

It is Here Finally: Survival or the End for Assyrians in Iraq  
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What must we learn from the results of the Iraqi elections?

How and why did the earlier promising gains of Slate 204 (Rafidayn National Coalition) dissipate all for a sudden in the elections?

How do we hold people in sensitive positions, those who install themselves leaders, and those who are making the wrong decisions on behalf of the Assyrian people responsible for the mistakes they make?

I have asked the following question repeatedly, who authorized, for example, Sargon Dadesho, Ishaya Isho, Romeo Hakkari, John Nimrod, Younadam Kanna, Joseph Kassab, abd al-Ahad Afram, Fou'ad Bodagh and others to speak on behalf of the Assyrian people (also known as ChaldoAssyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs). Did the Assyrian people elect them to speak on their behalf, and most importantly, are they transforming the aspirations of the masses?

Could any newly established group of few claims at any given time that it has the right to speak on behalf of the people?

Could I and few friends form a new group tomorrow and call it for example "Patriotic ChaldoAssyrians for Assyria" and demand that we be part of all meetings, local, national, and international involving Assyrian matters? What differentiate many Assyrian groups that exist today from this new group? Why they could speak on behalf of the Assyrians and I could not in the international discussions? It is simple; a group must show a record of accomplishment to be worthy to take such responsibilities, especially when we have no elections to represent such representatives.

How much damage, if any, did the above individuals and others cause in the last few years to the Assyrian cause?

Fact is that among all the Assyrian groups in Iraq and the Diaspora, only the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) could claim that it is elected by at least a segment of our society and thus has the legal right to speak on behalf of part of the Assyrian people, which elected it. Only the ADM has a worthy list of accomplishment. The ADM has participated in the regional north of Iraq elections in 1992 and won convincingly the support of the Assyrian people in the region. However, many foreign groups, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) under the leadership of Barazani, continue to interfere in Assyrian affairs. The newly empowered Kurdish groups continue to promote puppets from within the Assyrian society to undermine this elected leadership and Assyrian national dreams.

The Kurds have succeeded to keep the Assyrians busy with their internal disputes and thus valuable time was wasted on unnecessary matters whereas other important issues were not attended extensively. It is for this reason that when the elections were announced, Assyrians were not ready for them. The disputes were still there and last minute temporary patches were not capable to heal deep wounds. We kept putting many important issues off and we looked for a miracle to resolve those problems during the elections. It was just not possible for that unity to materialize in such circumstances.

The elections were a complete failure for the Assyrians in Iraq. Others have an optimistic look and say but the ADM won a seat even when for example a sophisticated and experienced politician and diplomat like Adnan al-Pachachi or the Sharif Ali of the Monarchy Movement failed to get the 30,000 votes needed to guarantee themselves a spot in parliament. I do not want to get into that argument here because it is too complicated.

The reasons for this failure were many. They might be summarized as such:

1. The hesitation of many in Iraq, especially in Baghdad and the city of Mosul, from participating due to fear.
2. The abstention of others due to discontent from the completely bleak picture.
3. The general psyche of the Assyrian people as non-trusting and that such process could not be fair.
4. The general feelings of apathy.
5. The distribution of our votes on many lists and non-unity.

The ADM makes a strategic miscalculation

While the ADM's work is very admirable in Iraq, and has been for decades, a decision in this campaign was poorly calculated. I hope that such mishap shall be dealt with better in the more importantly anticipated December 15, 2005 elections. The ADM had a strategic partner with the Chaldean National Congress (CNC) in Iraq. The CNC claims that it demanded repeatedly that its Secretary General in Iraq Mr. Fou'ad Bodagh be placed second instead of fourth on the slate behind Mr. Younadam Kanna, the Secretary General of the ADM. Of course, Mr. Kanna deserves to be on the top of the slate because of his position and activities in the last 25 years in the political and national struggle in Iraq. There was a critical decision to be made here, what should the ADM do? Keep ex-Minister Behnam Polous Zaia, who has close relationship with His Beatitude Mar Emmanuel III Delli, the patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church, in the second slot or replace him with Mr. Bodagh. The third slot has to be for a woman per the rules set forth by the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), where every 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and so forth on every slate must be a woman.

Thus, the problem was which of the two should occupy second and fourth slots. The ADM and Mr. Younadam Kanna miscalculated here in my opinion and bet on Mr. Behnam Polous Zaia. The CNC waited few days and then suddenly dropped the bomb, which was not a patriotic move on their part as well. The CNC issued a statement it which it announced that it was withdrawing from slate 204. The CNC did this only couple of days before the elections when everything was looking promising for 204 and it was expected to win many seats.

#### The Other Christian Candidates in Parliament

Mr. Younadam Kanna won a seat in parliament because our people voted him in. However, the numbers prove that many members of the Chaldean Catholic Church did not vote, while others voted for Itahad al-Sha'ib slate 324 (the Communists). Unfortunately, Shamiran Marogil Odisho and Dr. Hikmat Dawood Hakim on slots sixth and seventh of slate 324 did not win. Slate 324 did not win enough votes (not even 100,000) for these two individuals to a chance.

Of course, our people did not vote for Abd al-Ahad Afram (Chaldean Democratic Union Party) and neither for the other three: Goriel Mineso Khamis, Salim Potros Elias, and Jacklin Qosin Zomaya. These four won because they were part of the Kurdish slate 130. The Chaldean Democratic Union Party slate of Afram won only an embarrassing few hundred votes in Iraq and abroad. Despite his win, Mr. Afram might lose his seat because his name was on two different slates, his own and the Kurdish slate. This was against the election rules. Mr. Afram can cause great damage in parliament, as he will challenge Mr. Kanna's attempts to unite our people in Iraq or use one name to refer to them. The Kurds will use Afram to disrupt any efforts and recommendation of such unity in parliament. Even if Afram is gone, and the resignation of Salim Potros Elias is confirmed (Read News Digest, Zinda 18 January, 2005), there are still two more Christians that were included by the KDP and PUK on their winning slate; they could cause much damage and division. The other Christian in the Iraqi parliament Wijdan Michael is considered as an independent.

The members of the Chaldean Catholic Church in the United States did not vote heavily for 204 as was expected. It seems that the withdrawal of the CNC had a negative impact. At the same time, there was an anemic Christian showing in Baghdad and the city of Mosul perhaps due to security, and I personally blame the community for that since other groups did not mind the threats. In addition, there was the most damaging reason of preventing the Assyrians from voting in Nineveh Plain. How to deal with Bodagh and Polous was a tough decision, even if and logically so, was the safe decision to make under many circumstances.

#### The Bigger Mistakes of Others

While this was a strategic mistake, the activities of other self-appointed leaders are much harmful. Attacking the leadership of Mr. Kanna on AssyriaSat satellite TV so viciously for several months if not a year and more, in the manner it has been conducted, is a political assassination for the Assyrian cause. Attacking Mr. Kanna so passionately and for so long have discouraged many Assyrians and broke their spirits. They have distanced themselves from national issues as the negative propaganda made them lose their trust in their leadership. This could be one reason why many did not bother to vote.

There must be a way where self appointed leaders who cause damage to society be questioned legally. This is over and beyond the expression of opinion and criticism. Assyrians cannot continue like this forever. Few attorneys and legal advisers must come forwards, on behalf of the people, and question the activities of these self appointed leaders. These concerns needs addressing:

1. When can a leader of a group speak on behalf of the community? What should the threshold in the number of registered membership of any group be in order to give the leader of that group the legal rights to speak on behalf of the community?
2. If an Assyrian group is collecting grants from government to promote Assyrian cultural issue, should that group be allowed to use that opportunity and attack other Assyrian groups?
3. If someone is self appointed leader through the formation of a group consisting mainly of family and friends or a small tribe, what holds the community from suing such individuals and thus prevent him legally from speaking on behalf of the people at large?
4. In case that elections are not feasible to vote for leaders and programs, the least these self-appointed Assyrian leaders should do is present certain agenda to the people and let the people decide on them, whether via mail, e-mail, or any other reasonable manner. These self-appointed leaders do not have the right to discuss Assyrian national matters in international forums while presenting their personal recommendations and solutions only.

The Important Elections are yet to Come

We have lost a battle in the January 30, 2005 Iraqi elections to elect the 275 members of national assembly. The Iraqi national assembly will begin now to draft the Iraqi constitution and present it to the people for approval by midyear. If approved, new elections will be set for December 15, 2005. How are the Assyrians going to prepare for these elections? How would they present themselves in those elections?

We need to look at the Kurds and learn a lesson from them. It is not shameful to learn from one's enemy when the enemy is doing the right things and progressing.

Assyrians must begin today to prepare for the December 15 elections. A national conference, in which all political groups, cultural and civic institutions, notables, churches' representatives, and scholars be gathered to set the foundation for a united list to enter those elections.

We cannot accept anything else.

We cannot accept this chaos to continue.

Finally, the Kurds are investing millions in the Nineveh Plain. If we did not do something right away, the Kurds will soon take over the economy in these Assyrian towns and villages and when that aspect of life is controlled, we can say goodbye to Assyria, as the new reality will dictate its presence. Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain had suffered enough for 80 years and economy is the window that the Kurds are beginning to use to infiltrate the last Assyrian stance in Iraq. Only through our unity, we might defeat the Kurdish plans. Think about it, but do not think for too long since time is running out.