

The Nineveh Plain Self Administrative Region (Governorate) between Iraqi Government Decisions and US Congress Resolutions

Fred Aprim
June 18, 2023

Adnan al-Zurfi is an Iraqi politician, a former official of the US-run authorities, which took over Iraq after the 2003 US invasion that deposed former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath rule. He held many positions such as the Interior Minister Deputy for Intelligence Affairs and later as the governor of al-Najaf.¹

Al-Zurfi is the head of Nasr parliamentary group of former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. He was chosen as the new prime minister-designate in March 2020 by the then Iraqi President Barham Salih to form a government and resolve a months-long political crisis in Iraq. The US supported his appointment.² However, on April 9, 2020 Al-Zurfi decided to withdraw from forming a new government.³

on June 15, 2023, al-Zurfi appeared on القرار لكم (al-qarar lakom or The Decision is Yours) program of the Iraqi Dijla TV station. Al-Zurfi responded to an earlier statement by Masoud Barzani, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), on June 12 in which Barzani had said that the Kurdistan region is not only a red line, but it is a death line, either Kurdistan or annihilation.⁴

Al-Zurfi stated that International officials these days are visiting Baghdad first unlike before when they were visiting Arbil first. Referring to Barzani's statement and plans, Al-Zurfi said that national rhetoric based on racism is no longer accepted around the world. He said that everybody is keen on the unity and stability of Iraq and that the US wants to protect the minorities in Iraq. He added, the US Congress is in the process of voting on a resolution to create self-rule regions in Nineveh Plain and Sinjar linked to the central government in Baghdad and not to the Kurdish region.⁵

It is important to point that the statement about the Nineveh Plain Self Administrative Region (NPSAR) was not the center of the discussion. If we listen to the whole interview, we would realize that the Nineveh Plain self-rule was brought up as Al-Zurfi was trying to make a point that the world was now concentrating on Baghdad first and not Arbil.

Of course, there have been a few previous resolutions about the Nineveh Plains that were initiated by Assyrian groups. It started with the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) that fought hard to include article 125 in the Iraqi 2005 Constitution. Article 125 states: *"This Constitution shall guarantee the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents, and this shall be regulated by law."*⁶

In 2012, the NPSAR linked to the central government in Baghdad was initially agreed upon by the Iraqi council of ministers. However, the invasion of Mosul and Nineveh Plain by ISIS in 2014 put all plans

1 <https://alrafidaincenter.com/en/3397>

2 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-politics-usa-pompeo/pompeo-says-u-s-to-support-new-iraqi-pm-if-he-upholds-key-principles-idUSKBN21442X>

3 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/17/iraqi-president-salih-appoints-adnan-al-zurfi-as-new-pm-designate>

4 <https://www.arknews.net/en/node/45236>

5 <https://www.facebook.com/dijlahTelevision/videos/1427992311312270/>

6 https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005.pdf?lang=en

on hold.⁷ In January 2014, the Iraqi government initiated the process of creating a province in the Nineveh Plain to be used for the protection of religious minorities. This plan included land, independent security, and borders wherein some self governance exists.⁸

Then came the US Congress H. CON. RES. 152 in September 9, 2016, which titled, “*Expressing the sense of Congress that the United States and the international community should support the Republic of Iraq and its people to recognize a province in the Nineveh Plain region, consistent with lawful expressions of self-determination by its indigenous peoples.*”⁹

The resolution states that "*the indigenous communities of the Iraqi region of Nineveh Plain - Assyrian Christians Syrians and Chaldeans, Yazidis and others - have the right to security and self-determination, in the context of the Republic of Iraq*".¹⁰

We must be very careful with these resolutions that keep popping up every now and then. Many resolutions are introduced because of requests from common citizens who must seek the help of member/s of Congress to introduce those resolutions in Congress on their behalf. Any group of citizens, no matter how small, with simple donation to a cause that is supported by certain members of US Congress could convince those members who are passionate about that cause to introduce a resolution in US Congress. In fact, one individual who is friends with a member of US Congress could convince that congressperson to initiate a resolution. Most resolutions are non-binding and are designed to be printed, framed and hanged on a wall for decoration and to satisfy the ego of the congressperson and/or those who initiate it. However, if a few congressmen/congresswomen are popular enough and have good relationship with both Democratic and Republican members of the US Congress, they could pass a bill through both the House and the Senate and convince the US president to sign it and it becomes a law. Only at this stage, the US government will take all steps necessary to ensure that the bill will achieve its objectives. The most important and critical issues in a resolution are, the type of the resolution (determines how far it goes), its specific wording and what exactly it needs to accomplish. From the wording and objectives of the bill, one could determine who is behind that resolution (bill) and whose interest it really serves.

I deemed it necessary to search for the resolution which was mentioned by Mr. Al-Zurfi. The US Congress website did not show any such new resolution that was introduced in Congress. However, it is interesting to mention that the word Shabakistan (land of Shabak) was inserted in the text of the Facebook post that announced the interview, but, al-Zurfi himself did not mention it in his comments. Is it possible that there is a resolution in the making, but has not been introduced in Congress yet? Is it possible that such resolution is not initiated by Assyrian groups? Yes, that is a possibility. We must understand that the Nineveh Plain is a region that includes Assyrians (Nestorians, Chaldeans, Jacobites or Suryanis) and other non-Christian religious and ethnic groups such as, Shabaks, Shia Arabs, Turkmen, Kaka'i, and others. There is a possibility that the powerful Shi'a Arabs will try to disassociate this region from the Nineveh Governorate and create a region dominated by Shi'a. Consider that the Babylon Brigade militia of the al-Hash al-Sha'abi (Popular Mobilization Force) under the Rayan and

7 See the details in Fred Aprim, “The Betrayal of the Powerless: Assyrians After the 2003 US Invasion of Iraq”. Xlibris, 2021.

8 https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/2023/03/20/fight-to-protect-endangered-iraqi-christians-continues-after-years-of-war/?fbclid=IwAR2GGKvoJD4hsps0_MuiwVzFOh0iCrPFYt_k2SxVQeqLL1UytJ8sX36larI

9 https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/hconres152/text?fbclid=IwAR2gacgBHcgOX6ZbqQ91VJNsgR7IMxz5SRDmcUP5R1nb_cCLkNJBHQI-6DI

10 http://www.fides.org/en/news/60771-ASIA_IRAQ_Motion_at_the_US_Congress_to_support_the_self_determination_of_the_Nineveh_Plain?fbclid=IwAR0sjSlla2NKdp06mv2O1DwFHkpebPA_hwEmA8vq_Dv_F7Nn3DZvDIV9CZo

Osama al-Kaldani brothers is already controlling half of the Nineveh Plain. The Babylon Brigade is heavily supported by the Iraqi Shi'a and Iran. On the other hand, the Kurds and their militias (the peshmerga) are controlling the other half of the Nineveh Plain and they are trying to annex the Nineveh Plain to the Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

It is also worth mentioning that certain Assyrian activists and politicians, including Mr. Ashur Giwargis and his group Assyria Patriotic Movement, consider the Assyrians' NPSAR harmful for the Assyrian cause. Giwargis argues that NPSAR will officially divide the Assyrian central homeland or the Historic Assyrian triangle, which the Assyrians fought for in WWI and in the League of Nations. Giwargis believes that Assyrians will end up dropping their historic lands in Dohuk, for example, which are under the Kurdish occupation.

The Assyrians might lose the Nineveh Plain just as they lost other Assyrian historic regions, because they do not cooperate and work together to achieve the crucial goals important for their survival on their historic lands. While Assyrians are the indigenous people of Iraq¹¹ and have all the rights that are backed by the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people¹², still, being divided has repeatedly made them vulnerable and presented them weak. The empowered Kurds and Shi'a have taken advantage of this division among the Assyrian groups and have since 2003 inflicted on the Assyrians one setback after another. This must end for the sake of the few brave Assyrians who struggle daily to remain on their historic lands.

11 <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/08/10/iraq-must-recognize-assyrians-as-its-indigenous-people/>

12 <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>