



Written by [James Heiser](#) on January 28, 2011

Congress Considers Religious Freedom Envoy

As Pakistan slides further in the direction of Islamic extremism, and anti-Christian violence is on the rise in Iraq and Egypt, Congress may soon consider legislation which may increase the level of American intervention in such conflicts.

The plight of Christians and other religious minorities in Islam-dominated nations has become quite bleak, and shows little hope of improvement in the near future. When [Mogtada al-Sadr](#) was recently returned to Iraq he was met with a hero's welcome, even as a governor in Pakistan — Salman Taseer — was murdered for opposing the imposition of the death penalty for those found guilty of blasphemy under Sharia Law. Meanwhile, Egypt has experienced several outbreaks of anti-Christian violence, even as the Mubarak regime [may be in danger of falling apart](#). In the midst of such complicated developments — including substantial U.S. intervention, and financial aid to each of these failed, or failing, states — the question arises whether further intervention simply highlights [the wisdom of John Quincy Adams'](#) counsel in 1821 regarding American foreign policy:



She [the American Republic] has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings, as to the last vital drop that visits the heart.

She has seen that probably for centuries to come, all the contests of that Aceldama the European world, will be contests of inveterate power, and emerging right.

Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be.

But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.

She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all.

She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

Representative Frank Wolf (R-Va., above left), apparently favoring an approach quite different from that of Adams, has introduced legislation which would further involve the U.S. State Department in the complexities of religious conflict in some of the most troubled nations on earth. According to a [press release](#) issued by the office of Representative Wolf (who is now in his 16th term in office):

In the wake of increasing violence, targeted attacks and heightened discrimination against Christians in Iraq and Egypt,



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and persistent concerns in Afghanistan and Pakistan, among other nations, Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) today introduced bipartisan legislation calling for the creation of a special envoy at the U.S. State Department for religious minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia.

Wolf, co-chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, is long recognized as a voice for the persecuted around the world. He said threats against religious minorities have been increasing in recent months and that the United States has an obligation to speak out for the voiceless, to develop policies to protect and preserve these communities, and to prioritize these issues in our broader foreign policy.

"If the international community fails to speak out, the prospects for religious pluralism and tolerance in the region are bleak," Wolf said in introducing the bill. "President Ronald Reagan once said that the U.S. Constitution is a 'covenant that we have made not only with ourselves, but with all of mankind.'"

The text of the proposed legislation (H.R. 440, entitled "To provide for the establishment of the Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia") was not available from the [Library of Congress](#) at the time of this writing; therefore little can be said with regard to the particulars of Mr. Wolf's proposed legislation. However, the voting records of some of the sponsors of H.R. 440 are far from stellar, from a constitutionalist's perspective. In the final evaluation of the 111th Congress, Wolf earned a [Freedom Index](#) score of 65 percent, while his primary co-sponsor, Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.), mustered a mere 3 percent, and another co-sponsor, Rush Holt (D-N.J.), was similarly lackluster at only 8 percent. However, other co-sponsors — including Ken Calvert (R-Calif.), Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.), Trent Franks (R-Ariz.) and Joseph Pitts (R-Pa.) — earned ratings of 80% or higher. (According to [a report from Newsmax.com](#), Eshoo's cosponsorship is, in part, based on her own family's experiences: Eshoo is "the granddaughter of Assyrian and Armenian Christians who fled the genocide carried out by the Ottoman Turks and their Kurdish allies at the end of World War I[;] the dramatic upsurge in attacks against Christians in Iraq and Egypt was reminiscent of stories she had learned from childhood.")

Wolf is certainly not new to the perplexing issues related to religious freedom; he was, for instance, the author of H.R. 2431 (1998) — the "[International Religious Freedom Act](#)" — which established, among other things, an "Ambassador at Large" for religious freedom, and [publication of annual reports](#) on the topic. However, as informative as such reports may be, the sequence of events since the 2003 invasion of Iraq have hardly demonstrated a capacity on the part of the United States to press for greater religious freedom; the plight of Christians in Iraq and Pakistan has, in fact, grown significantly worse.

According to Ken Timmerman's article for NewsMax.com, the billions of American dollars which have been spent in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion have, if anything, favored Muslim interests:

Although tens of billions of U.S. taxpayer funds have gone to reconstruction programs in Iraq, a scant \$20 million has been allocated to projects in the predominantly Christian Nineveh Plain in northern Iraq, the ancestral homeland of many Iraqi Christians and a relative safe haven to which thousands of families have fled in recent years.

Worse, the way U.S. aid money has been spent is "not transparent," Rep. Eshoo said.

So she and other members of the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate recently asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a far-reaching audit of U.S. reconstruction assistance to Iraq, in particular as it touches on projects for Christian areas.

Juliana Taimoorazy, president of the Iraqi Christian Relief Council of Chicago, Ill., told members in private meetings on Thursday that most of the \$20 million has been misappropriated or diverted by the entities controlled by the neighboring Kurdish Regional Authority (KRG), including a private company allegedly controlled by the former prime minister of the Kurdish Region, Nechirvan Barzani.

"We have only seen \$180,000 of that money reach the Nineveh Plain for a well," she said.

Sister Maria Hanna, a Dominican nun who runs the al-Hayat maternity hospital in Baghdad, was promised a \$1.2 million grant by the State Department to build a similar facility in Karakhosh in the Nineveh Plain.

Instead, the money was paid out by the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mosul to a different entity not operating in the Nineveh Plain, which currently has no hospital at all for a population estimated at around 100,000.



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The folly of interventionism is that once one begins down the path of applying the 'stick and carrot' of U.S. troops and tax dollars in the attempt to reshape other nations in our own image, the unexpected consequences of one's own actions call forth greater and greater commitments to the path of intervention until the burden becomes unbearable. The mistakes of recent years have proven the wisdom of Adams; truly, America is at her best when "she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy," but instead elects to be "the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all," even as she "is the champion and vindicator only of her own." If the folly of U.S. foreign aid has only been compounded by it flowing to those parties which are hostile to the best interest of these United States, then the reasons are all the clearer to end such foreign entanglements.



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