Elizabeth Kendal is an international religious liberty analyst and advocate. She authors the weekly Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin, serves as the Director of Advocacy for Christian Faith and Freedom (Canberra), and is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the Arthur Jeffery Centre for the Study of Islam at Melbourne School of Theology, an affiliated college of the Australian College of Theology. Her previous book, *Turn Back the Battle: Isaiah Speaks to Christians Today*, presents a biblical response to persecution and existential threat.


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After Saturday Comes Sunday

Understanding the Christian Crisis in the Middle East

Elizabeth Kendal

The post-Christian West is in decline, revived Islam is on the rise, and Mesopotamia (Syria-Iraq), the cradle of civilization, has become ground zero in a battle for civilization.

Despised as *infidels* (unbelievers) and *kafir* (unclean), Mesopotamia’s indigenous Christian peoples are targeted by fundamentalist Muslims and jihadists for subjugation, exploitation, and elimination.

Pushed deep into the fog of war, buried under a mountain of propaganda, and rendered invisible by a shroud of silence, they are betrayed and abandoned by the West’s “progressive” political, academic, and media elites who cling to utopian fantasies about Islam while nurturing deep-seated hostility towards Christianity.

If they are to survive as a people in their historic homeland, the Christians of Mesopotamia will need all the help they can get. If Western civilization is to survive as a force in its historic heartland (Europe), then we had better start seeing, hearing, and believing the Christians of the Middle East, for their plight prefigures our own.

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“In her latest book, Elizabeth Kendal opens the eyes of her readers in compelling fashion to the tragedy that has befallen Middle Eastern Christians. Her extensive experience as a religious liberty analyst has informed this work, which is at once an insightful survey of past historical and political events, and a call to action on behalf of persecuted Christians. No reader could fail to be moved by this powerful study.”

—PETER RIDDELL, Vice Principal, Melbourne School of Theology

“Anyone concerned with the atrocities inflicted upon minority Christians in the Middle-East today will treasure this book. Kendal confronts readers with a current reality that cannot be avoided. A very pertinent and timely book.”

—HIS GRACE BISHOP ANBA SURIEL, Coptic Orthodox Bishop, Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions; Dean, St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Theological College, Melbourne

“In *After Saturday Comes Sunday*, Kendal gives us a penetrating insight into a world that hides behind a cloak of religious righteousness. In other words, after the Jews come the Christians. This book profoundly resonates with the Assyrian Christians of the Middle East that have suffered and continue to suffer greatly. Elizabeth Kendal has unveiled the truth.”

—HERMIZ SHAHEN, Deputy Secretary General, Assyrian Universal Alliance, Australia

“Kendal’s book is a godsend to anyone who is at a loss to understand what lies behind the suffering in the Middle East. Drawing on authoritative voices from the region, her clear-eyed analysis untangles the conflicts with the heart and insight of a prophet. She gives a sobering account of the West’s complicity in the atrocities—and what we can do to bring healing in a crisis as appalling as the indifference to it.”

—JEFF M. SELLERS, Editor, Persecution News Service, Morning Star News

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AFTER SATURDAY COMES SUNDAY
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Elizabeth Kendal

RESOURCE Publications • Eugene, Oregon
AFTER SATURDAY COMES SUNDAY
Understanding the Christian Crisis in the Middle East

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I dedicate this book to those priests, pastors, nuns and countless lay workers who struggle against overwhelming odds as they shepherd Christ’s precious flock through dark and dangerous days. I honor you.

May the Lord supply your every need (Phil 4:19).

Isaiah 40:31; Romans 8:31–39;
2 Corinthians 4:7–18; Ephesians 3:20–21.
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I want to acknowledge and thank Christian Faith and Freedom (Canberra) for its support, without which this book might not have been written.
Abbreviations

AH         after Hijra
AQI        al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM       al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AUA        Assyrian Universal Alliance
BBC        British Broadcasting Corporation
BP         British Petroleum
BTC        Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan
CIA        Central Intelligence Agency
CNS        Catholic News Service
CPR        Critical Prayer Requests
DI’ISH     Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah fe Al-Iraq wa Al-Sham
EFHR       Egyptian Federation of Human Rights
ESV        English Standard Version
FSA        Free Syrian Army
GCC        Gulf Co-operation Council
ICG        International Crisis Group
IDOP       International Day of Prayer
IDP        internally displaced person
IED        improvised explosive device
IOCC       International Orthodox Christian Charities
IRGC       Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corp
IS          Islamic State (previously ISIS/ISIL)
ISF         Iraqi Security Force
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ISI</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham/Greater Syria (aka ISIL; later IS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (aka ISIS; later IS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISW</td>
<td>Institute for the Study of War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JV</td>
<td>junior varsity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIFG</td>
<td>Libyan Islamic Fighting Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>Muslim Brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>member of parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSN</td>
<td>Morning Star News</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>National Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIE</td>
<td>National Intelligence Estimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td>Kurdistan Workers’ Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestinian Liberation Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLPB</td>
<td>Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNSC</td>
<td>Russian National Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROC</td>
<td>Russian Orthodox Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCAF</td>
<td>Supreme Council of the Armed Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAA</td>
<td>Syrian Arab Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOW</td>
<td>tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNPO</td>
<td>Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<tr>
<td>YPG</td>
<td>Kurdish People’s Protection Units</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMD</td>
<td>weapons of mass destruction</td>
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Figure 1. Geostrategic map of the Middle East.
Full color map available at www.ElizabethKendal.com
Introduction

Genocide is unfolding in the ancient Christian heartland of Mesopotamia. Yet across the West, Christians and non-Christians alike remain disengaged from the Christian crisis in the Middle East primarily because it doesn't make sense; they can't get their heads around it.

Cognitive dissonance rings in our heads as foreign correspondents on the Syrian frontline describe the bushy-bearded, black-flag waving, “Allahu Akbar”-shouting, heavily armed Islamic militants behind them as “moderate rebels” fighting for freedom, democracy, and human rights. Confusion reigns as leaked news of sectarian massacres and ethnic-religious cleansing is whitewashed by Western politicians who assure us “Islam is peace” and then send the “rebels” more guns.

The first casualty of war is truth. The media is awash with propaganda and conflicting narratives abound. And because the narrative of Middle Eastern Christians conflicts with the narrative of Western governments, the Christians—along with their inconvenient and politically incorrect narrative of Islamic persecution and genocidal jihad—are airbrushed out of the picture and silenced, pushed ever deeper into the fog of war, which for most observers is pea-soup thick.

Cognizant of that “fog” and the need to dispel it, and cognizant that every incident of persecution is but a vignette—a single scene within a great drama, I have resisted the temptation to write a dramatic running commentary on, or an emotional patchwork quilt of stories from, the war zone (although this book does contain both commentary and stories). Rather, I determined from the outset to write a book that exposes the persecution within its context, to help people understand the Christian crisis in the Middle East. Understanding has long-term value and is a very powerful thing,

---

1. Mesopotamia (from the Greek, meaning “between two rivers”) lies within the Fertile Crescent and covers much of Iraq and northern Syria. Fed and watered by the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, the region is often referred to as the cradle of civilization.
for it can enable discernment—which is essential if we are resist manipulation and exploitation—and propel people into action.

Of course, there are people for whom the only thing necessary to be propelled into action is the knowledge that people are in need. But for most, this is not the case. If it doesn't make sense, if they can't get their heads around it, they will struggle with motivation and may resist any involvement. But when the penny drops, when the light bulb goes on, when they can finally say "Now I get it! Now it all makes sense," I find that in unraveling the confusion we have leaped a hurdle, opening the way to passionate, committed active engagement with and for the persecuted. As such, I have developed a deep appreciation of the link between understanding and active engagement.

With that in mind, chapter 1 takes the Arabic war cry—"After Saturday comes Sunday" (which essentially means "After we [Muslims] get rid of the Jews we'll get rid of the Christians")—and shows how this threat has been playing out on the ground, specifically in the historic Christian heartland of Mesopotamia.

Chapters 2 and 3 then take the reader back to the very beginning, where the foundations of geography, history, and ideology are laid. We look at the Sunni–Shi’ite divide, to see why these sects are such implacable foes. We look at Islamic ideology and worldview, in order to understand why Islam has, throughout the ages, been such a threat to non-Muslims (and dissident Muslims) in its path and under its rule.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 build the framework and establish the context by detailing what I believe are the most significant and relevant stage-setting trends and events leading into the current crisis: the Islamic uprisings of 1979, the rise of the "Shia Crescent", and the eruption of the "Arab Spring."

I am firmly of the opinion that the Christian crisis in the Middle East cannot be separated from any of the issues, events or trends covered in chapters 2 through 6, nor can it be understood without them.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 track the evolution of the current crisis: from the outbreak of civil war in Syria, through its evolution into a regional imbroglio and the principle theatre of international Islamic jihad, to the return of the caliphate.

Entitled "A Message Signed in Blood to the Nation of the Cross," chapter 10 stands apart as a brief vignette, zooming in on a single episode: the Islamic State's mass execution of twenty-one Christian martyrs (twenty Copts and one Ghanaian) on a beach in Libya. That incident, along with the Coptic Church's response to it, in many ways encapsulates the Christian crisis in the Middle East.
Chapter 11 is a call to solidarity in the face of resurgent Islam: a call for Christian solidarity across denominational lines with the suffering and existentially imperilled church in the Middle East, and a call for operational solidarity within the Dar al harb ("House of war"—i.e., all those outside the Dar al Islam, or "House of Islam") in what is destined to be a long war in defense of civilization.

Returning to the Arabic war cry—"After Saturday Comes Sunday", chapter 12 essentially serves as a "bookend," complementing chapter 1. Here, however, the Arabic threat is turned on its head as it is translated through a theology of the cross. "Sunday" need hold no terror for the "Nation of the Cross."

It is my fervent prayer that this book will go a long way towards eliminating the ignorance, unraveling the confusion, and dispelling the hopelessness that culminate in bad policy and hinder active engagement. For in this time of darkness, as we await the dawn, the Christians of the Middle East need all the help they can get.
“After Saturday Comes Sunday”
(First the Jews, then the Christians)

There is a popular Arabic war cry which never fails to make the blood of Middle Eastern Christians run cold. Whether Muslims are spray-painting it on walls, whispering it in ears, or chanting it in the streets, “Ba’d as-sabt biji yom al-ahad” (“After Saturday comes Sunday”) is issued as a threat, meaning: As sure as Saturday (the day of Jewish worship) is followed by Sunday (the day of Christian worship), first we’ll kill the Jews, then we’ll kill the Christians.

It should be clear by now that this is no idle threat.

Iraq

In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah. To save Jerusalem, Jehoiakim, king of Judah, pledged allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. A deal was brokered, and Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylonia with tribute monies secured from the king, valuable artifacts looted from the temple, and captives taken from the cream of Judean society.

In 598 BC, King Jehoiakim rebelled, refusing to pay tribute. Nebuchadnezzar responded, laying siege to Jerusalem and taking Jehoiakim captive.

Jerusalem fell in 596 BC, her starving, decimated and devastated citizens no longer able to resist. After being ravaged and looted, the city was razed and an estimated 10,000 Judeans—all but the poorest of peasants—were taken captive to Babylonia. There, in historic Babylon, some 85 km south of modern-day Baghdad on the banks of the Euphrates, the Jews lamented: “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion” (Ps 137:1).

But empires come and go: in 539 BC, Babylon was eclipsed and conquered by the Persians, whose king—the great King Cyrus—decreed that
Jews could return to Judah. The Jews who journeyed back with Zerubbabel in 538 BC rebuilt the altar and then the temple, and the Jews who returned with Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the city the walls. For those who chose to return, it was a dream come true: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream" (Psalm 126:1).

However, not all of Babylonia's Jews wanted to "return" to the land of their ancestors. Many Jews—who by now were second- and third-generation Babylonians—preferred to remain in Babylonia where they had put down roots, assimilated, and were leading comfortable lives.

Meanwhile, to the north of Babylonia in the upper reaches of the Fertile Crescent was the nation of Assyria. Once the regional superpower, Assyria had been eclipsed by Babylonia, which had conquered Assyria and sacked its capital Nineveh in 612 BC before invading Judah.

Tradition has it that the Assyrians began worshipping Yahweh, the God of Israel, after the Hebrew prophet Jonah preached in Nineveh sometime between 780 and 755 BC. Subsequently, the Assyrians developed close relations with Jerusalem and watched with interest as the scandal of Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the Christ (the Messiah), played out. When news arrived in Nineveh that Jesus, though crucified, killed and buried, had risen from the dead (just as he said he would) and was seen by many before ascending to heaven, the Assyrians believed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah of whom the Jewish Scriptures spoke.

The Assyrian Church of the East—also known as the Nestorian, Persian, or Syriac Church—was established in Edessa (now in southeastern Turkey), in the first century of the Christian era.

The Assyrians had great missionary vision. By the end of the second century, the church in Edessa had four Gospels in Aramaic and was spreading Christianity east through the Persian Empire. In around AD 280, the Assyrian Church of the East established its headquarters at the metropolis of Seleucia, 32 km southeast of modern-day Baghdad. And all the while, Christian refugees fleeing violent persecution in Europe were streaming east, seeking sanctuary in Mesopotamia and Persia.

The Assyrian church's legendary missionary work continued for centuries, as historian R. G. Tiedemann explains: “As Nestorian Christianity spread eastward from Persia among the Turkic nomads of Central Asia and
along well-established trade routes, it eventually came into contact with Chinese civilization, probably sometime in the sixth century."  

In the early seventh century, the Arabs swept through Mesopotamia and Persia, severing the Assyrian Church from her missions in the Far East. At that time, some twenty-one Nestorian monks were active in China, where the first Christian church and monastery had already been built and *The Sutra of Jesus the Messiah* had already been translated into Chinese.  

“Just as the rivers flowed out of Eden,” writes historian Philip Jenkins, “so the other patriarchs flowed forth from Mesopotamia . . . The natural home of Christianity was in Mesopotamia and points east.”

Friday: Islamic Conquest and Colonization

Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula had been migrating to the greener pastures of Mesopotamia for centuries before the Muhammadian armies invaded in AD 633. The Arab Muslim armies comprised mostly nomadic tribes from Yemen, the Hejaz and other regions of Arabia, and their arrival in Mesopotamia caused a split in the settler community. While some Arab settlers remained loyal to the state that had become their home, others switched allegiances and turned on their Christian neighbors in pursuit of booty and status.

Historian Bat Ye’or elaborates: “The conquest extended over a decade and comprised some decisive armed confrontations, but mainly *razzias* [raids] and the pillage of both villages and rural areas. This conquest was facilitated by support from Arab tribes who had infiltrated the Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian borders of Arabia during the previous two centuries, occasionally settling there. Some of these tribes had become Christianized . . . As vassals of these states, they assumed responsibility for defending their frontiers and protecting towns and villages against the raids of the nomadic Bedouins who roamed through the adjacent deserts.”

Concerning the invasion and conquest of Mesopotamia, Ye’or writes:

The attack on Babylonia took place on two fronts which corresponded precisely to the densest Arab settlements . . . Large numbers of Christian Arab tribes fought on the Persian side, but others, long settled in the regions and attracted by booty, went over to the Muslims . . .

5. Ibid., 370.
Helped by local Arab support—particularly active in the central region and the lower Euphrates—and by troop reinforcements sent from Arabia, the Muslims extended their raids on the countryside and villages to the south and centre of Iraq . . . These raids were supported by [Caliph] Umar who sent reinforcements from Medina. The monasteries were pillaged, the monks killed, and Monophysite [Christian] Arabs massacred, enslaved, or Islamized by force; in Elam [east of Basra, in modern-day southern Iran] the population was also decimated, and in Susa [city] the notables were put to the sword. The conquest of Mesopotamia took place between 635 and 642. Like the conquest of Syria, it seems to have been a joint operation between the Muslim armies and Arabs already settled in the region.8

And so it was, that over time, Iraq came to be dominated by Arabs and Islam.

Saturday

Muslim anti-Semitism intensified across Arab lands from the 1920s onwards, fuelled mostly by the vehement anti-Semite Mohammed Effendi Amin el-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.9 Consequently, violence against Jews also escalated.

In 1906, an Ottoman census counted 256,000 Jews in the Ottoman vilayets (provinces) of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul (which together comprise modern-day Iraq).10 By 1949, only around 130,000 remained. "An estimated 130,000 Jews lived in the Iraq of 1949," writes journalist and author Edwin Black,

half of whom resided in Baghdad. The Baghdad Chamber of Commerce listed 2,430 member companies. A third were Jewish, and, in fact, a third of the Chamber’s board and almost all of its employees were Jewish. Jewish firms transacted 45 percent of the exports and nearly 75 percent of the imports. A quarter of all Iraqi Jews worked in transportation, such as railways and port administration. The controller of the budget was Jewish; a director of the Iraqi National Bank was Jewish; the Currency Office Board was all Jewish; the Foreign Currency Committee was

8. Ibid., 46.
9. For more on the influence of el-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, see Rubin and Schwanitz, Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East.
10. Black, Banking on Baghdad, 337.
about 95 percent Jewish. Over the centuries, Jews had become essential to the economy.\textsuperscript{11}

As the anti-Jewish pogroms reached their peak in the early 1950s, the newborn state of Israel rescued some 120,000 Iraqi Jews—most secretly airlifted out of Iraq in Operation Ezra and Nehemiah. The Iraqi Jews arrived in Israel penniless, having been stripped of their wealth by the Iraqi government of Nuri Said.\textsuperscript{12}

Black writes, "Between January 1950 and December 1951, Israel airlifted, bussed, or otherwise smuggled out 119,788 Iraqi Jews—all but a few thousand. Within those two years, Iraq—to its national detriment—had excised one of its most commercially, industrially, and intellectually viable groups, a group that for 2,600 years had loyally seen the three provinces of Mesopotamia as their chosen place on earth. This dispossessed group, who arrived in Israel with nothing but their memories, rose to become some of the Jewish state’s most productive citizens."\textsuperscript{13}

By 2004 only thirty-five Jews remained in Iraq; by 2008 there were ten,\textsuperscript{14} with eight living in Baghdad under the care of Rev. Canon Andrew White who described their situation as "more than desperate."\textsuperscript{15} In 2011, WikiLeaks published diplomatic cables from Baghdad, which Iraq’s last seven surviving Jews feared could hasten their demise, should they be identified.\textsuperscript{16}

In October 2014, Canon White was evacuated at the request of the archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who rightly assessed that White’s high profile had made him a highly desirable target. Six Jews remained.\textsuperscript{17}

After Saturday comes Sunday

Iraq’s last official census (1987) counted 1.4 million Assyrians—the indigenous people of Iraq, who now are Christian. However, as Islamic zeal rose in the wake of Gulf War I (1991), Christians with means emigrated. By the time of the March 2003 US-led invasion, Iraq’s Assyrian population had declined to between 800,000 and 1.2 million.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 348.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 338–52.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 352.
\textsuperscript{14} "Jews in Islamic Countries: Iraq."
\textsuperscript{15} Van Biema, “The Last Jews of Baghdad.”
\textsuperscript{16} Satherley, "The Last Jews of Baghdad."
\textsuperscript{17} Friedson, "Vicar of Baghdad"
The US-led regime-change operation liberated Iraq’s long-repressed Shi’ites, whose most senior cleric, the Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, vilifies Christians as *kafir* (infidels) and *najis* (unclean), equal to “Urine, Faeces, Semen, Dead body, Blood, Dog, Pig . . .”18 It also triggered Sunni resistance, providing fertile ground for al-Qaeda. In September 2006, the Mujahedeen Shura Council, an umbrella organization of Sunni Arab extremist groups that included al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), vowed on its website to “destroy the cross and to slash the throats of those who believe in the cross.”19

Deemed subversive by the “resistance” and *infidel* or *kafir* by Muslims (Sunnis and Shi’ites), Christians were easy picking for criminals and other hostile elements who exploited the cover of conflict to rape, loot, persecute, and kill Christians with impunity.

Christians fleeing persecution, war, and insecurity in Basra and Baghdad headed for Lebanon or Jordan, but mostly for northern Iraq, where they hunkered down in the ancient Assyrian homeland and homeland of the Nineveh Plain, mostly around the cities of Mosul (the capital of Nineveh province and Iraq’s second-largest city) and nearby Bakhdida (also known as Qaraqosh or Hamadaniya), Iraq’s largest Assyrian city.

In subsequent years, thousands of Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) jihadists would also reloc ate north. Driven out of the Anbar, Baghdad and Diyala provinces in 2006–2007 by the US “Surge”, ISI regrouped in Mosul where they subjugated, extorted [demanded *jizya* (protection money)], murdered, and terrorized the city’s Christians and assassinated the Christian leadership.

Father Boulos Iskander (59), a Syrian Orthodox priest, was kidnapped by ISI in Mosul on 9 October 2006. Two days later his decapitated and dismembered body was found dumped on the outskirts of the city.20

On April 2007, Fr. Ragheed Ganni (35) and three sub-deacons—Basman Youssef Daud, Wahid Hanna Isho and Gassan Isam Bidawed—were ambushed and assassinated by ISI jihadists as they left Mosul’s Church of the Holy Spirit after leading a celebration of the mass. Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, the bishop of Mosul, oversaw their funerals.21

---


19. “Iraq’s al-Qaida Threatens To ‘Destroy the Cross’.”

20. “Kidnappers Behead Priest in Mosul.”

In February 2008, Archbishop Rahho (65) was ambushed, shot in the leg, and kidnapped by ISI fighters as he left the Church of the Holy Spirit after leading a celebration of the mass. His driver and bodyguards were shot dead. Allegedly kidnapped for his refusal to pay jizya, the head of Mosul's Chaldean (Catholic) community died in captivity. His body was later found in a shallow grave.\textsuperscript{22}

As the persecution and targeted killings of Assyrian Christians did not threaten the volatile, all-important Arab versus Persian, Sunni versus Shi'ite, ethnic-sectarian situation in Baghdad—because Mosul's Christians refused to retaliate and repay evil with evil,\textsuperscript{23} it was deemed to be of no strategic significance and so was generally ignored by all but Christian media. As persecution escalated, so too did the Assyrian exodus, with multitudes fleeing across the border into the safe haven of Assad's Syria.

For security purposes, most Christian women in Iraq took to wearing the hijab (head scarf), or even the niqab (full covering), to hide their Christian identity, for increasingly the harassment, intimidation, and threats were coming not only from al-Qaeda, but from local Muslims—even long-time friends and neighbors. While some local Sunnis genuinely supported the jihad, others simply turned on their Christian neighbors in pursuit of booty and status.

By 2010, after seven years of war, sectarian killings, church bombings, ethnic-religious cleansing, and targeted terrorism, an estimated 400,000 Christians remained.

Distressed by the sight of rapidly emptying churches, Iraq's church leaders pleaded for Christians to return, but to no avail. Speaking from his place of refuge in Damascus, Syria, in April 2010, Christian refugee Toma Geogees told Catholic News Service (CNS): “It’s... impossible to turn back to Iraq. Our problem is not with the Iraqi government. Our problem is with Iraqi people... who want to kill us, who want to kill all the Christians... Those people are ignorant, and they just want to drink our blood as Christians.”\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} Malek-Yonan, “Genocide Unfolding: Death of a Catholic Assyrian Archbishop in Iraq.”

\textsuperscript{23} Christians follow a unique creed that teaches “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Jesus, in Matt 5:43–48) and “do not repay evil with evil” (Prov 20:22; Rom 12:17; 1 Pet 3:9). It is precisely because attacks on Christians tend not to trigger a violent destabilizing response, that their suffering is routinely ignored. Yet as a peaceable people, they are surely worthy of our attention.

\textsuperscript{24} “Despite Pleas from Iraqi Leaders, Christians Say They Won’t Go Home.”
On 25 April 2010, the BBC’s *Heart and Soul* program aired a report titled “Iraq’s forgotten conflict”, which described the systematic persecution of Iraq’s religious minorities as “a campaign of liquidation”:

Untold until now is the story of “a campaign of liquidation” against Iraq’s religious minorities who, post invasion, have had to endure torture, killings, forced conversions and exile.

As troops move out of Iraq, and in the wake of elections, US and British politicians refer to “the emergence of a pluralistic democracy.”

Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Louis Sako, of Kirkuk, begs to differ: “200,000 Christians fleeing Mosul alone, in fear of their lives, and 1,000 murdered, is not much of a basis for pluralism or democracy.”

It’s not just Christians who suffer. Both Mandaeans, who speak Aramaic—the language of Christ—and the Yazidis, goldsmiths with a history going back further than Christianity or Islam, are fast disappearing, too.

“Does nobody care about what is going on here?” asks Patriarch Sako. “It’s nothing less than the destruction of our ancient and honoured heritage, and our religious and cultural traditions.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, does. He tells the BBC that he fears it heralds the disappearance of Christianity from the Middle East . . .

At the time of the BBC broadcast, Christians were so endangered in Northern Iraq that Assyrian students were travelling to university in convoys under Iraqi military escort. On Sunday May 2, 2010, two bombs ripped through a convoy of buses transporting Assyrian college students from the Assyrian town of Bakhdida (Qaraqosh) to the University of Mosul. As the first buses had passed through the Kokjali checkpoint (manned at the time by US, Iraqi, and Kurdish soldiers), a car bomb parked on the shoulder of the highway exploded in their path, followed moments later by a roadside bomb. A local shopkeeper was killed and more than one hundred people, including some seventy of the targeted Christian college students, were wounded; seventeen critically.

Jamil Salahuddin Jamil (25), a geography major who was on the first bus, told reporters that one of his classmates lost her leg in the attack and two others were blinded. “We were going for our education and they

25. "Iraq’s Forgotten Conflict."

presented us with bombs,” he said. “I still do not know what they want from Christians.”

The answer is obvious, yet unthinkable and unutterable: the jihadists and all who support them want Christians out of Iraq.

Then, on Sunday evening, October 31, 2010, Christians in Baghdad experienced the worst attack on a Baghdad church to date. At 5:30 p.m., an ISI suicide bomber blew himself up in his car at the fortified gate of Our Lady of Salvation Chaldean Catholic Church in the inner-city suburb of Karrada. How he even got there through multiple checkpoints is a matter of contention; most believe he was waved through by Islamic sympathizers in the security forces.

Alerted to the impending danger, the church’s priests, who had been preparing to celebrate mass, ushered at least half of the 120-strong congregation into a back room. There they barricaded the believers behind bookshelves in a bid to protect them.

A terrorist then burst through the front door, gunned down the young priest standing before him, and hurled an explosive device into the sanctuary. The path now cleared, a group of ISI jihadists dressed in military uniforms stormed the church, mercilessly and indiscriminately shooting the worshippers whom they abused as “infidels.”

The streets of Karrada were closed off and the electricity cut. Helicopters circled above, periodically illuminating the chaotic scene with the occasional flare. As Iraqi security forces closed in, the militants inside the church detonated several large bombs. At 8:30 p.m., eight US soldiers arrived to assist the Iraqi counter-terror squad. Fierce gunfire erupted and three militants inside the sanctuary detonated their explosive suicide vests. Another round of shooting ensued—before silence descended over the cathedral like a shroud. That silence was soon shattered by the howl of ambulance sirens.

Reporting for The Guardian, Martin Chulov described the scene:

For the next forty minutes, a cacophony of screeching ambulances carried away the dead and injured. Walking wounded and survivors without injuries stumbled past them through the mayhem.

“They killed people, they injured people,” cried Bassam, before collapsing on the road outside the church. “Where is our father?” he screamed, referring to his priest. “Where is our father?”

27. Daigher, “Bombs Hit School Buses in Northern Iraq.”

Among [the walking wounded] were two elderly ladies in their blood-stained Sunday best, several children trembling too much to walk and a traumatised elderly couple searching in vain for their priest.

Bewildered and frantic, the survivors collapsed onto a median strip crying for telephones to call their families.

“I am going to leave Iraq with my family tomorrow,” said Bassam, an employee of an internet company. “Why am I here?” he wailed. “Look at this – this is Iraq.”

The next Sunday, November 7, 2010, around 100 survivors and mourners gathered at the cathedral. They lit candles in the shape of a cross on the now pockmarked and bloodstained marble floor next to the names of more than fifty dead. At the top they placed photographs of their martyred priests, Father Wissam (27) and Father Tha’ir (32). Another priest, aged seventy, was also killed, while a fourth priest, Father Rafael, survived with serious injuries. Many youths were amongst the dead; the youngest fatality was only four months old.

“They kill us not because we are Iraqi but because we are Christian,” said Fr. Douglas Bazi, who has permanent injuries after being kidnapped and tortured four years ago. His own Chaldean Catholic parish in the working-class neighbourhood of New Baghdad had dwindled from 2,500 families in the 1990s to less than 300 by 2010.

“We are singing the hymns we couldn't finish [last] Sunday,” said Ms. Riyadh, who was in the choir on the previous Sunday when the gunmen stormed the church and was shot in the leg. Fortunately, she was amongst more than fifty wounded to be flown out of Iraq to receive medical treatment in hospitals in France and beyond. At the time, Ms. Riyadh did not know if she would ever return to Iraq.

“I was one of the ones who wanted to come back,” said another member who did not want his name revealed, “but now we’re all leaving. What’s happening to us is what happened to the Jews.”

In March 2013—on the ten-year anniversary of the US invasion—Canon Andrew White estimated that a mere 200,000 Christians remained in Iraq, most hunkered down in northern Iraq’s Nineveh Plains.

On June 9, 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham/Greater Syria or the Levant (ISIS/ISIL) flooded into Nineveh province, capturing its capital.

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30. Arraf, “The Oct. 31 Attack on a Baghdad Church.”
31. Blair, “Iraq Invasion Anniversary.”
Mosul in a blitzkrieg. Half a million people, including some one thousand Christian families, fled for their lives.\textsuperscript{32}

On June 29, ISIS declared its caliphate and changed its name to Islamic State (IS). On July 18, it delivered an ultimatum to Mosul’s remnant Christians: convert to Islam, submit and pay \textit{jizya} (protection money/tribute), leave, or “face the sword.” And so Mosul’s remnant Christians departed, their homes and possessions forfeit to IS. They were met at checkpoints on the roads out of the city by IS militants, who robbed them of their cash, gold jewellery, and passports—essentially everything but the clothes on their backs.

Not so long ago, Mosul had been home to some 60,000 Christians. By July 19, 2014, only the most disabled and infirm remained—but not for long. Unwilling to convert and unable to pay \textit{jizya}, they would soon be shot and killed.

“Christian families are on their way to Dohuk and Irbil [in Iraqi Kurdistan],” cried Patriarch Louis Sako. “For the first time in the history of Iraq, Mosul is now empty of Christians.”\textsuperscript{33}

“Our people are disappearing,” lamented Canon Andrew White. “Are we seeing the end of Christianity? We are committed come what may, we will keep going to the end, but it looks as though the end could be very near.”\textsuperscript{34}

On August 6, 2014, IS forces overran Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), Iraq’s largest Assyrian city.

Patriarch Louis Sako, the Iraq-based leader of the Chaldean Catholic Church, issued a statement on August 10, 2014, through the Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need, in which he warned that Iraqi Christians “are facing a human catastrophe and risk a real genocide.”\textsuperscript{35} Noting that all the churches from Mosul to the border of Iraqi Kurdistan were now deserted and desecrated, the patriarch lamented, “The level of disaster is extreme.”

\textbf{Syria}

Christianity has existed in Syria since its inception two thousand years ago, pre-existing Islam by more than six hundred years. In fact, it was in Antioch

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item “Iraqi Christians Flee after Isis Issue Mosul Ultimatum.”
  \item “What is the future for Iraq’s Christians?”
  \item “Christians in Iraq on the Run”; Kendal, “IRAQ: Christians Flee the Killing Fields.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
in Syria—Rome’s “capital of the East”; a city with a “considerable and well-established Jewish community” 36—that the “disciples” (followers of Jesus Christ) were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Yet, as Bloomberg diplomatic correspondent Flavia Krause-Jackson has ominously noted, “a history that predates Islam won’t guarantee the communities’ survival.”37

It certainly didn’t help the Jews.

Friday: Islamic Conquest and Colonization

After Muhammad’s death, the first caliph, Abu Bakr, organized the invasion of the Levant, which Muhammad had already envisaged. The whole region from Gaza to Caesarea was sacked and plundered in the campaign of AD 634. “Four thousand Jewish, Christian, and Samaritan peasants who defended their land were massacred,” writes historian Bat Ye’or, who goes on to describe how the villages of the Negev were plundered, the countryside was overrun, and Jerusalem was besieged.38

In Syria, Arab settlers sided with the invading Muslim Arabs, leaving Greek Christians to bewail the destruction of churches and monasteries, the sacking of towns, and the burning of fields. Whole villages were totally eliminated; cattle and people were carried off as booty. Thousands subsequently perished due to conflict-related famine and disease.

“The Arabs,” writes Ye’or, “continued to launch successive raids on Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Armenia. The countryside suffered constant razzias [raids], while those who escaped the sword swelled the contingents of enslaved women and children, shared out amongst the soldiers after the deduction of the fifth reserved for the caliph. According to Michael the Syrian, the land taken from the Greeks was systematically pillaged. ‘The Taiyaye [Arabs] grew rich, increased and overran (the lands) which they took from the Romans [Byzantines] and which were given over to pillage.’”39

And so it was, that over time, Syria came to be dominated by Arabs and Islam.

36. Witherington, The Acts of the Apostles, 366–67. Withington notes concerning Antioch (founded 300 BC) that, “Jews played a significant part in this city from its earliest days, and there was a considerable and well-established Jewish community in Antioch in the middle of the first century A.D.”
38. Ye’or, The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam, 44.
39. Ibid., 47.
“After Saturday Comes Sunday”

Saturday

“In the 1930s,” writes Professor Harold Troper, “during the French colonial administration, Syria emerged as a center of Arab anti-Zionist sentiment.” Violent attacks on Jews were commonplace, and because French authorities did not want Syrian nationalist leaders to support the Nazis and foment insurrection, they turned a blind eye to the persecution. “In 1944,” writes Troper, “the Jewish quarter of Damascus was twice sacked by mobs.”

In 1947, Syria was home to some 40,000 Jews. On November 29, 1947, when the United Nations voted to partition Palestine to create the Jewish state of Israel, Arab mobs responded with riots and pogroms. In Aleppo, the 2,500-year-old Jewish community was violently attacked and devastated. Scores of Jews were killed and more than two hundred homes, shops, and synagogues were destroyed. Thousands of Jews fled Syria for refuge in Israel.

When Israel declared independence on May 14, 1948, Muslims responded with violence yet again. Syrian Jews were beaten and killed while their homes were looted and burned. Jewish institutions were closed, holy books were burned, businesses were boycotted, and properties were seized. Syria’s Jews were left destitute.

To prevent Jews escaping to Israel where they could strengthen the Israeli state and even become Israeli soldiers, Syria closed the borders and banned Jewish emigration. That period was so chaotic however, and the Syrian regime so unstable, that many Jews still managed to escape illegally into Lebanon or Turkey. By the time the doors were sealed shut in 1958, only around five thousands Jews remained—“approximately three thousand in Damascus, fifteen hundred in Aleppo, and another five hundred or so in the north-eastern town of Qamishli, near Syria’s border with Turkey.”

Not only were Syrian Jews prevented from leaving, they were marginalized, segregated, repressed and persecuted. Their mail was censored and their phones monitored. Confined to Jewish neighborhoods in Damascus, Aleppo, and Qamishli, they were not even afforded freedom of local movement; they had to request permission to travel more than 3 km from their homes.

In 1967, the Arab states were decisively routed in what came to be known as the Six-Day War [against Israel], and Syrian Jews paid the price.

41. “Jews in Islamic Countries: Syria.”
Faced with wholesale vigilante and state terror, the only way to survive was to pay an exorbitant *jizya*. Even then, security was tenuous.

During that time, Canadian Jewish couple Rubin and Judy Feld started wondering why the plight of Soviet Jews attracted so much more attention than the plight of Jews in Arab lands.

Then, as now, realpolitik and “vital interests” determine whose suffering matters and whose crimes will be tolerated. The West ignored the plight of Jews in Arab lands so as not to jeopardize its “vital interests” with the Arabs. Meanwhile, the West exploited the plight of Jews in Soviet lands to criticize communism and punish the revolutionary soviet regime. The same selective indignation occurs today—”There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9).

The Felds took up the cause of Syrian Jewry, and by late 1972 were in regular communication with a Rabbi in Damascus, sending coded messages and secret notes hidden in religious books.

When Rubin Feld (40) died of a heart attack in June 1973, the Felds’ cause might have died with him except for the fact that Judy—a formidable woman—was so passionate about it herself. After her husband’s death, Judy Feld devoted herself to speaking and fundraising on behalf of Syria’s beleaguered and imperiled Jews.

In October 1973, when the Arabs failed (yet again) to eradicate the state of Israel—this time in the Yom Kippur War (also known as the Ramadan War)—the situation for Syrian Jews deteriorated further. In the first week after the war, Judy received the news that all Jewish males in Aleppo had been arrested. The fate of Jews in Damascus and Qamishli was unclear. Gradually, stories emerged of Jews dying while trying to flee. Judy knew that the remaining Syrian Jews needed to be rescued.

“I took my first person out of Syria by ransom—a rabbi from Aleppo—in 1977,” she tells.43 Eventually she gave up her career as a musicologist to devote herself full time to running clandestine operations to rescue Jews out of Syria.

In April 1992, the Syrian regime of President Hafez al-Assad lifted the travel ban imposed on the country’s remnant Jews. At that point, the New York Syrian Jewish community organized a rescue operation through which hundreds of Jews were secretly airlifted out of Syria en masse.

Judy, who re-married and now goes by the name Feld-Carr, continued rescuing Syrian Jews until September 2001, by which time all the Jews who

43. Linde, “Judy Feld Carr Secretly Rescued Syrian Jews.”
wanted to leave had left. By then, despite raising six children of her own, Judy had been involved in the rescue of 3,228 Syrian Jews. How did she do it? “Slowly, slowly, slowly,” she says, “with a great deal of difficulty; it was not an easy thing to do, and I am not from Syria—I am an Ashkenazi [a Jew with Eastern European ancestry] from northern Canada originally—I figured out the system.”

In September 2013, as war raged in Syria, Sam Sokol reported for *The Jerusalem Post* that Syria’s remnant Jews—numbering about fifty—were living in central Damascus under the protection of President Bashar al-Assad. “The average age there is around 45 or 50,” he said. “There are no more youths under that age to my knowledge. No youths, no children.” In other words, the end of the Jewish existence in Syria was in sight, and all but guaranteed.

By 2014 there were as few as eleven Jews left in Syria. These were Jews who had chosen to stay and die in their homeland.

Watching the carnage of the Syrian conflict, Judy Feld-Carr commented in March 2014, that she was actually glad there were virtually no Jews left in Syria. “If they were there now . . . I know what would have happened. It would have been the slaughter of the Syrian Jewish community, that is for sure . . . I know there would be a slaughter.”

**After Saturday comes Sunday**

In April 2008, Elias Khoury (65) reminisced to *The New York Times* that he could still remember the days when the people who lived in his cliff-side village of Maaloula (around 55 km northeast of Damascus) were virtually all Christian and the elderly spoke only Aramaic, the language of Jesus. Mr. Khoury lamented the loss of culture. Not only had the government’s Arabization policies hurt, but as Assyrian (also known as Chaldean or Syriac) youths emigrated seeking better lives in the West, Arab Muslims flowed in to take their place. By 2008, Maaloula—which not so long ago had been entirely Christian and Aramaic-speaking—was almost 50 percent Muslim. It would not be long before loss of culture would be the least of Mr. Khoury’s worries.

44. Ibid.
45. Sokol, “Amid Civil War.”
47. Ibid.
48. Worth, “In Syrian Villages.”
International jihadists flooded into Syria throughout 2012, mostly over the Turkish border with the tacit approval and even aid of Turkish authorities, to wage jihad against the “infidel regime” of Bashar al-Assad. In March 2013, the northern city of Raqqa became the first provincial capital to fall under full rebel control. Divisions emerged in the rebel ranks, and within months Jabhat al-Nusra (the main al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria) had split between those loyal to al-Qaeda and those loyal to a new group: ISIS/ISIL. The Syrian government was being seriously challenged on multiple fronts.

Maaloula

The war had turned Maaloula into highly strategic territory. Located on high ground just off the main highway between Damascus and the then-rebel-capital of Homs, Maaloula would be an ideal place from where rebels could launch attacks on the strategic M5 highway critical to the government’s supply lines.

Early on the morning of Wednesday September 4, 2013, jihadists from al-Qaeda’s al-Nusrah Front, Ahmar al Sham (another hard-line al-Qaeda-linked, Salafist/Wahhabi, puritanical Sunni outfit), and a supposedly “moderate” US-allied Free Syrian Army brigade from Homs, seized control of Maaloula.49

True to the al-Qaeda modus operandi, the attacked commenced with a suicide bomber blowing himself up at the regime checkpoint at the entrance to the village. After seizing the checkpoint, the jihadists disabled two tanks and an armored personnel carrier. Eight Syrian soldiers were killed defending the historic Christian town. After seizing control of the Safir Hotel high on the hilltop, and the nearby caves that overlook the town, the jihadists began shelling the residents below. Some eighty terrified locals took shelter in a convent already home to thirteen nuns and twenty-seven orphans. Others managed to escape the town.

From her refuge in Damascus, Maaloula refugee “Marie” lamented: “They arrived in our town at dawn on Wednesday and shouted, ‘We are from the Al-Nusra Front and have come to make lives miserable for the Crusaders [i.e. Christians].’”50

Another Maaloula refugee, Adnan Nasrallah (62) told reporters: “I saw people wearing Al-Nusra headbands who started shooting at crosses,” adding that one of them “put a pistol to the head of my neighbour and forced

50. “Jihadists ‘Killed, Threatened Christians’ in Syrian Town of Maaloula.”
him to convert to Islam by obliging him to repeat ‘there is no God but God.’ Afterwards they joked, ‘he’s one of ours now.’"

Mr. Nasrallah told reporters that he had spent forty-two years running a restaurant in the US state of Washington—a restaurant he had named after his hometown, Maaloula. “I had a great dream,” he told reporters. “I came back to my country to promote tourism. I built a guesthouse and spent $2000 installing a windmill to provide electricity in the town. My dream has gone up in smoke. Forty-two years of work for nothing.”

But for Mr. Nasrallah, the worst thing of all was the reaction he witnessed from his Muslim neighbors when the jihadists entered the town: “Women came out on their balconies shouting with joy, and children . . . did the same. I discovered that our friendship was superficial.”

Maaloula refugee Rasha recounted how the jihadists seized her fiancé Atef, who belonged to the town’s defence militia, and brutally murdered him:

“I rang his mobile phone,” said Rasha, “and one of them answered.

“Good morning, Rash rush,” the voice said, using her nickname. “We are from the Free Syrian Army. Do you know your fiancé was a member of the shabiha (pro-regime militia) . . . we have slit his throat.”

The man on the phone told Rasha that Atef had been given the option of converting to Islam, but had refused.

“Jesus didn’t come to save him,” he taunted.51

Kessab

In the early hours of Friday March 21, 2014, jihadists from al-Qaeda affiliates al-Nusra Front, Sham al-Islam, and Ansar al-Sham crossed into Syria from Turkey via the Kessab border crossing.

Located in Syria’s far northwest, Kessab is a historic Christian Armenian town in the coastal province Latakia. Kessab’s population had swollen in recent years as Armenian refugees had flooded in from Aleppo, Raqqa, and other Syrian war zones.

As the jihadists advanced, most of the 3,500 Armenians living in Kessab (some 670 families) either fled into the hills or were evacuated to the port city of Latakia.52 Only the frail, infirm, and disabled remained. By the

51. Ibid.
52. “Two Thousand Kessab Armenians Find Safety in Latakia.”
end of the day, Kessab, the border crossing, and the strategic hill known as Observatory 45 were all under rebel control.

The next day, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) launched a counteroffensive. Its jets attacked rebel positions and drove the jihadists back. On Sunday March 23, however, jihadist reinforcements arrived and homes were looted, churches were desecrated, and the remnant Armenians were taken hostage. According to Armenian media, at least eighty Armenians were killed in the rebel assault in which Kessab was ethnically cleansed of its Armenian Christian community in a jihadist operation facilitated by Turkey.

In a written statement, the Armenian National Committee—International condemned the attacks along with Turkey’s active role in aiding and abetting extremist groups in their targeted attacks against the Christian and minority populations in Syria:

For months, we have warned the international community of the imminent threat posed by extremist foreign fighters against the Christian minority population in Syria. These vicious and unprompted attacks against the Armenian-populated town and villages of Kesab are the latest examples of this violence, actively encouraged by neighboring Turkey. We call upon all states with any influence in the Syrian conflict to use all available means to stop these attacks against the peaceful civilian population of Kesab, to allow them to return to their homes in safety and security. In the last one hundred years, this is the third time that the Armenians are being forced to leave Kesab and in all three cases, Turkey is the aggressor or on the side of the aggressors.53

Understanding the Christian crisis in the Middle East

A massive firestorm is devouring the Middle East. It is a highly complex storm with many elements to it, many factors driving it, numerous trends fueling it, and decades—even centuries—of pent-up momentum behind it. Contributing elements include apocalyptic politico-religious ideology and tortured history. Contributing factors include international geopolitics and strategic realpolitik. Contributing trends include urbanization, economic stress, Islamic radicalization, heightened sectarianism, globalization, the growth in communication technologies, and the decline of the West.

53. “Kessab Targeted by Al-Qaeda Front Groups.”
Most of these contributing trends have converged to create what strategic analyst Gregory R. Copley describes as a “perfect strategic storm.”

Two trends, however—decline of the West and the rise of Islam—could better be described as having passed each other, like travelers on adjacent escalators heading in opposite directions.

A century of Western hegemony has come to an end, and the West, having overturned the balance-of-power dynamic that existed through much of the twentieth century, is now in the process of departing the arena. It leaves behind a complex and multi-layered struggle through which regional forces are staking their claims, securing their interests, and advancing their agendas.

One layer of this struggle involves the region’s three imperialistic powers which are competing for territory and influence: ascendant Iran versus the Arabs (led by Saudi Arabia) versus neo-Ottoman Turkey.

Another layer involves the seemingly eternal struggle between region’s two Islamic sects: the Sunnis versus the Shi’ites.

Yet another layer involves the region’s two political axes: the east-west, Iran-led, Shi’ite-dominated Shia Axis or Axis of Resistance (comprising Tehran, Baghdad, and Damascus, along with Lebanon’s Hezbollah and other “resistance” groups such as Hamas) versus the north-south, Turkey-Arab-Sunni Axis (which itself is split between pro- and anti-Muslim Brotherhood [MB] factions). The fact that Russia backs Damascus while the US backs its Sunni allies merely adds fuel to the fire.

Rising up like a mushroom cloud in the midst of the chaos—indeed, exploiting and feeding on the chaos to advance its own ends (as is its modus operandi)—is the global movement of transnational jihadism. This movement—which is committed to establishing a caliphate in the heart of the Middle East from where it will wage jihad against the West—has now split into two mutually hostile factions: the pragmatic, pro-resistance al-Qaeda versus the inflexible, anti-Shi’ite IS. While the transnational jihadist element adds another layer to the conflict, it also transcends it while infecting every other layer.

Of all the groups operating in the Mesopotamian theatre, only the US lacks clear goals. Consequently, US policy has been inconsistent and contradictory, confounding its allies, and causing dismay and despair amongst the region’s existentially imperilled Christians who, in their heart of hearts, had truly believed that the West, particularly the US, might actually help them.

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54. Copley, “Early Warning. Here Comes the Cavalry.”
55. Neo-Ottomanism is a political ideology that aspires to empire and promotes greater political influence in and ties between Turkey and the regions formerly part of the Ottoman Empire.
Instead, it is as if the West can’t even see them; although maybe it is just that
the West is quite prepared to sacrifice them.

The struggle for hegemony will be furious, for the stakes are high. These groups are not merely fighting for hegemony over fertile, oil-rich
Mesopotamia. They are fighting for hegemony over the whole Middle East;
indeed, for hegemony over Muslims—for the right to claim leadership of
the Muslim ummah (nation). None will accept the pacification of Mesopo-
tamia until their interests have been secured.

In the eye of the storm, in the buffer zone between the region’s three
imperialistic powers, on the sectarian fault line between the region’s two
principle Islamic sects, at the flashpoint where the two political axes inter-
sect, is the ancient Christian heartland where the disciples of Jesus were
first called Christians—where the first Christian denomination (the Assyrian
Church of the East) was established, from where the gospel spread west
into Europe and east into Persia and China, and to where persecuted “early
church” Christians once fled for refuge.

 Egypt

Even in Egypt, home to the Middle East’s largest Christian community, es-
calating persecution is driving a new exodus.

The Copts are the indigenous people of Egypt, the true descendents of
the pharaohs. Tradition has it that the Apostle Mark—one of Jesus’ twelve
disciples—took Christianity to Egypt in the first century, becoming the
first bishop of Alexandria. Tradition also has it that he was martyred there,
burned alive during the reign of the emperor Trajan.56

When the Arabs invaded Egypt in the December of AD 639, Coptic Egypt was predominantly Christian and part of Byzantium (the Greek
Church). According to historian Bat Ye’or, the invading Muslim army, which
comprised “four thousand men,” overran al-Arish (on the Mediterranean
in North Sinai) and seized Pelusium in the Delta region after a month-long
siege before advancing on Old Cairo. The Arabs simultaneously sent a force
against the Fayyum oasis. “Behnesa, a town further south, was seized by
the Muslims, who exterminated its inhabitants, while the Fayyum and As-
boit suffered the same fate. The whole population of Nikious was put to the
sword. Amr continued the conquest of Egypt, pillaging and massacring . .

56. Foxe, Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, 7.
57. Bat Ye’or, The Decline of Eastern Christianity, 46–47.
The situation did not improve with time, as Philip Jenkins notes: “Although Egypt’s Christians had often been subjected to outbreaks of persecution, the events of 1354 reached an alarming new intensity. Mobs demanded that Christians and Jews recite the Muslim profession of faith upon threat of being burned alive. The government struck at churches and confiscated monasteries, destroying the financial basis of the Coptic Church.”

According to Jenkins, the persecution of 1354 was systematic, nationwide, and so acute that many converted to Islam just to survive. He describes it as a “catastrophic time”, not only for the Copts in Egypt, but also the Christians right across the Middle East where the Seljuk Turks were expanding their empire, bringing added pressure and more conflict. “So disastrous, in fact, were the cumulative blows against the churches in these years that we can properly see the fourteenth century as marking the decisive collapse of Christianity in the Middle East, across Asia and in much of Africa.”

“The story of religious change,” concludes Jenkins, “involves far more active persecution and massacre at the hands of Muslim authorities than would be suggested by modern believers in Islamic tolerance.”

And so it was that over time, Egypt came to be dominated by Arabs and Islam.

In September 2011, the Egyptian Federation of Human Rights (EFHR) released a report revealing that some 93,000 Coptic Christians had fled Egypt since the March 2011 “Arab Spring” toppling of President Hosni Mubarak. Naguib Gabriel, the head of the EFHR, estimated that the figure could increase to 250,000 by the end of 2011.

Just weeks later, on the evening of Sunday October 9, 2011, some one thousand mostly Coptic Christians, and maybe just as many sympathetic Muslims, rallied outside the Maspero building—the home of Egyptian state television and radio, near Tahrir Square in Cairo. The crowd, comprising mostly youths, rallied peacefully in protest of the escalating violent persecution of Copts in the wake of the toppling of Mubarak.

The Egyptian military came out in full force against the protesters. In the ensuing chaos, twenty-four protestors were killed and some 329 injured—run down by tanks and gunned down by soldiers to shouts of “Allahu Akbar” (Allah is greater). One soldier was caught on video boasting that he had “killed two of those infidels” (referring to Copts).

59. Kamill, “NGO Report: 93,000 Copts Left Egypt Since March.”
60. Kendal, “EGYPT: more radicalised than we realised.”
61. Rashwan, “Maspero Survivors Finally Testify.”
On October 10, 2011, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article on the Maspero Massacre, which noted:

Egypt’s post-revolutionary political ferment has ushered in a powerful contingent of Muslims who adhere to the fundamentalist Salafi school of Islamic thought widely practiced in Saudi Arabia. The Salafis were largely absent from pre-revolutionary political life, and their rapid ascent to the political mainstream—and widely suspected role in past incidents of sectarian violence—has alarmed liberal Egyptians and religious minorities.

“People are burning churches!” said Nasser Abdel Mohsen, a Muslim who said he had joined the Christian protesters out of solidarity. “That’s never happened before. We always used to live peacefully as Copts and Muslims.”

Sunday's events began in the early afternoon when thousands of Coptic Christians marched from the Cairo suburb of Shubra to the television building to protest what they said was the reluctance of the interim ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to prosecute radical Islamists who recently attacked two churches in Upper Egypt. The attacks occurred even after church officials had acquiesced to demands from local Salafis to remove bells and crosses from the church's facade.

. . . Mr. Mohsen said the military and fewer than a dozen “bearded men” who he said he suspected were Muslim radicals convened a group of men from local neighborhoods to assault the protesters with iron bars.

“It’s a stupid thing that the army is coordinating with the thugs and Salafis,” said Mr. Mohsen. “These are people who want to burn down the country, which will lead to burning down the region and then the whole world.”

An Egyptian Jew by the name of Joseph Wahed from Moraga, California responded to *The Wall Street Journal’s* article via a letter to the editor:

As an Egyptian Jew, I read with special interest your article “Clashes Between Christians, Police Rock Cairo” World News, Oct. 10, 2011. I was reminded of what our Coptic Christian neighbor told my family as we were being expelled from Egypt in November 1952: “After Saturday comes Sunday.” He accurately predicted that the Coptic community also would feel the wrath and hatred of Egyptians, much of it inspired by radical Muslims...

Nowadays, Christians are being victimized by the Muslim community in Iraq, Pakistan, Gaza, Bethlehem, Lebanon, Nigeria and elsewhere. Sadly, just as when Jews were being ethnically cleansed, there’s the same stone silence from the U.N., human-rights organizations, religious leaders and the world’s Christian community.63

Sunday is upon us

The Christian crisis in the Middle East is existential and immediate. Lest we forget: the elimination of an entire ethnic-religious group is not without precedent—the Arab states have already been “cleansed” of Jews.

It is possible that Christians and Christianity could be eliminated from the Middle East. The only thing necessary for this to be achieved is that we do nothing.64

63. “Anyone Notice the Persecution of Mideast Christians?”
64. Paraphrasing Edmund Burke: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”