

Guest Editorial

Assyrian Leaders Have a History of 'Disappearing' in North Iraq
Ashur Shirsha

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(AINA) -- The Assyrian community, having suffered years of silenced persecution during the early 20th century, mainly at the hands of their Kurdish neighbors, who tormented them as individual tribes (Shakkak), and as Muslim allies of the Committee on Union and Progress working through the Ottoman armies during WWI, and later as Kurds who participated in the 1933 massacre of Assyrians in Simmele, north Iraq, sadly have developed a healthy mistrust of their Kurdish neighbors.

It is part of their self-preservation armor.

In recent decades, aside from murders and imprisonment of many Assyrian men mainly over land disputes in northern Iraq, the rape of Assyrian girls and women for intimidation and perverted "fun," we also have two stark examples of the assassination of two prominent Assyrians: Francis Shabo and Franso Hariri.



Franso Hariri

Francis Shabo

These two men, both able politicians and administrators, but holding completely different views on working with Kurds, were killed in [June, 1993](#) and [February, 2001](#) respectively. The murders were committed by official or unofficial members of Kurdish organizations, including those presently holding power.

But it is not just Assyrians who have been targeted. On November 5, 2008 Turkmen journalist Timor Beyatli disappeared into a northern Iraq Kurdish dungeon while trying to fly out of Irbil (AINA [11-10-2008](#)). Kurdish journalist, Kamal Kadir Karim, arrested in October, 2006 for accusing Barzani of corruption, was only released from secret imprisonment when his case became front page news in the US and other [western media](#).

In response to a recent [story](#) by AINA on the disappearance of the ethnically Assyrian finance minister of the Kurdish Regional Government in north Iraq, a letter has been published in a Kurdish newsletter,¹ it reads as follows:

OPEN LETTER TO ASSYRIAN NEWS AGENCY AINA

Dear Gentlemen,

yes, this, indeed, was a real highlight in your ascending carrier as mythomans. I am talking about this:

Assyrian International News Agency
Mystery Surrounds Disappearance of Assyrian Finance Minister Sarkis Aghajan

Now, I have talked to Sarkis Aghajan this morning in a Central European city. He told me that he was recovering well from stress syndromes and was enjoying his respite from his hard job as finance minister. When I asked him if he would want to do something about your imaginations, he responded: "Oh, just do me a favour and show them the middle finger, Italian style."

Which I gladly do herewith.

Alexander Sternberg²
Berlin, Germany

Assyrian International News Agency

AINA contacted Mr. Alexander Sternberg on February 9 via email and requested that he arrange an interview with Mr. Aghajan for AINA. No response has been received.

So why does Mr. Alexander Sternberg make such an unseemly display when the international Assyrian community becomes alarmed at the disappearance of one of its leaders for three months? Does he not know the shameful history of Kurdish behavior toward their Aramaic speaking Christian neighbors? Does he not know that Franso Hariri too, like Sarkis Aghajan, was for years a trusted Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) operative?

It is true that Sarkis Aghajan is not universally loved by Assyrians in Iraq and that he has worked to undermine the standing of independent Assyrian parties. Many in the community regard him as a mouthpiece for the Barzani clan in their attempt to appear to the US State Department and especially US Agency for International Development as tolerant of Christians, and Assyrians in particular.

Nonetheless, no Assyrian wishes to see Sarkis Aghajan meet a secret death.

Why would this Alexander Sternberg expect that his word of Aghajan's healthy condition be honored as truth? And why would a telephone call to a person who says he is Sarkis Aghajan convince anyone with the smallest knowledge of the history of Assyrian- Kurdish relations that this KDP minister of finance is still alive?

Assyrian concern in this case, as in that of lesser public figures who are striving in their way to maintain an Assyrian presence in their indigenous land is fully justified. Let the immature remarks of Alexander Sternberg be replaced by real proof of the good health of Sarkis Aghajan.

We do not want to raise the middle finger to this Sternberg person. We do not believe that Sarkis Aghajan would do anything of the sort to his Assyrian compatriots. But we do need more definitive proof of Sarkis Aghajan's well-being than what has appeared to date.

The KDP itself needs to act if it wants to allay suspicions that may turn into political action.

¹ Mesopotamische Gesellschaft, February 8, 2009; Mezopotamian Development Society (Registered); PO Box 35 - D 61440, Oberursel - Germany.

² Alexander Sternberg is a German lobbyist who has been working for the KDP since the 1980s.

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