

The Dilemma of the Iraqi Draft Constitution and Looking Forward

By Fred Aprim
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Finally, and as it was expected, it became official that the two Christians in the Constitutional Committee could not influence the other 75 members to formulate the draft in a manner where it reflects the real picture of this indigenous community and its rooted and significant place in the history of Iraq. The constitution draft was disappointing, unfair, and unjust to the Assyrians (known also as ChaldoAssyrians in TAL).

Assyrian leaders living in Baghdad or Arbil fear retaliation and acts of vengeance against their people and not necessarily against themselves personally. Therefore, this leadership did not come out boldly and asked the people to vote NO in the October 15 referendum; however, many central committee members of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) issued statements to explain their grievances. There are many ways to say no to something without saying the actual word exactly, and that is what they did.

Here are few examples:

1. In an interview on Friday, October 14, 2005, posted on Zahrira, Ishmael Nanno, ADM Central Committee member, stated that despite certain adjustment, the draft did not point to what the ADM had requested, therefore, the ADM stand will not change and that there is the possibility if that continue that the ADM will ask the people to vote NO. It is important that we clarify our position in front of the people.

<http://www.zahrira.net/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1082>

2. On October 12, 2005, Abd al-Khaliq Sultan, Radio Free Iraq correspondence in Dohuk, interviewed Mr. Yousif Esha, Head of Relations Committee in the ADM. Therefore, according to Abd al-Khaliq Sultan, the reasons mentioned by Mr. Esha will make the ADM to vote "NO" on the draft constitution.

<http://iraqhurr.org/realaudio/correspondents/2005/10/20051011165559.ram>

3. According to al-Rafidayn, many political ChaldoAssyrian leaders presented their reservations from certain articles and hinted that they may ask the people to vote NO on the draft.

http://www.alrafidayn.com/Story/News/N14_10_26.html

Few have suggested that Mr. Younadam Kanna should have withdrawn from the constitutional committee when he realized that what our people had wished for, and/or demanded, was not going to be included in the draft. The question is: what would the Assyrians (ChaldoAssyrians) have gained from the withdrawal besides a stand. While to have a stand is honorable and important, the question remains, what would be the final result of that stand? A Kurdish agent, with, of course, a Christian name, would have been selected to replace Mr. Kanna to sit in the constitutional committee, and this new person would have done what the Kurds wanted to do anyways.

I would have loved it seeing the ADM asking Assyrians (ChaldoAssyrians) explicitly to vote no on the draft, thus going against the powerful Shi'aa and empowered Kurds. The question here, is that politically smart?

We have a problem; this problem is centered on the fact that we are weak and have no power on the ground and that is because we chose to remain divided. Nothing will save us unless we unite genuinely, reflect a united voice, and support each other. That is the bottom line. We hear about certain gatherings in Iraq and abroad to form a central leadership and to enter the next elections under one slate. This information is deceptive and misleading in a way. Groups that are linked to the Kurds in the previous elections have obligations to the Kurdish slate, and will not be allowed to form a united slate with other Assyrians (ChaldoAssyrians). These moves are good news for the media and to hypnotize the people temporarily; however, these moves are not genuinely motivated. While the Kurdistan slate includes five Christians who won because of the Kurdish vote, reality is that only Mr. Kanna won by the vote of our own people. Now,

the vote of Mr. Kanna in the Iraqi parliament (national assembly) could not win over the five other Christian votes that have association and obligation to Kurds. Something has to be done so that there is a balance. News leaked lately suggesting that Mr. Kanna is seeking an alliance with Shi'aa or Sunni Arab slates. Will these Shi'aa or the Sunni allow, for example, five members of the ChaldoAssyrian candidates to be part of their slate and get a favorite position in that slate to win automatically? Since the Kurdish slate has five Christians in it, why not have Christians in the Shi'aa or Sunni Arab slates in order to create some sort of a balance in parliament? What is the price that we have to pay in this case? What would the Shi'aa or the Sunni Arabs gain from such alliance, and why should they accept such unbalanced alliance?

If the security situation prevented many Assyrians from voting in the January 30, 2005 elections, or the Kurds prevented others from voting, and if the Assyrians in the Diaspora proved that they care less about the future of their people in Iraq by not being active or participating in the January 30, 2005 elections, shouldn't the Assyrian leadership in Iraq learn its lesson and do something in preparation for the next December 15 elections in order to gain some seats?

There is a misconception that President Harry Truman was a strong advocate and supporter for the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. In his memoir, President Truman tells us the contrary. President Truman, and the sentiment of the American government as a whole, was not in favor of establishing the state of Israel. He was advised repeatedly that the interest of the United States was with the Arabs, and that assisting in the creation of Israel was going to result a great loss for American interests in the Middle East. Experts issued statements that such state was not going to be able to survive and that the Arabs, with great numbers, would have attacked, and destroyed this new state, thus, a loss of many lives for nothing. After much pressure from the Jewish lobby and interest groups in the U.S. and around the world, the U.S. gave in; however, it did not take the issue seriously as it is obvious from the way President Truman recognized Israel initially.

What changed the attitude and position of President Truman and the U.S. Government so completely later? Well, the reason was the Arab-Israeli 1948 war itself that erupted as Israel was born. The war proved that the Jews had the will, desire, attitude, and power to sustain their new country and that was portrayed in the way they came out fighting; meanwhile, the Arabs showed much less interest despite sending their armies from certain states. The Arabs did not come out in the great numbers they were expected; in fact, the total number of the Arab soldiers did not match that of the Jews. Here, the United States realized that Israel could be an ally in the Middle East that it could rely on. In other words, the Jews dictated the U.S. new policy with what they proved on the ground.

A somewhat similar analogy could be drawn from the Kurds in Iraq. In today's world policy making, powerful countries pay little attention to history and more to reality on the ground. This, of course, should not mean that we forget about our history. People of will who desire and decide to make things happen, and who have history behind them, are very unlikely to be denied that will. If the Christians of Iraq will continue to fight among themselves, they will always be brushed off by the great nations. The U.S. is not going to back up one million Christians (living among 25 million Moslems), if these Christians chose to be divided into three or four camps, each with goals different from that of the others, and if they were not willing to cooperate with each other.

The ChaldoAssyrian compound title was a promising step towards unity, but we opted to destroy it. The Nestorian Assyrians with their numbers in Iraq will not be able to accomplish something of real interest, despite the fact that they have history behind them. The Chaldeans with their unproven past political and national background and with the absence of any solid history in northern Iraq (as ethnic Chaldeans, as few claim, and not Assyrians) have no chance to shake the Kurdish threat. The Suryan with their minimal numbers in Iraq have little chance to gain anything as well. The leadership of these three indigenous communities must put the well-being, prosperity, and most importantly, the survival of their communities ahead of everything else. If they do not, history will never forgive them. It is the existence of a nation that is at stake, and it is time that these leaders rise to the occasion, put their trivial differences aside, and work together genuinely under one leadership, one voice, and one goal to save our blessed land for future generations.