

This Despicable Trend Must Stop—Is This the Only Way?

The pilgrims traveling on the white buses that day were too focused on their visit to the church to pay attention to the group of men blocking the road and dressed in military fatigues, the kind worn by the Egyptian security services. Some of the women, looking forward to their encounter with the 100 monks who lived and worshipped at the Monastery of St. Samuel the Confessor in Minya Province, several hundred miles south of Cairo in the Nile Delta, held Bibles in their hands. Two-thirds of the residents in Minya Province are Christians, and the roadways are frequently filled with vehicles and buses headed to St. Samuel. The men in the fatigues ordered the vehicles to come to a halt, startling the passengers. Barking orders, the armed men forced all the passengers off the buses and demanded that they surrender their mobile phones. The group was then separated by gender.

The men were taken aside and ordered to recite the Shahada, a declaration to the Islamic faith. When they refused, the gunmen took aim. Most of the men were executed point-blank with a gunshot to the back of the head. By the time vehicles appeared in the distance and the killers decided to end the massacre, 28 men and children had been killed in cold blood. The attack bore the fingerprints of the Islamic State: ISIS.

The May 26, 2017, attack against Coptic pilgrims was the latest of what has become an unstoppable—sadly, almost common—wave of violence against Egypt's Christians. In 2017 alone, there were dozens of attacks targeting priests, worshippers and houses of worship. The worst such attack of the year was on April 7, when twin suicide bombings targeted two Coptic churches in Alexandria, killing 44 people and wounding several hundred. The targeting of Christians throughout the Middle East has become one of the toxic

byproducts of the new world order in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. From Libya, where ISIS terrorists beheaded dozens of Christians in a gruesome videotaped murder, to Syria, where Christian families are mercilessly caught in the crossfire between ISIS, other Islamic armies and the brutal Assad regime, Christendom is under fire and threatened like never before. Christian women are raped by ISIS and other Islamic militias of one fundamentalist persuasion or another; Christian girls are taken away from their families at gunpoint and turned into child brides. The metastasized civil war currently going on in Islam, one that now coincides with the retreating presence of the United States as the world's policeman, places the Christian minorities from North Africa to the Tigris River in great peril. The issue over equal rights for Christians, even an argument for justice and basic human dignity, has become one of survival. Over 2,000 years of a faithful presence in the very lands where early Christians spread their beliefs are at risk of being eradicated forever.

The war against ISIS is a huge element of this tragedy, but it's only part of the problem. The wars against al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and the rise of fundamentalist forces within the Arab states have placed the Christian communities in the crosshairs of hate and violence. Ancient enmities have been fired even though the Christians, as far back as the Ottoman Turks, were *dhimmis*, or protected persons, second-class citizens, to be sure, but ones assured of their basic human rights. But today, even in countries and entities where the violence isn't overt, the policies of discrimination are eating away at their vibrant history. Through expulsion, injustice, theft of property, intimidation, emigration and outright despair, the Christian population in the Middle East is slowly but surely evaporating before our eyes.

This trend must stop.

Governments know how to defeat terrorism. There are military responses, law enforcement proactive deterrence and, of

course, financial measures. Along with my attorney colleagues, I have spent my entire career on the legal front holding terrorist groups, their state sponsors and the banks that finance the bloodshed, to account for the suffering of so many innocent civilians. The power of federal courts to seize assets, close bank accounts and render terrorists and those guilty of war crimes nonpersons in the world of banking and asset holding is a powerful weapon. It has worked against Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as against the Islamic Republic of Iran, Syria and even the Palestinian Authority.

But here's an idea that can not only maintain a Christian presence in the Middle East but restore it after years of targeted violence and intentional abuse. Using money seized from groups like the Islamic State and its backers, as well as aid from Western governments, the United States and like-minded nations should embark on an ambitious and necessary Marshall Plan to rebuild Christian communities that have been decimated by years of intimidation, war and terror. The money will be used to rebuild schools and churches, and invest in Christian businesses that will hopefully provide incentive to the hundreds of thousands that have fled the region. Federal law enforcement agencies in the United States have done brilliant work with asset forfeiture, seizing untold millions from drug dealers, organized crime gangs and other criminals. The money and property seized was turned around to buy new police vehicles and crime-fighting equipment; the dirty money was cleansed by putting it to good use.

Accordingly, stiff and unrelenting economic sanctions must be levied against the governments who allow the harassment of Christians and other minority communities to transpire; foreign aid will be denied to these governments. Banks and other financial institutions will be blacklisted if they knowingly do business with groups or government engaged in the discrimination or violent campaigns against the Middle East's Christians.

Money is a potent weapon. Money talks in every language. The threat of economic warfare and then economic reward, the proverbial carrot and the stick, must be employed in the fight against Islamic fundamentalism and in the effort to keep Christian communities throughout the Middle East safe and free from discrimination and violence. Governments and terrorist groups alike must learn that there is a steep cost when national policies and terrorist charters target the Christian minorities. {eoa)

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