



Christians Attacked in Their Ancestral Home — the Middle East

As the world focuses on Jerusalem's Old City on this Good Friday, watching the throngs of Christian pilgrims, some bearing wooden crosses, making their way along the cobblestoned Via Dolorosa (the Way of Sorrows) — the path that Jesus walking on his way to His Crucifixion — the followers of Christ continue to suffer persecution for their faith.



However, the plight of Christians in the Middle East has received some media attention. In an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal* for April 16, Ron Prosor, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, dashed off an ample list of facts and figures to document just how badly Christians in the Middle East have fared over the past century or longer. A striking revelation: At the turn of the 20th century, Christians made up 26 percent of the Middle East's population, but now comprise less than 10 percent.

Among the Middle Eastern localities where Christians have suffered attacks, notes Prosor, are the Syrian cities of Aleppo and Damascus, where "Christians who refused to convert to Islam have been kidnapped, shot and beheaded by Islamist opposition fighters." He also cites Egypt, where "mobs of Muslim Brotherhood members burn Coptic Christian churches in the same way they once obliterated Jewish synagogues."

Another hotspot for Christians is Iraq, where, Prosor writes: "Terrorists deliberately target Christian worshippers. This past Christmas, 26 people were killed when a bomb ripped through a crowd of worshipers leaving a church in Baghdad's southern Dora neighborhood."

The anti-Christian turmoil in Iraq since the ouster of Saddam Hussein over 10 years ago is reflected in the figures Prosor cites. He notes that during the past 10 years, nearly two-thirds of Iraq's 1.5 million Christians have been forced to flee their homes because of the anti-Christian violence. Many emigrated to Syria, which like Iraq under Hussein, was tolerant of Christians. However, they are "once again becoming victims of unrelenting persecution. Syria's Christian population has dropped from 30 percent in the 1920s to less than 10 percent today."

Prosor — who as a representative of the Israeli government would not likely give Assad much credit — did not mention that life for Christians was considerably easier and safer under Assad than it has become since civil war has broken out across Syria.



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However, speaking on NBC's *Meet the Press* last September, Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) described the current conflict in Syria as a clash between the government of Assad, who, Paul said, "has protected Christians for a number of decades," and al-Qaeda-aligned "Islamic rebels," whom Paul said "have been attacking Christians."

"I think the Islamic rebels winning is a bad idea for the Christians, and all of a sudden we'll have another Islamic state where Christians are persecuted," Paul said.

In the interview, Paul, who is a strong opponent of U.S. foreign intervention, including U.S. foreign aid, said the United States should pursue a negotiated settlement where "Assad is gone, but some of the same people [from Assad's government] remain stable," because, "that would also be good for the Christians."

Prosor noted that Israel is the only country in the Middle East where the Christian population has grown over the past 66 years, increasing from 34,000 in 1948 to 140,000 today. He attributes this growth largely to "the freedoms Christians are afforded" and quoted Father Gabriel Nadaf, a Greek Orthodox priest living in Israel, who recently told Prosor, "Human rights are not something to be taken for granted. Christians in much of the Middle East have been slaughtered and persecuted for their faith, but here in Israel they are protected."

Another journalist, Raymond Ibrahim, who was born and raised in the United States by Coptic Christian Egyptian parents, wrote an article posted by humanevents.com on March 21 decrying the fact that while the UN, Western governments, the media, and academia "insist that Palestinians are suffering tremendous abuses from the state of Israel," in contrast, "the greatest human rights tragedy of our time — radical Muslim persecution of Christians, including in Palestinian controlled areas — is devotedly ignored."

Ibrahim also noted the decline in the Christian population in the Middle East since 1900, but put today's numbers even lower than the figures cited by Prosor — less than two percent. He noted,

In one week in Egypt alone, where my Christian family emigrated, the Muslim Brotherhood launched a *kristallnacht* — attacking, destroying, and/or torching some 82 Christian churches (some of which were built in the 5th century, when Egypt was still a Christian-majority nation before the Islamic conquests). Al Qaeda's black flag has been raised atop churches. Christians — including priests, women and children — have been attacked, beheaded, and killed. [Emphasis in original.]

Ibrahim then segues into a most revealing statement:

Far from helping these Christian victims, U.S. policies are actually exacerbating their sufferings. Whether in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, or Syria, and under the guise of the U.S.-supported "Arab Spring," things have gotten dramatically worse for Christians. Indeed, during a recent U.S. congressional hearing, it was revealed that thousands of traumatized Syrian Christians — who, like Iraqi Christians before them are undergoing a mass exodus from their homeland — were asking "Why is America at war with us?"

Ibrahim's attempts to answer that question, while apparently sincere, still seem to miss the mark by putting the onus entirely on the "radical Muslims" and asserting that the mass media's main agenda in ignoring Christian persecution in the Middle East is an anti-Israeli prejudice: "Because radical Muslim persecution of Christians throws a wrench in the media's otherwise well-oiled narrative that 'radical-Muslim-violence-is-a-product-of-Muslim-grievance' — chief among them Israel." He continues: "the



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media will present such hostility as ironclad proof that Palestinians under Israel are so oppressed that they have no choice but to resort to terrorism.”

Ibrahim asserts that the reason the media ignores violence against Christians in the Middle East is because it does not want to consider or report any motivation for Islamic anti-Christian violence other than the same motivations for Islamic anti-*Israeli* violence — which are either “land disputes” or “grievances” against the Israeli or Christian presence in what they consider as their sole proprietary land.

What he fails to consider however, is the role that U.S. foreign policy has played in exacerbating the instability of the Middle East, helping to remove moderate, Christian-friendly governments from power and actually encouraging the rise of radical Islamic regimes prone to persecuting Christians.

Rand Paul’s description of the rebellion against the Christian-friendly Assad is an example of the effects of this phenomenon, but he did not mention the U.S. role in assisting the rebels in that particular interview. However, when opposing U.S. aid for the anti-Assad rebels during a hearing last May of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Paul said, “This is an important moment. You will be funding, today, the allies of al Qaeda.”

Paul’s father, former Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), was an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. In response to President Obama’s May 19, 2011 Middle East speech, Paul said, in part,

The President also defended his unconstitutional intervention in Libya, authorized not by the United States Congress but by the United Nations, and announced new plans to pressure Syria and force the leader of that country to step down....

I am not the only one who can see the absurdities of our foreign policy. We give \$3 billion to Israel and \$12 billion to her enemies. Most Americans know that makes no sense.

We need to come to our senses, trade with our friends in the Middle East (both Arab and Israeli), clean up our own economic mess so we set a good example, and allow them to work out their own conflicts.

In an article for *The New American* posted on April 23, 2012, Alex Newman quoted a statement from CEO Art Thompson of The John Birch Society, who said, “Our government’s policies in the Middle East are a reflection of our government’s policies at home. The war on Christianity in public life here at home in the schools and courthouses is manifested in the Middle East with the destruction of Christianity in the nations where we have been interfering.”

In nation after nation, where the United States has either intervened directly, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, or indirectly, through support of rebel or “Arab Spring” organizations in places such as Syria, Egypt, and Libya, Christians have suffered from a radical backlash.

It is quite possible for adherents of the three major monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, to coexist peacefully in the Middle East. They did so for years in places such as Lebanon, Iran, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. But it is first necessary for the United States to stop its unconstitutional intervention in the region — intervention that almost always destabilizes governments led by moderate, Westernized Muslims and replaces them with radical, anti-Christian Islamists.

Photo: cathedral in Beirut, Lebanon with mosque in background



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