

CREATING A NINEVEH PLAIN
LOCAL POLICE FORCE:
OVERCOMING ETHNO-RELIGIOUS
MINORITY INSECURITY

Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project
POLICY BRIEFING

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“The United States has no intention of determining the precise form of Iraq’s new government. That choice belongs to the Iraqi people. Yet, we will ensure that one brutal dictator is not replaced by another. All Iraqis must have a voice in the new government, and all citizens must have their rights protected.”

President George W. Bush, February 26, 2003.

1. Introduction

The Nineveh Plain requires a legitimate, formal local police force, drawn from the local community. It is essential for providing the necessary security for vulnerable minorities such as Christian Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriacs (herein ChaldoAssyrians), Shabaks and Yezidis. It is also entirely in step with US strategic interests in that area of Iraq, particularly in relation to the expanding threat of radicalism from Mosul City and the destabilizing pressures of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) from the north.

ChaldoAssyrians, Shabaks and Yezidis are given the freedom and support as the Sunnis in the Al Anbar Province, and the Kurdish parties, to establish a police force that is able to secure their neighborhoods, roads, businesses and the Nineveh Plain overall (its villages and cities). This allows the force to make steady progress in fighting terrorists within the Nineveh Plains. After five years with no progress this is the only ‘course of action’ that will allow ChaldoAssyrians and other minorities of the Nineveh Plains to build true Democratic institutions that will bring about economic stability to this vital area of Iraq. The means to stand up a comprehensive security force are already in place in other provinces of Iraq. The people of the Nineveh Plain must be supported in standing up security forces under the supervision of the United States Military Forces Military Transition Teams (MTT), and Police Transitional Teams (PiTT), and a Nineveh Province Special Weapons and Tactics Unit (SWAT) trained and guided by the United States Special Operational Forces.

Only then can the ChaldoAssyrians’ political and police leadership in Nineveh Plains take the lead in defeating terrorists and providing their own security, with a fully constitutional administration in place, and on its way to achieving its economic potential for the benefit of a future secure, stable, and democratic Iraq.

2. The Nineveh Plain and US Strategic Interests

The Nineveh Plain, a discernable, compact territorial unit, that is absorbing waves of internally displaced (IDP) families in the thousands, has no formal local policing. Its residents face constant security risks as a result. Those IDPs seeking refuge in the Nineveh Plain are in effect returning to the homes and lands from which they were Arabized in decades past. The absence of formal local police keeps driving their fear.

United States policy is to create effective Iraqi policing units throughout the country, down to the local level. This is made abundantly clear in the ‘Mission Statement’ of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), which states,

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‘Organize, train, equip and mentor Iraqi Security Forces, in order to support Iraq’s ultimate goal of a unified, stable and democratic Iraq, which provides a representative government for the Iraqi people...’¹

American resolve on seeing through the objective of having areas develop legitimate, formal local police forces must be strengthened. The Department of State must authorize the Department of Defense to start prioritizing military assets towards ensuring the formation of local policing forces in the Nineveh Plain.

The basis for this prioritization rests in the articulation of extraordinary security threats in Iraq for minorities, but also from the wider perspective of the global war on terrorism. The formation of a local, formal police force in the Nineveh Plain is one more step to reinforcing moderation and moderates in Iraqi society, in defending themselves against extremists, as defined in the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terror (NMSP-WOT). This document states clearly, “In the global war on terror, violent extremism – in its various forms – is the primary threat to the United States, its allies and interests. [...] ‘*Extremists*’ are those who (1) oppose – in principle and practice – the right of people to choose how to live and how to organize their societies, and (2) support the murder of ordinary people to advance extremist ideological purposes. ‘*Moderates*’ ..., refer to those individuals who do not support extremists.”²

This is about protecting a sizable population and region sitting abreast Mosul City, in the hands of moderates who can ensure the diffusion of moderating ideas in Iraq’s transition. ChaldoAssyrians, as a result of previous waves of persecution, have large populations throughout the United States and in other countries allied to the United States. They maintain deep connections to their families in Iraq and the Nineveh Plain. They constitute a natural human bridge/connection for the transference of values and norms essential for reinforcing moderation in Iraqi society.

Although merit must always remain the primary basis for qualification in the Iraqi Security Forces, emphasis on it being ‘representative’ also ensures it can connect to the local population, and garner the much needed trust of the communities they would protect. It is remarkable that to this day the Nineveh Plain, the area with the highest concentration of Christian ChaldoAssyrians, Shabaks and Yezidis, is denied the formation of a genuine, formal local policing service. These religious minorities are extraordinarily vulnerable in the area and face deliberate targeting.

It is also vital to recall that Ninawa Governorate is not one of the areas turned over yet. In essence, while the turn-over of security to a province or region does not mean a US departure, it does mean that Ninawa Governorate is one with a directly engaged US presence. The ability of MNSTC-I to intercede in the formation of a legitimate, representative local policing force in the Nineveh Plain is part of the mission and a goal within reach.

The Iraq Study Group (ISG) reported: “The Iraqi Police Service, which operates in the provinces and provides local policing, needs to become a true police force. It needs legal authority, training and equipment to control crime and protect Iraqi citizens.” The report goes on to say, “In order to more effectively administer the Iraqi Police Service, the Ministry of the Interior needs to undertake substantial reforms to purge bad elements...”³

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The lack of a local police force in the Nineveh Plain affirms the ISG Report findings.

Their Reality

ChaldoAssyrians are “particularly targeted” according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁴ Shabaks, Yezidis, Armenians, Turkmens, Mandaean-Sabaeans face similar conditions. Christian Iraqis constitute a vastly disproportionate amount of Iraq’s refugee and IDP crisis. As early as mid-2005, UNHCR began reporting that Christians constitute 36 percent of registered refugees.⁵

While exact figures in Iraq are always difficult to provide, UNHCR has developed the clearest picture of the scope of ethnic cleansing taking place. ChaldoAssyrian Christians constitute 15 percent of refugees in Jordan and 20 percent of those in Syria.⁶ This means that a minimum of 350,000 have fled Iraq. Based on these numbers, upwards of 1 in 3 Iraqi Christians has fled their land. It will not require a great more to flee, to tip the population completely outwards and spur a full scale cleansing.

The Nineveh Plain, an area spanning the lands north, east, and south-east of Mosul in Ninawa Governorate, is demographically dominated by Iraq’s most vulnerable minorities, particularly ChaldoAssyrians. There are also sizable Shabak and Yezidis populations. This area is daily absorbing Christian Iraqi internally-displaced families, especially from the ChaldoAssyrian community. Fleeing a complete security collapse for minorities in Baghdad, Basra and Mosul, they arrive in the Nineveh Plain only to find that it is denied a formal local policing force.

The Iraqi Minorities Council, in mid-2006, was already reporting the addition of at least 1000 Shabak families from Mosul, adding to the existing Shabak population in the Nineveh Plain. In 2005, Shabak protesters had automatic gunfire strike a peaceful demonstration calling for the recognition of their ethnic identity in Iraq’s Constitution. It was KDP-affiliated Peshmerga guilty of the human rights crime. These types of pressures are constantly driving them from areas such as Mosul into the Nineveh Plain.

To ensure that ChaldoAssyrian, Shabak and also Yezidis peoples are able to remain in their homeland, withstand increasing insecurity in Iraq, and simply provide an area of continued stability, it is essential to form a representative, formal local police force in consultation with the legitimate representation of the minorities in the Nineveh Plain.

Dora:

Over three months ago, Islamists/insurgents, launched a formal and public campaign to purge Christians from Baghdad. The Islamists are succeeding.

Dora, a district in Baghdad that at liberation was home to just over 20,000 Christian families now has under 3000 broken homes left (partial families). The threats to the families are direct and blunt: convert to Islam and also assist in the targeting of other Christians; provide substantial funding for the terrorists; send a daughter or sister to the local mosque to be married to a Muslim; leave, *or die*.

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Types of Attacks and Threats

Attacks at innumerable levels, across the country, make it difficult to understand the nature of the targeting and victimization. Every Iraqi Christian reports a climate explicitly identifying them for violence. Signs on major walls, notes painted at major junctions in the city, or in their neighborhoods, all state that Iraq is no longer for the Christians. Threats delivered to homes either with bullets attached or stained with blood tell them of their impending slaughter.

Kidnappings are so common that they hit single families multiple times. In effect, Christians are funding the insurgency that in turn makes them the target. Summary justice – carrying out decisions from local mosques – often leads to executions or flight by whole families.

The Islamists also target Christian religious leaders to send messages to the community as a whole. Over 33 churches have been bombed or burned out, some attacked on multiple occasions. Last year, Fr. Paulis Iskander was beheaded, dismembered and disemboweled and returned to his church, with a note indicating the Pope should have apologized for his perceived slandering of Islam. On June 3, 2007, Fr. Ragheed Aziz Ganni and three sub-deacons were gunned down in the streets not long after Mass. Police did not bother to investigate and arrived several hours later. These two examples are illustrative of the messages of violence the ChaldoAssyrians are receiving.

Sargon Hanna's Story

ISDP conducted a field mission to gather the story of Christian ChaldoAssyrian refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. During this field mission, Sargon Hanna's story was documented. Sargon Hanna lost his leg getting parishioners back inside the Church of St. Mary in Baghdad after a small bomb exploded. He realized a larger second bomb was going to be detonated targeting those gathering after the first bomb exploded. He lost a leg saving lives from the second bomb. One month later his son, a guard for the Church and US contractors, was kidnapped. While his son was being tortured, the kidnappers gave Sargon these options: become a devout Muslim and also report on other Christians, provide USD \$200,000, or drive a car-bomb. His rejection of these options resulted in an AK-47 round through his son's spine, paralyzing him. His son is now fighting for his life in Syria with part of his family.

Like many, Sargon Hanna left Baghdad heading first to northern Iraq, from where he and his relatives originate. He, like so many others, did not see a stable situation even in terms of security. A great many ChaldoAssyrians becoming IDPs, arrive first in the Nineveh Plain. Forming a formal and representative policing force in the area, drawn from the local community, would allow many to stay.

Presently, refugees indicate the absence of any credible policing force for the area as a reason for moving on and becoming refugees.

3. The History of the Issue

In the last months of 2005, the United States Army Joint Operation Center, in conjunction with Iraq's Ministry of the Interior decided at the cabinet level to create a battalion-strength (1000 persons) formal police force in the Nineveh Plain. The names of the majority of individuals

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were provided by the elected representatives for the area (principally ChaldoAssyrian and Shabak due to their high proportion in the area).

These elected representatives (Members of the Iraqi Representative Council and Provincial-level representatives) immediately reported the blockage of this decision in the Ninawa Governorate's Provincial Council. The Governor, urged on by the Deputy Governor, Mr. Khisro Goran of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), prevented implementation of this order. Obstacles were placed in the path of implementing this policy over a period of 7 months, during which Mr. Khisro Goran publicly indicated he opposes the formation of what he termed, "a Christian militia."

With the initial US-sponsored effort undermined by the KDP-Deputy Governor in Mosul, the elected representatives of the minorities in the Nineveh Plain increased pressure on getting formal policing forces in the Nineveh Plain. The United States Army and Iraqi Government approved 711 names, sending the recruits for training. It appears US military were unaware that the trainers belonged to the same political grouping that successfully blocked the first effort. The recruits were threatened and harassed out of the training program by the trainers.

This second effort to secure the formation of a police force produced all the necessary administrative measures to formalize it. This is made clear in the original text of the Iraqi Government authorization (see Box 1).

Box 1: Translation of the original letter authorizing the formation of a Nineveh Plain Local Police Force in the 'Second Effort' by Minority Elected Representatives (note: document number, order number and names of recruits changed for security reasons)

Ministry of Interior,
Nineveh Province Police Department
Document #: 4336
Date: June, 14th, 2006

Order #1975

In regards to the implementation of the order of the Minister of item #14 of the law regarding the updated clause of employment and pension of the internal security forces #1 of year 1978, and in accordance to the order from the Directorate Office's Assignment Division # 4532 of April 26th, 2006.

This order was directed to us on April 29th, 2006 in a letter #11654 from the Ministry's Office for Police Affairs.

The order was to assign citizens according to the list starting with #1: Namrod Yousif and ending with #711: Wissam Hanna as permanent police officers in the stations applied for.

Signed.

Wathiq Muhamad Abd Al-Qadir
Nineveh Province Police Director

Copies to :

- Ministry of Interior, management office director
- Ministry of Interior, office of the police affairs director
- Nineveh Province Finance department.
- Police directorship- to implement in 15 days from the date of this order.
- Hamdaniya Police Department

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This second effort managed to secure full authorization from the Iraqi Government, in pursuit of establishing a police force that can further assist the United States Government in meeting its objectives in Iraq. Kurdish intervention, however, managed to undermine this effort as well. To this point in time, the Nineveh Plain has no formal local policing force, a critical security objective of the US and MNSTC-I.

4. KDP Interests and the Nineveh Plain's Right to a Police Force

KDP interests are outlined in a simple article of the KRG's Constitution, Art. 2(1/first), that says the Nineveh Plain shall be absorbed into the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. Pursuit of that objective necessitates blockage of the formation of a local police force, even when it is approved by the Iraqi Government (see 'History of the Issue' and Box 1 above). KDP actions are also directly undermining realization of US strategic interests in this case.

In reality, the KDP is funding the existence of a few 'KDP Christian Loyalists' who take orders from the KDP while cynically arguing that the creation of a formal local police force, as approved, is tantamount to creating a militia. The KRG's Finance Minister, the Hon. Sarkis Aghajan, a senior member of the KDP, aggressively advertises the existence of a security force which is funded by the KRG. The Guardian Unlimited News published the following out of an interview with the KDP Minister:

“The Christians' last hope in Iraq may just lie, according to Lalo [assistant to the Governor of Mosul], with Sarkis Aghajan, minister of finance in the Kurdistan regional government and, until last May, Kurdish deputy prime minister. It is he who has been channeling money to Nineveh to pay for armed guards.”⁷

Paying for 'armed guards' in the Nineveh Plain, which buttresses the volatile city of Mosul, is no assurance of any modicum of security. It can only be understood from the agenda of the KDP to expand its territory regardless of the security risks to the Christian ChaldoAssyrians and other minorities. If, however, these forces inspired a degree of confidence and proved capable, that might mitigate the costs of the political agenda behind it. This is not borne out by recent events and assessments by observers.

Due to KRG machinations in the Nineveh Plain, it has been reluctantly put into the front line of a fomenting battle between KDP Peshmerga implementing the partitioning of Iraq, Sunni Arab Iraqi insurgents and foreign Islamists seeking to expand the scope of violence. There have now been two car bombings in the region. The first car bombing came in the town of Bartillah on June 25th, 2006. The second attack occurred in Bakhdede, a ChaldoAssyrian town of well over 40,000, on September 29, 2007.

The Nineveh Plain has never been on the insurgent's radar, and indeed a great many suspicions remain about the source and motivation for the attacks. However, two facts remain undeniable. First, if a formal local police force existed, drawn from the local population and is legitimate, it might have prevented the attacks and loss of life. Second, the fact that despite the attacks, there still remains no willingness for the KDP to remove its blockage to the formation of such a force

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indicates a singular disdain for minority rights to security and is part of the safety crisis driving minorities out of the country.

As for the ‘KDP Christian Loyalists’ described by KDP Minister Aghajan as ‘armed guards’, recent observers from Europe who visited the area say this about security in Christian ChaldoAssyrian villages *within* the KRG: “The government pays for a ... local militia that mans checkpoints around Christian villages. But it all seems haphazard.”⁸

Clearly, the roll-out of formal, local and legitimate policing, as approved in 2005 by the US military and Iraqi government is the necessary step for all concerned. At issue is the level of concern by the US Government regarding minorities and their security and recognizing this matter as part of the war on terror.

5. United States Government Apathy

Meetings and dialogue with senior Department of State officials regarding the targeting of minorities elicits dismissive responses that, ‘All Iraqis are suffering, and all Iraqis face violence daily.’ This common response must be labeled a myth. ‘The Myth of Equality of Victimization’. Admitting the severity of the problem and indicating the lack of capacity to cope with it would pave the way for constructive solutions. The perpetuation of a myth demonstrates United States Government apathy and requires a response.

Fundamentally, this *myth* can be dismissed on the following basic grounds: first, ChaldoAssyrians and other minorities do not present any politically significant force. They control no government ministries or political turf that makes them a strategic political target. Attacks are thus purely driven by malice and contempt of their ethnic and religious identity. Second, equality of victimization would mean equality in flight from the country. However, while numbers are still subject to variance and debate, there is no hesitation by experts on asserting that Christian refugee numbers are greatly disproportionate to their percentage of the population. Last, without any proper representation in the policing forces in major cities and without their own armed militias roaming their neighborhoods they lack any means of deterring attacks against them.

This myth also applies to police cadets and police officers for Iraqi Christians. The following comes from a George Will column in the Washington Post on June 17, 2007:

*“Senator Gordon Smith had lunch with three soldiers from his state, one of whom had been working with an Iraqi officer training police cadets. That soldier told Smith that when the cadets learned that the Iraqi officer was Catholic, they stoned him to death.”*⁹

Bishop Ibrahim N. Ibrahim, of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Michigan, who was in Iraq when Fr. Ragheed and three sub-deacons were killed, brought this message back to his parishioners:

*“We do not have weapons, we do not have a militia, and nobody is supporting us.”*¹⁰

‘The Myth of Equality of Victimization’ must be discarded as a standard response by US Government officials, particularly those in the Department of State. Instead, the US Government must begin seeking ways of securing Iraq’s most vulnerable minorities.

6. A Course of Action

Once properly accepted as a priority in terms of the War on Terror, it is necessary to place the formation of a Nineveh Plain Police Force within the 'DIME' strategic framework (Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic) of operations to benchmark its realization. This will assist in ensuring that it receives the relevant attention and that obstacles generated by the KDP, among others, can be properly dismissed and pursuit of United States' interests can be secured.

A starting point must be with the 711 names approved in the second effort, and then a rapid inclusion of the remaining names that constituted the first 1,000 that were recruited. Within the appropriate time frame, set by police training experts, this force must be expanded to include a further 4,000 – a need projected by elected, legitimate representatives of the Nineveh Plains.

Independent, elected representatives (those who do not belong to the dominant political groups in the north of Iraq, whether Sunni-Arab or Kurdish) must always be consulted in confirming lists of recruits to ensure this effort remains driven by forces of moderation.

Strong consideration should be given to concurrently have US Special Forces – who are tasked with conducting Foreign Internal Defense (FID) missions – to help train ChaldoAssyrian SWAT units specifically dedicated to protecting the minorities of the Nineveh Plains, alongside other similar Iraqi forces.

Thereafter, special US attention to the treatment of this force must become a routine matter. This includes follow-up training for the unique situation and pressures these police forces will meet. They would be policing an area absorbing a constantly growing population as the indigenous ChaldoAssyrian Christians return to their lands and villages.

7. Conclusion

Failure is not an option since it will hand a decisive victory over the United States, vindicating extremists' tactics and beheadings, suicide bombings, and ruthless intimidation of civilians, inviting more deadly attacks against ChaldoAssyrians, Yezidis, Shabaks and Americans and other free people in Iraq and across the globe.

The lack of support for the ChaldoAssyrians and other minorities of the Nineveh Plain will call American credibility in the region into question and throughout the world. It is already used as a psychological operations campaign by the enemy to recruit more terrorists in the province. No support is also weakening the growth of democratic impulses in the region. ChaldoAssyrian reformers would never again fully trust American assurances of support for democracy and pluralism in the region – a historic opportunity, central to America's long-term security, will forever be lost in the eyes of this global Christian community.

If the US retreats from the ChaldoAssyrians, the terrorists/extremists will pursue them, expanding the fight to the rest of the minorities in the region.

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When also seen in light of the fact that upwards of 1 in 3 Christian ChaldoAssyrians is fleeing Iraq (at least 350,000 of a starting population of over 1.1 million in 2003), the urgency becomes obvious. Those who have yet to leave Iraq largely go to the Nineveh Plain, and it is vital to provide them the safety they require to remain and play a role in Iraq's recovery and further development – essential for the realization of US strategic interests.

¹ Multi-National Force – Iraq. http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1111&Itemid (last accessed June 12, 2007).

² Richard B. Myers, Gen. “National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terror”, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC. February 1, 2006. <http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr/docs/2005-01-25-Strategic-Plan.pdf> . (last accessed October 10, 2007). P. 3.

³ Iraq Study Group Report. December 2006.

http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/iraq_study_group_report.pdf. (last accessed June 12, 2007) P. 53.

⁴ UNHCR, “Guidelines to the Eligibility of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers” October 2005.

<http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDLEGAL/4354e3594.pdf> (last accessed June 9, 2007) P. 9.

⁵ UNHCR, “Background Information on the Situation of Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Iraq” October 2005. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd/rsddocview.pdf?tbl=RSDLEGAL&id=4371cf5b4> (last accessed June 9, 2007). P. 4.

⁶ United National High Commission for Refugees. “Iraq Situation Map” July 2007.

⁷ Lattimer, Mark. “In 20 Years There Will Be No More Christians in Iraq”, The Guardian, October 6, 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,,1888848,00.html>. (last accessed September 15, 2007).

⁸⁸ Asia News. “Overcrowding and Kurdification Threaten Christians in northern Iraq” October 15, 2007 <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=10562&size=A> (last accessed October 15, 2007).

⁹ Will, George, “An Iraq Caucus of One”, Washington Post, June 17, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/15/AR2007061501981.html> (last accessed June 20, 2007).

¹⁰ Delaney, Robert. “‘Let Iraqis kill each other’ Catholic Bishop Says, Calling for US Withdrawal”. Catholic Online. June 27, 2007. http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=24532. (last accessed June 27, 2007).