



**Religious minorities in the Arab world between terrorism and crises of
fragile States:
Observation and Analysis**

By Hani Nesira

Introduction:

Religious minorities have been the first victim of terror outbreak and religious extremism characterizing the post Arab revolutions chaos. As a result of the predominance of a rule of the majority spirit and the absence of a citizenship culture, they have been the target of ideological mobilization that rejects their rights and choices. Close allies of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood have described the 19 March 2011 referendum as "the ballot box conquest" and considered the vote in favour of the constitution as pro-Sharia for the Christian minority disapproved proposed amendments. It is worth mentioning that most civil and revolutionary forces also rejected the amendments in question.

In the context of the crisis that hits failed or fragile States, organizations like ISIL, *Ansar al-Sharia*, as well as other extremist militias emerge. Consequently, crimes against minorities and civilians increase. The alternative concept of fragile States, which replaces that of failed States, points out the extent to which some States have been unable to carry out their core functions, to control their territory, and to face new and various challenges.

Since 2008, theorists of Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups have been talking about a "management of savagery strategy", which was elaborated in a book of Abu Bakr Naji (the Egyptian Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah) entitled *Management of Savagery*. The book discusses the need for terrorism to seek safe havens where it can establish its ideal government: the religious emirate. To this end, it continuously targets regimes and countries it considers as enemies. If its strategy achieves its goals, as it was the case with the victory of ISIL in 9 and 10 June 2014 in Iraq, its first victims will be religious minorities as well as intellectuals and political opponents.

Needless to recall that the claims of extremists are contrary to the Islamic heritage of tolerance. It may be noted in this regard that Christians and Jews had senior



positions in the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphate. Indeed, Mansour Ibn Sergius (St. John of Damascus who died in 97 AH) was responsible for Treasury and Finance under the rule of some of the Umayyad caliphs before his ordination, his father also had the same responsibilities under the reign of the first Umayyad caliph Muawiyah. Overall, Christians and Jews had been held close to the caliphs and rulers in the first and second Abbasid eras. Patriarch Timothy I was close to the Caliphs al-Mahdi, al-Hadi and to the son of the latter, Harun al-Rashid. In Egypt, some of them had ministry positions under the Fatimid, Ikhshidid and Mamluk periods. They also took over as administrators and prime ministers during the reign of the Muhammad Ali dynasty since the mid-nineteenth century.

Largely speaking, minorities as well as Arab peoples in general have fundamentally suffered authoritarian extremism with both its religious and political dimensions. Thus, they have suffered all along the Ottoman Empire during which they began to immigrate, firstly to Latin America, then within the region itself, to Egypt specifically. They also endured hard times after its resounding collapse in 1924 because of the rise of Islamist political movements demanding the return of the Caliphate, such as the Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1928 and the *Islamic Liberation Party (Hizb ut-Tahrir)* founded in 1953.

Those religious parties strengthened and extended their influence at the expense of civil and progressive movements. They gave rise afterwards to jihadist groups that have been acting for the purpose of empowering discrimination on religious and intellectual bases. Therefore, Jihadist parties used the minorities' card as weapon in their conflict with ruling authorities as we have seen during their struggle against the regime of Mubarak. At that time, Copts have been the target of systematic attacks carried out by extremist groups throughout the nineties, especially by *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* (literally *the Islamic Group*) before it launched a review of its policies in 1977. By acting this way, this group intended to force the regime to bow to its demands, especially in the governorates of Minya, Asyut, Sohag and Qena in Upper Egypt where it has gone as far as to impose Sharia punishments to some Copts in al-Rahman mosque in Minya. Furthermore, it has hung victims' heads to lighting poles after the killings happened between 1992 and 1994 in Abu Qurqas in the governorate of Minya. The number of Copts that have been killed only during this period reached more than a hundred persons



in separate incidents¹. It seems pertinent to recall also that Al-Qaeda cells in Tunisia targeted firstly Jewish places of worship in 2005.

This report cites several examples of such violent strategy, especially with the rise of ISIL in Iraq and Syria, and the progress achieved by Islamists who took power in the context of the Arab spring, which some observers described as an Islamist spring and a Christian winter!

The following issues will be addressed throughout the report:

1. Internal and external Christian's migration.
2. Major sectarian incidents in the countries that witnessed the Arab revolutions.
3. The most important crises characterizing fragile states and the chaos affecting societies as a whole.
4. An interpretation of ISIL breakthrough in Syria and Iraq.
5. An attempt to explain the real reasons of these crises and some potential solutions to them.

Migration of Christian religious minorities:

During the last decade, 2 million Christians preferred to emigrate from the Middle East. Western estimates point out the decline of Christian's percentage in the Arab world to 5% today compared to 20% at the beginning of the last century.

The estimated number of Christians in the Arab world was about 15 million people in 2000 (excluding South Sudan after its independence) according to the Immigration Department in the US State Department whereas the American website "Factbook" talks about only 10 million in total.

The Christian minority entered a new discrimination phase since the assault of the *Lady of Annunciation* Church, which spoiled the joy of the Christmas Eve in November 2010 in Baghdad the Iraqi capital. Indeed, while the faithful were praying, gunmen affiliated with Al-Qaeda stormed the Church, killed fifty of them, wounded at least 150, and took a number of hostages. They also declared in a statement that their next target would be Egyptian Copts because of religious conversion incidents raised at that time. The extremists managed to keep their

¹ See Al-AWA Salma, 2007. مكتبة الشروق الدولية سنة 2007. ط. الجماعة الإسلامية المسلحة في مصر، ط.



promise and assaulted the *Church of Saints* the first of January 2011, killing 21 people and injuring 79. The Crisis has been escalating over the last three years, which led to the emigration of one hundred thousand Christians from March to November 2011, according to the Egyptian Coptic activist Naguib Gabriel and to the legal adviser to the Pope. The number of those who left the country during one month and a half after the election of ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi reached one hundred thousand persons as well, according to the US diplomat Dennis Ross who referred to data provided by Egyptian Coptic organizations.

Sectarian incidents in Egypt after 2011

The following table shows the most prominent sectarian incidents throughout the transitional phase in Egypt:

The date	The incident	Description	Death toll	Injured
January 29, 2011	First Rafah incident	St. George Church and the Holy Family in Rafah have been the target of armed attacks, in addition to acts of looting and burning by masked persons.	No accurate statistics. Unknown number.	Completely destroyed church.
March 4, 2011	Soul church, Gizah province.	Disagreements between two families, one Christian and the other Muslim about a romance between their children turned into sectarian violence and attacks on Copts homes. Church of St. George and Church St. Mina also attacked.		
February 14, 2011	Incident of Bishoy monastery in <i>Wadi Natrun</i>	Clashes between military forces and monks, as well as a number of Christians who were there. Monastery wall destroyed.	One Christian victim.	7 Christians injured
March 8, 2011	Manshiyat Nasser incident in Cairo	Violent clashes between hundreds of Muslims and Coptic protesters	15 killed (10 Christians, 5 Muslims)	114 injured



From 5 to 25 March 2011	First Maspero sit-in	Christian demonstrations in front of the television building in order to put pressure on authorities to release Christian prisoners.	No victims	16 Christians injured. 11 arrested.
March 22, 2011	The ear of a Christian man has been cut	A presumably Salafi group attacked a Christian citizen and cut off his ear on the pretext of committing immoral acts.	No victims	No injured
April 19	Abu Qerqass sectarian incidents, al-Menia province.	A quarrel between Muslims and Christians in which firearms were used because of a dispute over an artificial bump. relatives of the Muslim victims burned 10 houses and shops owned by Christians.	2 Muslims killed	4 Muslims injured
May 6 &7, 2011	Imbaba incidents	Thousands of Islamists tried to storm Saint George's Church on the pretext that a Christian woman converted to Islam and married to a Muslim was inside. Violent clashes broke out.	No accurate statistics	22 persons arrested. 15 Muslims, 7 Christians
May 8, 2011	Second Maspero sit-in	Following attacks on a church in Imbaba, some Copts held a sit-in in front of the TV building to demand the arrest and the prosecution of perpetrators, as well as the opening of closed churches.	No victims	74 injured, 48 detainees, all of them Christians.
September 20, 2011	Burning and demolishing al-Marenab church in Aswan	Some parts of Mar Gerges Church in the village of al-Marenab (Aswan province) have been burned and demolished	No victims	No injured
October 4-9, 2011	Maspero incident	Thousands of demonstrators gathered in front of the Supreme Court in an attempt to pressure the government to rebuild al-Marenab Church. Violent clashes between the army and demonstrators.	24 killed	329 injured. 28 arrested (25



				Christians, 3 Muslims)
February 13, 2012	Displacement of Christian families from Ameriyah in Alexandria province.	A rumor spread in the village that a young Christian has been circulating his pictures with a Muslim woman. Despite the fact that the young man turned himself in to the police, and the fact that the prosecutor decided to hold him in custody pending investigations, dozens of angry young people asked him and his family to leave the village immediately.	No victims	No injured
August 1 st , 2012	Displacement of Dashur's Copts (Gizah province)	Dahshur events known as the "shirt incident" started because of a fight between a young Muslim and a Christian man in charge of ironing his clothes. The Christian burned a shirt while doing his task and clashes took place between the two families. Muslims of Dahshur attacked Copts stores.	1 Muslim killed	No injured
September 28, 2012	Displacement of Copts from Rafah	10 Christian families living in Rafah have been displaced. A Christian shopkeeper attacked by unidentified gunmen. Christians received a warning from unknown persons to leave the town.	No victims	No injured
February 16, 2013	Clashes between Muslims and Christians in Faiyum province.	Security services in Faiyum managed to control disagreement between Muslims and Copts because of a church expansion.	No victims	No injured



April 6, 2013	Qalioubiya incidents	Qalubia deadly clashes erupted between a group of Muslim and Christian teenagers after the latter allegedly painted offensive drawings on the gates of an Azhar Institute. The situation evolved into a gun battle.	7 killed	21 injured
April 7, 2013	Cathedral incidents in Cairo	Funeral of Qalioubiya victims	2 killed	89 injured
May 8, 2013	Religion defamation incident in Luxor city.	A Christian teacher has been accused of contempt of Islam and of insulting the Prophet Muhammad, as well as of the practice of proselytizing among students of Sheikh Sultan elementary school south of Luxor. Prosecutor ordered to keep her 15 days in custody.	No victims	No injured
May 10, 2013	Coptic tailor killed in Minya	A Tailor was shot dead during an altercation between him and a farmer in the village of Al Barsha because of a dispute over the price of tailoring.	1 person killed	No injured
May 11, 2013	A Coptic man stabbed his Muslim wife	A Coptic man has stabbed his Muslim wife while she was trying to see her son in front of his school in Assyut.	No victims	1 person injured



May 11, 2013	A quarrel between two families because of a girl	A quarrel between two families, one Muslim and the other Christian, erupted in the village of Ismailia in Minya after a young Coptic tried to seduce a Muslim girl. The quarrel evolved into a shooting.	No victims	5 injured
August 3, 2013	A Quarrel turned into bloody incidents in the village of Bani Ahmed. Minya province.	An Altercation between citizens turned into clashes, and a rumor that Christians of Bani Ahmed village attacked Mosque spread. A pharmacy, a house, a truck, a trailer, a store of electric equipment, a shop of oils and lubricants, 4 other shops, a restaurant, 3 clothes and furniture shops, a photography studio, 1 taxi, 2 cars, have been totally or partially destroyed. 4 houses have been burned. Demonstrators threw burning tires at the charitable clinic of the village. On the other side of the village, the façade of a house and a shop has been smashed. Young protesters tried to break into the Apostolic Church, but some wise people in the village prevented them from doing so.	1 farmer killed	13 injured
August 12, 2013	Rabia sitters attack a Christian	A taxi driver filed a complaint to the police department of Nasr City against Mohamed Beltagy and Safwat Hijazi, accusing them of inciting Islamist sitters to attack him as he walked near the protest area. Protesters insulted the man, threw him outside the taxi and dragged him to the ground.	No victims	The taxi driver injured
August 15, 2013	Morsi supporters killed a Christian and abused the	The supporters of ousted president killed a Christian and abused the dead body after tying it to a tractor. Houses of 19 Copts, as well as the Church of Our Lady and Anba Abram Monastery have been	1 Christian killed	No injured



	<p>dead body. The also burned 19 houses in Dalga.</p>	<p>burned. Some contents of the monastery have been stolen.</p>		
<p>August 17, 2013</p>	<p>Clashes between Moris supporters and Copts in Faiyum</p>	<p>Clashes between ousted Morsi supporters and Copts in the surrounding area of a school, near the Holiness Revival Church. Heavy shooting has been heard in the neighborhood inhabited by large numbers of Copts.</p>	<p>No victims</p>	<p>No injured</p>
<p>August 29, 2013</p>	<p>2 houses burned in the village of Damshir</p>	<p>A group of Muslims burned 2 houses belonging to Copts after a rumor of a relationship between a young Christian and a Muslim girl. A number of Muslims gathered in front of the houses of Copts and threw bricks and Molotov cocktails against them.</p> <p>The security services managed to contain the situation and arrested a number of suspects in order to prevent renewed clashes between the two parties.</p>	<p>No victims</p>	<p>No injured</p>
<p>December 2, 2013</p>	<p>A love story between a Muslim girl and a Christian</p>	<p>The two lovers left the village of Deir Mawas in Minya province and went to Cairo. A rumor circulated that the Muslim girl was kidnapped and abused by the young man and his brother. A villager managed to bring her back to her family. Violent clashes erupted then between Muslims and Christians. Many houses and shops have been burned.</p>	<p>1 person killed</p>	<p>11 injured</p>
<p>December 5, 2013</p>	<p>Disagreement about an agricultural land, Minya province</p>	<p>The incidents occurred between 2 villages, <i>al-Hawartha</i> and <i>Nazlat Abid</i>, one Christian and the other Muslim, separating separated by a station of drinking water.</p> <p>Isaac Jacob decided to build a house in a field inherited by his wife in al-Hawartha</p>	<p>3 persons killed</p>	<p>26 injured</p>



		<p>village. A Muslim family living next to the land refused because they think it is not appropriate that a Christian builds his house in a Muslim village.</p> <p>Many people gathered beside each party and began exchanging gunfire. Mohamed Sabir Mohamed Shehata (25 years) was shot dead. Distress calls have been launched from the mosque microphone, claiming «Christians are killing Muslims».</p>		
July 23, 2014	Displacement of a Copt. Luxor	<p>The <i>Tod</i> Prosecutor General (Luxor province) decided to release Aziz Jaber Dryas (a carpenter) who has been accused of sexual harassment of a child aged 7. The coroner's analysis has shown the absence of any traces of abuse. However, the local committee of conciliation decided to transfer all the woodworking tools and household items to another Copt. The workshop has been closed and Jabir Aziz prevented from practicing his job.</p>		

There has been a shift, in the wake of ISIL victory, from the rule of political Islam to that of radical jihadist Islam which managed to take control of 35% of Syrian territory, and expanded significantly into Iraq, especially after it announced the Caliphate in 29 June. The new self-proclaimed State apparently attracted several other jihadist groups, and kept moving forward until it reached Iraqi Kurdistan region. Then, it was not particularly difficult for it to expel Peshmerga forces from Mount Sinjar and Zammar areas.

Syria between the hammer of Al-Assad regime and the anvil of ISIL

-An armed terrorist group kidnapped in 23 April 2013 Bishops Yohanna Ibrahim and Paul Yazigi, respective heads of the Syriac Orthodox sect and the Greek Orthodox Church in Aleppo while carrying out humanitarian mission in the village of Kafr Dael situated in Aleppo countryside.



-On 25 May 2014, the *Syrian League for the Defence of Human Rights* issued a statement confirming Father Paolo killing, according to a dissident source from the *Islamic State*. The *League* confirmed that one of the organization's leaders in *Raqqah* personally executed Father Paolo after two hours of detention in one of the *State* prisons within the Palace of the Governorate on 29 July 2013.

-In public statements dating from May 2013, the Greek Catholic Patriarch in Syria Gregory third reported that a thousand Syrian Christians have been killed in the current conflict in Syria, that at least 40 churches have been vandalized, and that at least three thousand hundreds Christians have emigrated.

Iraqi Christians: the worsening crisis and the ISIL phase

The number of Christians, according to the last 1997 census, have been as high as 1.3m. It has fallen currently (2014 statistics) to around 500,000, taking into account the absence of official statistics in this country. The rest emigrated out of Iraq because of the deteriorating security and economic situation, as well as their disappointment over the inaction of the current authorities to protect them, beside the lack of suitable living conditions that enable them to live in dignity. Nearly 900,000 Iraqi Christians -which represents two-thirds of their overall number- have emigrated after the US invasion within the framework of the migration of three million Iraqis following sectarian unrest. Today, there are no more than 50 churches across the country while there were 300 before 2003.

The Iraqi *Hammurabi Organization for Human Rights* has recorded 66 assault cases on churches and monasteries until 2012, as well as about 200 kidnappings. This figure does not represent more than 10% of cases experienced by Christians as the organization has not been able to register all of them for the abductees fear to provide data that may put their lives at risk. The organization also recorded more than 190 different attacks on Christian citizens.

In June, a major setback occurred when the so-called Islamic State succeeded in controlling Iraq's second largest provincial city of Mosul, following the withdrawal of Al-Maliki troops. The narrative at that point was that Iraqi forces abandoned ammunition and military equipment of six brigades throughout the provinces of Nineveh, Salahuddin and within Speicher base. ISIL's power became then equivalent to a State's power. Similarly, it became the richest terrorist organization in the world, with a budget of almost a half billion dollars according to some, while others speak of much more than that. A budget to which should be



added the seizure –by the terrorist organization- on 3 August 2014 of two oil fields located within the boundaries of Zammar region, 80 km northwest of Mosul, near the pipeline connecting Iraq to Turkey. ISIL militants had also taken control, after 10 June, of the *Ajil* oil and gas field, as well as *Qayara* field south of Mosul.

Despite this brutal expansion through the fragile structures of the regime led by Nouri Al-Maliki, the government resorted to conspiracy theories, laid charges against the opposition and sought to exclude both Sunni and Shia political opponents. In the wake of this big crisis, which has been described as a setback, the government remained almost trapped in Baghdad. Likewise, Al-Maliki tried to cling to the premiership despite the rejection of his political partners and several recommendations from Shiite religious authorities stressing the need for change.

Christians and Yazidis in Mosul

After ISIL seized control of Mosul, twenty-five thousand Christians have been forced to leave their homes, according to statements made by the Patriarch of the Chaldean in Iraq and the world Louis Sako. Mosul is the historical stronghold of Christians in Iraq. It includes 30 churches, some dating back more than 1500 years; it is also home to 100,000 Christians, according to a 2003 official census. Since the city was taken over by ISIL, the number of Christians living within shrank dramatically to 200 people.

Sunni Arabs make up the majority of the Mosul's population; they are concentrated in the city's eastern side (called the *Left Coast*) where the presence of Sunni Kurds is also significant. The largest Christian community in the country also live in Mosul and surrounding villages. There is equally a noticeable presence of Turkmens and Shiite Arabs in the town of *Tal Afar* in the north. Some sources indicate that the percentage of Christians in Nineveh is about 5%, that they live in *Tall Kayf*, *Sheikhan* and *Hamdania*, which constitute the *Nineveh Plain*. The estimated number of *Shabak* people in Mosul is about 400,000, whereas the proportion of Turkmens amounts to approximately 14%.

While some few Christian families managed to emigrate out of the country, the majority of Christians and Yazidis fled toward Dohuk and Erbil in the Iraqi Kurdistan region that have hosted hundreds of thousands of displaced people. The massive displacement movement had occurred after armed groups distributed a statement on 17 July leaving the Christians a few options. Indeed, they have been told either to convert to Islam, to pay *al Jizya* tax (an amount of \$ 250 per family



for those who would like to stay in the city), to leave without moving any of their belongings with them, or to face death. Afterwards, gunmen began distributing leaflets to Christian homes, wrote "Islamic State property" on their walls, and painted the Arabic letter "nun" ("N" in the western alphabet) on the doors. The letter "nun" stands for Nazarene, a reference to Christians being the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Gunmen burned Mosul's Syriac Catholic Diocese located in Al-Maydan area.

Yazidis in Mosul, or, dying of thirst

Yazidis are concentrated in the north and northwest of the country, particularly in the area around Mount Sinjar, west of Mosul province, in the district of Sheikhan, as well as in some villages of Tall kayf district, Bashiqa area, and Zakho, Smeal districts of Dohuk province. They are one of the oldest ethnic and religious groups in Iraq, and the origins of their religion date back to thousands of years in Mesopotamia.

Due to the absence of official statistics, we shall refer to informal estimates. In fact, Yazidis believe that their number in Iraq is higher than 560,000 people, and that they have become the second religious minority in Iraq after the Christian migrations.

They consider mentioning Yazidism in the Iraqi Constitution (Art.2, parag.2) as formal recognition of both their religion and their presence as a minority community, which was not the case in the past. In addition, the Yazidi endowments have been created in Baghdad in the framework of the Office of non-Muslim religions Endowments. Eventually, this community won also parliamentary representation, and for the first time, a Yazidi minister has been appointed in the Ayad Allawi's government (Dr. Mamo Farhan Osman Yezidi Minister for Civil Society).

When ISIL militias entered the town of Sinjar in northern Iraq, Yazidis living there fled to the neighbouring mountains for the sake of survival. They now need help, trapped in those isolated mountains without food or water, or medical care in an extremely hot summer weather.

The Islamic State fighters are Sunni Muslims. They have targeted Christians and other religious minorities, as well as Shiite Muslims. In a moving speech, the sole representative of the Yazidis in the Iraqi parliament Vian Dakhil, said hours after



Mosul's invasion, 70 children have died, women were being killed or sold into slavery, and more than 500 men have been slaughtered. In tears, she appealed to MPs assistance and warned that the so-called Islamic State was trying to exterminate her community. «There are several attempts to exterminate the Yazidi people», stated Mrs. Dakhil. In turn, UNICEF said the same things in its report on Tuesday 5 August and confirmed that 40 children died of hunger and thirst under ISIL bombardment while they were sheltering in Mount Sinjar. According to Iraqi and Kurdish sources, the number of people caught up in that area has reached 2000 Yezidi until 5 August.

Context of the crisis in the Arab world

I-Chaos and extremist organizations' rise

Since the events occurred during 2011 and the broken promises of Arab Spring revolutions, sectarian discrimination has been escalating in an unprecedented way, human rights violations and humanitarian challenges have increased too. Migration rates generally attained much higher levels in these countries. Many immigrants escaped from armed chaos that prevented, for instance, one million Libyans to return to their country after the 17 February 2011 revolution. In the specific case of Libya, some symbols of the revolution against Muammar Gaddafi's regime fled the country as well and were unable to return. In fact, systematic assassinations of political and security leaders abounded. In 2013 the number of assassinations was about 120 murders; in February 2014 fifty-two people have been murdered, most of them were security senior officers. Moreover, at least 200 people have been killed, thousands of families have been displaced during the Misrata fighting that lasted until 6 August 2014 and took place over three weeks in which pro-Islamist organizations tried to take control of Misrata city. Battles pitted *al-Saiqa* and *al-Qaqaa* Brigades against the *Dignity Movement* led by retired General Khalifa Haftar. After meeting in Tobruk, the new Libyan Parliament demanded a cease-fire between the various parties involved in the conflict under the auspices of the United Nations. The leader of the *Dignity Movement* approved the decision, however the Islamist militia rejected it categorically.

Libya is still suffering from the obsessive tendency to dominate which characterizes the Islamists and their militias. Indeed, those groups announced the



establishment of a religious *Emirate* in Benghazi in the first of August 2014. Some of them have even refused to recognize the elected parliament that was welcomed by regional and international powers.

Many of the Arab countries have suffered from the same turmoil, especially in the first wave of revolutions between January 2011 and June 2013. After the departure of Mubarak, March 2011 saw three big sectarian events, some of which were totally unprecedented. They are respectively: at first, the demolition of the *Sol* Church in Giza Governorate on 9 March 2011, then, the killings, destruction and vandalism acts on the basis of sectarian discrimination occurred in Mokattam on 11 March 2011, and finally, the mishap of a Coptic man accused of running immoral business whose ear has been cut in Qena province in 24 March. By mid-April, demonstrations broke out in the same province (Qena) to protest against the appointment of a new Christian prefect of the Upper Egypt governorate. In the end, the protest movement forced the interim government and the *Supreme Council of the Armed Forces* to respond to the demonstrators' demands.

On 8 May 2011, the *Imbaba* horrific events took place in the Church of Saint Mina, which resulted in a large number of deaths and dozens of wounded. One of the outcomes of that climate was the feeling of resentment many Copts had towards their condition, as reflected in some of their rallying cries following the events: "Oh! Mubarak where are you, there are Salafis between us and you", "Let him steal us, we want nothing but safety" in front of the Supreme Court and the *Tahrir Square* and *Maspero*. Some interpret this position by saying that «the Egyptian Church was the subject of special and unique attention by Mubarak and his clique, Egyptian officials were quick to show all sorts of affection and love for Pope Shenouda and his followers». Some others explain it by reference to the growing concerns and threats Copts feel towards the rise of political Islam and its hold on the political life as a whole². Other explanations evoke the role of foreign countries and Israel in sectarian violence, as well as the role of Arab countries seeking to thwart the revolution. A large number of Egyptian elite hold former regime loyalists responsible for the events and stress that sectarianism in Egypt is a product of the Mubarak regime. Some Islamists believe that the inexperienced Coptic media in Egypt – after some Coptic businessmen became owners of newspapers and TV stations- were behind the sectarian tensions³.

² See NESIRA Hani, 2011 منشور في مركز الجزيرة للدراسات- قناة الجزيرة في 23 يوليو 2011. الطائفية قبل وبعد الثورة المصرية، منشور في مركز الجزيرة للدراسات- قناة الجزيرة في 23 يوليو 2011.

³ Ibid.



In the wake of the 19 March 2011 referendum (*ballot boxes conquest* as Islamist parties called it), some Islamist factions demanded explicitly that Christians leave the country if they were not satisfied with the election results decided by the Muslim majority. When the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt, they did not notice in the late November, while signing the 2012 Constitution, that the representatives of the three Egyptian Churches had refused a significant part of the Constituent Assembly discussions. Ousted president himself has overlooked Christians' demands, which they wrote in a well-known joint statement. He has also overlooked the wrath of the Patriarchate and the Churches Representatives after extremists of his brotherhood broke into the big Coptic Cathedral in December during the funeral of deceased persons.

Islamists came to power in Libya and Tunisia. Therefore, jihadi militias have become more active thanks to the newly acquired freedom of movement, their violent rhetoric have escalated towards minorities as well. Eventually, religious and sectarian discrimination dominated the overall climate throughout the Arab revolutions countries. The situation is still the same in Libya. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood phase ended after they have been thrown out of power on 30 June 2013 following mega-demonstrations backed by the army, which refused to shed the blood of its people, and delegitimized the rule of Islamist President Mohammad Morsi. In turn, Tunisia witnessed a smooth removal of the Islamists, for the religious party Ennahda gave up power in October 2013. Nevertheless, the terrorist militia hotbeds that have been active all along the previous period, are still active in mountainous areas like the Egypt' Sinai and Mount Chaambi in Tunisia.

Libya's model: a militia State

Libyan people are suffering from the tyranny of armed militias that have recently won the battle for Tripoli last August. Many of those killed over the battle were Egyptian since they constitute the largest foreign community in Libya (70% of expatriate workers in Libya). They have been targeted primarily on sectarian and religious basis during a dramatic context where the whole country turned into a scene of kidnappings that included several local and foreign activists, as well as military and security officers and journalists from various intellectual backgrounds. Similarly, seven Egyptian Christians have been shot dead on 25



February 2014, which has been preceded by another incident motivated by religious identity last year.

Diplomatic missions have been among the most affected by the deteriorating security situation prevailing in the country in spite of the arsenal of international laws and norms that were supposed to protect diplomats from warlords' oppression. Thus, many of them in addition to UN organizations, have left Tripoli in the last week of July after the city has been taken over by jihadist militia. The United States Mission has been among the first to have left Libya.

Hereafter are the most prominent incidents that have occurred in this context.

June 2012: Armed Jihadists attacked the Tunisian consulate in Benghazi in protest against an exhibition of paintings held in *Abdellia* Palace in Tunis. The attackers considered the paintings offensive to Islamic beliefs; their assault did not result in any casualties.

August 2012: Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi threatened to slaughter Burma ambassador to Libya during demonstrations in support of Muslims in Burma. Protesters condemned injustices Muslims were suffering in that country, and a spokesman for Ansar al-Sharia said the group would slaughter the Burmese ambassador if the genocide against Muslims did not stop.

September 2012: In Benghazi, killing of the US ambassador to Libya John Christopher Stevens with three of his staff in an attack on the US Consulate carried out by gunmen in protest against an American film they considered offensive to Islam. At the time, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula issued a statement in which it announced that the attack was in retaliation for the killing of Sheikh Abu Yahya al-Libi, one of its leaders in an air strike drone in June 2012.

January 2014: In the capital Tripoli, kidnapping of the diplomat Han Seo-Woo, head of South Korea's trade mission in Libya by unidentified assailants who wanted to get a ransom in exchange for his release. The hostage has been liberated after a full week of negotiation.

January 2014: In Tripoli, kidnapping of five Egyptian officials at the Egyptian Embassy, including the cultural attaché and the administrative attaché. The abduction was in retaliation for the arrest -by the Egyptian authorities- of former leader of *Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room*, Shaban Hadia nicknamed "Abu Ubaidah al Zawi", accused of bombing the Cairo Security Directorate



building. Egyptian diplomats have been freed after difficult negotiations with the kidnappers, which resulted in the release of Abu Ubaidah al Zawi.

March 2014: Tunisian authorities announced that a Tunisian diplomat – Mohamed Sheikh Rouhou- has been kidnapped in Libya. His car has been found empty in Tripoli.

April 2014: Libyan Foreign Ministry announced the kidnapping of the Jordanian ambassador to Libya by an armed group. A ministry spokesman told AFP that unknown gunmen abducted the Jordanian ambassador in Tripoli Fawaz al-Eitan. He specified that unidentified masked gunmen, driving two cars without plates, attacked ambassador Fawaz al-Eitan and his driver, and took the ambassador to an unknown place. He added that the driver was wounded by two bullets and was in hospital in Tripoli for treatment.

II-Syrian Revolution and the survival of Assad’s regime:

The Arab Spring stopped at the door of the Baathist regime in Syria, which did not accept to relinquish its hold on power in favour of the people. Assad hangs on to office despite the killing of 200,000 Syrians and the displacement of 9 million out of the country until early 2014. He assassinated the pacifist and civil character of the uprising born from the innocence of Daraa children in March 2011. Then, he managed to militarise the revolution by using bloody violence, which resulted in the spread of sectarian tensions throughout the region.

Assad’s death machine was unprecedented, especially after he used internationally banned chemical weapons against his opponents. Geneva 2 Conference has consequently decided to remove those weapons. The process is currently underway, yet, until the eight of August, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons succeeded in destroying nearly 75% of Assad’s chemical arsenal. In addition to the use of such weapons against his own people, Bashar al-Assad bombs civilian demonstrators and took advantage of sectarian militia that came from Lebanon and Iraq to support him. In the end, the revolution has been militarized on account of three main factors:

1-Government and Army dissidents:

It is a movement initiated by the late Hussein Harmoush in July 2011. Several factions united over time into what is known as the *Free Army*.



2-Sunni Jihadism:

Owing to the regime's practices and to the existence of Shiite militia among its allies, Sunni jihadist groups joined the revolution. The first to come were *al-Nosra Front* and some other Islamist factions. The *Islamic State* arrived afterwards. It controls presently more than 35% of the Syrian territory.

3-The resignation of political solution in Syria:

The political solution has resigned early in Syria. Probably before the resignation of United Nations envoy Kofi Annan on 2 August 2012 and that, long-delayed, of Lakhdar Brahimi on 13 May 2014. Meanwhile, the Syrian tragedy has continued and spread until the country turned into a safe haven for terrorism. ISIL has therefore ensured its survival and has gone as far as to call on al-Qaeda to swear allegiance to it. Bashar al-Assad also ensured a pretext to remain in power through the spectre of terrorism, which has become a horrific reality that is likely to destroy everyone. Thus, the survival of Assad tyranny has become practically linked to the existence of terrorist organizations and vice versa. As to the Syrian people, their hopes are linked to the end of the tragedy, which means the disappearance of both (the regime and ISIL).

The political solution has resigned after Assad's regime managed to procrastinate despite regional and international mediation efforts. It also succeeded in pushing the revolution towards militarization by refusing dialogue with the opposition during several months. In those circumstances, military dissidents that have joined defenceless people, formed the first *Free Army* groups in November 2011. The Free Army has been led to sectarian conflict against pro-regime militia that came before, such as Hezbollah, Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigade, as well as the Afghani Shiite fighters named Hazara. It is the Assad regime death machine that produced monsters like the Islamic State and other jihadist groups. Both are actually fighting the revolution. This is how rebels found themselves caught between the hammer and the anvil.

III-The crisis of fragile regimes and States:

The repercussions of the Syrian revolution did not stop at the borders of Syria. They have grown in magnitude and ended up being an additional factor of sectarian tensions in neighbouring Lebanon, where repeated sectarian clashes in the city of Tripoli have been intensifying until the adoption of the security plan in



April 2014. Repeated reprisals against Hezbollah intervention in Syria took place in its stronghold in Beirut's southern suburbs. The village of Aarsal located near the Syrian borders became an area of constant tension. The effects of such a situation have affected the Lebanese army after it arrested Abu Ahmed Jomaa, one of the leaders of *al-Nusra Front* in August 2014. Several clashes occurred following this incident between the army and Islamist fighters who managed to capture a number of soldiers. The truce set up by some Sunni clerics between the two parties, (the clerics are members of the *Association of Muslim Scholars*) is until today, 8 August, trying to last.

In Iraq, al-Maliki government, allied to Iran and Bashar al-Assad regime, has followed sectarian policies based on discrimination against citizens of the Sunni provinces in northern and central Iraq. The situation have started to escalate since 21 December 2012 when gunmen affiliated with al-Maliki arrested some bodyguards of the Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi. Then, people of Anbar rose up to protest against what happened and to condemn the Prime Minister policies targeting Sunni notables of the country. They carried out a peaceful sit-in in the city of Ramadi, which al-Maliki troops broke up in 30 December, killing at least 10 people. As expected, ISIL exploited the incident. In an audio recording, Abu Mohammed Al-Adnani addressed on 31 January 2013 Sunni tribes asking them to carry arms and defend their rights against al-Maliki violations.

The Islamic State exploited to the full the popular resentment over al-Maliki sectarian performance during his two terms. Indeed, the terrorist organization knew political opponents of the Prime Minister were not the only ones to feel outrage against the government. Because close partners as the Shiite *National Alliance* also reiterated –several months before the Mosul invasion in June 2014- their rejection of al-Maliki inauguration for a third term.

In Yemen, the activity of the Iranian-backed Houthis has intensified since the group succeeded in expanding the territory it dominates (in addition to its stronghold Saada, it have seized control of the province of Imran). While Houthi fighters were the less powerful and the most vulnerable during their six previous wars (2004-2010), the beginning of 2014 constituted a turning point for them as they took over in 12 January 2014 the town of Dammaj, the stronghold of their Salafi traditional enemy. Thousands of families have been displaced in the capital Sanaa as a result of this operation. The actual influence of the Houthis has expanded over the past few months, causing a shift in the power balance within the traditional tribal structures of Yemeni society. On 8 July Houthis seized



control of the Amran province⁴ which is adjacent to the capital. It is worth to mention that Houthis are operating in the north, while *al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula* and its branches operate in Abyan and Aden in the south, which makes Yemen one of the most fragile regimes in the region.

Hotbeds of savagery and terror:

The term "Management of Savagery" belongs to the register used by the second generation of al-Qaida. It refers to a concept that has been created by one of the terrorist organization ideologists, Abu Bakr Naji (who is likely to be the Egyptian Mohamed Khalil Hakaymah, murdered in 2008) in a booklet of the same title, as a new strategy for al-Qaeda and its branches. In summary, this strategy focuses on the pursuit of appropriate environments such as absolute chaos or failed political regimes in order to create safe havens where the jihadists could establish their caliphate, through waging a war of attrition against existing States.

It seems that Mohammed Khalil Hakaymah whose ideological heritage has not been acknowledged neither by al-Zawahiri nor by Bin Laden, was rather closer to al-Zarqawi (killed in 2006), and thus closer to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the current presumed Caliph and former leader of *Ansar al-Sunna Army*). The Caliph swore allegiance to al-Zarqawi in 2006. He has been acting under the banner of al-Zarqawi and was responsible for the *Sharia Committee* in the *Islamic State of Iraq*, which is an organization that has been defeated by the tribal *Anbar Awakening* movement (*Sahawat al-Anbar*) in 2007. Al-Qaeda has been deadlocked in a hopeless situation until it found its paradise thanks to new areas of free movement provided by the Syrian crisis. On Syrian territory, jihadist militants appeared in late November 2011 through *al-Nosra Front*, which was affiliated with al-Qaeda in Iraq, the latter having changed its name in October 2013. Al-Maliki discriminatory policies made him lose Sunni tribes, and ended the role of the *Sahawat* movement, which served as a bulwark against al Qaeda and its offshoots.

ISIL and Savagery: an increasingly dangerous situation:

The region has reached savagery phase because of the weakness characterizing political regimes ruined by terrorist organizations. The current situation is also a

⁴ "Houthis take control of Imran and military aircraft launched raids", Deutsche Welle, 08/07/2014.



result of the fragility of some States, which have followed policies based on sectarian discrimination and have not managed to implement good governance principles. They have failed, actually, to embody a democratic approach in ruling their societies and dealing with all their components. Furthermore, the US and the International Community have shown confusion and hesitation over the Syrian crisis, contrary to Russia and China, which used repeatedly their veto power and thwarted all attempts to take deterrent action against the Assad regime that has exceeded red lines. Counting on the firmness of the Russian and Chinese position, the Assad regime counteracted several initiatives for political solution until all international mediators resigned in view of an impossible mission. Eventually, under the Assad era, Syria turned into a *savagery* space after having been a republic of fear before the revolution. It constitutes today a safe haven for terrorist organizations living side by side with the regime in a sort of undeclared truce, where each one benefits from the survival of the other.

At first, the regime committed atrocities and brought jihadist militia to support it. This produced a proliferation of anti-jihadist groups, among which ISIL was the most prominent. The so-called Islamic State did not fight Assad but fought the revolution, because it wants a caliphate, not a modern State. However, Assad succeeded in raising the specter of terrorism even before it became a real fact. The jihadist organization, in turn, has strengthened its power and expanded its territory, which could result in a new wave of terrorism that does not threaten only Syria and neighbouring countries but the region and the whole world. We are witnessing actually an unprecedented rise of extremism and terrorism in the Middle East and the world, which requires from all parties to fulfil their obligations in order to stop the outsourcing of funds and weapons, as well as to protect all citizens including religious minorities. It might be deduced from the latest US Administration's statement on 7 August 2014 that a possible intervention in Iraq would shortly take place.