



Why did Assad show a Christian Gospel film in Damascus back in 2009?

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Abstract

In March 2009, Syria's Assad decided to feature a Christian Gospel film in Damascus about the Biblical Apostle Paul. Moved by the film on Damascus's history and its centrality in Christianity, two years later when civil war broke out and Sunni Islamists in the anti-Assad rebel groups began to persecute Christians and other minorities, ironically it was Assad who stepped up to protect them. Now with NATO member Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia supporting the *Army of Conquest* and al-Qaeda affiliates that is threatening to topple Assad, Syrian Christians fear a stark future and possible extinction should Assad fall.

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Analysis

On Monday, 2 March 2009, an incredible event took place in Damascus.

Over 1,100 senior Syrian government officials, journalists, business leaders, and Muslim clerics watched the film “Damascus”¹ about the life of the biblical Apostle Paul.

Written, produced and directed entirely by Syrian Protestant Christians in cooperation with the mission groups *Agape* and *Campus Crusade for Christ*, the film was described as a “tool for evangelism”² which “clearly reflects the Gospel.”



Premiere of the Christian film “Damascus” at the Syrian Opera House on 2 March 2009

Joel Rosenberg, the film’s adviser and former communications strategist for PM Netanyahu and Natan Sharansky, said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had seen the film and was very moved. Years later in a church sermon, recounting how the event unfolded back in 2009, Rosenberg said Assad was so amazed at the history of Damascus and its centrality in Christianity, that he decided more Syrians should view the film and understand their own lineage.

Assad then proceeded to provide the facilities and funding, and premiered the film in the Damascus Opera House. The film was hosted and narrated by one of the most well-known Syrian TV newscasters to explain the historic events of Paul’s life in Damascus, which received coverage from a dozen television networks, street reviews, was advertised on huge billboards in public places viewed by at least one million people daily, that prompted Rosenberg to marvel “it’s almost unimaginable” that this took place in Syria, a predominantly Islamic country.

Writing then, two years before the Arab Spring erupted in 2011, Rosenberg made a prescient observation on the prophetic significance of the event and what would unfold years later as Syria descended into a bloody civil war.

“It is especially noteworthy given two Bible prophecies – one in Isaiah 17 and the other in Jeremiah 49 – that suggest the city of Damascus will be obliterated in what the Bible calls ‘last days’.”

Rosenberg continued³, “The Scriptures do not say exactly when or how the Syrian capital will be destroyed. But let us pray that the powerful message of Paul’s life and Jesus Christ’s love and forgiveness for all people is clearly communicated to every Syrian, particularly those in the capital.”

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ2tzEaDUi8>

² <http://www.worthynews.com/5704-over-thousand-muslim-clerics-watch-gospel-film-in-syria-investigation>

³ <http://www.levitt.com/news/2009/03/02/damascus-film-premiere-in-syria-on-monday-march-2/>



Now six years on, with the eruption of the scourge of ISIS as they advance towards Damascus and reports of their access to WMD⁴, Rosenberg's observation in 2009 does appear eerily prophetic.

Moreover, one ponders if the film has something to do with Assad's stance in protecting the Syrian Christians and minorities from Islamists and Salafi-jihadists in the Army of Conquest⁵ – in which al Qaeda's Nusra Front plays an indispensable role – and is ironically backed by western allies of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

On Thursday, their Nusra Front killed an additional 20 Druze villagers in Jabal al-Summaq and continues to target other Syrian religious and ethnic minorities of Christians, Alawites and Kurds, prompting fear that these Islamic extremists would take over if Assad were removed.

Lebanon's labor minister Sejean Azzi, a prominent Lebanese Christian politician long opposed to Assad, said "it is unfortunate that certain Arab countries try to convince the U.S. and the rest of the antiterrorist alliance to rehabilitate Nusra."

He warned that "this is a great error – we refuse the choice between ISIS and Nusra. We want to choose between democracy and dictatorship, not between terrorism and terrorism. If the Syrians have to choose between ISIS, Nusra or Assad, they will choose Assad."

Qatar even recently tried to repackage Nusra as a repentant terrorist group on *Al Jazeera*, featuring its leader Abu Muhammad al Jawlani sitting in a high-backed, throne like chair formerly occupied by Idlib's governor. Much like the big bad wolf dressed in grandmother's clothing attempting to deceive Little Red Riding Hood, Jawlani dressed in a plaid shirt with his face covered and proclaimed he wasn't targeting the West.

However, he revealed his claws and true nature when he refused to denounce al Qaeda and stated Alawites would only be spared if they convert to Nusra's version of Islam.

It is indeed a twist of irony that while NATO and the West profess to be arch defenders of the values of human rights, democracy, and rule of law, yet allows its own NATO member Turkey and so called "allies" of Qatar and Saudi Arabia to sponsor terrorists that violate those values with impunity on a daily basis.

Seeing the West's constant proclamations of moral outrage not backed by any action, Evelyn Finger⁶ from the German weekly newspaper *DIE ZEIT* rightly decried the West "should spare our public outrage, because moral outrage without the intention of taking moral action is hypocrisy."

And as the West continues to corrode its moral legitimacy by being unequally yoked with repackaged terrorists and big bad wolves, Assad and Syrian Christians may now need to look east for deliverance from these Sunni Islamists – to the Chinese dragon and the Russian bear.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

⁴ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isiss-dirty-bomb-jihadists-have-seized-enough-radioactive-material-to-build-their-first-wmd-10309220.html>

⁵ http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/syrias-assad-nears-the-tipping-point/2015/06/04/ae9af080-0af4-11e5-95fd-d580f1c5d44e_story.html

⁶ <http://www.transatlanticacademy.org/node/817>



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