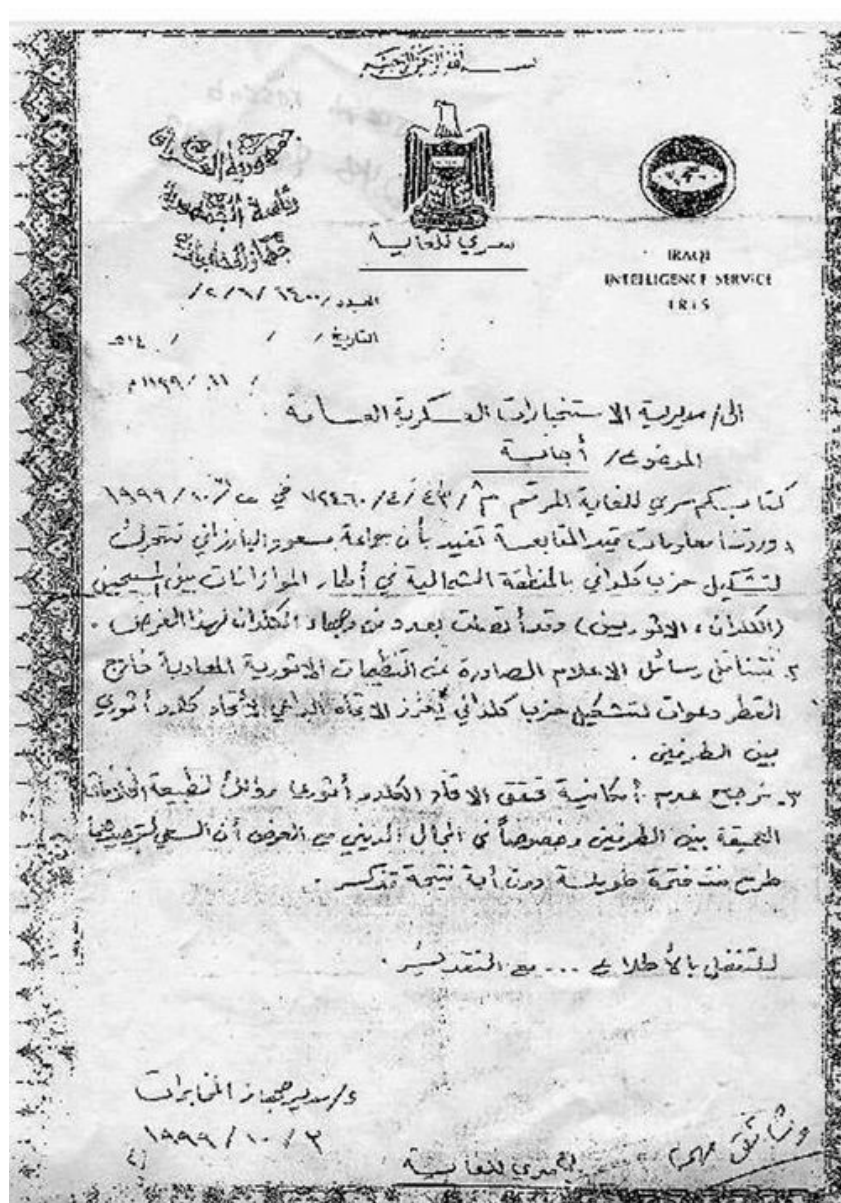


# How Masoud Barzani and the KRG divided the Assyrians

[Fred Aprim](#)

The below Iraqi Top secret document<sup>1</sup>, dated October 2, 1999, was issued as a response by the Iraqi Intelligence Service to an earlier inquiry from the Military Intelligence Directorate. The document refers to efforts by Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani who was in the process of creating a Chaldean political group in northern Iraq to establish what they called a balance between the Christian groups in the Kurdish region. The document also states that Barzani's people have already contacted few of the Chaldean notables for that purpose.



1 Many such documents were retrieved from the various Iraqi government offices post 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

The Iraqi Ba'athist regime, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the enemy of the Assyrian people had supported all possible and available efforts to block any rapprochement between the one Assyrian people (Chaldeans, Nestorians and Jacobites) groups and to spread division between them based on their sectarian affiliations. This anti-Assyrian national approach by the former Iraqi regime and the Kurdish leadership found few who were ready to sell their souls and fuel sectarian and political differences to weaken the Assyrian national dream. Only with the [Assyrian division, the enemy wins](#) and the Assyrians lost.

This approach by the Barzani Kurdish regime began to take shape after the creation of the autonomous Kurdish region in 1992 and the following elections in that same year. The Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) won all 5 seats assigned for the Assyrians in the Kurdish regional parliament; however, one seat was stolen in a highway robbery style. This solidarity behind one Assyrian political/national group was a threat to the Kurdish nationalists and their future plans.

Francis Shabo was one of the five Assyrians elected in May 1992 to the northern Iraq Kurdish regional parliament. As an Assyrian representative, he worked tirelessly to end the expropriation of Assyrian lands under KRG jurisdiction. Martyred Shabo was a member of the Chaldean Catholic Church, but he was also an outspoken advocate of unity among all Assyrians regardless to their church affiliation. He spoke widely and publicly on this issue urging Assyrians to reject division based on religious affiliations. On June 1, 1993, a Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) member [Wahid Kovelı assassinated MP Shabo](#) in Nohadra (Dohuk) as Shabo was on his way home. In June 2010, *Hawlati*, a Kurdish newspaper<sup>2</sup> leaked official document from Saddam Hussein's era Directorate of Intelligence tying Kovelı to Shabo's assassination. Kovelı never served a single day in prison.

In addition to silencing Assyrians who promoted unity, attempts to divide the Assyrians also ensued. The Barzani and the KDP were behind steps taken initially around the mid 1990s by few members of the Chaldean Catholic Church in northern Iraq and the said church in the US. Few Chaldean Catholic clergy and notables contacted the US Census Bureau and demanded that the term Chaldean be considered as an ethnic group separate from the Assyrian tabulation in the US Census 2000. The US Census 2010 divided the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs into separate groups. That continued in the [2020 US Census](#) as shown in the graphic below. Some argue that the Vatican was behind this scheme when the Assyrian Church of the East at the time did not proceed into the final phases of the [1994 Christological Understanding](#) between the two churches. The final phase opens the path for a Full Communion (Full Unity), meaning, to have the Pope as the supreme leader of the united church.

Many Assyrian nationalists and good members of both the Chaldean Catholic Church and Syriac Orthodox Church struggled to keep the various Assyrian groups united under one name. The ChaldoAssyrians, ChaldoAssyrian Syriac, Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac (slashes), Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac (dashes), Assyrian Chaldean Syriac (no dashes no slashes) and other [combination titles were born](#), but failed in time. When all was set and done, the plans of the KDP were successful in dividing the historically known and [proven one Assyrian people](#) into several and [separate ethnic groups](#).

Today, we have Christian groups loyalists to the KDP and/or the Shia Arabs representing the Assyrian people in the Iraqi Federal and Kurdish regional parliaments.<sup>3</sup> In preparation for the 2009 Iraqi Federal

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<sup>2</sup> *Hawlati* is published in Sulaymaniyah, which is under the Talabani group who has been in conflict with the Barzani.

<sup>3</sup> Consider for example that Rayyan al-Kaldani and his group Babyliyoona controlling the 5 quota seats assigned for Christians in the Iraqi Federal Parliament through votes from Arabs from southern Iraq and not from votes by Assyrian Christians living in northern Iraq.

and Kurdish regional elections, the [KDP leadership continued in its division plans of the Assyrian people](#) as the Assyrians continued their noticeable support for the ADM.

In 2007, on the initiative of Barzani, Sarkis Aghajan, a high-ranking member of the KDP, the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council (*al-Majlis al-Sha'bi al-Kaldāni al-Suriyāni al-Āshuri*) was established. [This interference in the internal affairs of the Assyrians continued in the future elections as well.](#)

Table 1.  
Middle Eastern and North African Population by Detailed Group: 2020

Detailed group	Alone		Alone or in any combination	
	Number	Percent of Middle Eastern and North African alone population	Number	Percent of Middle Eastern and North African alone or in any combination population
Middle Eastern and North African .....	2,544,154	100.0	3,522,478	100.0
Algerian.....	30,439	1.2	38,186	1.1
Arab.....	170,437	6.7	238,921	6.8
<b>Assyrian .....</b>	<b>42,372</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>57,944</b>	<b>1.6</b>
Bahraini.....	673	0.0	973	0.0
Berber.....	1,750	0.1	3,871	0.1
<b>Chaldean.....</b>	<b>47,029</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>59,045</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Egyptian.....	313,720	12.3	396,854	11.3
Emirati.....	1,931	0.1	2,480	0.1
Iranian.....	413,842	16.3	568,564	16.1
Iraqi.....	179,252	7.0	212,875	6.0
Israeli.....	137,023	5.4	190,660	5.4
Jordanian.....	102,919	4.0	121,917	3.5
Kurdish.....	19,755	0.8	25,466	0.7
Kuwaiti.....	5,204	0.2	6,923	0.2
Lebanese.....	328,137	12.9	685,672	19.5
Libyan.....	10,895	0.4	13,681	0.4
Moroccan.....	98,838	3.9	147,528	4.2
Omani.....	868	0.0	1,336	0.0
Palestinian.....	132,935	5.2	174,887	5.0
Qatari.....	452	0.0	650	0.0
Saudi.....	22,404	0.9	30,563	0.9
<b>Syriac.....</b>	<b>1,670</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>2,413</b>	<b>0.1</b>
Syrian.....	122,194	4.8	222,196	6.3
Tunisian.....	10,667	0.4	15,270	0.4
Yazidi.....	444	0.0	630	0.0
Yemeni.....	73,692	2.9	91,288	2.6
Other Middle Eastern and North African ...	228,229	9.0	292,612	8.3

While the [Barzani regime claims to be protecting the “Christians”](#) in northern Iraq, the KRG fails to respect and preserves the rights of the Assyrians as an ethnic group. The reported [involvement of the KRG with ISIS](#) plans in northern Iraq is yet to be investigated on the Iraqi national or International levels.<sup>4</sup>

Also, the United Nations General Assembly that gathered in Paris on December 10, 1948 ([General Assembly resolution 217 A](#)) approved the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#). Article 21.3 of UDHR states: “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.” The KDP authorities have continued to prevent the Assyrians from exercising their granted [right as indigenous people](#) to vote in a democratic, safe and free environment.

4 See <https://www.atour.com/government/docs/20190306a.html>