

Iraqi Census Must be Taken Before Anything is Decided

By Fred Aprim
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The Kurds are seeking recognition for their position well before the approval on March 1, 2004, of a "Basic Law" to govern Iraq during the transition period through 2005. They are pushing for ethnic federalism and a control of northern Iraq, meaning relying on their population in the region. The Kurds claim that the 1957 Iraqi census is most reliable to follow, which is disputed by many Assyrians. The Kurds claim that the 1957 census, for example, indicated that 80 percent of the population of Kirkuk were Kurds, followed by Turkmen and then Assyrians and Arabs. Accordingly, the Kurds are claiming Kirkuk as well today. We are not sure when they will claim the whole of Mosul, as they have claimed part of that province already. The Kurdish ever-growing demands have always awoken fears among all other Iraqis and in neighboring countries, especially Turkey. More recently, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul sounded an alarm bell when on Monday January 5, 2004 he states: "If the wrong measures are taken in Iraq, if measures endangering the territorial integrity and political unity of Iraq are taken, that will signal the start of a new and dangerous escalation in Iraq," warned Gul. This stand was reiterated two days later during the visit of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to Ankara, when both Damascus and Ankara on January 7 showed strong objection from the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. However, the more recent reports about the new transitional Iraq law has shown that the present Kurdish parliament of northern Iraq will continue to exist; and this perhaps points to intents to the formation of such state by leaving the current systems in place, as it is just a matter of time.

What justifies these Kurds' exceeding demands? It is their sheer claimed population, simple. The next question to ask would be, how did the Kurds increased their population in north of Iraq and how accurate are their claims and population estimates? The facts are that the Kurdish increase of population occurred in two periods: First, after 1925, as the Iraqi-Turkish frontiers (border dispute) were resolved. Great Britain and Iraq from one side and Turkey from the other agreed to accept the Brussels Line in principle (basically today's borders) as the official borders, with minor modifications that occurred later. Many Kurds chose to be in Iraq under the British mandate and Arab government than being under the Turks, therefore, they crossed from Turkey to Iraq. Second, many Kurds fled into Iraq after the fall of the Kurdish Mahabad Republic in 1946 in western Iran (which was situated in northwestern Iran neighboring the Iraq borders at Sulaimaniya). Of course, the Mahabad Republic lasted only 11 months and was crushed by the Iranian Army. Masuad Barzanai, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) himself, was born in Mahabad, Iran, and not in Iraq. Finally, it is the natural high birth rate of the Kurds as well and the Kurdification of Assyrians and Assyrian villages and lands. Therefore, the Iraqi Census of 1957 favors the Kurds and does the others, including the Assyrians, great injustice.

It would not be reasonable to ask for census of Iraq (i.e. the three vilayets of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul before 1921) when it was under the Ottoman Empire, therefore, since Iraq as a country was founded in 1921, Assyrians MUST ask for the Iraqi census that is as close as possible to 1921. One must take into consideration as well the good possibilities that the Turkish and Arab census employees manipulated the figures in favor to their own. Assyrian population could not be based on today's figures since it was the policies of the Iraqi Sunni Arab governments and Kurdish massacres, oppression, persecution, terror, and assassinations committed by one or the other latter two groups that forced the Assyrians into exile. According to Yusuf Malek, a civil Iraqi official during the 1920s, the population of the non-Moslems in Iraq was 400,000 out of the 3,000,000 Iraqi total populations (Read "The British Betrayal of the Assyrians," The Kimball Press, 1935). The Assyrians (including Chaldeans and Suryan) made the majority of this non-Moslem population. If we consider a moderate 300,000 to represent the Assyrians, therefore, they could have made 10 percent of the Iraqi population in around 1921.

Since Iraqi census were always manipulated, one wonders on what foundation are the Kurds building their population percentages, especially in Mosul and Kirkuk. Reliable sources have recently disclosed to this writer that an employee in the Iraqi Census Bureau in 1990 accidentally came across the general census chart of the various groups of Iraq. In that chart, the Christian population was reported as 3,500,000 souls. That figure was later disclosed to a friend of that employee who lives today in Europe.

The Christians of Iraq, including the Assyrians, have been misrepresented in Iraq always. The presence of a person or two, loyal to government, in high-ranking position is not considered representation for the Christians. Such individuals work for the agenda of the government and not the Christians of Iraq. They are used as a façade to the outside world to reflect something that is not there. The presence of 3,500,000 Christians of Iraq, who many of them are willing to declare their ancestry as Assyrian or ChaldoAssyrian if there is no fear of persecution, is of great significant. We must call for a census in Iraq as soon as stability and security is established in Iraq. Such census must be organized and overseen by international observers from the United Nations and the European Union in order to have a fair and true count.

Therefore, we suggest that all major decisions in regards to the constitution, representation, federalism, and other matters to be held until an internationally monitored and reliable Iraqi census are taken to verify the true population of the various groups. The 3,500,000 Christian populations is a power almost equal to the Kurds, who claim to make 15 - 20% of the Iraqi population. If that is the case, Kurds and Christian should have equal power in government. Even if Iraqi census reflected the 3 or 5 percent Assyrian (including Chaldeans and Suryan) population in Iraq, it would not be fair to consider that figure under consideration since it was the policies of the Iraqi governments and Kurdish atrocities that drove over 2,000,000 Assyrians to flee Iraq since the establishment of the country. Assyrians must be given a special status in Iraq for at least one good reason and that is that they are the indigenous people of Iraq and Nineveh plain must be considered as a protected region where Assyrians can govern themselves and live in peace within Iraqi state.