

# How Muslim Clerics Exploit the Spread of the Coronavirus

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The story is [here](#).

*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The devastating onslaught of the coronavirus is being exploited by Muslim clerics to instill fear in their followers and compel stricter religious observance. At the same time, parts of the Arab world are looking to Israel and the Jews to find a cure.*

*On hearing initial reports of the deadly spread of coronavirus in China, many in the Arab world rejoiced. Arab social media threads called the virus Allah's will to punish the Chinese for their cruel treatment of the Uighur Muslims of western China.*

*When the virus broke through China's borders and landed in Iran, the Arab world was even happier. Images of Iran's suffering as a result of coronavirus, and discussion of its rapid spread throughout the country, went viral on social media. Again, many Arabs claimed this was Allah's wrath, this time over Iran's heinous treatment of Sunni Muslims in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria.*

For many Sunnis, the Shi'a of Iran are a hereditary enemy. They are not even recognized, by many Sunnis, as true Muslims, but are regarded as Infidels and even, because they dare to claim to be Muslims, as the "worst of the Infidels." So of course there was initial delight among Sunnis, as long as the virus seemed contained, in the Middle East, to Iran.

*When the coronavirus first began infiltrating the wider Middle East after its initial outbreak in Iran, many in the Arab world thought it might be an Iranian conspiracy. Arab populations succumbed to widespread panic and fear. Governments throughout the region, scrambling to contain the virus, closed mosques and shut down most of society. Even Islam's holy cities of Mecca and Medina closed their sacred sites—the first time public prayer has ceased in those cities since the time of Muhammad.*

*It's hard to discern the current extent of coronavirus infection in these countries due to a lack of governmental transparency. Egypt and Jordan remain in complete denial about the threat of the virus, falsely telling their people and the world that they have yet to identify a single case.*

*The International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUM) released a religious edict forbidding Muslims from praying at mosques and calling on them to protect themselves from infection. The IUM urged Muslims to pray at home and stay away from holy sites.*

The IUM took a sensible step in forbidding Muslims from praying at mosques. Even more impressive was the step taken by the Saudi government, which shut down sacred sites in Mecca and Medina, including the Grand Mosque in Mecca, for the first time in history, and banned the entry of all foreign pilgrims. But not all clerics agree with the IUM or Saudi authorities. There are many clerics, and laymen, too, who continue to believe that far from being dangerous, praying in mosques can only win the favor of Allah, and while Believers are inside the mosques, the contagion will not spread.

*On social media, it appears that many [Arabs] are placing their hope on Israel and the Jews to find a cure or develop a vaccine for the virus. A survey was distributed among Arabs asking whether they would purchase a vaccine developed in Israel. Placing their health first, the majority answered in the affirmative.*

It is fascinating that Muslims who preach implacable hatred for Israel and the Jews at the same time display great faith in Israeli scientists; they expect nothing from their own modest or nonexistent scientific establishments; they are keenly aware of how many advances have come out of Israel in so many different areas, from irrigation and waste-water management and desalinization, to cypersecurity, drones, and anti-missile systems, to therapies and treatments for cancer, heart disease, MLS, and much more. Despite themselves, they cannot hide their awareness of Israel's accomplishments, even as they denounce the Jewish state. Neither the Arabs nor the Iranians would be surprised if a major advance against the coronavirus came out of Israel; they hate, but at the same time also respect the Jewish state.

When asked if they would use a vaccine developed in Israel, a majority of Arabs answered yes. That left a large minority who insisted that even if their lives were at stake, they would still not use a vaccine developed by Israelis – thus reminding

us of the depth of the hatred that so many Muslims display toward Israel.

*Iran's Ayatollah Nasir Makarim Shirazi released a surprising statement on this matter. He said there is no prohibition in Islamic law against purchasing medicine or a vaccine from Israel, provided there is no other country from which to acquire it. In other words, the prohibition against doing business with the Zionist entity has exceptions.*

Ayatollah Shirazi, who is a 93-year-old cleric, and well-known as a denier of the Holocaust, was first quoted as saying in an interview on March 11 that Muslims could buy, if there were no alternative sources, medicines and vaccines from Israel. But several days later, his office issued a statement claiming that he had never said that, that the interview itself had never occurred and was "fake news." Undoubtedly he had received a tsunami of outraged emails from those determined to have no dealings with Israel, and he decided to deny his original remark. And no other Iranian cleric has since come forward to suggest that it was islamically permissible, in cases of absolute necessity, for Muslims to use any vaccines made by Israelis.

*In an unusual sermon, Jordanian MP, former minister, and lecturer at the University of Amman Muhammad Abdulhamid Qudah called the coronavirus a "soldier of Allah" and said it had been sent to punish both the West and Muslims. He claimed Allah is angry with the world, especially Muslims, because they have failed to obey him.*

In order to calm Allah's ire, it's not vaccines that will count, but a change in the behavior of Muslims, who have "failed to obey him" and must become true Muslims again. It's not so much a disease as it is a divine punishment. Presumably non-Muslims will be able to save themselves from the coronavirus only if they convert to Islam, and adhere strictly

to their new faith.

*Bashir bin Hassan, a controversial Salafist cleric in Tunisia, posted on his Facebook account, which has 500,000 followers, that the Chinese are being punished by Allah because of the siege they have set against the Uighur Muslims. According to the radical cleric, Allah has many soldiers, including both angels and viruses. He said that just as Allah drowned Pharaoh's soldiers in the sea, he is similarly granting victory to the Uighurs.*

Bashir bin Hassan is a little late in claiming that the Chinese are being punished by Allah for their mistreatment of the Uighurs. The Chinese have now brought the virus under control, reporting several days with not a single new case, and that has occurred without any modification in their treatment of the Uighurs. Why would Allah have lifted the scourge of the virus if the Chinese had not ended – and give no signs of ending – their persecution of the Muslim Uighurs? Despite Bashir bin Hassan's claim, there has been no Allah-granted "victory to the Uighurs." They are still being kept in re-education camps. Besides, if Bashir bin Hassan thinks that the coronavirus outbreak in China was punishment of the Infidels by Allah, what explains the spread of the virus in Muslim Iran? Or its spread, so far less than in Iran, to dozens of Muslim countries, including his own country of Tunisia, which has just allocated \$850 million to combat the effects of the coronavirus? How does Bashir bin Hassan explain that?

*Kuwaiti cleric Othman Khamis stated in a sermon on his YouTube channel that this is not the first time Allah has visited his wrath upon the world: he also sent a mosquito to kill Nimrod and unleashed the ten plagues to punish the Egyptians. The coronavirus is thus another warning to humanity from Allah. The only solution is to return to him and follow his ways; only then will the virus disappear.*

The Kuwaiti cleric, like so many other Muslim clerics, sees the coronavirus as an illness to be cured not by science, but by a renewal of Muslim faith. Only thus, once humanity returns to follow his ways, will Allah halt the spread of the virus. Muslims who have left the true path must return to it; as for non-Muslims, they will be safe only if they convert and adhere to the true faith, but if they do not, they should expect continued susceptibility to the disease.

*There is no doubt that coronavirus is a matter of serious concern not just to the West, but to the Arab world as well. Unfortunately, Muslim clerics are exploiting the precarious situation and inciting their constituencies throughout the region. They have millions of followers on their social media channels and can spread their messages to huge numbers very quickly. The clerics' sermons have the ultimate purpose of instilling fear in their listeners to convince them to adopt a religious way of life."*

The inshallah-fatalism that Islam encourages makes people less willing to modify their behavior to diminish the risk of transmission of the coronavirus. If the virus is a way for Allah to punish some and to save others, there's less felt need to follow government warnings about social distancing – that is, not to congregate in groups. Many have insisted on attending mosques, thinking they are safe from contagion as long as they are in a mosque; the opposite is true. Mosques are places where large numbers of people – hundreds, thousands – pray side by side. These close-quartered crowds provide ideal mediums for the transmission of the virus. Crowds continue to be seen on the streets of Iranian cities, so very different from the empty streets in Italy, France and Spain. In late March Iranians were still shopping, visiting restaurants, meeting their friends at cafes, as if there was no need to modify such behavior. Some may simply not believe the warnings from their government, given its long record of lying to them. Iranians may also believe, not without reason,

that the government preaches the need to keep from congregating as a way to suppress anti-government protests.

The continued hold of inshallah-fatalism on the Muslim psyche makes some Iranians indifferent to modifying their behavior, for what Allah wills, will be. Not a few clerics continue to send out messages on social media channels to their huge followings, in which they still insist that the coronavirus has been sent by Allah because Muslims themselves have been lax in their observances; they insist that only a return to a strictly religious way of life – as set out by the clerics themselves – offers hope. Hand-washing, social distancing, sheltering at home – none of that matters. It's a terrible message to send.

What could change this attitude would be a sudden dramatic spike in cases of, and deaths from, the coronavirus, with much of that increase traceable to a particular mosque on a particular day when Friday Prayers were held. That increase in cases would do two things: first, it would put paid to the widespread belief that the contagion cannot spread in mosques; second, it would show that the coronavirus does not spare even the most faithful of Muslims; third, that it is widely communicated by crowds, and fourth, that the government's demands – that people wear masks whenever possible, practice social distancing, and, except for buying food and medicines, remain at home – make perfect sense.

Iran's government – its highest clerics – must insist that the coronavirus is not a "punishment sent by Allah"; that the virus strikes Muslim and non-Muslim alike, and even the most devout Muslims can be, and have been, stricken. That insistence on common sense will not come naturally to the clerical rulers or to many of their subjects, but in the absence of a breakthrough in vaccines and therapies – made by the Infidels, of course – for hard-hit Iran, it's all they've got.

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