



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on October 10, 2011

Egyptian Regime Kills Dozens of Christian Protesters

The military regime ruling Egypt is under fire after it responded to weekend protests by Coptic Christians in Cairo with deadly force, leaving hundreds wounded and dozens dead. An official investigation is ongoing. Following another church attack last week blamed on Islamist extremists, Christian activists marched to the state-run TV station headquarters in the capital. The demonstrators were demanding government protection from Muslim attacks and the resignation or firing of a provincial governor.



"Down, down, Field Marshal Tantawi!" the protesters were also reportedly chanting, calling for the Egyptian regime's chief to step down. Then the situation spiraled out of control.

According to news reports, thugs in civilian clothing unleashed a wave of violence against the Christians using swords, clubs, and other weapons. The government then sent armored personnel carriers and mowed down dozens of protesters. At least 25 were killed, probably more — some crushed under tanks, others shot.

"The army was very violent in dealing with all these demonstrations ... and they are being very violent as they know they will not be held accountable and will use such protests to increase repression in Egypt," Gamal Eid of the Arab Network For Human Rights Information [told](#) the Reuters news agency. "That is evidence that the military has to leave power as soon as possible."

Coptic leaders said the Christian community was being specifically targeted by the Egyptian regime. "The Copts are being persecuted by the state," priest Sila Abd al-Nour was quoted as saying during a ceremony mourning the victims. Other prominent Christian voices said the government was failing to enforce the law and protect Copts.

The military regime, which seized the reins of power after dictator Hosni Mubarak was ousted early this year, claimed shots were fired at soldiers from the crowd. But the Coptic Church accused agent provocateurs enabled by the military and police of instigating the unrest as an excuse to murder demonstrators.

"Strangers got in the middle of our sons and committed mistakes to be blamed on our sons," the Coptic Church, representing about 10 percent of Egypt's population, said in a statement. The anti-Christian provocations are a regular fact of life for the Coptic community, the Church noted. And the violence is rarely, if ever, punished.

But "Prime Minister" Essam Sharaf promised to investigate. "The necessary measures are being taken now to immediately investigate the event and bring the perpetrators to justice, whoever they were," he wrote on Facebook.

During a segment on state television, Sharaf said "hidden hands" — both foreign and domestic — were trying to obstruct Egypt's transition to democracy. But he advocated forging ahead with efforts to build



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a “modern state” based on “democratic principles,” lamenting the fact that the nation was now having to search for security and stability yet again.

“We will not surrender to these malicious conspiracies and we will not accept reverting back,” Sharaf was [quoted](#) as saying by Reuters. He also called on Egyptians not to “give into strife.”

Still, the Copts are suspicious. Many of the victims’ families are refusing to allow government autopsies, fearing that the regime will try to cover up the truth about what happened.

Outside a hospital where some of the wounded were taken, according to CNN, protesters [chanted](#): “The army has its tanks but we have our prayers.” Even some Muslims joined the rally to express solidarity, the news agency reported.

Anti-Coptic violence in Egypt, of course, is hardly a new phenomenon. Islamic extremists have been bombing Christian churches there for years. But in the post-Mubarak era the attacks have intensified — and this weekend's state-sponsored violence might be the start of a whole new chapter.

Many Coptic Egyptians actually took part in the revolution that brought down the U.S.-backed tyrant, hoping things would get better. Pictures at the time showed Christians protecting Muslims from security forces as they prayed.

But now, members of the Coptic community are becoming increasingly concerned about their fate as radical Muslim groups — long repressed by Mubarak — wield growing power and influence. Eye-witness reports of the weekend violence offered an ominous warning about what may be coming.

Thousands of Muslims swarmed into the streets as the Christian protesters approached their destination, and unrest became obvious. News accounts reported that some had joined the demonstration to defend the Copts from the regime and express their outrage with the military rulers. Others, however, wanted to help authorities quash the protest.

Several reports, citing witnesses, said club-wielding men were helping to brutalize Christians, shouting slogans such as “No God but Allah” or “Islamic, Islamic.” The *New York Times* [reported](#) that some Muslim civilians appeared to be working with police and soldiers while chanting “The people want to bring down the Christians.”

A Cairo-based analyst with the International Crisis Group who witnessed the clashes painted a dark picture. “What I saw and heard today is a side of Egypt that I’ve never seen before,” Elijah Zarwan [told](#) the *Washington Post*. “There have always been sectarian tensions simmering under the surface, but now something very dangerous has been unleashed.”

The growing unrest has sparked concern abroad, too, as European politicians condemned the violence. EU foreign policy boss Catherine Ashton said she was “extremely concerned by the large number of deaths and injuries.”

The Obama administration also offered its condolences to those affected. “Now is a time for restraint on all sides so that Egyptians can move forward together to forge a strong and united Egypt,” the White House was [quoted](#) as saying. “As the Egyptian people shape their future, the United States continues to believe that the rights of minorities — including Copts — must be respected, and that all people have the universal rights of peaceful protest and religious freedom.”

The military regime has attracted widespread outrage for refusing to step down in a timely fashion. Outrageous behavior, such as military trials for civilians, has not helped to soothe Egyptians’ concerns.



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The junta also recently announced that presidential elections would be postponed until 2013, sparking fury among citizens who were hoping for change following the brutal, decades-long reign of Mubarak. Analysts said the outcome of the investigation into the violence will be a key indicator about the future of Egypt.

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Photo: Egyptian Christians protest outside St. Mark's Cathedral against the military ruling council in Cairo, Egypt, Oct. 10, 2011 a day after at least 25 people were killed: AP Images



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