

OUR VIEW: 'THIS IS GENOCIDE'

Posted: August 7, 2014

It's been nearly a year since Rep. Frank R. Wolf, R-10th, delivered what proved to be a prescient speech at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. In that address last fall, he spoke ominously of efforts, largely in the Middle East, to eliminate "first the Saturday people (i.e., the Jews, who observe their "Shabbat," or Sabbath, on that day) and then the Sunday people" (Christians).

Now, Mr. Wolf and the rest of the world — or at least those paying proper heed — are bearing witness to these fears. Not only, as he told us during a 75-minute interview Wednesday, have the Jewish populations in Iraq and Egypt been reduced to but a few hardy but aged souls, but Christians and members of the Yazidi sect in lands now controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) are also being systematically persecuted.

"This is genocide," Mr. Wolf says. "It meets the United Nations' definition made in the 1940s. It's a crime against humanity."

But, sadly, not until Mr. Wolf and a few other keepers of the human-rights flame within Congress raised a hue-and-cry about such atrocities were Americans even remotely aware what was taking place in large swaths of Iraq and Syria — in lands where such Biblical giants as Abraham, Esther, Jonah, Daniel, and Ezekiel lived and/or are buried. Now, only the resilience and courage of the Kurdish militia — the *peshmerga* — stand between these innocents and outright elimination.

For more than a week before this latest congressional recess, Mr. Wolf took to the House floor to plead their cause. On Monday, he wrote a letter to President Obama, requesting action. On Wednesday, as he was speaking to us, his office was preparing another. Mr. Wolf, who's retiring from Congress this year to pursue a second career in human-rights advocacy, is all in.

He is not alone. As we have noted, others in Congress are sounding a like clarion. And so are Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury (Justin Welby), and the Southern Baptist Convention. But far too many religious leaders in the West have not raised a voice, to the utter dismay of Mr. Wolf.

Most egregious in its silence, though, has been the Obama White House. In April 2012, Mr. Wolf reminded us, the administration established a genocide prevention board. To date, he says, it's done nothing in the way of prevention, particularly in those Christian and Yazidi sectors of the Middle East where genocide is now the order of the day.

"Doesn't this arouse people?" Mr. Wolf asks, noting parallels between this situation and that which prevailed in 1930s Europe. "Doesn't it arouse them to do something about it? Does anyone care in the West?"

They should, especially those who are "Saturday people" and "Sunday people" themselves.