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## Wave of Terrorism Hits Home for Iraqi Assyrians

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(AINA) -- The August 1 bombings of 5 churches in Baghdad and Mosul have now been followed by [mortar attacks](#) against the Assyrian town in [Bakhdeda](#), northern Iraq. At 11:30 pm on September 10, an unspecified number of terrorists lobbed a series of mortar shells on civilian homes in Bakhdeda (also referred to as Qarqosh) in the Hamdaniya district of the Nineveh Governorate. The Assyrian (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) Christian residents of Bakhdeda had just begun to retire from their religious celebrations of the Holy Cross (Aida d' Sliwa) when several mortar shells slammed down on several homes. Although a final casualty report is still pending, it has been confirmed by sources inside Bakhdeda that 13 year old Mark Louis Sheeto was killed in the attack while his mother Bushra Toma Sheeto and his 8 year old brother Bihnan Sheeto both sustained serious injuries and were listed in critical condition in a nearby hospital.



This most recent attack against Assyrian civilians follows a wave of [escalating](#) violence that culminated in the [bombing](#) of four Assyrian and one Armenian Churches on August 1. Because the attacks have all been directed against civilians, it is widely believed that the general purpose is to incite general panic in the unprotected Assyrian population. Neither the Church bombers nor the Bakhdeda attackers have been identified and no one has yet claimed responsibility. In the recent past, though, Assyrians have faced attacks by several elements within Iraqi society including [by Kurds](#) tied to strongman Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), former Baathist elements, and Islamic [fundamentalists](#). The recent Bakhdeda attacks represent a fundamental shift and intensification of attacks against the very existence of Assyrians in Iraq as it signals the first major attack against Assyrians in the [Nineveh Plains](#) -- an area until now relatively quiet and secure.

Bakhdeda lies in north Iraq, near Nineveh, the former capital of Assyria, and in the ancestral Assyrian heartland. The city's 30,000 inhabitants, 98% of which are Assyrian Christians, regard Bakhdeda as a major religious and cultural center with numerous churches and monasteries dating as far back as the 3rd century A.D.

Several middleEast analysts suspect that the terrorists may have been encouraged by reports that up to [40,000 Assyrians](#) may have fled Iraq following the August 1 Church bombings. The Church bombings had galvanized the Assyrian community and intensified calls for the establishment of an Assyrian protected area in the Nineveh Plains. To Assyrians, Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law (TAL, [English](#), [Arabic](#)) that was signed by the Coalition Provisional Authority as well as the Iraqi's themselves before the turnover of sovereignty, recognized Assyrians' administrative rights in the Nineveh Plains, where a large number of nearly exclusively Assyrian towns and villages still remain. As one analyst noted "The Church bombings simply emphasized the need to establish a protected area in the Nineveh Plains in order to stem the tide of a still greater, more catastrophic mass exodus of Assyrians from Iraq to the West. In turn, the Bakhdeda shelling represents the terrorists' response to Assyrian calls for security and a protected area." The aim appears to be to underscore a lack of security and Assyrian vulnerability in order to encourage further flight.

Currently, the perpetrators remain unknown and at large. However, the tactic of midnight terror raids against Assyrian towns has directed suspicion first and foremost against Barzani's KDP. For years under the UN administered Safe Haven, KDP paramilitary forces besieged Assyrian towns (AINA, [10-16-1999](#), [11-30-1999](#)), assassinated Assyrian leaders such as Mr. Francis Shabo, abducted and tortured Assyrian civilians (AINA [09-17-2001](#)), kidnapped and raped Assyrian woman (AINA [09-28-1996](#), [06-19-1999](#)), and forcibly expropriated dozens of Assyrian towns and villages ([1](#), [2](#)) with impunity. UN Oil for Food funds were monopolized by the KDP tribal elite in order to ensure Assyrian villages suffered for lack of basic infrastructure. As one Assyrian leader noted, "The KDP has drawn its map for their envisioned 'Kurdistan,' and it includes the Assyrian heartland -- the Nineveh Plains. Presumably, to KDP warlord Masoud Barzani, Assyrians have one of two choices -- either leave Nineveh or acknowledge his feudal lordship as obedient serfs. Moreover, a self-administered Assyrian Regional area akin to the Kurdistan Regional Government remains problematic to the ever expanding Kurdish map." Other groups in northern Iraq such as the Yazidis and Turkman face similar challenges.

The embattled fledgling Iraqi government has not responded well to the Assyrian crisis. Although Assyrians remain reluctant to criticize a nascent government struggling with its own uprising, Assyrians have been frustrated by a lack of focus given to

Assyrian Christian security. After an initial refreshing outpouring of condemnation against the Church bombings from nearly all segments of Iraqi society, no effort has been subsequently made to make Assyrians more secure. Moreover, none of the Churches or homes destroyed in the bombings or shellings have been assisted by the government in stark contradistinction to Muslim areas such as Najaf that have been promised generous reconstruction assistance.

Assyrian frustration has begun to foment into outright anger against Coalition policies on account of the lack of security afforded Assyrians and the free reign granted the KDP. One observer asserted "While Washington continues to battle terrorist insurgents in Iraq, it ignores the excesses of its own terrorist allies -- the KDP. The US continues to allocate tens of millions of dollars to resettle Kurdish refugees while Assyrians displaced by Kurds are given nothing. While representative city councils are established throughout Iraq, Assyrians are denied fair participation in the KDP occupied cities of Dohuk and Arbil. While other militias are disarmed, the KDP's forces have become still better trained and armed. While the KDP extends its gains in the TAL, ChaldoAssyrians and Turkomen struggle to see any progress to the administrative rights promised them in the TAL."

Another Assyrian Christian leader inside Iraq lamented that "Americans in Iraq are bending over backwards to look like they're not helping us out of fear of an Islamic backlash." Another observer noted, "In the early days, we welcomed a strong US relationship with the KDP as a moderating source of influence on KDP aggression. Instead, we find as a result a better armed, better trained, more confident and brazen KDP hell bent on occupying the very last corner of our existence." With what was described as a "gradual, persistent ethnic cleansing of Assyrians continuing directly under US auspices," one activist noted that "unless the current US policy is changed and security provided to the Assyrians in a protected area in the Nineveh Plains, history will record that President George Bush's vision for Iraq succeeded in finally eliminating the 6700 year Assyrian existence in Mesopotamia."

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