

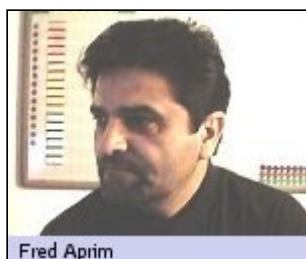
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The "New" Iraq: A Century Old Dilemma

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Fred Aprim

No one ever thought that it was going to be easy! Thirty-five years of the [Ba'ath](#) iron rule have devastated Iraqis with the exception of a small circle of loyalists that prospered in every imaginable way. So, where do [Assyrians](#) stand today after the fall of the Ba'ath regime

and what does the future holds for them? How would society adjust to democracy when the last two generations have lived nothing but oppression and totalitarianism? Would the various Iraqi ethnic and religious groups tolerate each other and how would Assyrians fair next to the two dominating groups: the Arabs and the Kurds, with both their Shi'aa and Sunni Moslem denominations?

Assyrians and the Iraqi Political Dilemma

The Assyrian national question has been part of the Iraqi republic dilemma from the day of its inception in 1921. The Assyrian national question emerged on the outbreak of World War I in 1914 when the Allies (Britain, France, and Russia) asked the [Assyrians](#) to joint forces against the [Axis Powers](#) (Germany, Italy, Turkey, and Japan) in return for a national home. The Axis lost the war and the armistice was signed in 1918. Ottoman Turkish government has to pay a high price for siding with Germany. Few years earlier, Great Britain and France have decided already on the partition of the Ottoman Empire through the [Sykes-Picot](#) agreement. At this time the dream of creating Israel was in fact a plan in motion. The region had to be broken up to avoid a one strong entity against the proposed small state of Israel. The borders of modern Turkey, especially those with Iraq, had to be drawn. This commenced through several treaties between the Allies and Ottoman Turkey that started in 1919.

In [Sevres Treaty](#) of 1920, the rights of the Assyrians were specifically mentioned and guaranteed through the negotiations between the Allies, presented in principle by the then powerful Great Britain, and Ottoman Turkish government (the defeated Sultan) that ruled from Istanbul. As the Young Turks seized power in Turkey, ruling from Ankara, they did not recognize the Treaty of Sevres signed by the Sultan and demanded new talks. In 1923 and during the negotiations in Lausanne, Great Britain and her Allies needed to open a new page with this new Turkish government. When signing the [Lausanne Treaty](#) with Turkey on July 24, 1923, the Assyrian rights were sacrificed despite

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partially granting rights for the non-Moslem minorities in Turkey, however, mentioning only the Armenians, Greeks, and Jews specifically. The Assyrians protested and the League of Nations assigned a special commission to study the matter. The special commission recommended a homogenous settlement of the Assyrians in a region in north of Iraq as it was impossible for the Assyrian Christians to survive in the middle of several unfriendly surrounding ethnic groups. The Assyrians have experienced the Turkish barbarity, i.e. [1914-1918 genocide](#), and it was impossible for them to request that they remain under Turkish rule. In their own analysis, the Assyrians figured since Iraq was under the British mandate, it was safer to be part of Iraq. Furthermore, at the time, they had not experienced any tragic treatments from the Arabs in modern times. Therefore, when the time came to vote on whether to attach Mosul province to Turkey or Iraq, the Christians of Mosul, and the Arab Moslems of course, voted in favor of Iraq. This paved the road to shape the present borders between Iraq and Turkey in 1926.



Assyrian Monument, Baquba, Iraq

Ignoring the Assyrians by name in the Treaty of Lausanne could be seen as planting the seeds for marginalizing the presence of Assyrians by Turkey and Great Britain (on behalf of Iraq); a process that continued ever since. While ruling Iraq as a mandate, the British encouraged Iraqi governments to deal mainly with the "Christians" of Iraq, a propaganda tool to silence any world criticism. Thus, Faisal I, King of Iraq, granted for example the Chaldean patriarch a seat in the Iraqi Senate and promoted few other Christians, mainly Chaldeans and Suryan, to be elected to the House of Representatives. In addition, the government picked malik Khoshaba and dealt with him and a circle of his loyal friends to silence any [Assyrian](#) demands. The government realized that those mentioned "Christians" were not a threat to the Iraqi state. This formula was practiced almost until the fall of Monarchy in 1958.

The leader of the July 14, 1958 military coup brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim was a nationalist who had a new vision for Iraq with all its people regardless of their ethnicity or religion. However, many of the members of the Free Officers movement came from different schools of thoughts and had different political backgrounds. Lieutenant Colonel [Abd al-Salam Mohammad Aarif](#) was a Nasserite – a Pan Arabist, as were others in the movement. He never shied away from making his true hateful feelings towards the Assyrians public. He opened the wounds of the [1933 Simele](#) massacre in an effort to incite hatred, first against Abd al-Ilah, the regent for King Faisal II from April 4, 1939 to May 23, 1953 and also held the title of Crown Prince of Iraq from 1943 and second to bring back the events of 1933 in an attempt to paint the image of the Mar Shimun as a outcast even when Abd al-Ilah was not friendly to the Mar Shimun or the Assyrian people. In his statement after controlling the Iraqi Broadcasting station on July 14, 1958, Abd al-Salam Aarif said: "... *Our brave nation, our fighting nation, was looking forward to this day. Abd al-Ilah [the regent of Iraq], is the enemy of God, is the slave of the imperialists, he fights [unclear] and he is in conformity with [Mar Shimun](#)...*"

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Archive: [audio file](#)

The statement of Lieutenant Colonel [Abd al-Salam Mohammad Aarif](#) on July 14, 1958 as he and his unit sieged the Iraqi broadcasting station announcing the military coup that ended the monarchy era in Iraq.

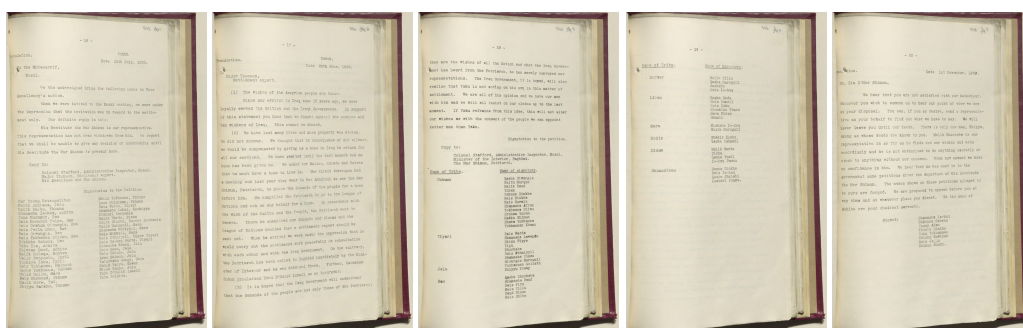


Translation of the statement:

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[Malik Khoshaba](#) made a mistake of trusting the Iraqi government's intentions, a government that was run by the British in reality.

[unclear] and he is in conformity with [Mar Shimun](#) ..."



1934: League of Nations: Iraq - The Assyrian Question
<https://www.atour.com/history/1900/20210220a.html>

Iraqi Nationals or Pan-Arabs

In my opinion, a real democratic Iraq could materialize through the resurgence of a purely Iraqi national sentiment. When people begin to believe that those who live within Iraq are equal Iraqis, irrespective to their ethnic or religious background, and when Iraq's heritage before Arabs and Islam is honored and cherished much progress will emerge. Some argue that Iraqis have done everything but being Iraqis. Although there is some truth to this, but it is not the complete truth. Throughout the history of the modern Republic of Iraq (i.e. since 1921), the Sunnis of Iraq have oriented their activities towards pan-Arab nationalism, meanwhile, the Shi'aa in general have defended Iraqi nationalism. The Iraqi Shi'aa were tested during the Iraq-Iran 1980-1988 war. While many predicted that the Shi'aa of Iraq would sympathize with their coreligionists counterparts Shi'aa of Iran and cross the lines, Iraqi Shi'aa showed that their Iraqi national ties were stronger than their Persian denominational ones. The Kurds seems to be more concern about their national aspiration than their religious ties. Most of their ties have been with non-Arab non-Moslem countries like with the U.S., Russia, other European countries, and Israel in particular, with the exception of a short period of relying on Iran's Shah.

The Kurds

Throughout the twentieth century, if compared to the Arabs, the Kurds have done more damage, if not equal, to Assyrians and the Assyrian question. For few centuries, the Kurds have crept into Assyrian lands in northern Iraq from the Zagros Mountains between Iraq, Iran, and Turkey and with time forced the Assyrians to evacuate their homes and villages whether through terror, murder, oppression, or sheer consistent harassment. (Read reports on www.AINA.org) When the two main Kurdish factions: the Barzani and Talabani were fighting each others in the mid 1990s, al-Hayat interviewed Jalal Talabani, President of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). In that interview, Talabani declared that it was Masuod Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and his gangs, who assassinated an Assyrian representative in the local parliament (Read al-Hayat, January 11, 1995 issue). Of course Talabani is referring to Assyrian Democratic Movement's representative Francis Shabo, who was assassinated in 1993 in northern Iraq. The assailants are still at large as with every single crime committed against Assyrians in north of Iraq. The Assyrians are the indigenous people of northern Iraq and the Kurds know this fact. The Assyrians are the only true obstacle in the Kurd's way to claim northern Iraq as Kurdish region, and I am not underestimating or ignoring the Turkomen and Turkey in the background here. The Kurds have to deal with the Assyrians, the Turkomen issue in the northern province of Kirkuk. The Mosul province issue is another dilemma, which I will touch on later.

The Kurds have no interest whatsoever to help or be friendly towards the Assyrians. Their inclusion of certain seats for Assyrians in the local parliament in 1992 was a stunt to show the world that they are open to the Christian minority. In recent years, it was the Kurds again who promoted the separation of the one Assyrian people into Assyrians and Chaldeans. They did this through their puppets in north of Iraq and certain religious figures. The reasons are obvious, sooner or later elections will take place and the Kurds want to weaken the Assyrians by applying the rule of divide and conquer in order to dominate northern Iraq. The Kurds understand that there is no threat to the so-called Kurdistan by an ethnic group called Chaldeans since history does not substantiate such claim. We must understand that ancient and modern Chaldeans are two completely different things. The modern [Chaldeans](#) are nothing but Catholic Nestorians. On the other hand, the Kurds realize that the Assyrians, historically, have legitimate claims in northern Iraq (Assyria); it is their ancestral land. Therefore, they will obviously promote Chaldeanism but undermine and marginalize Assyrianism.

L. Paul Bremer III is a longtime associate of former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. The Kurds have many concerns with Bremer, and blame his associate Kissinger for their betrayal in the intelligence wars between Iran and Iraq three decades ago. How would Bremer deal with the lawlessness of certain Kurdish forces and what they have displayed in the last few weeks since the liberation of Iraq in April 9, 2003? The Kurds feel certain discomfort; they have witnessed a trend of alienation by the United States lately towards them; the leadership of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) seemed to be depressed few weeks back. They have not stopped their oppression against the Assyrians. In fact, many portray Masuod Barzani's oppression of Assyrians in Dohuk and Arbil as similar to that of Saddam Hussein's oppression of Assyrians. The Kurdish threat is real and dangerous; the Assyrians are fearful. The true picture of Assyrians in north of Iraq could not be analyzed through the statements of Assyrian political organizations in the region; these organizations are under the powerful Kurds and are to a sizeable degree helpless. The true picture is the real persecution Assyrians face daily by lawless Kurds who are seeking to establish the so-called [Kurdistan](#). The church can play an important role in diffusing some of this fear by having, for example, Patriarch Mar Dinkha moving to Iraq to be around his very distressed congregation and being more active. Many Assyrians believe that it is only the right thing for the patriarch to do, almost all Iraqi exiled leaders or dissident have returned with the liberation of Iraq, but the patriarch opts to remain in Morton Grove, Illinois.

The Kurdish militant Ansar al-Islam (partisans of Islam) are still around and they attempt to bring an Islamist government to north of Iraq. They since the last assault on them by the U.S. forces have dispersed throughout Iraq. The white House describes this group as an al-Qaeda affiliate. (Read the Christian Science Monitor, Monday, August 11, 2003 issue) In fact, the group is dubbed as the "Kurdish Taliban." Jund al-Islam (Soldiers of Islam), is yet another militant group, which in fact is a component of Ansar al-Islam. Another Islamic group, the Komala, work closely with Ansar al-Islam in north of Iraq.

The Sunnis

The Sunnis, while running Iraq since its creation in 1921, have played different roles. From one end, they have been compassionate to certain Christian denominations, if these Christians proclaimed that they were ethnically Arabs or stayed away from national affairs. From the other side, they interfered directly in the affairs of the Assyrian Church of the East. In the 1960s for example, the Iraqi government seized many Churches and delivered them to Toma Darmo, the excommunicated bishop from India, who initiated the split in the Church of the East. While the government promoted Arab-based Christianity in Iraq, it cracked down on any Assyrian national movement. The government imprisoned and tortured many Assyrian nationals while executing others. The fallen Ba'ath government has nationalized Assyrian schools, prevented Assyrians from giving their new borns Assyrian names, forced students to study the Koran at school, forced them to register as Arabs or Kurds in the 1977 and 1987 national census, prevented them from selling their properties in Kirkuk for example but to Arabs, among other oppressive measures.

The Shi'aa

The Shi'aa are the crucial card in the Iraqi national affairs due to their sheer numbers as they make 55-60 percent of Iraqi population. However, the Shi'aa have their own dilemma to figure out. They settle mainly in southern Iraq with some 40-50 percent of Baghdad population being of Shi'aa sect as well. However, Baghdad in general has been a Sunni power center, in addition of course to Tikrit, Samarra, Falluja, Ramadi, and Mosul where most of the Arab Sunni tribes live. The Shi'aa do not want to be deprived from the wealth of oil in the northern cities of Mosul and Kirkuk and the Shi'aa religious centers of Kadhmayne in Baghdad. Therefore, the Shi'aa, if having it their way, are not interested in some southern region autonomy; they want Iraq. Since Shia'ism is a fundamentalist Islamic movement that believes in the rule of Islam through the Koran, therefore, a Christian have no place in a country that makes Islam its official religion and rules through the Shari'aa (The Islamic Codes). Islam through the holy book of the Koran prohibits the authority of a Christian over a Moslem; therefore, it is impossible to have a complete democracy in an Islamic state where no Christian can have a seat of authority.

To Assyrians, there are several issues here to address when dealing with the effect of Islam in Iraq, the Middle East and the world. First is the ramification of Shi'aa rise mainly in Iraq. Second, the growing of Wahabi Sunni influence in Iraq and throughout the world. Finally, the Kurdish question. Allow me to address these issues briefly.

The Shi'aa and U.S. policy

We can consider the Iraqi Opposition March meeting at the southern Iraqi city of Nasirriya as a promising start as far as Shi'aa implications over the future of Christians is concerned. Many Shi'aa leaders in that meeting advocated the rule of law, respect for all religious and ethnic identities and the separation of mosque and state. The Akbari Shi'aa, i.e. the high-ranking noblemen, notables, or senior ranking, support the emergence of at least a semi secular government in Iraq because of their strong Iraqi nationalist traditions; they are ethnically Arabs after all. In contrast, many Usuli Shi'aa, i.e. the traditionalist and mainly Iranian backed and influenced by Qom, believe in a comprehensive religious and political system that evolves around Islam. The issue is tricky because despite the fact that the Akbari are the majority in Iraq, still, the Usulis can gather support since they subscribe to the strict teaching of the Koran, which is rooted deeply in the Moslem thought and is the way of life for Moslems. Therefore, the Akbaris could find themselves overshadowed by the powerful minority. The world followed the news of the assassination of al-Khaili in southern Iraq, one of the most moderate Shi'aa leaders. Some point fingers at the Iranian backed Usulis for the assassination but that has not been confirmed yet. Meanwhile, Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, the head of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), has been in exile in Iran for over 20 years. He stated upon his return to Basra after the liberation that he is for an Islamic state in Iraq. Couple of days later in Nasirriya, while on his way to al-Najaf, he changed his tone and declared that he was for a democratic Iraq that respects Islam. One can notice a clear change in language in couple of days, was he pressured? We have to admit that whatever is going to happens in Iraq will be influenced by the American strategy in its war on terror and the security of Israel.

President Bush has a clear vision for a democratic Iraq. In an interview with NBC's Tom Brokaw on April 24, 2003, the president said that he would like to see a government in Iraq that separates mosque and state. "There may be a nationalist government, a government that really honors the Iraqi history and the Iraqi traditions and Iraq itself," Bush said. "But it must be a government that is going to, you know, represent all the people. And I believe that can happen." Bush dismissed critics who say democracy cannot take hold in Iraq. "It may not look like America," the president said. "You know, Thomas Jefferson may not emerge. But, nevertheless, I do believe there can be a representative government and all factions can be represented." However, President Bush knows well that a strong united Iraq is not in the interest of Israel, thus I believe that a strong united Iraq is but a dream.

Certain statements by senior officials in the United States administration could lay the foundation for the U.S. policy in Iraq. These statements should give us a glimpse of the future picture of Iraq from the American perspective:

1. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Thursday, April 24, 2003, that the United States would not tolerate Shi'aa rule in Baghdad. "If you're suggesting, how would we feel about an Iranian-type government with a few clerics running everything in the country, the answer is: That isn't going to happen," he said in an interview with the Associated Press.
2. Secretary of State Colin Powell said in an interview with the Lebanese Broadcasting Corp. "We want to reach that point where with a full government, everybody can be represented in one way or another—to include those who disagree most strongly with the policies of the government that happens to be in power at the moment." (Los Angeles Times Friday, April 25, 2003)
3. Ret. Lt. General, Jay Garner, head of the Pentagon's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (replaced now), said that he did not believe that an Iraqi Islamic state was likely to meet U.S. conditions. (San Francisco Chronicles Friday, April 25, 2003)

The message from the American administration is loud and clear; they cannot allow Iranian based Shi'aism to migrate into Iraqi society. This is backed by the Nasiriya April 15, 2003 and the follow up of Baghdad April 28, 2003 Iraqi opposition meetings. Now, whether the Americans are going to go ahead with the plans as described or come up with something completely different is to be seen.

Iraq: World Affairs and Terrorism

Iraq's future cannot be isolated from world's affairs. I personally do not consider Shi'aism a threat to world peace. The Shi'aa population is concentrated in one main country, Iran, with presence in southern Iraq and minimal existence in Syria and Lebanon. Therefore, if we take into consideration the Sunni/Shi'aa 1400-years conflict, it becomes obvious that Shi'aism will not have a global effect, no matter how we slice it. It is not easy for a Shi'aa to have influence in Sunni region if the issue was kept local. The two sects could put their differences aside when threatened by infidels. In natural circumstances, Shi'aism will always be confined within the Iranian borders and among Persians in general, with some influence in Iraq. The Iranian-Syrian backed "Hizb Allah" and "Hamas" in Lebanon is an exception, and through U.S. pressure on Syria and Iran, these organizations will be neutralized in time when their role is over. Syria already has decided to close many offices of these groups in Damascus after the American strong criticism. Khatami, President of the Iranian Islamic Republic, visited Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Bahrain early May 2003 and that could be to pave the road for the Iranian government change of policy and perhaps the end of its involvement in Lebanon and its support for the militant groups!

We can say in confidence that the influence of Shi'aa is not global; it became regional for a short period and will be diminishing to strict national level again. On the Iraqi national level, Assyrians could be in danger for sure, if the Usulis came to power in Iraq. However, if the Akbari ruled in Iraq, one wonders if they could control the Usulis? We have already seen many acts against the Assyrian Christians: Eight Assyrians kidnapped near Mosul; many Assyrian liquor distilled factories have been destroyed; an Assyrian was killed near Kirkuk; and two more Assyrians killed in Basra for owning liquor stores. (Read news.telegraph.co.uk 8/22/2003, news originally filed on May 10, 2003) In addition, Certain Usuli leaders in Baghdad, like Mohammed al-Fartousi, have been demanding the exercising of the Islamic rule in Iraq, although he has been quite since he first came out with his demands. Usulis in Iraq today have begun threatening movie theater owners from displaying "inappropriate posters" or playing "tasteless movies with obscene clips." They have warned theater owners that they will blow them up if any movie theater did not follow their instructions. Does this concern the Americans and their policy?

Furthermore, news have spread that in north of Iraq, Islamic Troops of al-Badiri are terrorizing the Christian population by threatening them with letters delivered to their homes. The letter's message states that the group expects from the Assyrian women in the name of Allah (in the name of God) not to adorn themselves. The letters indicate that the Islamic group hopes that the Christian families will follow the Muslim rules of wearing the veil and possessing the basic honorable teaching of Islam. Al-Badiri group threatens anyone who takes this lightly; they threaten to kill, kidnap, or burn and bomb the Christian homes. Would the Americans look at the issue as whether there is an international threat on the American interest or are they going to turn a blind eye to the suffering of the small Christian minority in Iraq in exchange for the satisfaction of the majority?

From the international perspective, the major threat of fundamental Islamic groups to world peace comes in reality from a Sunni branch of Islam; the Saudi Arabian based Wahabi movement. The Wahabis through the Saudi monies have constructed many mosques in northern Iraq in the last ten years or so in order to change the Christian image of northern Iraq. The Islamic presence in the Asian and African Continents is Sunni in nature and that explains why Usama bin Ladin, a Wahabi, succeeded in Afghanistan and found strong followers in the Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt, and other countries, unlike the Persian backed Shi'aa groups who cannot establish such presence in Sunni dominated Asia and Africa. Of course, Iraq is different due to the presence of the Shi'aa holy cities of Karbala and Najaf.

The U.S. government created the Islamic Government in Iran in 1979 in order to stop the Communist threat from spreading and the policy worked. The mistake the U.S. made was to rely on the Saudi based Wahabis to fight the Russian presence in Afghanistan. Today, Communism has collapsed and the combination of the Cold War and Islam was successful to stop its spread southwards in the Asia Continent. However, while the Shi'aa spread was kept in check, with the exception of "Hizb Allah" of Lebanon, because of its own sectarian nature, the fundamentalist Wahabi Sunni found the perfect environment to spread worldwide. One can easily assert that today's international war on terror is, generally speaking, not against Shi'aa per se; it is rather against the Wahabi Sunni movement. The governments of the Philippines and Indonesia have cracked down on groups linked to this movement with the help of the U.S. and their effective presence there and in Afghanistan in time will end. What remains as a threat is the center of this movement, i.e. Saudi Arabia. Usama bin Ladin's family is huge and his supporters in Saudi Arabia are many and wealthy.

It seems to me that this global war on terror will hit the Saudi Arabian kingdom as soon as the U.S. guarantees the flow of cheap oil into its market. The solution is in the Russian oil and the pipeline that will run south through Afghanistan carrying it to the Indian Ocean ports and with the complete control of Iraqi oil. I believe that when that is all in place, the Saudi Arabian regime will face tough sanctions. This long process is in motion. Early in May, the U.S. decided to move its al-Riyadh Air Base in Saudi Arabia to neighboring Qatar. The presence of the U.S. in Saudi Arabia will continue to diminish in preparation for the upcoming face-off.

The Kurdish question

This we have addressed in short earlier. Need to add here that the Kurds in the final analysis want to create the so-called greater Kurdistan. This Kurdish dream has its southern part in Iraq, its northern part in Turkey, its western in Syria and the eastern part in Iran. Despite a setback in the 1970s, the Kurds of Iraq have positioned themselves to seize northern Iraq. What needs to be taken into consideration and as I mentioned earlier is Turkey. Turkish governments have not shied from demanding the return of the Mosul province to Turkey. The Turks argue that the 1926 border agreement was unfair and that the British forces took Mosul after the armistice was signed between the Allies and the Ottomans (1918) and after the Turkish army withdrew during time of peace. Furthermore, Turkey will not allow the Turkomen of Kirkuk to lose the oil-rich province over to the Kurds. Furthermore, Turkomen and Assyrian Christians always dominated Kirkuk throughout the last millennium. Of

course, most of the original Assyrians of Kirkuk and due to oppression have dropped their language and they use Turkish today while referring to themselves "Qala Jawir".

The Assyrian dilemma

On July 13, 2003, the New Iraqi Governing Council was formed from 25 members and Assyrians were part of it. The Assyrian representative in the Iraqi Governing Council was Mr. Younadam Kanna, Secretary General of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM). Certain controversy surfaced when the ADM stated through its news release to Zinda magazine that Mr. Kanna's representation was for "Chaldean-Assyrian Christians of Iraq." However, AssyriaSat, which broadcasts from Ceres, California, aired a special program on Sunday, August 3, 2003, to prove that Mr. Kanna's representation in the Council was under the title "Christians." Dr. Sargon Dadesho, President of the Assyrian National Congress, led a campaign of attacks through AssyriaSat on the ADM. Other members of the BNDP flooded Assyrian discussion forums with messages accusing the ADM of selling the Assyrian name out and marginalizing the Assyrian national cause.

It is a well-known fact that the ADM's struggle was never portrayed under the context of Christianity. At least the latest Iraqi Opposition Group's meetings in London, Salah al-Din, Nasiriya, and finally the April 28, 2003 Convention Center meeting in Baghdad presented the ADM as a national representative of the Assyrian people. On July 26, 2003, Yonadam Kanna, Secretary General of the ADM, stated in a program on Ashur TV that was transmitted internationally that we are Christians indeed, but ADM's work has always been political and was never religious in nature. He adds that the ADM today has taken the political decision to represent the "Assyrian Chaldean Christians" of Iraq and that is how his representation is accepted among most of the Iraqi leaders. Many news agencies substantiate Mr. Kanna's assertion. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld on August 5, 2003 and during the Pentagon briefing pointed to the 25-member Iraqi Governing Council and referred to the representatives as "Sunni, Shi'aa, Kurds, Assyrians, Turkoman, men and women," he mentioned Assyrians and did not say Christians.

At any rate, the governing council is a temporary body and whatever titles that are bestowed on its members are thus temporary as well. Mr. Younadam Kanna has no future personal benefits from being on the council as some claim. The rules of the Council state clearly that any person on the council will not be eligible to have any ministerial position in the new Iraqi government. I understand that the Iraqi Governing Council will pave the road for the making of Iraq; however, we must remember that the U.S. has the final say after all. What is important for Assyrians is the New Iraqi Constitution. I do not see that the ADM has struggled for 25 years to represent the Assyrians as Christians; I just do not see it.

The question here is:

What will be the basis of the new Iraqi government system? Would Iraq adopt Federalism?

Well, Federalism as we know is a system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and certain defined political units, which have a fair degree of power. In some multi-cultural states similar to Iraq like Switzerland for example, the political units are defined not only geographically but are based also on language, ethnicity, religion, or even tribal affiliation. Therefore, federalism is an organizing structure that can promote stability in a multi-ethnic or multi-religious state like Iraq. A constitution that provides written principles concerning structure and certain important rules and guidelines controls the relationship between the central government and the political units. Thus, just as in Switzerland, federalism can guarantee political and cultural rights of Iraq's ethno-linguistic and religious communities.

Many Iraqi opposition group leaders have propagated and promoted federalism. The question is: would the Assyrians have a place in this system or are we going to see federalism of only three units: Shi'aa in the south, Sunni in the center, and Kurdish in the north? Are the Assyrians going to be a minority within the Kurdish minority: in other words,

are the Assyrians going to live as Christian minority in a Kurdish political unit? Will the new Iraq allow the Assyrians to have their own political unit in regions such as Qaraqosh, Karamlis, Bartilla, Ba'ashiq, Telkepe, Batnaya, Tel Isqof, Sharafiya, Alqosh, Mengesh, Sapna valley and other historically Assyrian regions? The Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) has the answer for sure and because of its complex relations with the two main Kurdish groups, i.e. KDP and PUK, many Assyrians outside the ADM remain skeptical. At this moment, I have decided to stand aside, wait, and see what develops as I have put my trust in the ADM's leadership to guide us through. On July 26, 2003, Yonadam Kanna, Secretary General of the ADM stated live on Ashur TV: "if a federal system was constituted under ethnic lines, then each ethnic group will have its administration on a defined piece of land. Assyrians as well will have their legitimate rights over their historical lands or at least over parts of their known historical lands. We might have part in a piece of land "Ashur State," which is a long-term strategy." I do not have logical reasons to doubt the ADM's intentions and its Assyrian nationalistic goals. Certain actions, that might look unfavorable, are sometimes taken because the political situation dictates such; this is politics. I personally cannot pass judgment on the ADM on the basis of what is seem as a purely political step; we have 25 years of track record to consider. I am an Assyrian and I do not think that anybody can take that away from me; however, we must differentiate between history and politics. What is priority one and perhaps an issue of life and death for Assyrians of Iraq is unity between the various Assyrian denominations.

Meanwhile, the new Iraq must appreciate its ancient heritage, including that of the Assyrians. In my opinion, the population figures should not be an issue concerning the Assyrians. The Assyrians are the indigenous people of Iraq and they must be treated through special laws. It is for reasons of oppression, persecution, harassment, massacres, and genocide that Assyrians' population has dwindled in their ancestral lands. That explains why two-thirds of the Assyrians are in the Diaspora today. In the new free and democratic Iraq, the United Nations' resolutions on indigenous people must be applied to the Assyrians, even if they were a tiny and insignificant community. On their part, Assyrians must build special relations with the Mandeans and Yezidis. The Assyrians share cultural aspects with these two groups; the prior shares with the Assyrians the Aramaic language and practices aspects of Christianity and Babylonian religion while the latter is much closer in many aspects to the ancient Assyrians as many of their leaders have stated.









Finally, Assyrians of the Diaspora, without exception, must look at the bigger picture of Iraq. We must look at the different groups in Iraq, analyze our position, and set strategies that are appropriate and practical. One thing we must do is providing a complete moral and physical support. I believe in democracy, however, today, we have the ADM by far as the choice of the Assyrians in Iraq as their political representative; this we must respect. The ADM is where it is because of 25 years of proven national struggle; [a path paved with blood](#), sacrifice, and [achievements](#) that go beyond empty declarations and some impressive agendas that remain excellent on paper. Assyrians cannot afford setting roadblocks for one another; it is insane and hypocrisy for one to claim Assyrianism while attacking another Assyrian. Assyrian political organizations must put their differences aside today and gear their activities towards the common danger. Assyrian organizations must stop this campaign of attacking one another because this is not how differences among the one people are reconciled; we must learn how to yield. This is a crucial time in the Assyrian national movement in Iraq and all Assyrians must rise to the level of urgency in which the Assyrians, especially those in Iraq, are founded today.

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