



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on December 26, 2013

Under “Democracy,” Iraqi Christians Face Potential Extinction

On Christmas Day, more than three dozen civilians in Iraq were reportedly slaughtered in a series of coordinated bombings aimed at Christians. In one of the attacks, a terrorist car bomb went off near a church right after Mass, killing 26 and wounding almost 40, officials said. A separate attack moments earlier targeted an outdoor market in the Christian section of Athorien, leaving 11 dead and more than 20 wounded.



The vicious murders aimed specifically at embattled Iraqi Christians, though, [are nothing new](#). Three years ago, for example, Islamist terrorists with the al-Qaeda-linked group “Islamic State of Iraq” stormed the Our Lady of Salvation cathedral and brutally slaughtered some 60 Christian martyrs after taking more than 100 as hostages. It was among the most brutal anti-Christian attacks in recent Middle East history.

Still, the recent high-profile attacks, which tend to garner more media coverage, only tell a small part of the story of the last decade’s assault on Iraqi Christians. Since the George W. Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq that ousted strongman Saddam Hussein, the ancient Christian communities across the nation — many have been there for close to two millennia — have suffered from ruthless persecution for their faith.

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The numbers tell a more complete story. Before the U.S. government imposed so-called “democracy” on Iraq, estimates suggested there were as many as 1.5 million Christians throughout the diverse country. They had survived centuries of invasions, persecution, and more — but in many respects, the community was still thriving. Today, experts and Christian leaders suggest the number of Christians still in Iraq is somewhere closer to 200,000. Many of those would leave if they could.

At least half of the Christian population — perhaps as much as 90 percent, depending on what estimates are examined — has fled from Iraq so far. The communities are shrinking every day. Regularly faced with bombings, torture, rape, plunder, and other persecution at the hands of ruthless Islamist forces [unleashed after the U.S. government invasion](#), Christianity may very well become extinct in Iraq in the coming years — at least if the situation does not improve.

Less than two weeks before the Christmas Day massacres, the U.K. *Telegraph* highlighted the growing problems in a rare article about the trend headlined [“Iraq’s battle to save its Christian souls: ‘Christians are finished here.’”](#) The article pointed out that a decade after the U.S. government overthrew Hussein’s secular regime, Christians have dwindled from over a million to as little as 200,000.

The hard-hitting report also featured comments from Archdeacon Temathius Esha, described as the last Christian priest in the Baghdad suburb of Doura — one of the areas that was bombed this week. Even before the latest attack, though, Archdeacon Esha explained the plight of his church offering sanctuary to an “ever-dwindling flock.”



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Just two out of the original seven churches in Doura remain open. The others: shuttered in the wake of bombings, the kidnapping of priests, and an ongoing and accelerating exodus of Christians. Archdeacon Esha's church has been targeted by three bombs so far — all of which were foiled before killing the intended Christian victims. Others, though, were not so fortunate.

"Doura was once one of the biggest Christian communities in Iraq, with 30,000 families," Archdeacon Esha was quoted by the *Telegraph* as saying while preparing for the next service, which barely filled two of the 22 rows of pews. "Now there are only 2,000 left. They feel they are strangers in their own land, and that makes them want to leave. The bleeding from migration is continuous."

Of course, Christians are not the only victims suffering from deadly Islamist attacks. According to United Nations estimates cited in media reports, over 8,000 people have been killed just in 2013, including more than 440 in December alone. Sunni terrorists often target Shia Muslims as well — a phenomenon that has been accelerating in other Middle Eastern countries [suffering under U.S.-backed "liberation,"](#) too.

Despite his brutality and tyranny, though, Hussein had little tolerance for attacks on minorities — including persecution of Christians, some of whom [held senior positions](#) in his relatively secular regime. Indeed, Iraq under Hussein's ruthless dictatorship represented one of the few remaining safe-havens for persecuted Middle Eastern Christians.

"In Saddam's time, Christians could worship freely, and as long as you avoided politics you could survive," Archdeacon Esha explained, echoing widely held sentiments among Christians and other embattled minority groups in Iraq. "But since the war we have been attacked, robbed, raped and forced out of both Doura and the country."

Indeed, in much of the Middle East, Christianity has been under constant assault, especially in recent decades — [either by U.S. government-backed Islamist regimes such as the one ruling Saudi Arabia,](#) or Islamic extremists operating with tacit approval from government authorities. In Middle Eastern countries, officials often tolerate the attacks, or at least do little to prevent them and hunt down perpetrators.

The escalating violence in places like Iraq has led to an exodus. "Often just psychological pressure has been enough; people will drive past here and fire guns in the air, or leave bullets and threatening messages outside Christian homes," said Archdeacon Esha. "Sometimes Islamic extremism is used as an excuse, sometimes it's just blackmail for criminal purposes."

Many Christians who have not yet escaped are ready to get out of Iraq as soon as possible. "I will leave whenever I can," Christian Isaac Napoleon, one of Archdeacon Esha's remaining parishioners, was quoted as saying. "Christians are finished here in Iraq." He reportedly lost a brother and a son to Islamic terrorists, and he is hardly alone.

In a tragic twist, many of the Christians fleeing from violence and persecution in Iraq have headed for Syria. The relatively secular Syrian strongman Bashar al Assad, like Hussein, ran one of a small handful of regimes in the region that protected religious freedom and Christian communities. Then came foreign intervention; with the Obama administration and Sunni Arab dictators helping to arm ruthless Islamist rebels as part of a "regime change" operation.

As *The New American* has been [reporting](#) for years, Christians in Syria are now facing a similar fate as their brethren in Iraq: martyrdom, persecution, rape, massacres, plundering, and more. Over 500,000 have already been forced to flee their homes as Obama-backed rebels work fiendishly to exterminate



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minorities and create an Islamic dictatorship.

As in Syria, though, some Iraqi Christian leaders refuse to surrender their homeland in the face of persecution. The *Telegraph* article focused in on the new Patriarch of Baghdad, Louis Sako, appointed earlier this year. Like others in the region, Sako is determined to ensure that Christianity survives in Iraq and the Middle East — the birthplace of Christ and of Christianity itself.

“I know your fears,” Patriarch Sako said at Baghdad’s St. Joseph’s Church in his first public address as the city’s chief Christian leader. “But you have been here for 2,000 years and are at the origin of this country, together with the Muslims. Why is the little flock still afraid? Do not emigrate, whatever the pressures.” Considering the circumstances, though, it remains unclear whether the embattled Christian communities can or will make it through the barbaric onslaught.

As usual, the Obama administration offered the obligatory condemnation of the latest anti-Christian massacre. In a statement released shortly after the Christmas attacks, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad condemned “in the strongest possible terms” the attacks in Doura “that targeted Christians celebrating Christmas.” It also extended “condolences” to the victims and their families, and wished for a speedy recovery for the injured.

“The Christian community in Iraq has suffered deliberate and senseless targeting by terrorists for many years, as have many other innocent Iraqis,” said the U.S. Embassy statement, released on Christmas shortly after the massacres. “The United States abhors all such attacks and is committed to its partnership with the Government of Iraq to combat the scourge of terrorism.” Meanwhile, the Obama administration has [promised to shower even more military aid](#) on the regime in Baghdad, supposedly to help deal with the surge in violence.

In recent weeks and months, a few high-profile figures have spoken out, drawing attention to the growing suffering and anti-Christian persecution that has largely been ignored by the outside world. Last month, for example, Pope Francis warned that Christianity was in danger across the region. “We will not resign ourselves to imagining a Middle East without Christians,” he said. Prince Charles has also [started speaking out](#).

Little attention has been paid so far, however, to the role of U.S. government intervention in facilitating and in some cases even funding the growing persecution of Middle Eastern Christians. As *The New American* [reported](#) in April of 2012, ancient Christian communities across the Middle East and Africa have increasingly been targeted in the wake of unconstitutional military and “foreign-policy” machinations by the Bush and Obama administrations.

From Egypt and Libya to Syria and Iraq, [Christians are facing threats to their very survival that are at least linked to Washington, D.C.](#) and its schemes. Indeed, if drastic changes in U.S. foreign policy are not forthcoming, experts say Christianity might well be extinguished in the land of its birth — owing at least in part to the lawless machinations of successive American presidential administrations.

Photo shows Iraqi Christians attending Christmas Mass in Basra, Iraq: AP Images

Alex Newman, a foreign correspondent for The New American, is normally based in Europe. He can be reached at anewman@thenewamerican.com.

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