

## The Kurds and the Future of Nineveh Plain (Little Assyria)

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It puzzles me how some of our people continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the simplest of behaviors or actions on the parts of Barazani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and those few Assyrian individuals who speak on behalf of the Assyrian nation unlawfully.

Two simple questions:

1. If Mas'aud Barazani and KDP really mean well towards Assyrians, why marginalize the biggest Assyrian political group by far, i.e., the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) and exclude it from participating in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) cabinet since the ADM has been in that government since 1992 and won the only elections in northern Iraq that took place in that year. If the KDP means well, why use its influence in order to control the sole Iraqi Central Government seat that is assigned for ChaldoAssyrian Christians by having Fawzi Hariri, a KPD associate, as a minister in it. Why not act democratically and yield to the ADM that won in two national elections of January and December 2005 to fill that position? Why is it so hard to understand that Barazani is doing all this to control the Assyrians' future and cause?
2. Do the five Christian political groups, supported by KDP and its strong man Sargis Aghajan, that call for joining the Nineveh plains to the KRG, namely,
  - a) Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP),
  - b) ChaldoAshur Org. of Kurdistan Communist Party,
  - c) Chaldean Democratic Forum (CDF),
  - d) Chaldean Cultural Association (CCA), and
  - e) Bet Nahrain Democratic Party (BNDP)

really think that they will secure the Assyrian rights by simply allowing Barazani to usurp the Nineveh plain without serious guarantees recognized by the Iraqi government and international institutions. Do these five small groups have the support of the Assyrian people to be involved in such undertaking when the Assyrians gave them a clear thumb down in three elections (1992, January 2005, and December 2005)? Of course some of these groups did not exist during the 1992 northern Iraq regional elections. Who gave these five small groups the authority to ask the KRG and Kurdish lawmakers to join the Nineveh plain to the Kurdish region? Under what grounds do these five groups issue declarations to join the Nineveh plain to KRG and claim that such declarations are the voice of the people?

Allow me to emphasize that when a nation marginalizes and undermines its own democratically elected individuals and parties, then that nation is inviting the enemy to meddle in its internal affairs. When this happens, the people will never get what they want but what the enemy wishes. Sargis Aghajan, Nimrod Baito Youkhana, Dr. Goriel Esho Khamis, Sa'eed Shamaya, Poulos Shamoun Ishaq, Romeo Hakkari, George Mansour, Fawzi Hariri, Abd al-Ahad Afram Sawa, Ninf Matran Hariri, etc., do not have real authority to negotiate on behalf of the people and for the people because they do not have the support and vote of the people and were not elected by the people. Barazani will tell these individual and dictate to them what to say and do; he will dictate to them when to say and do those things as, and when, needed.

I am not saying that as far as power is concerned the ADM is in par with the KDP, i.e., in position to dictate things; however, the ADM as the legitimate democratically elected party should be legally in the forefront position to negotiate. Should the ADM be alone at the negotiating table with other Iraqi and international groups? I am not suggesting that either, since the opinion of all groups is valuable. However, each group must understand where it belongs and every group must be reasonable with its own internal demands depending on its real power and representation in society.

Furthermore, the real Aghajan has surfaced as we predicted in our previous article published in Zinda magazine couple of issues back. In an interview with Sargis Aghajan by Jonathan Steele for the Guardian Unlimited, Steele presented Aghajan as the Christians' main political leader in northern Iraq and the trustee of all churches and armed guards that protect those churches. In that interview, Aghajan declared that every Christian town and village on the Nineveh plain east of Mosul now has its own armed guards. Aghajan stated, "They are answerable to me."

Who installed Aghajan as the Assyrians' "main leader," which it seems that he or his associates hinted to the reporter? Did the Assyrians vote for him in three elections? The answer is no! The fact remains that he is an official of a Kurdish national party, i.e., KDP that calls for the establishment of Kurdistan over historic Assyria since that is in the KDP bylaws and one generally must abide by the bylaws of the party he/she is a member in. On the other hand, the Iraqi National Assembly (Parliament) is discussing and deliberating the structure of Iraqi regions and governorates, including the Nineveh plain region, and then the people of the different governorates will decide their fate whether they want to be joined to other regions or governorates or be on their own. In the Interim, the KDP is promoting Aghajan and trying to sell him to the Assyrian people by making him in charge of building churches and halls in northern Iraq. Of course, the money spent is the Assyrians' share from the Iraq reconstruction fund; however, the donors insisted that only the central and regional governments in Baghdad and Arbil be in charge of the distribution and use of that money and not groups and parties. Thus the KRG, as in charge, did not allow the ADM to be part of the process of allocating and distributing the funds since that would have given the ADM additional power and popularity.

As Aghajan became popular due to the awards bestowed upon by the various patriarchs and few institutions and due to the propaganda of his TV station Ishtar, it was time to use this now popular Aghajan to promote and facilitate the demands of joining the Nineveh Plain to KRG before the structure of the region is instituted. By promoting and using Aghajan and the other smaller parties the Kurds will kill many birds with one stone. First, they will expand the KRG borders to the Tigris River and there is nothing in their way but the last Assyrian strong stand, the Nineveh Plains. Second, they will look to the outside world as the protectors of the Christians. Third, they will rule over the Nineveh plain and control the Assyrian cause through their popular puppet.

On March 11, 1970 and after years of fighting, the Iraqi government and the Kurds reached an agreement. The agreement called for the creation of a Kurdish Autonomous Region consisting of the three governorates (provinces) of Dohuk, Arbil, and Sulaimaniya. The agreement was to be implemented within four years. The heavily Assyrian populated Dohuk governorate was carved out of Nineveh (Mosul) Governorate and made a separate province for that purpose and handed to Kurds. The Kurdish autonomy, which provided for the Kurdish administration, was formally proclaimed in 1974. However, some Kurdish leaders did not accept it. Major war ensued in 1974/5 in which the Kurds received considerable Iranian, Israeli and American covert support. In March 1975, the Treaty of Algiers between Iraq and Iran ended the Iranian support for the Kurds. This led immediately to the collapse of the Kurdish armed rebellion and strength. However, the Iraqi government unilaterally carried out its part of the autonomy agreement. A regional parliament was established and Iraq had a Kurdish vice president.

In early 1988, the Kurdish Autonomous Region was governed according to the stipulations of the March 11, 1970 Autonomy Agreement. It had a twelve-member executive council that exerted both legislative and executive powers and a legislative assembly that advised the council. The chairman of the executive council was appointed by Saddam Hussein and held cabinet rank; the other members of the council were chosen from among the deputies to the popularly elected legislative assembly. Despite all this, genuine self-rule did not exist in northern Iraq's Kurdish region. The Iraqi central government was running the show.

Today, Barazani and KRG are playing the same game towards the Assyrians that Saddam and the Iraqi government played towards the Kurds in the 1970s. The Kurds want to usurp the Nineveh plain to the KRG, then create a phony Assyrian administrative region under their puppet Aghajan, rule over it and make all decisions for Assyrians from Arbil.

I say no. Assyrians must say no to Aghajan and his master Barazani.

Assyrians do not want an administrative Assyrian region within the Kurdish region. Assyrians want to rule themselves through their democratically elected individuals and organizations. This is what democracy means. Are we seeking democracy or not? Assyrians want a region called by its historic name Assyria, in par with that of the Kurds and not to be part of the Kurdish region. Assyria must have its own security forces to protect the towns, villages, institutions, and the people. Other smaller Assyrian localities, such as Sapna, Nahla, Zakho, Barwar, etc. should have Assyrian administrative characteristics, even if limited. Later, when security and stability rule over Iraq, the people within the Nineveh plain (Little Assyria) should decide the fate and association of their region. We have witnessed what happened to the Assyrian regions in Hakkari (Turkey), Urmia (Iran), and many regions in northern Iraq. Who is controlling those Assyrians regions today other than Kurds? Do we really want to give the Kurds further powers to rule over the Nineveh plain too? When are we going to learn from our past? Lastly, but not least, we want Assyria to have its own secular constitution where all Assyrians, Yezidis, Shabaks, Turkomans, Bahais, etc. living within its domain to live free and equal under the rule of law. That federal Assyria region will be a model in the Middle East for a true democratic and open society.