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KDP's Islamic Fundamentalist Ties Threaten Assyrians

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Increasingly, reports from northern Iraq have revealed a dangerously escalating degree of Islamist militancy and fundamentalism in Iraq in general and especially within the portion of northern Iraq currently occupied by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Not surprisingly, Islamic militancy in the UN "Safe Haven" has been particularly detrimental to the indigenous Assyrian Christian population in the area.



[Rabban Hormizd Assyrian Monastery in Northern Iraq](#)

An ever growing number of Islamic fundamentalist and other terrorist organizations operate freely in the KDP occupied region of northern Iraq, often with direct support from the KDP strongman, Mr. Masoud Barzani. The most notorious Islamic fundamentalist organization with direct ties to the Barzani clan is the Kurdish Revolutionary Party of God (Hizballah al Thawry al Kurdi) headed by Sheikh Mohammed Khalid Barzani, the late Mulla Mustafa Barzani's first cousin. In fact, Sheikh Khalid happens to be Mr. Masoud Barzani's father-in-law as well as that of Mr. Barzani's late brother Adris as well. In their 1995 report entitled "Human Rights Abuses in Iraqi Kurdistan Since 1991," Amnesty International noted that the "Kurdish Hezbollah" was "led by Sheikh Muhammad Khaled Barzani (a cousin of Mas'ud Barzani), which was formed in 1982 in Iran." The group has enjoyed generous support from Iran on account of its fundamentalist character and ideology.

Another organization referred to as the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK) (Al Haraka Al Islamayia Fi Kurdistan Al Iraq) is likewise supported by the Iranian government and functions primarily in the Arbil and Sulaimaniya regions. Although the IMIK began initially as an Islamic charitable organization, they subsequently deteriorated into a militant terrorist organization at times targeting the indigenous Assyrian Christian community with threats and intimidation. Initially, the IMIK was headquartered in Halabja in the area currently under the occupation of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). In the mid 1990's, the internecine tribal blood feud between the KDP and PUK led Mr. Masoud Barzani to

actively support the IMIK as a hedge against the PUK. With the quieting of the bloodletting, it is widely believed that Mr. Barzani has maintained ties to the organization as insurance for any future battles against the PUK as well as a constant source of pressure and intimidation against the indigenous Assyrian Christian population.

The Army of Islam (Jund Al Islam)-- recently receiving great notoriety for their links to Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden-- is believed to have evolved from members of the IMIK, many of whom continue to enjoy close relations with the KDP leadership. It is widely believed that Mr. Barzani has maintained ties with the Army of Islam leadership, although no public acknowledgement has been provided by the KDP since allegations surfaced that the Army of Islam was tied to other international terror organizations.

Another organization named Islamic Unity in Kurdistan (Al Itihad Al Islamiya fi Kurdistan) also referred to as "Yukkouto" also primarily operates in the KDP occupied areas. "Yukkouto" reportedly primarily receives its support from Saudi Arabia. The movement officially espouses nonviolence and is active in providing assistance to needy Muslim families. Through one of its affiliates- Islamic Ties (Al Rabeeta Al Islamiya), the Yakkouto has been aggressively engaged in building scores of mosques, some in Assyrian villages and lands. In Dohuk alone, Yakkouto has built as many as one hundred mosques, many in Assyrian villages first destroyed by the government and then illegally expropriated and forcibly occupied by Kurdish tribes. For their part, the KDP has overseen and directly supported the settling of Behdanani Kurdish tribesmen onto Assyrian lands all the while restricting the building of Assyrian religious and cultural institutions. The building of mosques in Assyrian villages and lands is seen as having the political motive of entrenching and consolidating the illegal settlement of these lands by Behdanani Kurdish tribesmen.

Islamic fundamentalist pressure has recently increased against Assyrians living in the government controlled area of Iraq as well. The Iraqi government has long had laws on the books designed to control and regulate Assyrian, including Chaldean and Syriac, religious institutions ([AINA, Assyrian Human Rights Report, 1997](#)). Still more, a 1980 law making Koranic education compulsory for all Christian students was de-emphasized shortly after it was enacted due to massive protests by the Christian community. However, as originally reported by The Rutherford Institute ([link](#)) and more recently by the Catholic World News ([3-8-2002](#)), these laws are being rejuvenated and enforced with greater determination. Additional decrees restricting the types of names Assyrians may give their newborns to Arabic names have incensed the Assyrian community within Iraq and the Diaspora. The net effect of the anti-Christian, anti-Assyrian campaign has been to further pressure Assyrian cultural and religious identity while practically nationalizing the Churches under an Islamic ministry. The governmental intrusion in Assyrian Christian life has been so brazen that a grassroots uproar has even led some previously timid and acquiescent Church leaders to protest.

Often sharing similar motives and tactics, the KDP as well as the government of Iraq have cynically used their close ties with Islamic fundamentalists to further persecute the indigenous Christian Assyrians, including Chaldeans and Syriacs. For the government of Iraq, the intent is to suppress any semblance of Assyrian cultural, nationalistic or religious identity. As for the KDP, Mr. Barzani has used his incestuous relationship with militant Islamic groups such as Hizballah to further the KDP's long running scheme to ethnically cleanse the region of the indigenous Assyrian community. While duplicitously presenting a

pro-western, secular, and democratic image externally in order to attract international sympathy-internally, Mr. Barzani continues to use fundamentalist terror tactics to intimidate Assyrians in a bid to consolidate illegally expropriated Assyrian lands.

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