

The Tragedy of Halabja: What They Don't Tell You

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March 18, 2022

March 16, 2022 marked the 34th anniversary of the chemical attack on Halabja, a town in northern Iraq dominated by Kurds. Halabja is located southeast of the city of Sulaimaniya and very close to the Iraq-Iran borders. The attack occurred in the final days of the 8-Years Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988). According to many estimates, the 8-Years war caused more than half a million of casualties on both sides, hundreds of thousands of injuries and a combined financial cost of US\$1 trillion to both countries.¹

For many years, northern Iraq has been under a general unrest due to a guerrilla warfare carried on by militias from both the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) against the Republic of Iraq. The Kurdish militias or Peshmerga were supported and armed by Iran for many years if not decades. The Peshmerga took advantage of the preoccupied Iraqi Army with the war against Iran and increased their attacks on Iraqi installations in northern Iraq, specially in the early 1980s.² Saddam Hussein initiated the Anfal Campaign in the mid 1980s to eradicate the KDP and PUK insurgents. The Anfal campaign intensified in the latter parts of 1988. In the winding days of the war, the Iranian Army through Operation Zafar 7 captured the Iraqi town of Halabja. Analysts argue that the attack on Halabja was to cover-up Iran's failure in the southern front to control the Iraqi port city al-Faw on the Persian Gulf. Halabja had no military or economic value in itself, but to control it would allow access to a strategic road controlling a complex of water projects in the region, thus the Iranians took it. The Iraqi army mounted a heavy counter-attack and recaptured Halabja and forced the Iranian Army to retreat into the Iranian side of the borders.

After the smoke had cleared, reporters flocked into the town of Halabja. Soon, horrifying images of the dead bodies of innocent people including children in the streets of Halabja appeared on several International newspapers. But many images of Iranian soldiers that were recovered in Halabja from the Iraqi counter-attack were published as well. The Kurdish leaders quickly pointed their fingers at the Iraqi Army for the tragedy in Halabja. Iraq claimed that the killed Kurdish civilian were caught in crossfire as it targeted Iranian soldiers occupying the town. Furthermore, there are reports by international and American officials confirming that Halabja was struck by volatile cyanide based gas that Iran possessed.^{3 4}

Kurds within the Kurdish region in northern Iraq held special events for the 34th anniversary of Halabja (1988). The three presidencies of Iraq, the Kurdish region and that of the Iraqi Parliament stressed that Halabja must be honored by turning the district into a governorate. They also asserted that the families of the victims be compensated and to send those who are still living with injuries abroad for treatment.

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran%E2%80%93Iraq_War

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halabja_massacre

3 <https://www.the-trench.org/allegations-of-iranian-use-of-chemical-weapons-in-the-1980-88-gulf-war-halabja>

4 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40276361>



The Halabja Memorial

Many Assyrians ask, if Halabja needed to be transformed into a governorate, when will Simele (or the Nineveh Plain) be turned to governorate? When will the 3,000 Assyrian families of the 1933 Simele massacre by the Iraqi Army under Kurdish General Bekir Sidqi be compensated? When will the government/s build a monument for the Assyrian victims of Simele, similar to that erected for Halabja victims? Where is the morality of the officials in Iraq as they leave the remains of massacred innocent Assyrians exposed and desecrated in Simele?



Two pictures of the exposed and desecrated site of the 1933 Simele massacre (with permission from Gishru)

With help from the West and its powerful media, the subject matter of the Kurdish armed revolt against the Republic of Iraq was transformed into a case of war crime by Saddam Hussein against “innocent” Kurdish people. Halabja was used as the center of that case. But we must consider that the Kurdish guerrillas were attacking Iraqi vital economic installations throughout northern Iraq and fighting against the Iraqi Army. The Iranian Army with the help of the Kurdish guerrillas took over the Iraqi town of Halabja and the Iraqi army needed to retake the town back. The US campaign to blame Saddam Hussein for the tragedy was calculated. Washington has been planning its own war with, and involvement in, Iraq. The 1991 Gulf War and the later 2003 US full invasion of Iraq were in the making. Saddam Hussein was the

excuse. No one should compare US President Harry Truman with Saddam Hussein, but was Truman a criminal for dropping the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki killing 250,000 innocent Japanese in the process? Analysts argue that it was World War II and Truman wanted to end it swiftly to avoid a prolonged war with further catastrophic consequences. Was the use of 32,000 tons of napalm on North Koreans and Chinese in North Korea in 1950s by President Truman and General Douglas MacArthur acceptable, considering that the napalm bombs were often deliberately targeting and burning civilians?

Apparently, and in a devious way, politicians categorize weapons that kill human as “acceptable” in certain cases and “unacceptable” in other cases. Many argue that war is war and whether innocent people die by atomic bombs, chemical weapons or swords, it makes no difference – innocent people are killed. Those politicians seem to insinuate that the International justice system should only go after those who use particular weapons when killing people and not all those who kill innocent human beings? The point is, the Kurdish peshmerga were treasonous for collaborating with the Iranians, assisting them to capture Halabja and acting against their own country of Iraq. Furthermore, it is impossible to believe that 200,000 Kurds disappeared because of the Anfal Campaign. Even today, all efforts to locate the remains of such large number of victims have failed. Special teams have searched throughout northern Iraq using advanced technology of search have been unsuccessful.

Rev. Walter Mwambazi said, “... we live in an era where the media and its control has us really maligned. It is getting harder by the day to really know who is being ‘objective’ and truthful.” US and Israel have considerable control over popular media outlets and they have succeeded to present the Kurds as innocent peaceful people when their history is completely the opposite.⁵ The Kurdish crimes against non-Kurds in northern Iraq, Syria, southeast Turkey and northeast Iran are blocked from being populated. Today, that powerful media presents the Kurds as the protectors of the “Christians”, whom they have massacred for the last 300 years, but that media ignore the oppressive policies of the Kurdish leaders against the Assyrians, as an ethnic and indigenous group.

5 Read for Example:

Rev. Yonan Shahbaz, [The Rage of Islam](#), 1918.

[Abraham Yohannan](#), [The Death of a Nation](#), 1916.

Rev. Joseph Naayem, [Shall This Nation Die](#), 1920.

David Gaunt, [Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I](#), 2006.

[Joseph Yacoub](#), [The Assyrian Question](#), 1986.

[Joseph Yacoub](#), [Year of the Sword: The Assyrian Christian Genocide](#), 2016.

Sebastien de Courtois, [The Forgotten Genocide](#), 2004.

Kamal Salibi and Yusuf Houry, [Reports From Northern Iraq, Vol 1, 2 and 3](#), 1997

F. N. Heazell & Mrs. Margoliouth, [Kurds and Christians](#), 1913

The ill-feelings of Kurdish leaders, politicians and most of their historians towards the Assyrians as an ethnic group and indigenous to northern Iraq are reflected in many of their actions, reports and statements. For an example, in September 2011, the remains of the Assyrian and Kurdish victims of the Soriya massacre were transferred from Arbil to Dohuk and from there to the martyrs' place of birth, Soriya, about 37 miles north of Dohuk. On Sept 16, 1969, after a land mine had exploded near the village, Iraqi Army Lieutenant Abd al-Karim al-Juhaishi carried on an order from the Ba'athist authorities to execute all men and youths of the village.⁶ 38 or 39 martyrs were executed, among them were 25 Assyrian Christians and the village was completely annihilated.⁷ The official KRG's funeral ceremony took place in Dohuk club stadium and from there the coffins were transferred in a special long military procession to Soriya where a private religious ceremony took place at the cemetery in the village.⁸ The Kurdish officials used this occasion to insult, dehumanize and disgrace the Assyrian martyrs. They wrapped all coffins with the Kurdish flags to give the impression that the martyrs were Kurdish Christians, which goes hand in hand with their kurdification policies and presenting the Assyrians as Christian Kurds.

Soriya Assyrian Victims

The family of Khamo Maarogeh Shimun (the village's mayor): Khamo Marogeh, his wife Kathryn Sargis, and Laila Khamo.
The family of Mansour Ishaq: His wife Kathryn Shimun, and a three months old baby.
The family of Misso Maarogeh Shimun: Misso Marogeh.
The family of Hermiz Marogeh Shimun: Goro Hermiz, Antar Hermiz (a little boy 5 years old).
The family of Othman Suleiman: His wife Amina Rajab, Nahida Othman, Sabiha Othman, and a little baby three months old.
The family of Meho Hassan: Miran Meho, Ghariba Meho.
The family of Berro Huusein: His wife Qamar Rasheed, Nadira Berro, and his mother Halima.
The family of Mounir Yousif: Firman Mounir, Talan Mounir.
The family of Eilo Youkhana: Yaqo Eilo.
The family of Yalda Raasho: Basima Yalda.
The family of Giwargis Qoryakus: Naji Giwargis.
The family of Shabo Baazna: His wife Shoneh, Samir Shawel and a little girl who died in hospital.
The family of Boutros Toma: His wife Yono Sliwa, a little girl 5 years old, and a little boy 4 years old.
The family of Alo Youssif: His wife Shirin Samo, and Amina Alo 7 years old.
The family of Oraha Khamo: Oraha Khamo, Warina Oraha 5 years old.
The family of Rasho Warda: Rasho Warda, and his wife Asmar Elias.
The Reverend Hanna.
The driver Husni from Zakho.
Guiliana Markus.

6 It was very common to find land mines throughout north of Iraq because of the Kurdish revolt.

7 <https://www.atour.com/news/assyria/20080813a.html>

8 <https://english.ankawa.com/?p=5380>



The Kurdish people deserve to live in peace just like other people around the world, but they, as relatively newcomers compared to the rest of the people in northern Iraq, must not create their illusive state at the expense of the indigenous people. The Assyrians and Yezidis are not strictly religious minorities worthy of protection by the Kurdish leaders when it suits their propaganda or that of the states behind them. The Assyrians and Yezidis are rather the indigenous people of northern Iraq ([Occupied Assyria](#)), a region that the Kurds are occupying illegally.