

Interview: Two Syrian Christians Expose Media Lies Against Damascus

*Helga Zepp-LaRouche on June 21 interviewed two Syrian Christians who have lived for years in Germany. The interview, first published in the weekly *Neue Solidarität*, was translated from German. The names have been changed and are unknown to the editors.*

Zepp-LaRouche: How do you see the situation in Syria today?

Zaki: I was in Syria in October of last year, for the funeral of a relative in northeastern Syria. We've heard many things on TV and I call my homeland regularly.

In many cities the situation is very calm; only in a few cases are there small conflicts among us, but these have almost nothing to do with [developments in] the country. The situation in central Syria is such that many people don't know why they are fighting against al-Assad, i.e., against the government. They are fighting against a religion, because those who rule the country are mostly Shi'ites, Alawites, but the majority of the population are Sunnis, and these groups hate each other and don't accept one another.

The Sunnis also had problems with Bashar al-Assad's father, from the very beginning. Today it is the sons of the former opponents of the regime who are rebelling against Bashar. And this revolution, as far as I can see, is not one in which people are demanding civil rights and liberties, but just a revolt.

Many did not want to be involved in killing, but were forced to do so by the revolutionaries. There are many minorities who enjoy civil rights in Syria; for example, the Christians—our churches and our priests are protected by the Syrian regime.

Around 3% of the population of Syria belongs

to the Syrian Orthodox Church. These people speak Aramaic and are preserving their traditions. Many of them have emigrated to Europe, America, and Australia, and so forth. The Syrian Christians enjoy special recognition from the government. We elect ministers and mayors ... and we can also practice our religion.

I know people from central Syria, from cities where there are now problems, who are Sunni terrorists. I am not saying that all Sunnis are terrorists, but there are people who murder and throw others out of their homes, and shoot at the soldiers. If the soldiers then shoot back, then immediately pictures are taken and shown on TV internationally.

There are villages in which the terrorists carry out targeted killings. Many of them come from Lebanon or Turkey. It's especially the foreign terrorists who create the problem.



Western media propaganda, beating the drums for war, invariably blames the Assad regime for violence in Syria, even when the facts on the ground point clearly to certain opposition groups as the instigators.

I heard a speech by the President on the opening of Parliament, in which he said that the terrorists don't have a chance. Everything will be done to protect the country; no one is needed from outside the country to rule our country.

Of course, Christians, Shi'ites, and Sunnis are all represented in the new parliament. That is, there are civil rights in Syria. Obviously they have not reached the European level. This is still an Islamic country—in Islam there are no civil rights for non-Muslims, but that is not the case in Syria.

One-Sided Reporting

Zepp-LaRouche: What then do you think of the Western media-campaign on the situation in Syria? For example, the program by Anne Will, who said, "Assad allows children to be killed—how long will you watch this go on?" What do you say about this kind of reporting?

Maher: Let's just say that the coverage is very one-sided and in some cases false! Syrian television, which we still trust and which we regularly watch, provides evidence—insofar as it can be scientifically verified—based on videos that the terrorists calmly carry with them, that the the shots have been clearly well-prepared. The videos are supposed to show what serves this putative opposition.

And thus it seems to me very sad that such professional TV channels as ARD and ZDF, which are in fact public stations, fall in line with that, and simply report things without having proved them to be well-founded. (You can understand how this happens with private television, perhaps because they are linked to special interests—that would obviously be the case for the stations like al-Jazeera)... No one can say that this is free journalism; it is rather controlled journalism.

Of course the Syrian government is also now carrying out an information war, no question; it also wants to polish up its image. Keep in mind that the Syrian government also uses horrible pictures to try to draw people in the country onto its side—pictures that we here [in the West] do not see: body parts lying around, infants' bodies immediately after a terrorist attack, are explicitly shown on Syrian TV. In this case I find the German press better! It shields us from such pictures. But I think that the Syrian government's intent is to show clearly, to the people within Syria: Look at what the terrorists are doing! Thus a certain fear is disseminated.

But the fact is that the Syrian state is not responsible for all the things of which it has been accused. This is

unquestionable, because we have authenticated reports, we have contact with our relatives and the diocese, which confirm that for us.

We come from northeast Syria, the city of al-Qamishli. A large group of Syrian Orthodox Christians live there.

In this region, so far, nothing has happened like what is happening in Damascus, Homs, Hama or other cities. There is no large concentration of one ethnic group in this region. Kurds, Assyrians, Aramaics, Chaldeans, Armenians and, of course, Shi'ites and Sunnis live there. In addition there are large groups of Arabs loyal to the government, who have been resettled in this region from central Syria. In this way the region has also been "Arabized."

In a word: The German media are broadcasting only half the truth. And that is sad.

Zepp-LaRouche: I think, less than a half-truth.

Maher: Less than a half-truth; that's more accurate....

Zepp-LaRouche: There are also many reports, for example from Roman Catholic missionaries or other monasteries, that the massacres actually first began when the Syrian Army lost control. Have you also seen this?

Maher: I would agree that is true. Do you know why? We cannot say that the government is not capable of carrying out massacres, because it committed massacres in the city of Hama during the 1980s. I know people who were soldiers at that time.

Zepp-LaRouche: But that was not this government—

Maher: —but his father's.

But the truth is that in the age of Twitter and Facebook, no government could be so stupid as to commit a massacre. Bashar al-Assad's government has modernized a great deal. He rules with a sense of proportion and would not commit a massacre.

It is nonetheless proven that massacres have been perpetrated against people loyal to the government, Alawites, Shi'ites, as well as Sunnis who are in positions of a high responsibility or perhaps in the military. The government would have no interest in doing this, in slaying its own loyalists, so to speak.

In addition, due to the reports of the ways by which these people were murdered, I hardly believe that this was done by the government. It was reported that the bodies were hacked up with knives and machetes, and

that frequently they were stabbed with swords. This is not the work of a regular army.

You also find horrendous videos on the Internet—I have not seen them myself—such as first came from Iraq, in which masked men take a prisoner, hold a sword to his throat, and then, while the camera rolls, cut off his head. In one of these videos the masked men speak an Alawite dialect, from the area of Latakia, and says, “You want democracy? We’ll show you democracy!” and start their bestial deed.

Yet there are no Alawites in the video, just terrorists who portray themselves as Alawites. The video is supposed to show the bestiality of the Alawites, and thereby of the Syrian government.

In Homs there was a huge incident where soldiers allegedly shot people. But there were no soldiers there, because the real soldiers had previously been ambushed, murdered, their clothes put on, and their vehicles and equipment used to shoot people. The Syrian government was actually able to prove this, because people were arrested who then reported: “Yes, we did it!” But this story did not get out here. You had to see it on Syrian TV.

Zepp-LaRouche: There were even announcements that terrorists from Libya, mercenaries from Syria, and al-Qaeda fighters from Iraq were systematically being smuggled into Syria and then financed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. I do not want to speak either for or against the government; I only think that if insurgents were recruited from abroad, then the government has the right to restore order.

Maher: Absolutely.

Zepp-LaRouche: That would be the case if, for example, the Hungarians invaded Bavaria, and wreaked similar havoc; then the Bavarian government would also deploy the border police.

Maher: Clearly. You also have to consider what kind of situation the soldiers or commanders are in; we actually know this from eyewitness reports. The composition of the population is 80% Sunni, 10% Shi’ite and Alawite, and 10% Christian. And you find this composition in



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President Bashar al-Assad. What interest would he have in perpetrating a massacre against his own supporters?

almost every grouping. Thus, if there is a commander who has, perhaps, 100 men under him, then you must have this same composition: 80 of them are Sunni, 10 Alawite, and 10 Christian. The commander would most likely be an Alawite. These 80 Sunni soldiers, standing before him in uniform, would have to actually follow an order of which they probably do not at all approve. Because inwardly, let’s say, they are not loyal to the government. And extreme situations can occur in which a commander reacts differently than he really should.

But you also find this in the American Army. That is, under stressful conditions, a commander allows civilians to be shot, because he was shot at. As Mr. Zaki said, in Syria this will be filmed, if the Army did the shooting.

The situation is similar with the Kofi Annan plan: a ceasefire was supposed to be in place. I think that the government is in a situation where it could silence its weapons, but if it is shot at, should it shoot back with potatoes?

And if I then show the world—“Look here, it is the Army that is shooting,” then I am giving one-sided information.

Zepp-LaRouche: Basically there is a danger of civil war in the long term.

Maher: That would be the worst outcome.

Zepp-LaRouche: . . . I think that somehow we must make the situation even clearer, because we face a virtual black propaganda campaign by the people who are running this campaign. In my opinion, those on the Syrian side must try to give a counter-response; the Russian media and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov have often said how they see the situation, but that view doesn’t really break into the Western media.

Maher: Very concretely, the question is, what can one do? . . . Our possibilities as as naturalized German citizens, but obviously also citizens of our [Syrian] homeland, are limited. We have no contact with high-level politics. We are trying within the realm of ecu-

menicisms, to speak with our sister churches and to inform them about the real situation.

Zepp-LaRouche: But what if the Syrian churches released a joint declaration . . . to the world public? For example, if the Catholics and the Orthodox and the Alawites and perhaps others would say together that—at least it appears to me to be the case—ethnic cleansing is underway in the “freed” regions. And that it is similar to what went on in Iraq.

Maher: There’s no question—it is even much worse than in Iraq.

Our Bishop, Yohanna Ibrahim, from Aleppo, in the early stages of these developments, was on Syrian TV—I don’t know how often in the meantime. Clergymen from other confessions were also very strongly represented. They have expressed themselves very clearly and uncharacteristically critically. They have spoken of problems and corruption, but have pointed out that force is no solution! But we must see to it that we, as Syrian citizens, protect peace first, and then solve the political, economic, and social issues.

Threat to Alawites and Christians

What happened in Iraq is nothing like what can happen in Syria. In Iraq there is a strong concentration of both Shi’ites and Sunnis, more evenly balanced,¹ whereas in Syria you have 80% Sunnis, and they will do everything to fight against, or annihilate, first the Alawites, and second the Christians. And believe me: the pent-up rage—including over the fact that the government has treated the Christians humanely—will then erupt.

Some of the slogans of the insurgents are: “Death to the Alawites and the Christians in Lebanon!” Something like that. Thus you can already see what direction the situation is going.

And thus it is again understandable, or understandable in our view, why the Syrian regime will never cave in. Because if they cave in, that will mean the death of almost all the Alawites. Because they are integrated in everything which embodies the state—every single family. Otherwise they could never have controlled this state, due to their minority status. They never could have done it without controlling all state functions.

Bashar’s father made this totally clear when he said: How can I seize the country and bring it under my con-

trol? I can only do it with the Army! And then he gave out the slogan: “No Alawite family marries its daughter to an Alawite man who is not a professional soldier.” So all the young Alawite men were, more or less, forced to enlist in the Army—that is generally known—and every Alawite has a key function. And if we then consider that also the civilian posts are held by the military—the mayors, city councils, government ministers are all generals or soldiers—then you realize that the whole state is controlled by the Alawites. And the Alawites are better situated vis-à-vis the Christians in any case, than vis-à-vis the Sunnis; you can say that.

But there is also a battle among religions in Islam, as also occurred earlier among the Christians, perhaps, so that the Pope even cursed the Jews in the Mass. If you listen to the imams at the Hajj, for example, Christians and Shi’ites are cursed so heavily that you have to wonder, how can someone pray to God, yet curse men and desire their death?

If you listen to the Shi’ites, on the other hand, they curse the Sunnis. And therefore there is a battle between these two religious tendencies; because an axis has arisen between Iran, now with Iraq (where the Shi’ites were oppressed for years), the Alawites in Syria, and the Hezbollah in Lebanon—an axis which is not accepted by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar or other states or kingdoms.

Neutralize the Threat of Civil War

Zepp-LaRouche: It is our observation that, fundamentally, the Sykes-Picot dynamic has been reactivated, trying to use the religious conflict between Shi’ites and Sunnis to destabilize and control the region. . . . How do you see this? And how must one intervene in Syria to neutralize the danger of civil war?

Maher: Our representatives are churchmen, that is, the Bishop, the Patriarch. Bishop Mata Rohum lives in al-Hasaka (this was also mentioned in one of your articles), Bishop Hanna Ibrahim lives in Aleppo. Both have involved themselves extensively in securing peace in Syria, since the beginning of these events. They are the appropriate contact persons.

But we also have political parties, one of which demands “Assad, we can no longer accept this!” Other organizations ask, what will the future bring? What kind of change would best represent the interests of our people?

We are politically weak, and thus always rely on the protection of those in power. What will happen to the Christians if this regime falls? That is a very important question. Many face this question because they hear the

1. In Iraq: 60-65% Shi’ite, 32-37% Sunni, 3% or Christian or other—ed.

one-sided press coverage that presents the fall of the Syrian government as a sure thing. The circumstances in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt reinforce this prospect.

Zepp-LaRouche: Most people don't understand that we live under an empire. If you ask the German population, if you say to any ordinary German on the street: "We must now develop Africa, where 20 million are starving! We could simply go in and build bridges, build roads, develop agriculture," 99% of all German will say: "There's nothing anyone can do."

And then I always ask people; "What does it mean if you say that there's nothing anyone can do? Do you then live in a democracy? Obviously not. We live under an empire which is dominated by an oligarchy, and people are just subjects. I want to change that, I don't accept it. . . ."

Maher: You want the ideal situation. We want to help to fashion the society in which we live, using the capabilities we have through Christian conduct, love of one's neighbor, honesty, and readiness to compromise.

It is important that a society have critical voices. As Christians, we see it as our responsibility to question assertions that are made—for example, that there's

nothing that can be done. Many opinions are dictated to us by the economy, for example. Personally, I believe that powerful interests are always represented in the spread of supposed facts. Thus also in the case of Syria.

We were also amazed, as Christians, that, when Christians in Egypt were seized and killed on Good Friday and New Year's Eve, that this was not newsworthy for the daily news programs.

Zepp-LaRouche: That coheres with the fact that the German media are even more controlled than in Goebbels' time. . . . There are forbidden topics that are never reported. Three-quarters of the media are running PR campaigns. They are not reporting news, but they have public relations firms that carrying out "social engineering"—there is no good German word for that; it that means, simply, that by repetition of certain things you change the axiomatic thinking of the population until they believe whatever you say: "Syria is a dictatorship, Assad is a dictator."

Qaddafi, until shortly before the campaign against him, was a renowned head of state with whom French President Sarkozy had conducted wonderful business, and who had forsworn terrorism; and suddenly, from one day to the next, he was a dictator. One campaign after another is carried out this way.

Unfortunately, in Germany, this has an effect. If you ask a Syrian what it means that an article presents such-and-such, I'm rather sure that the Syrian would ask: "Who wrote it, and what is their intention?" But in Germany they say, "Oh, that's in *Bild Zeitung*,² so it must be true." That, unfortunately, is my experience.

Maher: Yes, that's right.

To us it is very important that we make our voices heard as Syrian Orthodox Christians. In this specific situation, what's important to us is first, that peace in Syria be maintained. God willing, there will be no war in Syria, especially no civil war, because then the Christians will suffer the most. Unfortunately today there are already attacks on Christians.

When our Federal Chancellor meets with the Dalai Lama, all the TV stations report on it. But when the Bishop of Baghdad, or the Christian Patriarch of Lebanon meet with Merkel, they don't notice it. Thus our charges about the situation for Christians in Lebanon do not get broad publicity.

2. A popular daily, just a few cuts above the *National Enquirer* in the United States.

Planetary Defense

Leading circles in Russia have made clear their intent to judo the current British-Obama insane drive towards war, by invoking the principle of Lyndon LaRouche's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Termed the Strategic Defense of Earth, the SDE would focus on cooperation between the U.S.A. and Russia for missile defense, as well as defense of the planet against the threat of asteroid or comet impacts.

The destiny of mankind now is to meet the challenge of our "extraterrestrial imperative"!

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