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Assyrian Security Force Needed in Iraq's Nineveh Plain

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(AINA) -- On Feb. 20, 2008, Uruknet¹ and the Kurdistan Post² reported that Masroor Barzani, son of the Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani, was arrested in Austria for an assassination attempt against Kurdish journalist and outspoken critic of the KRG, Mr. Kamal Sayid Kadir.³ Mr. Kadir was arrested and detained for several months in 2005 in the KRG Region for harsh criticism of the Kurdish government and political parties.

On Feb. 17th, 2008, Johnny Khoshaba, an Assyrian Deacon, was arrested by the Kurdistan Democratic Party Peshmerga from his home in Telkeif⁴, Iraq, and taken to a prison in Sarsink, in the KRG Region. Telkeif lies in the Nineveh Plains, outside of the KRG, yet the KDP militia operates as a security force in the area. Johnny Khoshaba's crime was criticism of what he sees as corruption in Assyrian religious and political leaders including Finance Minister Sarkis Aghajan, and also the KRG and Kurdish political parties.⁵ Before his release four days later, he was required to sign an agreement to stop all criticism of the KRG and Assyrian religious leaders.

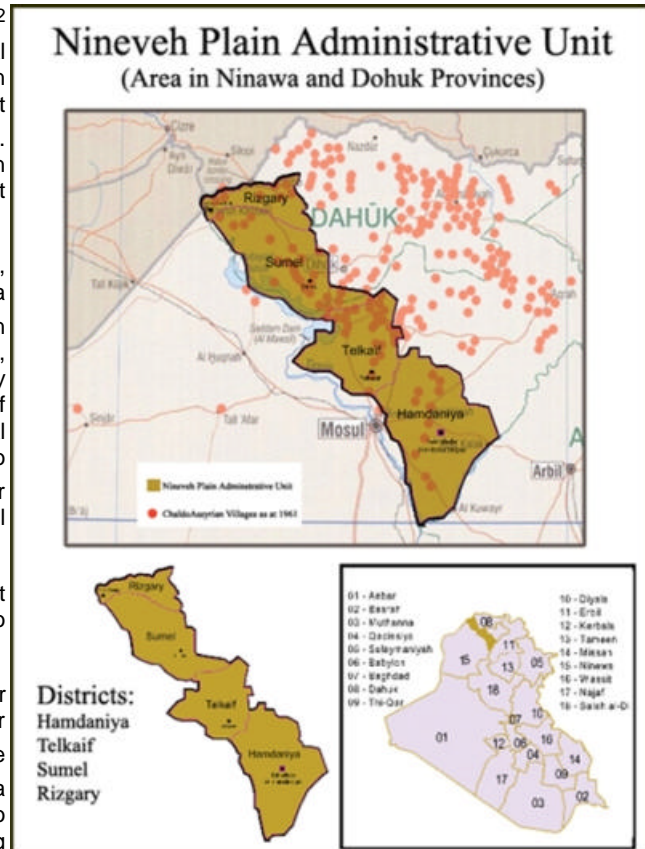
Both Mr. Kadir and Mr. Khoshaba live outside of the KRG, yet the reach of the Peshmerga and KDP seems to extend to wherever there is dissent or criticism of Kurdish authorities.

The KDP uses an unstable Iraq as an excuse to use direct their militias as they please, seemingly with the nod of approval -- or the blind eye -- of coalition forces.⁶ As early as 2005, the Washington Post discussed the Kurdish militias⁷, describing a situation where KDP militias are free to do as they please to consolidate the power of their party, intimidating and arresting at will.

While Peshmerga presence likely brings some stability to the area, it comes at a severe price: the long, corrupt arm of the KDP is extended into the indigenous Assyrian territory outside the territory already taken - a territory which the KRG draft constitution seeks to "normalize" and annex to the KRG Region. Should the Nineveh Plains not be annexed to the KRG, expansion of KRG territory would be difficult.

KDP offices and control are, therefore, necessary for this goal of annexation. In 2006, when the Assyrian Democratic Movement received permission from the Iraqi Ministry of Interior to assign 800 new policemen in the Nineveh Plains, to be chosen from the local inhabitants, the KDP-controlled Provincial Council in Nineveh successfully delayed and ultimately blocked the implementation, ensuring their control of the area.⁸ However, without immediate implementation of the Ministry's order for a local police force, stories like Mr. Khoshaba's will become more and more common.

As the KRG overreaches their authority and continues, unchecked, the pattern of authoritarianism it is blatantly displaying, it will be difficult to reverse the process and ensure Iraq becomes a democracy for all of its citizens, rather than only for the privileged political elites and those "connected" to the rich and powerful. With increasing reports of economic and political marginalization of non-Kurds, intimidation to join the Kurdish political parties for financial and physical security, and usurpation of independent organizations to control ethnic and religious minorities, the KRG is quickly showing its proficiency at controlling their agenda through brute force and superior financial resources. It is becoming increasingly clear that the KRG is not much different than the previous Iraqi regime⁹ in terms of their political tactics and structure. Indeed, "The Other Iraq" is looking more and more like "The Previous Iraq, continued".



By Waleeta Canon

Waleeta Canon is the Director of the Washington, D.C. based [Assyria Foundation](#). She has published and presented on Assyrian political and human rights issues since 2003.

Notes:

¹ "[Barazani's son arrested in Austria on murder attempt charge.](#)" See [here](#) also.

² <http://www.kurdistanpost.info/news/173.html>.

³ Kadir, Kamal Sayid; [Iraqi Kurdistan's Downward Spiral](#)

⁴ [AINA 2-22-2008](#). The KDP Peshmerga often acts under the guise of the Iraqi National Guard -- although it is clear they are taking orders from the KDP (see "[Kurdish Soldier Kill Assyrian Boy in Drive-By Shooting](#)", Assyrian International News Agency, July 2007; "Northern Iraqi Human Rights Field Mission", Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project, April, 2006.

⁵ See Mr. Khoshaba's [letter](#) to Ankawa.com after his release.

⁶ "[Militias on the Rise in Iraq.](#)"

⁷ Ibid

⁸ "[Kurds Block Assyrians, Shabaks from Police Force in North Iraq.](#)"

⁹ Rubin, Michael; [Is Iraqi Kurdistan a Good Ally?](#)

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