

The Destructive Effects Of Religious Extremisms

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My thesis is that paradigm change, developing from humane movement and economic development, such as that proposed by Hussein Askary at the recent Schiller Institute conference in Germany,² and especially today, by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, will be greatly hindered, if not blocked, in the foreseeable future, unless and until expanding religious extremism on various sides is reversed, at least in regard to many of its differing aspects.

I thank the Schiller Institute for inviting me to participate in this conference. Having listened attentively to the talks by Helga Zepp-LaRouche and Bruce Fein, and having read the papers delivered at the event at the previous Schiller Institute conference in Germany, I think I understand, and I certainly appreciate, the theme of, and emphasis upon, the need for the paradigm change in our world, in order to stop further chaos and destruction, and to move forward in advancing civilization.

Although many people believe that when most of us grow older, we become more pessimistic, *I*, having recently turned 80, feel not only younger in age, but also increasingly optimistic. Optimistic! [applause] Well, after that applause, let me say that, given what I shall attempt to present to you today, you may think that my statement of optimism is at odds with my presentation. Especially when combined with what Helga Zepp-LaRouche, whom I greatly respect, has presented today.¹

My area of focus will be on what I term the Middle East, or, more precisely put, Southwest Asia/North Africa. The Middle East, as I use the term, means, of course, the Arab nation-states and the state of Israel.

I do not say this as an enemy of religion in general, but rather as someone who puts high value on many religious principles, and also as someone who is a member of a Lubavitch Hasidic Jewish congregation, that I, as a member, regard, on balance, as being in the extreme category.

In the few minutes allotted to my presentation, I can, at best, only make a few general points, that will hopefully be seriously considered, and prompt further discussion.

Islamic Extremism

It is perhaps unfortunately not difficult to specify the negative—and that is an understatement—aspects of religious extremism. Obviously, violent extremists, who commit terrorist acts within the context of their interpretation of Islam, first of all, and under their own banners of Islam, however wrong they may be, are killing and wounding human beings, and destroying living essentials. They impede positive development; they are oppressive; they threaten further chaos and destruction. Not only has this been the case in the Middle East in the

1. “Helga Zepp-LaRouche: A New Paradigm To Save Mankind,” *EIR*, Feb. 1, 2012.

2. Hussein Askary, “A Revolutionary Development Plan for the Near and Middle East,” *EIR*, Dec. 7, 2012.

recent time period, and the not so recent past; it is the case today, from Yemen to Algeria, in Iraq, Libya, and other places, and both the numbers of these extreme militants, and their actions, are increasing.

If we go beyond the Middle East, moreover, into Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Mali, we see more violent actions, terrorism, more killing, more wounding, more destruction, certainly impeding any positive advancements, really any planning, of economic development.

The worst situation in the Middle East presently, as you all know, is Syria. The fastest-growing al-Qaeda is presently in Syria. This terrorist group, using the cover name Jabhat al-Nusra al-Qaeda, has probably become the most lethal element in the opposition to the al-Assad brutal dictatorship. For al-Qaeda, Assad and the Alawis are good targets, since many Sunni Muslims believe the Alawis are a divisionist sect of Islam, which should be suppressed. Jihadist websites every day are saying that new al-Qaeda martyrs, from many countries, have died in, but are continuing to come to Syria—from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and elsewhere.

The longer the war continues, the more al-Qaeda will benefit from chaos and sectarian polarization. The number of deaths in the Syrian civil war is now well over 60,000—maybe up to 70,000. The number of people displaced, and those who are refugees, is estimated in the many millions, in a country that had a population of 21 million when this started less than two years ago. The situation grows worse every day.

If and when the Assad regime collapses, moreover, the extreme militants are likely to have a major foothold in Syria. That, of course, will be a major problem.

Egypt, the largest Arab country, is a different case. Only yesterday, there were again demonstrations, especially in Cairo, and some violence in the streets, because many Egyptians, who forged a revolution, were reacting against Islamists in the government, whom the people in the street believe, with some justification, were trying to impose a version of Islamic law that would impede, from their perspective—which is probably a correct perspective—positive progress and development in building a new, more democratic government, and a better economy and society.

Positive development in Egypt is at a standstill. If anything, this large but poor country is presently moving backward.

There should be no doubt that governments and individuals from countries outside the Middle East,

have contributed to the increase in religious extremism, and to the growing number of militants in the Arab Middle East. These countries include Britain, France, Russia, Iran, and China, in addition to the United States. My greatest concern in this regard is with the United States.

Successive United States governments have, by their actions, often made already bad situations in the Middle East worse. Iraq is, of course, one of the leading examples.

It is definitely easier to justify the problem of Arab religious extremism, a lot easier to do that, than it is to propose what should be done to promote change. Prof. John Olin IV of the University of Virginia wrote an interesting op-ed article that was published in the *New York Times*, on Jan. 6, in which he argued that Islamism is winning out in the Arab Middle East and elsewhere, because it is the deepest and widest channel into which today's Arab discontent can flow. Islamism, from Olin's perspective, especially the somewhat less violent type advocated by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, has provided a coherent narrative about what ails Muslim society, and where the cure lies.

Far from rendering Islamism unnecessary, as some experts had forecast, the Arab Spring has increased its credibility. The Islamists, after all, have long condemned the corrupt regimes that they have said are destined to fall. The backing and support of corrupt regimes by the United States and other countries, in addition to specific United States military actions that Bruce Fein mentioned,³ have resulted, as you know, in numerous deaths and other damage to the civilian population. This has, of course, clearly aided the growth and expansion of extreme and militant Islamism. That such supportive actions should be stopped, is almost certainly a necessity.

Jewish Extremism

I wish to turn now to another and different type of religious extremism in the Middle East, which hinders positive progress, and threatens further chaos and destruction. This is a religious extremism that I know very well personally. I have lived partially within its framework, even in opposition to it, for most of my life. I am here referring to Jewish religious extremism.

I underline and emphasize that this Jewish religious extremism stems from only a few of the many interpre-

3. "Bruce Fein: What Is Mankind As a Species?" *EIR*, Feb. 8, 2013.



A faceoff on the occupied West Bank between an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian. The most militant Jewish settlers want to expand the settlements, with violence if necessary, in the belief that God gave the land to the Jews.

tations of the religion of Judaism, and is actually opposed, on balance, by a majority of Jews. This Jewish religious extremism, nevertheless, is influential and dangerous, within the context of the Palestinian-Israeli, Arab-Israeli conflict, and that conflict, as I am sure you know, has, for over six decades, threatened, and at times thwarted, peace and positive advancement in the Middle East. That conflict has resulted in wars, loss of life on many sides, destruction, and confiscation of land, continued oppression by the state of Israel of the indigenous Palestinian population, and lack of security for Israeli Jews.

The Jewish religious extremists to whom I am referring are ultra-Orthodox Jews, whose views and positions are certainly based upon traditional Judaism. Numerous other Orthodox Jews, who may disagree on some points, and many other Jews, who are neither Orthodox nor even religious, support many of the positions and actions of these people. Certainly, some other Jews, even a few other ultra-Orthodox Jews, both inside and outside of the state of Israel, do oppose the positions and actions of the ultra-Orthodox Jews to whom I am referring.

These ultra-Orthodox Jews either are themselves, or are fully supportive of, the most militant Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Those settlers are supported and maintained by the current Israeli government, as well as having been supported by previous governments. The position, or, better put, the belief upon which these ultra-Orthodox Jews base their actions, which are sometimes violent, is that the entire area of present-day Israel, as well as some of the adjacent area, is the holy land that God promised to the Jews. They want Jewish

settlements expanded in this area of the West Bank, with violence, if necessary.

There is no question of their belief; it's a matter of theology. And now I want to get a bit deeper into this. Because it's the theology, in a sense, that is terribly important.

These are not ideas that these people have, ideas of this world only. These are ideas that form a deep belief. This is among Jews, but I'm sure you also know, that if we take other groups of people, in other religions, people have unfor-

tunately similar kinds of views.

Traditional Judaism, beginning in the post-Biblical literature, promotes the idea that the divine choice of the Jewish people, God's choice, is "a cosmic act that grants superiority to Jews." In medieval times, this concept was developed more in traditional Judaic theological texts. Within the dualistic approach of the Kabbalah, with its distinction between sanctity and impurity, the non-Jew was often presented as part of the other side. The dualistic concept of the distinction between the divine soul of the Jew, and the animal-like soul of Gentile, became a prominent element of much of this literature.

Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, who was the great patron saint of the Lubavicher Hasidic Jews, of which I said already I belong to one of those congregations, he believed and added—it's not my view—he believed and added to the above differentiation between Jews and non-Jews. And what he said not only represents this one grouping of ultra-Orthodox Jews; it really is within the basis of traditional Judaism. He actually quoted something called the *Book of Tanya*, which is holy scripture for these ultra-Orthodox Jews, and he said, I'm quoting it, "There is a qualitative difference between the soul of the Jew, and the soul of all other ethnicities. The latter possess an animal soul (*nefesh habahamit*), which is located in the left chamber of the heart, whereas the former is endowed with the divine soul (*nefesh ha-elohit*), the spark that emanates from the light of the infinite God, and is located in the brain, as well as in the right chamber of the heart."

Another current rabbi, who is a spokesperson for these people, Yitzchak Ginsburg, has continued to

expand and develop some of those theological approaches. For example, “The Gentile is created, but the Jew is part of divinity itself.” He claims, within the context really of, unfortunately, traditional Judaism, that while the Jews are the chosen people, and were created in God’s image, the Gentiles do not have this status, and are therefore effectively considered sub-human.

Accordingly, for example, the Commandment, “You shall not murder,” does not apply to the killing of a Gentile, since “You shall not murder” relates to the murder of a human, while for Ginsburg, and for many of these ultra-Orthodox Jews, the Gentiles do not constitute human beings.

Now again, this kind of theology is certainly not the theology of the majority of Jews. In fact, if we take Israel, as many of you know, the estimates are that about 75% of Israeli Jews are not religious, let alone, not being traditional Jews who believe in this kind of ultra-Orthodox theology. But even secular Israelis—not all of them, some goodly number of them—still support actions, activities, of the ultra-Orthodox, who therefore have a good deal more influence on the Israeli government and what Israel does, than they should have—well, from the point of view of their numbers.

And that’s not the case just today. That has been the case.

Christian Zionism

Now if I then for a moment, go to a companion group, outside of Judaism—not Jews, but a companion group of these ultra-Orthodox—I go to evangelical Christian Zionists in the United States. Well, they don’t have the same theology; they don’t have the same theology at all. But they have a theology that, from my perspective, is equally horrendous, and that’s why they fully and totally support, fully and totally, the state of Israel. They believe, as I’m sure some of you know, that before the Second Coming of Jesus, Jews must have, and will have, either full control of the Holy Land, or some of these Christian Zionists believe, they should be the only inhabitants of the Holy Land.

We have different estimates on their numbers. There was recently an op-ed in the *New York Times* that said evangelical Christian Zionists numbered 20 million in the United States—that’s a large number. My research indicates that evangelical Christian Zionists probably number twice that many. And they fully

back the state of Israel, but, more importantly, they have created one of the major lobbies in this country. My view is that their lobby, in terms of influence, is at least as effective as the so-called Israel lobby, headed by AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] in Washington, and maybe in many ways even more effective, largely because of their numbers, and even including some members of Congress who are part of that group.

Now, in terms of their theology, that’s something that they fully and totally believe. Let me just give you this one example. Three years ago, when I was in Israel doing some research on Christian Zionism, I first went to some of my relatives, who happened to be among the most right-wing Israeli Jews you can find. How do they view me, since I’ve been an anti-Zionist all my adult life? I’ll tell you. They say, “Norton”—they still call me a boy, I’m 80 now, but—“Norton is a good Jewish boy, from a good Jewish family, with a good Jewish heart. He just has some wrong ideas.”

Anyway, I stay with them when I go back to Israel, part of the time. I asked them what they thought about these Christian Zionists, because, at least since the 1990s, every Israeli prime minister, publicly, usually at the annual conference they have in Jerusalem—Israeli prime ministers have stood up and said, “You are our best friends in the world.” And by the way, there’s a lot of truth to that. Because that’s the most effective lobby in the United States. That’s most important for this state, and for the kind of oppression that this state exerts upon the Palestinians.

So I went to my friends, relatives, some of them, and I said: You must know about their theology, because also in their theology, they believe that before the Second Coming, there’s going to be an Anti-Christ first, and then most of the people who call themselves Christians, as well as others, are going to follow the Anti-Christ, and then there’s going to be Armageddon. What’s Armageddon? The mother of all holocausts, that’s going to wipe all these people out. And these Christian Zionists, with an exception or two, as I’ll mention momentarily, say that in Armageddon, all but 144,000 people who are Jews, will also be killed. They’re supporting all these Jews—5.7 million by the last census, Jews in the state of Israel; maybe 15 million worldwide. But they say only 144,000 will be saved.

Where did they get that number? They say they get it from the Book of Revelations! I couldn’t find it in the



“The younger generation,” said Mezvinsky, “especially in this day and age, which is a different day, and a different age from years in the not-too-far-distant past—that’s where the hope lies.”

Book of Revelations, but I know what they do. They take the 12 tribes, multiply by 12, and that’s 144, and they add three zeroes.

So, of course, the answer I got from my relatives—you get this from almost any Israeli Jew, same answer; it didn’t surprise me, but I wanted to hear it—they said, “We consider that theology to be nonsense. Nonsense!” But, of course, as an uncle of mine said, “We’re Machiavellian. Look at all the help they give us. Now, we can understand that.”

Then I went to three different groups of Christian Zionists who were then in Israel—well, they were all united, but they were separate. They come for periods of time, one month, two months, six months. I went to the three groups, and I asked the same question. I said, “Do you know? You must know, but do you know the views that Israeli Jews, including people in the government, have of your theology?” Now, this is my point. As one of the leaders told me when I asked the question, before I ever used this word, which I got from my relatives—he said to me, “We know they consider our theology nonsense, but we’re not supporting them because we’re taking orders from them;

we’re taking orders from [points heavenward].” And that’s what he did.

Now, obviously my point, and I’m going to conclude on this, is that when we have groups of people, be they Muslims, be they Jews, or be they Christians—probably other religions as well, but these are the three religious groups that I’m concerned with here—when we have people like that, who sincerely believe that they have the Word of God, and that what they believe, and that what they’re doing, all of that comes from God, that’s a huge problem. And that’s what tends to make me, I don’t say pessimistic, for the near future, but that’s what tends to thwart my optimism.

Educate the Younger Generation

But I do want to conclude on this note. I’m willing to pick it up from what Bruce Fein said, towards the end, when you said, the most important thing that you would advocate is education. You advocated gaining of knowledge and so on. I want to emphasize that. I’m worried I’ve been too brief, but I tried to make a point. And I can tell you that even the kinds of people that I’ve just described, even though they are very devout, I have found, just by my own experience, some by others too, that when you sit and confront many of them, and talk with them, you at least will put questions in their minds.

And so the one thing I would add to what he said, which I’m sure Bruce Fein and the rest of you would agree with, is that the emphasis needs to be, in terms of trying to put different thoughts, if not question marks, in people’s minds, to increase knowledge. The emphasis should be on the younger generation. The younger generation, especially in this day and age, which is a different day, and a different age from years in the not-too-far-distant past—that’s where the hope lies.