

A Christian redoubt?

By [David Heim](#)

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With Christians in Iraq and Syria on the brink of destruction, [Walter Russell Mead wonders](#) if Christians in the West will do more than wring their hands.

He says we can either help Christians in the Middle East flee persecution and start new lives elsewhere, or we can help them “fort up”—create “redoubts,” or enclaves that they can defend by force. Mead has in mind, for example, the way Maronite Catholic militias are able defend themselves against Muslim militias in Lebanon.

I tried on Mead’s thought experiment and I found it unnerving. It is extremely hard to imagine mainline Christians in the U.S. sending arms to fortify Christian groups in a military fight against Muslim groups. The idea foments a literal “clash of religious civilizations” ideology that I want to resist.

Still, Mead’s idea illuminates something important about the Middle East, and his analysis dovetails with that offered by Syria expert [Joshua Landis in a recent issue of the Century](#). Both see the Middle East engaged in a nation-building process marked by wars of identity. Europe endured a similar process in the 20th century when national groups shrugged off empires in the name of self-determination. The process is bloody, especially for minority groups in any region.

For me and I think for many Christians in the West, arming Christian groups would seem like a moral and political regression, a return to 16th-century wars of identity. Landis and Mead help us see that for many people—Christians, Muslims, and Jews—those wars never ended. The question for them is how to survive.