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Christians in Iraq Baffled at How U.S. "Can Find Water on Mars", yet "Unable to Spot ISIS in the Desert"

By [Samuel Smith/CP](#) | 12 May, 2016





Iraqi Christians pray as they attend a Good Friday mass at a church in Baghdad, Iraq, March 25, 2016.
Reuters/Khalid al Mousily

WASHINGTON — A Chaldean priest who oversees hundreds of Iraqi Christian refugees displaced by the Islamic State says Iraqi Christians blame the United States government for not protecting them and their ancient communities from being conquered by the barbaric terrorist group.

Father Douglas al-Bazi, who runs the Mar Elias Church and displacement center in Ainkawa, is in the U.S. this week to raise awareness about the plight facing hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians who are forced to live as refugees after IS [also known as ISIS or ISIL] overtook their homes and villages in the Nineveh plains of Iraq in 2014.

Bazi, who is originally from Baghdad and was [kidnapped from his church and tortured for days](#) by Islamic militants

in 2006, shared his story with a group of reporters and writers in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday and discussed the Iraqi Christian community's aggravation with the U.S. government.

While President Barack Obama was calling IS the "JV team" and ignored ["very, very clear" warnings](#) about the rise of dangerous radical extremists groups in Iraq following the U.S. military's complete withdrawal from the country in 2011, IS seemingly had little trouble conquering Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, and large swaths of territory in Northern Iraq in the summer of 2014.

As IS conquered Christian and Yazidi towns in Northern Iraq, many Yazidis and Christians were forced flee their homelands or risk being killed for their faith. It wasn't until IS began making its way toward the Kurdish town of Erbil later that year that the U.S.-led coalition finally started its airstrike campaign against the militant organization.

Bazi explained that the timing of the airstrike campaign has left many religious minority refugees wondering why the U.S. did not act sooner to save their own villages.

"When the Islamic State attacked, no one took action until the Islamic State arrived to Erbil. [It wasn't until then] when the Americans started bombing the Islamic State," Bazi said in broken English. "So the Yazidis and Christians, they ask why America just helped those people and they forget about us? Also another group called Shabak, they had the same feeling."

As it emerged in September 2015 that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration had [discovered water on Mars](#), many around the world celebrated the discovery. However, that discovery left suffering Iraqi Christians families who are living in 10-by-15-foot iron containers in the Mar Elias displacement center with a sour taste, Bazi said.

"My people, they [ask why] NASA can find water on Mars but they were not able to find the Islamic State [when] they were just in the middle of desert by hundreds, [with] Toyota cars everywhere," Bazi explained. [They were] just in the middle of the desert and [the U.S.] was not able to find them by satellite. This is a disappointment."

Although the U.S. [State Department designated](#) IS' treatment of Christians and others in Iraq and Syria as a genocide in March, the U.S. has done very little since

then to provide help for the suffering Christian refugee communities in Erbil, Bazi said.

"My people blame America for what has happened. [The] genocide [designation] was the first time the Americans said, 'We care,'" Bazi stated. "But caring means more than words. It means taking action for my people."

A humanitarian source close to the situation in Iraq said that although millions of dollars in foreign government aid is being sent, very little to none of that money is going to help Christians and other religious minorities because the money is being funneled through the Iraqi government and not given directly to the agencies and organizations providing for the refugees.

The source added that most of the funds used to help support the Christian refugees are being funneled through churches and dioceses who are working with them directly.

Additionally, Christians in Iraq and Syria are largely overlooked for resettlement in the U.S. The U.S. [relies heavily](#) on resettling refugees who register with United Nations refugee camps. However, most Christians avoid registering with U.N. camps due to fear of being persecuted by Muslims.

Bazi added that once IS is defeated, he doesn't believe many Christians will want to go back to their homes and villages, knowing what has happened in those places.

"For sure, our people are not ready to go back," Bazi said. "Maybe they go back for one reason — just to sell their houses."

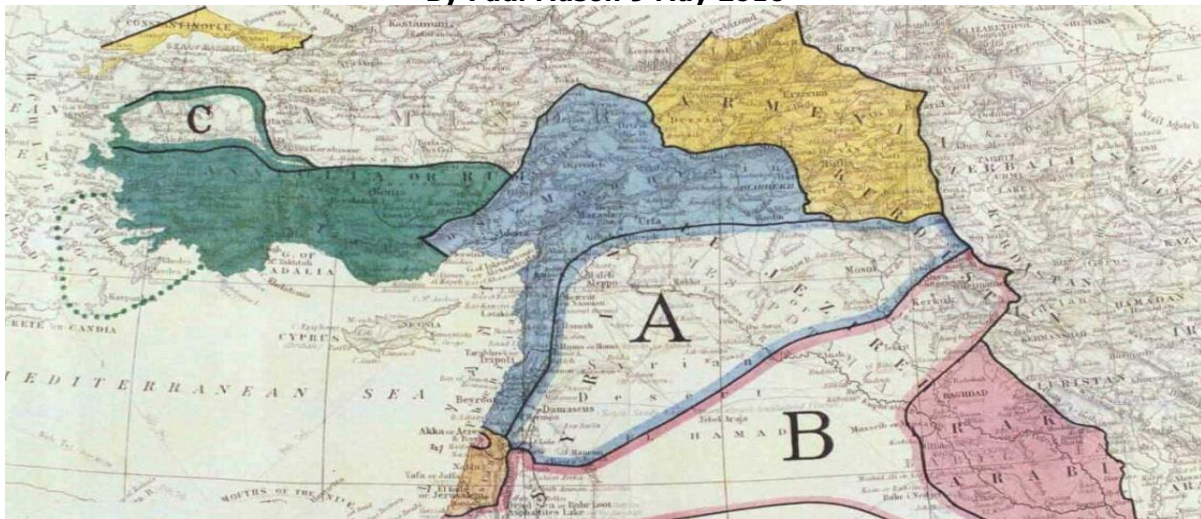
In order to give the Christians and other religious minorities confidence that things will be different in a post-IS Iraq, Bazi stresses that the Constitution that was passed in 2005 during the U.S. occupation must be changed.

"Our constitution actually it is Part 2 of Quran," Bazi argued. "The Western country when they looked at our Constitution, they read just the first part, that it is based on democracy. They say, 'Oh yea, that's good,'" Bazi explained. "But they ignore the other point [that states] you cannot have any law against Shariah and Quran. That makes me forget about the first part [about democracy]."

The [Iraqi constitution](#) does in fact state in Section 1, Article 2: "No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam."

<http://christianexaminer.com/article/christians-in-iraq-baffled-at-how-u-s-can-find-water-on-mars-but-not-isis-in-the-desert/50697.htm>

Paul Mason on Sykes-Picot: How an arbitrary set of borders created the modern Middle East By Paul Mason 9 May 2016



100 years ago today, Britain and France carved up what would become Syria, Iraq and Israel. Their imperial mindset still scars the region.

One hundred years ago today, Britain and France drew a line through the Middle East that became the border between Syria and Iraq, with a kink at the end of it that became Israel. You get a sense of the breezy confidence behind the so-called Sykes-Picot agreement from the minutes of the cabinet where the idea was hatched:

"What sort of agreement would you like to have with the French?" Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, asks Sir Mark Sykes — a brilliant but erratic colonel just back from a tour of the region. "I should like to draw a line from the 'e' in Acre to the last 'k' in Kirkuk," says Sykes.

Thus the destiny of millions of people was shaped by the way a printer had arranged some place names on a map. It was not the first unfortunate encounter Sykes had with a map. In January 1915, he penned a fateful letter to Winston Churchill urging him to seize Constantinople (now Istanbul).

Sykes pointed out that if Britain and France could seize the main city of the Ottoman Empire, not only would that empire crash, and German influence in the east be ended, but the way might be open to invade Germany via the Balkans.

"Could you by June be fighting towards Vienna," Sykes advised, "you would have got your knife near the monster's vitals and perhaps might achieve the line Mulhausen, Munich, Vienna, Cracow before winter".

It is worth contemplating this line — Sykes was very keen on lines — with your finger. To get there, Britain would have had to subjugate the entire Balkan region. To kick things off, you had to land troops in Turkey, at a place called Gallipoli.

"It is not so chimerical as it may sound," Sykes wrote to Churchill. 40,000 troops died trying to prove him right, but failed.

When Islamic State blew up border posts between Iraq and Syria in 2014, it declared an "end to the Sykes-Picot

era". But you do not have to be a terrorist to object to the imperial mindset that drove the agreement.

The arbitrary drawing of borders, in defiance of geography, ethnicity and common sense, became the hallmark of imperialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

If, today, the Kurds are driving IS out of northern Syria, with bare-headed communist women in the vanguard, that is – in part – a result of Sykes' legacy. In 1915, Sykes assured the British cabinet that "east of the Tigris the Kurds are pro-Arab". Kurdistan was subsumed within a French zone of control and, by the time the post-war order was frozen at Versailles in 1919, the Kurds had become a non-people.

Sykes' famous pencil-stroke through the Arab world, combined with his enthusiastic support of Balfour's 1917 declaration in favour of a Jewish state in Palestine, makes him one of the few British figures who exerted strategic influence on the twentieth century.

It was influence born of first-hand knowledge and experience. Sykes had grown up in the Arab world. His assurance to Prime Minister Herbert Asquith that the "spiritual fire" of pan-Arabism lay in Saudi Arabia, while its "intellectual organising power" lay in Syria, Palestine and Beirut was well-observed.

But his expertise prompts the question: how could somebody so knowledgeable get it so wrong?

To read Sykes' papers today is to observe the tragedy of an intellect shackled by delusions of superiority. Sykes worked on the assumption, central to all imperialisms: that subject peoples behave only according to their ethnic or national "characteristics", whereas powerful white nations have agency.

Paradoxically, for someone whose name was hated by generations of Arabs, Sykes idolised Arab culture. First because he believed it to be non-revolutionary, in contrast with nationalism in Turkey and India where the problem was "a lot of poor men who have got a little education and greater ambitions".

Second, because he believed it could encompass both wings of Islam, plus Christianity, and tolerate the Jews.

The one national characteristic Sykes and his generation never seemed to notice was their own. Imperialism turned them into purblind fools who thought that, by drawing lines, they could control history.

What they failed to imagine was that, first, Turkey would develop a modern, secular, national consciousness. This meant their one-way bet against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War proved futile. Turkish secular

nationalism would shape the region just as much as pan-Arabism in the next 100 years.

Second, though he understood Islam well, Sykes and his generation saw it as entirely secondary to ethnicity, language and political tradition.

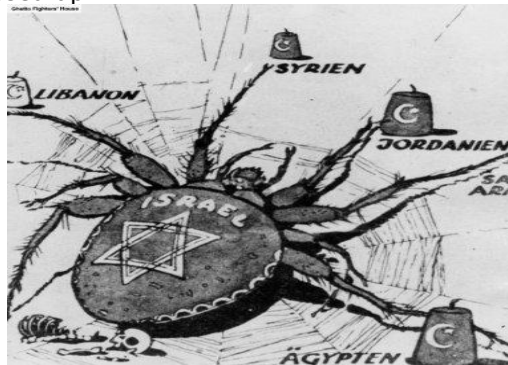
Third, they failed to anticipate the emergence of anti-imperialism: once "very poor men" got educated, and were drawn into cities and factories, it was they who began shaping history and the white officer class who had to stand and watch.

Fourth, they failed to imagine that, one year after Sykes-Picot, a workers' revolution in Russia, spreading to the Caucasus, would free large parts of the exotic and remote world they had become obsessed with – not just from imperialism but from capitalism itself.

Today, the easy lesson to learn from Sykes-Picot: don't draw arbitrary lines across the map. Peoples and nations must have the right to self-determination. This was the principle US President Woodrow Wilson outlined as America entered the war, and which caused the British and French governments to hide the existence of Sykes' map from Washington.

The harder lesson to learn is: never rely on national stereotypes; never reduce the conflicts of the world to ethnicity alone. There are also class, gender, religion, politics and history – attributes Sykes discounted as he tried to predict how the sub-groups of the Middle East would react to British policy.

The final lesson is: accept responsibility. The Sykes-Picot agreement was conceived in the same room David Cameron's cabinet sits in now. The passage of time should not absolve us from engaging with the situations we messed up.



<http://www.newstatesman.com/world/middleeast/2016/05/paul-mason-sykes-picot-how-arbitrary-set-borders-created-modern-middle>

From the Archive:

Robert Fisk: *Were it not for the French, Hezbollah would all be Syrians fighting on their own government's side inside their own country*

And you thought the Middle East was a difficult place to understand.

Try living here

[Robert Fisk @indyvoices](#) Monday 3 March 2014

Borders are becoming a bit odd in the Middle East. They always have been, of course. Ever since Mark Sykes and François Georges Picot – the latter a former French consul in Beirut, by the way, who cost a lot of brave Lebanese their lives by his carelessness in sealing their anti-Ottoman letters behind an embassy wall – divvied up the Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, etc, one lot of Arabs (or their grandchildren) found themselves living as hated refugees not many miles from their original homes, cursed and spat at and sometimes killed by

another lot of Arabs who turned out to be – much to their own surprise, in some cases – Lebanese or Syrians.

Then we come to the question of a state called Israel which exists in a land that was called Palestine, 22 per cent of which – and the percentage is growing smaller by the day – is supposed to be called "Palestine". Well, maybe.

Which brings me to the point. For last week, the Strategic Affairs Minister – is there any other nation on earth which has such a ministry, I ask myself? – of

Israel, warned Lebanon that it must prevent Hezbollah (Iranian-armed, Syrian-supported, you know the usual and true clichés) from attacking Israel in reprisal for Israel's attack on a weapons convoy – an attack which, as is often the case, Israel didn't actually admit to having carried out.

So let's get this straight. And I start with a weird quotation from the Reuters news agency. "Israel warned Lebanon Friday to prevent a Hezbollah [sic] retaliation for an alleged [sic] Israeli air strike on a site used by the party on [sic] the Syrian border." What? Reuters editors had hit a factual problem, of course. The Israelis didn't actually admit that they had bombed the weapons inside Lebanon, so the agency had to fudge the strike which Israel had not admitted to staging – Israel's confirmation being needed for any statement of fact in the Middle East – while at the same time referring to the air strike which hundreds of Lebanese in the Bekaa Valley had actually witnessed as "alleged". Oddly, even Hezbollah didn't admit this in the beginning. No problem, I suppose, if the air raid had been staged inside the Syrian border – like another three such attacks, also unconfirmed by the Israelis.

But let's get back to Yuval Steinitz – the aforesaid Israeli minister – who claimed that "it is self-evident that we see Lebanon as responsible for any attack on Israel from the territory of Lebanon". Israel, according to the same Reuters report, has promised to destroy "thousands" of residential buildings that it claims Hezbollah uses as bases. This is even more odd. For many years – and I have been a witness to five of these wars, although Israel claims only to have fought three of them – I have seen thousands and thousands of "residential" buildings blown to bits by Israel which were not Hezbollah bases. So is Mr Steinitz actually being more restrained than his predecessors? Is he saying that Israel may attack only those residential buildings that Hezbollah is using – and not any other residential buildings that may be in the area? If, of course, Hezbollah retaliates for the Israeli air raid that may – or may not – have happened? And just to finish with the crazed editors at Reuters, the agency report has one more wonderful line which I must share with you. "Israel is technically at war with Lebanon and Syria." Well, blow me down!



A picture taken from the Lebanese village of Adaysseh shows Israeli soldiers patrolling along the Israeli-Lebanese border on January 20, 2014. (Getty ImageS)

So back to borders. There were, many decades ago, several villages in Lebanon which the French handed over to the Brits – when the Brits ran "Palestine" and the French controlled Lebanon and Syria (Lebanon being a part of Syria until the French chopped it off as a useful ally for future years). A lot of Lebanese, born into the Ottoman Empire, therefore woke up one morning and

found they were no longer Lebanese – but Palestinian. And when the Israelis arrived in Galilee and did a spot of ethnic cleansing (see the work of that fine Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, among others), some of these former Lebanese – but now Palestinian – folk were murdered. The rest were thrown out of Israel (formerly Palestine) and into Lebanon – where most of them were born – as refugee Palestinians. A few years ago, they were actually given Lebanese passports – so they knew at last that they were no longer Palestinians.

There can't be many still alive, although – if they had driven a few miles north of their present homes in Lebanon last week – they might have witnessed the air raid on Lebanon which was only "alleged" to have happened, thus observing an attack by a country which expelled them from "Palestine" to a country they had actually been born in, an air assault which may not have actually happened because the country they were not born in did not claim that it had actually attacked the country of which they are now (again) citizens.

And you, Readers, thought the Middle East was a difficult place to understand. Try living here.

Well, let's get back to Syria for a moment. As you know, there's been a civil war going on there for more than two years. Hezbollah is fighting on the side of Bashar al-Assad's government – a heinous offence in the eyes of the Western governments which allowed France to chop Lebanon off from Syria after the First World War. Had the French not done so, of course, Hezbollah would all be Syrians fighting on their own government's side inside their own country and would thus not have offended us by crossing the border which we Westerners created against the wishes of their grandfathers. And in which case, the Israelis would not have to warn Lebanon about Hezbollah reprisals for an air raid which might – or might not – have been made on Lebanon by Israel but which would – if we hadn't created Lebanon – have been the fourth attack of its kind by Israel on Syria, always supposing that Israel "acknowledged" that it had attacked Syria in the first place.

Over to you, folks!

The good guys and the bad guys are interchangeable Dictators go on forever. Let's start with Abdelaziz Bouteflika who plans to stand for his fourth presidency of Algeria. Jolly good, too. The latest edition of *Jeune Afrique* – which you absolutely must read if you want to understand the Maghreb – carries a fascinating interview with a much younger man who calls himself "Nabil", who was, so he says, a member of the revolutionary Islamists who fought the regime during the 1990s war.

Under a government amnesty, he ate "couscous" with his intelligence officer enemies, persuaded his former comrades to surrender – but then discovered that some of them were billionaires.

Funny how wars end with the good guys becoming the bad guys (or vice-versa, depending on your point of view).

"Nabil", I have to add, ended his struggle with "empty pockets".

Bouteflika, they say in Algiers, doesn't know which day of the week it is. Which would you prefer?

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/robert-fisk-were-it-not-for-the-french-hezbollah-would-all-be-syrians-fighting-on-their-own-9163596.html>