Solomon, Moses and Jesus, for example? Why this obsession? Why

didn't Mohamed choose Arab prophets? Or Inuit prophets? Or Aztec prophets? Incas? Aborigines?

Messiah. Hebrew word. Jesus belief. You, a Muslim, have no idea what it means.

14 hours ago
in reply to Hizb



Hizb

True some Arabs worshiped stone figures out of ignorance, but that was before the prophet Mohamad with Islam, where most Arabs were still Hanafi- (followers of the original Ibrahimic message)and some were Christians. In contrast But most of the Jews worshiped the Calf after they saw the Miracles of prophet Mosa (Peace be Upon Him) Big difference Knowingly disobaying GOD hence the expulsion from the Holy land, Ibrahimic- AlQuds

3 hours ago
in reply to marieleroux



Hizb

if u see different doctors coming and going to a house it does not

mean the people inside are healthy. Many prophets = arrogant people. they deny the messengers hence expelled from the holy land. Q why there are Jews still, why they did not follow Essa-the Messayeh peace be upon him. GOD Does not have mercy on Jews, when they disobey HIM, and the Do.

3 hours ago
in reply to marieleroux



scartoon

The West's drive to unseat Assad has nothing to do with establishing democracy in Syria or saving the lives of Syrians battling Assad. The drive has everything to do with the fact that Syria, unlike almost other Arab states, refuses to be a hired hand of the West. The other reason is to destroy Iran's best friend in the region and in the process eliminate the Hizbollah. In other words, the plot to unseat Assad is to make life more comfortable for racist, expansionist, imperialist Israel. By the way, Israel is not the 51st state of America; America is the second state of Israel when it comes to Middle East politics.

To Marie Leroux.

No state other than Israel and some stamp-sized and bribed South Pacific island recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel--not even your lackey Washington. You didn't give Sinai to Egypt. It wasn't yours to give. You attacked Egypt when Egypt was no threat to you. You knew Nasser's announcements were for domestic consumption. Damn it: a senior diplomat who evacuated his family from Cairo a day before your attack said that on the way to the Cairo airport he noticed the Egyptian radar was immobile. Not turning as one would have expected from a state preparing to go to war. As well, almost a third of Egypt's army was in Yemen at the time. What kind of lunatic Egyptian ruler would have planned to attack the Zionist entity when one-third of his badly equipped army was a 1,000 k away?

You returned Sinai to Egypt to take out Egypt from the struggle to liberate Palestine. So far the plan has succeeded.

Your emotional language makes me wonder whether I should continue to discuss the topic with you.

1 day ago 9 Likes

Like Reply



scartoon

The West's drive to unseat Assad has nothing to do with establishing democracy in Syria or saving the lives of Syrians battling Assad. The drive has everything to do with the fact that Syria, unlike almost other Arab states, refuses to be a hired hand of the West. The other reason is to destroy Iran's best friend in the region and in the process eliminate the Hizbollah. In other words, the plot to unseat Assad is to make life more comfortable for racist, expansionist, imperialist Israel. By the way, Israel is not the 51st state of America; America is the second state of Israel when it comes to Middle East politics.

21 hours ago in reply to scartoon Like Reply
5 Likes



marieleroux

Israel is neither imperialist nor expansionist. Little Israel is only shrinking, unfortunately, due to some stupid Israeli politicians trying to please the Europeans, those that kicked the Arabs out of Iberia and the Arabs, those killing each other in their endless civil wars, the invaders from Arabia. Israel gave the Arabs (22 countries, 1 in Palestine, Jordan, occupying 80% of the region) the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza and most of Judea and Samaria, including Bethlehem, capital of Judea, city of Jewish King David and his descendant Jesus. But you are not returning the Malvinas or Gibraltar, I suppose.

14 hours ago Like Reply
in reply to scartoon 1 Like



Leon

It only shrinks when you make some stupid post that doesn't reflect its true size.

12 hours ago Like Reply
in reply to marieleroux



marieleroux

2 billion Christians choose a Saviour that was Jewish and born in the Jewish contry, whose capital was Jerusalem, this some 700 years before Islam was invented and the Muslim Arabs invaded Jewish Palestine. But the "Christian" (poor Jesus...) countries deny that Jerusalem is Jewish. Also 1,500 years after Judaism, 650 after Jesus an Arab in Arabia invented a new religion where all "prophets" are.... Jews! And when the

armies of this obsessed man invaded Jewish Jerusalem they built that vulgar mosque right on top of Judaism holiest site in the Jewish capital, Jerusalem, but today the 1,4 billion Muslims that worship those Jewish "prophets" deny Jerusalem is Jewish. Strange, strange world.... Why didn't you choose the Incas, for example? Today you would be fighting over Cuzco.

Muslim Arab judenrein bloody dictatorship of Egypt, the occupied (by the Muslim Arabs from Arabia) land of the Copts, the original Egyptians, declared war and attacked Israel in 1948. In 1967 the Muslim Arab bloody dictator of Egypt made genocidal threats against Israel, that preemptively attacked and won. Land conquered in a defensive war shouldn't be returned.

Liberate Palestine? But Palestine is free, at least the 20% of it call Israel, where everyone has rights. Iberia is free too (La reconquista, celebrated to this day), and so is Southern Sudan, not before 300,000 black Christians were slaughtered by Muslim Arabs in Darfur.

1 day ago in reply to scartoon Like Reply
1 Like



scartoon

The West's drive to unseat Assad has nothing to do with establishing democracy in Syria or alleviating the suffering of Syrians. It has everything to do with demolishing the only Arab country which refuses to be a hired hand of the West. It also has to do with damaging Iran by destroying Tehran's best friend in the region, in addition to collapsing the power of Hizbullah.

In other words, the attack on Assad is the make life easier for the racist, expansionist Tel-Aviv regime. By the way, Israel is not the 51st state of the US; the US is the second state of Israel when it comes to America's Middle East policies.

1 day ago 8 Likes Like Reply



marieleroux

Tel Aviv is not the capital city of Israel, Jerusalem is.

Racist? Rights for all in Israel. And Israel is the only country that imported black people from Africa (Ethiopia)) not to enslave, but free them.

Little Israel is not expanding, but shrinking, unfortunately. The Sinai Peninsula, given to a Muslim Arab dictator. Gaza, given to the local Arabs, judenrein now, ruled by a Taliban / Al Qaeda kind of Muslim terrorist group, like those your country kills by the thousands in Iraq and Afghanistan and the most of Judea and Samaria given to Egyptian terrorist Arafat and his corrupt PLO.

Israel is not the 51st state of the US, but your Britain is their poodle.

1 day ago in reply to scartoon Like Reply



Leon

Not equal rights.

When will Palestinians get the right to return?

12 hours ago
in reply to marieleroux

Like Reply



scartoon

To Marieloux:

You conveniently digress and shift the focus of the discussion to religion ("poor Jesus...2 billion Christians...vulgar mosque..."). This is a tired ploy spouted by Zionists with more eloquence for deception than you possess.

The conflict between Jews and Arabs has little to do with religion. European Jews, through guile, money, blackmail, propaganda, and Western connivance stole Palestine. They first gobbled 78% (1948) and the remaining 22% in 1967. Palestinians and Arabs in general have many times offered permanent peace for the return of the 22%, but expansionist Zionists, who want to expand beyond the borders of Palestine, know a permanent peace would end their dreams for further conquest.

To maintain it imperial regime, Israel needs to be permanently at war footing. Peace would result in deep cuts of financial support from overseas Jews and the West. Peace would eventually make Jews minority in the Israeli colony. Thus the Zionist endless war drum beat. They have to convince world Jewry that Israel is facing "existential" threat from Arabs, from Iran, from Hizbullah, from Palestinians, perhaps even from Turkey... What I am saying is known to most of the world. It's a fact. The Zionist deception and games have been exposed. Your false slogans ("Give the land without people to people without a land") won't wash anymore. The game is up.

20 hours ago
in reply to marieleroux
2 Likes

Like Reply



marieleroux

The conflict between Israel and Iran has everything to do with religion. Iran is obsessed with Israel, because the Arabs forced them to convert to a religion invented out of an obsession with Jews, today only 0,2% of the

world's population, but 100% of the "prophets" in their Koran. Their prophets are not Arabs, they are from another people. And that Arab in Arabia didn't choose those "prophets" from the Inuits, Aborigenes, Aztecs, Incas or any of the thousands of peoples / religions in the world at that time. The moment the Iranians would go back to their original religion, the one they followed before being forced to convert, the problem, the obsession with Jews and their country, would go away. The magic pill.

19 hours ago Like Reply
in reply to scartoon
1 Like



scartoon

You digress again, Marieleroux. I suspect you are doing it deliberately. The conflict between Iran and Israel is about the Zionist theft of Palestine. That the Holy Sanctuary is occupied by Israel is an added insult to any Muslim. Your "Iran is obsessed with Israel because Arabs forced to accept [Islam] and Jewish prophets..." is an insane idea. Please read that incredible sentence again. You also claim that when Iranians revert to Zoroastrianism, they will forget Israel. Another humdinger of an idea. If I follow your logic Christian Europeans to this day hate Greeks and Jews for introducing Christianity to Europe. Now I understand all the European hatred directed toward Greece in recent months and their condemnation of Israel's vile acts. Cherches le Christ!

16 hours ago Like Reply
in reply to marieleroux
3 Likes



marielero...

Theft: Of the Malvinas.
Also stolen: Mesopotamia, Palestine, North Africa and Iberia, by the Muslim Arabs, invaders from Arabia.

14 hours ago
Like
in reply to scartoon
1 Like



William St...

Ricardo, sorry Marieleroux, didn't even know who Zoroaster was a couple of weeks ago.

14 hours ago
Like
in reply to scartoon



Thomas , Paris has all but exhausted the su...

Well said.

Apart from bypassing the obvious 'elephant in the room' however, the western media and politicians persistently downplay the threat it poses. Yet as imprisoned Israeli nuclear scientist Mordechai Vanunu confirms, European cities are actually targeted by Israeli nuclear missiles.

Iran's nuclear threat is a lie Iran's crime is its independence. Having thrown out America's favourite tyrant, Shah Reza Pahlavi, Iran remains the only resource-rich Muslim state beyond US / Israeli control. Iran does not have a Zionist usury-based Central bank. In Libya, a Zionist Central bank was established in Benghazi while the country was still at war. Islam forbids the charging of usury, the practice of charging excessive, unreasonably high, and often illegal interest rates on loans, and that is a major problem for the Rothschild banking system.

Fox News viewers would disagree. We know damn well that the Syrians and Iranians did do 9/11 (They would say).

(Edited by author 1 day ago)

1 day ago in reply to scartoon
6 Likes
Like Reply



marieleroux

Thomas, your name is Jewish Israeli.
The Rotschids are poorer than your queen, the one that ordered the attacks against Korea, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, Iraq again, Afghanistan, Argentina and Libya, the one that ordered the killing of all those civians in Northern Ireland.

Going to Luton to jeer the soldiers? No? Then you are just another British hypocrite.

1 day ago
in reply to Thomas

Like Reply



Thomas, Paris has all but exhausted the superlativ...

What is absolutely stunning is that this massive criminality at the highest levels of the US government is going on totally unchallenged by the US/UK mainstream media.

One would think that the magnitude of the unknown and dangerous potential consequences of a criminal attack on Iran by the US and its client state Israel would lead at least some news organizations to look into the very legality of such an attack.

(Edited by author 1 day ago)

1 day ago 5 Likes

Like Reply



marieleroux

Thomas (Jewish Israeli name) "... by the US and its client state Israel ". You forgot your country, the Little Satan, the poodle.

19 hours ago in reply to Thomas

Like Reply

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