

Iraqi Parliament Speaker Needs Lesson in History

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Dr. Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, is part of the Iraqi Accord Front, a mainly Sunni Islamist Iraqi political coalition created on October 26, 2005 to compete in the December 15, 2005 Iraqi general elections.

On March 9, 2008, Al-Mashhadani and his two deputies, Khalid al-Atia, a Shiite, and Arif Taifur, a Kurd and member of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), were in Arbil to participate in the March 11-14, 2008 Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) Conference with other delegates from 18 Arab countries [1]. On March 10, 2008, he addressed the Kurdish KRG regional parliament. His speech lasted about 25 minutes [2]. Here is an excerpt from the Arabic speech, which I first transcribed and then translated.

Al-Mashhadani opened his speech in the traditional Islamic manner and then greeted the audience with the eternal Islamic greetings without any consideration for the non-Muslims members of the Kurdish parliament. He stated that he was not going to make his speech too long, but he was going to point to certain facts.

Al-Mashhadani stated that God has given the Kurdish people wisdom for avoiding issues that could have resulted in security unrest. He stated that this wisdom is attributed to the Kurdish leadership. He stated that if we examine history, we would find that the Kurdish people were brave and wise. He explained that the Kurds were brave because they did not waiver or surrender their principles, and wise, which was obvious from their actions. He stated that the Kurds in their wisdom and in holding on to their principles were lofty as the towering mountains of Kurdistan. Then, al-Mashhadani asked the world; doesn't this nation [Kurds] deserve getting what they demand? He praised the Kurdish people for what he called their tolerance throughout history. Show me, asked al-Mashhadani; show me one crime committed by Kurds against any other nation or component [of society] since the birth of Kurdish history. If we examined history, he continued, we will find that crimes have been committed against the Kurds while they did not commit any crime and have done no misdeed or wrong against anyone.

Al-Mashhadani then stated that he is blamed sometimes for leaning heavily towards, and strongly supporting, the Kurdish people and cause. He said that he was not to be blamed because he was taught how to pray by his Kurdish teacher Jamal in elementary school, while living in a village, where he knew almost nothing. He stated that his Kurdish teacher taught him how to pray in 1958 and he in turn taught his parents and the whole village. Therefore, stated al-Mashhadani, he was influenced by this Kurdish man, by his [Islamic] religion, his way of thinking and obviously by his people [Kurds].

Al-Mashhadani continued to explain how strongly the Kurds influenced him and said that in the 1960s he joined a movement [political] that was established in the 1940s by a Kurd, Abdul Karim al-Sa'iqqa. However, after "The Defeat" [1967 Arab-Israel War] he left the Nasserite movement and sought the mosques looking for answers. There, in a mosque, he met Abdul Hamid al-Musallih, another Kurd, who in turn delivered him to a man from the Kurdish Talabani family, Sheikh Bahjat al-Talabani, who taught him all about the [Islamic] Salafi doctrine. Then Al-Mashhadani explained that he always sought Kurdistan and specifically Halabja, whenever they were pressured [by the regime]. In addition, he reflected on what he learned from history curriculum regarding Salah al-Deen al-Ayooobi [who is claimed to be a Kurd and who defeated the Crusaders].

Here, al-Mashhadani asked, how could the Kurds not influence me? This nation [Kurds], he said, served Islam, but did not take credit for that as an ethnic group; however, the Umma [Islamic nation] at large took the credit. This, he said, is unique about the Kurds. Therefore, added al-Mashhadani, I am happy to be on the side of the Kurds. In all my positions and stands, he concluded, I am the first to support the Kurdish cause, because the Kurdish people are the only people that lived within the Ottoman Empire, but did not gain an independent country after the fall and partition of that empire.

In 2006, al-Mashhadani survived a campaign by many politicians to remove him after he said that Iraqis who killed American troops should be celebrated as heroes. In May 2007, he slapped a lawmaker in the face and called him "scum" at the end of a raucous session. Soon after, a member of the Kurdish coalition in parliament, Firyad Mohammed, was dragged by his tie and shirt by al-Mashhadani's security guards and briefly detained in an unused office [3]. This caused a temporary rift between the Kurdish coalition and Speaker al-Mashhadani. The uncivil and erratic behavior of al-Mashhadani continued when he or one of his guards physically intimidated different members of parliament, in at least two cases striking them. Finally, in June 2007, the Iraqi Parliament voted by a majority to replace him as speaker, but he was reinstated after his fellow members of the Sunni Iraqi Accord Front (holds 44 seats out of the 275 seats in parliament) boycotted the parliament for several weeks.

In July 2006, al-Mashhadani told Al-Sharqiyah television that the killings and kidnappings in Iraq were the fault of "Jews, Israelis and Zionists...using Iraqi money and oil to frustrate the Islamic movement in Iraq" [4]. Most outrageous for many Assyrians was his statement on 18 July 2006, on al-Iraqiya Sat. In that interview, al-Mashhadani, addressed the issue of kidnapping his sister Tayseer al-Mashhadani (member of the Iraqi Islamic Party and Iraqi Parliament). Addressing the kidnappers, al-Mashhadani stated: "Why kidnap this Muslim woman? Instead of Tayseer, why not kidnap Margaret or Joan?"[5], in reference to Assyrian Christians or Europeans.

Al-Mashhadani's stands in the Iraqi Parliament have been anything but fair for the Assyrians. This many faced chauvinist Arab, devout Sunni Muslim and Kurdish sympathizer and supporter has made it his aim to support the Kurds and undermine and marginalize the Assyrians. When the Iraqi Constitution was being written, he made sure that the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations were completely disregarded from the Constitution's Preamble. As far as al-Mashhadani (and Islamists) is concerned, Iraq's history begins from the 7th Century Islamic Conquest. He also made sure not to mention the atrocities committed against the Assyrians during the 1933 Simele and 1969 Sooriya massacres; but any unfair treatment of Kurds was emphasized in that same Preamble.

In his speech, al-Mashhadani bizarrely and foolishly claimed that the Kurds have not committed any crime against any other groups. This is a most incredible statement. Here are a few examples from history:

1. The massacres of Assyrians by Kurdish Bedr Khan in 1842-1847, where 50,000 Assyrians were murdered by Kurds in the Hakkari Mountains of south-east Turkey.
2. The genocide of Assyrians during and after WWI, where the Kurds were the tool of the Turkish state in slaughtering two thirds of the Assyrian people.
3. The cowardly and treacherous murder of Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun (and many of those who accompanied him) by Kurdish leader Simko in 1918 while the Patriarch was on a peaceful mission and a guest in Simko's house.
4. Bakir Sidqi, the Kurdish general, who led the Iraq army in slaughtering 3,000 innocent and unarmed Assyrian civilians, including women and children, in 1933 in Simmele, north Iraq.
5. Stealing Assyrian villages and lands in northern Iraq by Kurds since the creation of the Iraqi state in 1921.
6. The Kurdish massacre of Armenians during WWI.

Regarding the claim that Kurds alone, among those who lived within the Ottoman Empire, did not gain an independent state after the collapse and partition of the said empire, Assyrians, Druze, Yezidis, Mennonites and others, including the Jews (established their state 30 years later and not post WWI), were left without an independent country as well.

Dr. Mahmoud al-Mashhadani is a dogmatist, Kurdish propagandist and a history revisionist. The Kurdish Islamists trio of Jamal, Abdul Hamid and Sheikh Bahjat taught him well. It is very unfortunate that such a bigot holds the position of the speaker of the Iraqi Parliament. How could we expect democracy to flourish in Iraq with such people in leadership positions?

References:

1 http://pukmedia.com/english/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3646&Itemid=52

2 www.krg.org

3 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/12/AR2007061201057.html>

4 Associated Press. "Parliament speaker blames Iraqi violence on 'Jews'", Jamaica Observer, 2006-07-14.

5 "Pamphlets Warn Christians in Dora and Mashtal Districts", Zinda, 2006-07-29.