



I was finally able to take some time to consider the final policy statement from the EU conference this past week. I acknowledge I do not come to this question as an unbiased observer. I have actively worked to support the NPU and have promoted their plainly stated agenda that the Nineveh Plain should become a province under the central government of Iraq. I support this policy precisely because this political framework would preserve the greatest degree of political power for Assyrians in Iraq and it is what people on the ground who are not in a patronage relationship with the KRG actually support.

Of course, I support the principle that the people of the Nineveh Plain should decide for themselves their long-term future, but then I support the structures and relief that would ensure these peoples' decisional autonomy. Before any such referendums for the long-term future of the Nineveh Plain are to be held, the people need to be resettled and get back on their feet with the rebuilding of their own institutions. If the people of the Nineveh Plain are to decide their own future, shouldn't they run the election? Shouldn't they have their own government that runs the election?

A democratic process with true decisional autonomy requires a Nineveh Plain Province under the central government, then the resettlement, the economic development, and the maturing of a local provincial government and its governmental institutions, including a security structure. These are the preconditions for a free and fair election, preconditions that will take several years to take hold; and preconditions that only start with a Nineveh Plain Province under the central government.

So with that said, I was curious to examine whether the policy outcome favors the policy agenda I think is in the best interest of the Assyrian people:

First, on security, it contemplates the KRG and Peshmerga having control over the unified security force. The KRG had primary responsibility for the security of the Nineveh Plain. They disarmed us and abandoned us. If the intent is for security to be by the people of the Nineveh Plain, then whatever security apparatus is developed should not be under the supervision of the KRG. This should not be the case unless and not before the Nineveh Plain is formally annexed to the KRG. Yet by creating this structure, it allows the KRG to insert itself into the affairs of the people of the Nineveh Plain.

If security is under the supervision of the KRG, the KRG gets a veto over security efforts, even if acting through other Assyrians. Moreover, there are well-documented, independently sourced instances of voter disenfranchisement of Assyrians by the KRG and its security elements. Given the publicly stated agenda of the KRG to annex the Nineveh Plain, I find this proposed security structure highly biased, and one that sets the stage

for annexation in the name of staged democracy.

Second, for as important a thing as a referendum is in letting the people decide, and that was the key principle goal aspired to before the conference began, it seems more than odd that the issue of a referendum is not addressed squarely as its own section in the policy document. There are only two passing references to a referendum:

The first is in the Iraqi constitutional reference to becoming a region, that a Province can have a referendum to become a region. Presumably this means the Nineveh Plain could become a region vis a vis the KRG. This sounds great, but this is not new language. Its the Iraqi constitution, and its precisely this legal structure that should motivate Assyrians seeking greater political control to create a Nineveh Plain Province under the central government because the province is the constitutional first step to greater political autonomy as a regional government in Iraq.

But then what follows is totally curious: a reference to Article 35 of the KRG constitution (an article which has yet to be implemented for any group) followed by a plea for the Government of Iraq to work in this spirit. The only reason to include this reference to Article 35 in this context is to imply a referendum be held to join the KRG and become a "region" within the KRG. Basically, this insertion attempts to redefine what a region means. This conception of a region in a region lacks a legal foundation, which is why the Iraqi Government is being asked to embrace the spirit of Article 35, and in so doing, ignore their own constitution.

The second reference to a referendum is for the international coalition to work with the KRG and GoI to recognize the Interim Nineveh Plain Council and plan a referendum. Again, the KRG should have no role in either the Nineveh Plain Council or the referendum, especially if the content of the referendum is to join the KRG as a region in a region. The involvement of the KRG in a referendum for the people of the Nineveh Plain is a clear conflict of interest and undermines the precept that the people of the Nineveh Plain should and will decide their future.

And then there is no mention of the timing of the referendum either. We all know the KRG is calling for a referendum in September and is calling for the referendum to include the people of the Nineveh Plain to decide the future of the Nineveh Plain. This silence on timing certainly opens the door to the KRG's plan of a rapid referendum before the resettlement and institutional and economic development that are necessary preconditions for any free and fair referendum.

So, on closer examination, the policy document does nothing to move the ball forward on some key questions of controversy in the ongoing conflict for control of the Nineveh Plain. Will the Nineveh Plains be a province under the central government or will it be a region in a region of the KRG? I can't tell from this statement. When will a referendum be held? After the people are back on their feet or while they're still living in caravans receiving handouts from the KRG? I can't tell.

But on two key points there is clarity. The security structure of the Nineveh Plain would be under the partial supervision of the KRG, thus exerting a veto on security affairs. And the interim Nineveh Plain Council would be under the partial supervision of the KRG, thus exerting a veto on political affairs. If the goal was to have the people of the Nineveh Plain decide their fate on their own terms with their decisional autonomy and integrity intact, this policy document falls short of that mark.

that a Nineveh Plain Government would be "granted broad administrative and financial authority to enable them to manage their affairs in accordance with the principle of federal administrative law" (art 102). It also states that the "Government's Council" shall not be subject to the control or supervision of any ministry or any institution not defined in a ministry.

In addition, article 103 of the constitution should include all issues concerning Nineveh Plain that can be dealt with at the level of Nineveh Plain, which should at least include the following:

1. Education that shall be shaped in such way that it serves and covers the religious and linguistic components of the Nineveh Plain, ensuring that their characteristics of the population will be reflected in all levels of education present in Nineveh Plain. Furthermore, educational institutions should be free to have a special relation with similar educational and cultural institutions outside the Nineveh Plain.

2. Health care

3. Regular governmental services such as the transportation of newspapers, electricity, water supply, medical institutions etc.

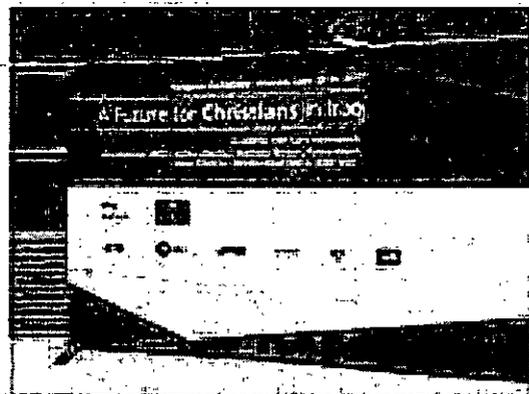
4. The Nineveh Plain will have the liberty to issue its own money and currency supply if it wishes to do so.

5. Police (not to be confused with self-defense forces)

6. Legislative rights in matters reserved by civil status law. At least one coast of the same political level that is currently present at government level in Iraq. These matters shall not be passed at Nineveh Plain given that the vital majority of the population is non-Iraqi.

7. The citizens of the Nineveh Plain will be exempt from the clauses in article 24 of the new ID law which refer to the origins of the ID card or passport holder. This is in light of the vital majority of the Nineveh Plain. It should therefore be considered that a local AP government would have delegated authority to

The Future of the Nineveh Plain: A Proposal from Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian Political Parties



Further to the needed work paper signed by the Chaldean/Syriac political parties on March 6-7, 2013, we stress the following:

For thousands of years, the Nineveh Plain has been known as the heart of the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people and Yezidi. As a result of recent events and wars throughout history, the area has also become home for Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen and Armenians. Consequently, the area has become one of several nationalities, (as perceived by several governments).

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