



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on April 2, 2012

Obama-backed Syrian Rebels “Ethnic Cleansing” Christians

Armed Islamist rebel groups in Syria supported by the Obama administration and Western governments seeking to oust “President” Bashar al-Assad are engaged in “ethnic cleansing” of Christians, according to news reports and human rights organizations. And as the conflict escalates, the persecution of the once-protected Christian minority is growing as well.

The Syrian Orthodox Church, which represents over half of Syrian Christians, issued a statement saying revolutionary fighters had expelled some 50,000 Christians from the embattled city of Homs. That figure is estimated to account for about 90 percent of the Christian community there. Hundreds more — including women and children — were [slaughtered](#), according to charitable organizations operating in the area.



The Orthodox Church referred to the persecution as the “ongoing ethnic cleansing of Christians” by Muslim militants linked to al Qaeda. According to its report, the so-called “Brigade Faruq” is largely to blame, with Islamic extremists going door to door and forcing followers of Christ to leave without even collecting their belongings. Their property is then stolen by rebels as “war-booty from the Christians.”

Christians in Homs were reportedly told that if they did not leave immediately, they would be shot. Then, pictures of their bodies would be sent to the pro-Syrian-regime-change Al Jazeera — a media broadcaster controlled by the dictatorship ruling Qatar — with a message claiming that forces loyal to Assad had murdered them.

“Christians are being forced to flee the city to the safety of government-controlled areas,” [noted](#) a spokesman for the Christian relief agency Barnabas Fund, which reported that over 200 Christians had been murdered by insurgents. “Muslim rebel fighters and their families are taking over their homes.”

Other reports noted that Christians were being kidnapped by rebels for use as human shields. “Some Christians who tried to escape a week ago were stopped from leaving by the rebels and were instead forced to go to a mosque to act as shields,” a Syrian priest from Hamidiya was [quoted as saying](#) by the *Daily Telegraph*. “They thought that, because Christians support Assad, the government would not attack them.”

According to reports from sources on the ground, Muslim militias also used churches to attack government forces. “[M]ost of the time militiamen were using the churches and the Christians as shields to protect themselves from shelling,” [explained](#) regional director Issam Bishara with the



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Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA). “It is also important to mention that some icons inside the churches were damaged on purpose by the militias.”

One possible motive cited by analysts for the ongoing persecution is the fact that Syrian Christians largely support the Assad regime, [fearing genocide](#) if their protector were to fall at the hands of Islamic extremists. The secular Syrian strongman, despite ruling the nation with an iron fist, is known for protecting Christians and other minorities.

Church leaders in Syria have largely urged their parishioners not to take sides in the conflict. Because Christians make up only around 10 percent of the population of Syria — with Sunni Muslims accounting for about 80 percent — there is widespread concern over what might come next in the civil war.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented a wide array of abuses committed by the regime. However, it also reported last month that the rebels were kidnapping, torturing, and executing perceived opponents — and not just Christians.

“We are writing to express our concern about increasing evidence ... of kidnappings, the use of torture, and executions by armed Syrian opposition members,” Executive Director Sarah Leah Whitson of the group's Middle East & North Africa division wrote in an [open letter to the rebels](#), urging them to stop engaging in the “unlawful” practices.

The group also said civilians had been targeted and that some of the attacks appeared to be motivated by sectarianism. Citing a United Nations-mandated “Commission of Inquiry” report on Syria, the organization noted that the armed rebels “have committed gross human rights abuses.” Those crimes include kidnapping, execution, and displacement of civilians — mostly members of minority groups or perceived supporters of the Assad regime.

After the U.S. invasion, Christians in Iraq were viciously slaughtered by various factions. The ancient communities there — which had survived for almost 2,000 years — are now almost gone. In fact, according to most estimates, the population of Christians in Iraq has declined by two thirds or more. And many of those who successfully fled went to Syria, where they now face an uncertain fate once again.

The chaos in Syria, which borders Iraq, began more than a year ago when armed militants among groups of protesters [killed police](#), burned down government buildings, and more. The Assad regime responded by deploying the military to quash the unrest in what observers said was a brutal and bloody crackdown on dissent. Almost 10,000 people have already been killed in the clashes, according to estimates.

But analysts say that if the rebellion succeeds in toppling Assad — which at this point remains uncertain, as the Russian and Iranian governments continue to support their ally — Syria will likely go the way of [other nations](#) afflicted by the so-called “Arab Spring.” Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood and even more extreme groups are likely to seize power, with dire implications for freedom — and especially for the Christian minority.

The Obama administration, Western leaders, Arab dictatorships, and the chief of al Qaeda have all [publicly expressed support for the rebels](#). Various forms of aid are also flowing to opposition forces from an assortment of governments and terror groups. The U.K. has even been openly shoveling tax money at the rebels despite concerns expressed by some Christian members of Parliament.

“A great many have taken refuge in neighboring Syria in which, despite the heavy-handed nature of its



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dictatorial regime, Christians (and indeed Jews) have found an oasis of relative calm until hit by the recent stirrings of the Arab Spring," [wrote](#) MP Edward Leigh, blasting recent attacks and murders of Christians in the nation — many of whom found asylum there after Islamist forces were unleashed in Iraq and elsewhere in the region. He also warned that thousands of Christians could be killed if Assad falls.

"Christians are currently engaged in almost every aspect of public life in Syria. Can we realistically expect this to continue under an Islamist government with democratic legitimacy?" Leigh wondered. "As we are now witnessing beatings, abductions, and xenophobic killings in [free Libya](#), the West must be forced to acknowledge the pernicious edge of our liberal internationalist foreign policy."

The UN, meanwhile, sought to pass a resolution demanding "regime change" in Syria, but the measure was [vetoed in the Security Council](#) by the Russian and Chinese governments — citing the recent NATO- and Islamist-backed [bloodbath in Libya](#). U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [vowed](#) to redouble the administration's efforts to topple Assad anyway, proposing an international coalition to do the job.

Late last month, Obama was [publicly considering](#) sending "aid" to the Syrian rebels. And over the weekend, an assortment of governments, including the United States, [announced](#) that they would be sending millions of dollars.

According to more than a few analysts, reports, and experts, however, the administration and its allies around the world have been [backing the Syrian uprising from the start](#). Humanitarian and relief agencies, meanwhile, are [seeking aid](#) for the growing number of displaced Christians.

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Photo: A Syrian woman lights a candle for the people and army soldiers who were killed during the recent violence around the country during a mass service prayer at the Holy Cross Church, in Damascus, Syria, Jan. 9, 2012.



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