



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on April 10, 2017

44 Killed by ISIS Bomb Attacks on Coptic Christian Churches in Egypt

ISIS has claimed responsibility for a pair of deadly bomb attacks on Palm Sunday that killed 44 people at two Coptic Orthodox Christian churches in Egypt. The first bombing took place at St. George Church in Tanta, a Nile Delta city about 60 miles north of Cairo, killing at least 27 people. A few hours afterward, a second bomb was detonated at St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria, killing another 17 people. The two attacks wounded more than 125 people.



St. Mark's is the historic seat of the Coptic Orthodox pope, currently Tawadros II, who had just finished celebrating mass in the cathedral at the time but escaped unharmed.

Pope Francis, who was celebrating Palm Sunday in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, condemned the bombings, and expressed "deep condolences to my brother, Pope Tawadros II, the Coptic church and all of the dear Egyptian nation." (The two churches separated following the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.)

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Fox News reported that Grand Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, the head of Egypt's Al-Azhar, which is the leading center of learning in Sunni Islam, condemned the attacks, calling them a "despicable terrorist bombing that targeted the lives of innocents."

President Trump tweeted that he is "so sad to hear of the terrorist attack" and stated that he has "great confidence" that Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi "will handle the situation properly."

In response to these terrorist bombings, el-Sissi declared a state of emergency for three months during a speech at the presidential palace following a meeting of the national defense council.

During the speech, reported Fox News, el-Sissi accused unnamed countries of fueling instability in the country, adding, "Egyptians have foiled plots and efforts by countries and fascist, terrorist organizations that tried to control Egypt." He ordered the immediate deployment of troops to assist police in protecting vital facilities across the country. Under Egypt's constitution, el-Sissi will have to put the measure before parliament for approval within a week.

A message posted at the U.S. State Department website on April 9 stated:

The United States condemns in the strongest terms the barbaric attacks on Christian places of worship in Tanta and Alexandria that killed dozens of innocent people and injured many more on this holy day of Palm Sunday. We express our condolences to the families and friends of the victims and wish a quick recovery for all those injured.

The United States will continue to support Egypt's security and stability in its efforts to defeat terrorism.



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The Fox News report noted that Egypt has struggled to combat a wave of Islamic militancy since its military overthrew its elected Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, in 2013. Morsi had been elected in June 2012. Because of his persecution of Christians, Egypt's Copts were largely supportive of the military overthrow of Morsi. However, after he was deposed, they then incurred the wrath of many of his followers, who attacked churches and other Christian institutions.

A number of articles published by *The New American* chronicled the rise of radical Islamic power in Egypt under the Muslim Brotherhood following the end of Hosni Mubarek's rule in 2011. In January 2011, widespread protests began against Mubarak's government and during the following month, Mubarak resigned and fled Cairo. Parliamentary elections were held in November 2011, and, as noted above, Mohamed Morsi — the Muslim Brotherhood candidate — was elected president in June 2012.

An article in *The New American* in December 2011 foretold what was ahead in its title: "[Egypt's Coptic Christians Brace for Life Under the Muslim Brotherhood](#)." The article observed: "A year [2011] which began with Muslim terrorists [bombing a church in Alexandria, Egypt](#), during the Coptic Church's celebration of Christmas on January 7 has now witnessed the rise of militant Islam to the point of having utter control of the government of that nation."

The article quoted from a report from *The New American's* foreign correspondent Alex Newman observing that, "Egyptian voters delivered a powerful victory to Islamists and the long-outlawed Muslim Brotherhood in the first round of parliamentary elections [in November 2011], with hard-line Islamic parties winning around 65 percent of the vote."

The article went on to observe:

U.S. policy toward Egypt has now led to a situation similar to the debacle in Iraq, where a U.S. invasion led to the systematic persecution of a Christian minority which had survived in that nation for centuries. Now, it remains to be seen whether Coptic Christians will begin fleeing a country reshaped by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Fortunately, Egypt's Copts had sufficient fortitude that they did not flee Egypt, but managed to outlast Morsi. On July 3, 2013, after a high level of public discontent with the autocratic excesses of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood government had eroded his popular support, the military staged a coup and removed Morsi from power and installed an interim government.

On March 26, 2014, el-Sissi, who was then the head of the Egyptian Armed Forces, resigned from the military and announced his candidacy for the presidency. El-Sissi was sworn into office as president of Egypt on June 8, 2014.

An April 10, 2017 CNN report summed up the Morsi years by noting:

During the years that the Morsi regime was in power, Copts were terrified, not only because of spates of sectarian violence, but also out of fear of a creeping Islamist takeover of the Egyptian state. When then-General Abdel Fattah el-Sissi moved to depose Morsi, arguably no community supported him more strongly than the Copts.

Pope Tawadros sat by Sissi's side as it was announced that Egypt's first democratically elected president had been removed from office, while Christians celebrated in the streets.

The jubilation quickly dissipated, as outraged Islamists set upon churches throughout the country with a vengeance, burning dozens of them to the ground and damaging many others.

CNN noted that while Islamic terrorist attacks against Copts in Egypt is nothing new, what has changed



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“is the bloodthirstiness of radical Islamists in Egypt with the growth of ISIS in the country.”

The report also noted that while Egypt’s Copts were elated when Morsi was overthrown and replaced by el-Sissi, the current president has often failed to protect them from attacks by radical Islamists. He has often voiced support for the Copts, but his actions have fallen short of his promises.

The report observed that Copts are reacting to the latest round of attacks with weariness and outrage.

“I made the same comments after the [Christmas 2016] bombing of Saint Peter’s church,” CNN stated, quoting Mina Thabet, a program director with the Egyptian Commission of Rights and Freedoms, who spoke from inside Saint George’s Church. “We have to review our strategy for fighting terrorism.”

“You can’t get any reaction from the people now, other than anger,” Thabet continued.

“Everyone is saying, ‘Oh, again, again,’ ” said Noaman Sideek, a Copt who lives in Cairo. “We need more security.... Of course we are targeted, and of course the government knows we are targeted, so why don’t they protect us? We are feeling hurt and let down by the government.”

Trump’s tweet expressing “great confidence” that el-Sissi “will handle the situation properly” may have been overly optimistic.

Photo of Coptic Christians in Tanta, Egypt: Sipa via AP Images

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