

Skewed Recovery: Minority Assistance Programs to Iraq in Historical Perspective

By Lily Hindy, Philip Hoffman, and Monica Widmann

UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy

June 2021

Introduction

Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's August 25, 2020 speech to the Republican National Convention attracted controversy more for its form than its content. Pompeo spoke from a taxpayer-sponsored trip in Jerusalem after circulating an agency-wide memo prohibiting Senate-confirmed employees of the State Department from participating in political activities,¹ raising ethics concerns that dominated media coverage of his remarks.² A closer look at one particular section of Pompeo's speech, however, sheds light on an area of American foreign policy over which the Trump administration exercised determined, tangible influence.

"In the Middle East," Pompeo said, "when Iran threatened, the President approved a strike that killed the Iranian terrorist Qasim Suleimani. This is the man most responsible for the murder and maiming of hundreds of American soldiers and thousands of Christians across the Middle East."³ Pompeo's description of Suleimani's victims should raise eyebrows. Suleimani, as head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' "Quds Force," gave Iraqi insurgent groups training spaces, financial support, and technically advanced explosive devices throughout the latter years of the American occupation of Iraq, clearly causing (as Pompeo noted) the deaths of American soldiers. And while communities across the Middle East celebrated Suleimani's death, from the Syrians displaced by Iranian-backed forces during that country's civil war, to the Lebanese alarmed by the strength of Iran-backed Hezbollah, one struggles to find a prominent incident in which Suleimani purposely targeted the region's Christians. In describing Suleimani this way, Pompeo clearly aimed his speech at a domestic audience of evangelical voters whose support was crucial to Trump's re-election efforts. He also spoke, however, to a broader paradigm that has helped structure Western policy—both in the region as a whole, and particularly in Iraq, where Suleimani was killed.

In both the British Mandate period and the latter years of American humanitarian assistance in Iraq, Western economic and political policy aims in the

¹ Matthew Lee, "Pompeo Warned Diplomats to Avoid Politics; He'll Talk at RNC," Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 25, 2020, <https://www.star-telegram.com/news/politics-government/national-politics/article245234315.html>.

² "Watchdog Groups Say Convention Appearances Broke Hatch Act," AP NEWS, August 27, 2020, <https://apnews.com/a6ea0162c2ea6242cb9c8284c451560f>.

³ *Secretary Pompeo Full Remarks at the 2020 Republican National Convention, 2020*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQqbs5pQ1Wc>.

country have coexisted and frequently overlapped with a simplistic dichotomy that views Iraq's non-Muslim minorities in general, and Christians in particular, as a particularly aggrieved population in need of special protection. This framing buttressed British Mandatory designs on the population composition of much of central and northern Iraq, creating population centers (in colonial eyes) of "friendly" communities that would resist the rising tide of independence-minded Arab nationalism in the region. In the Trump administration's structuring of humanitarian aid to a post-Islamic State (IS) Iraq, a similar overarching dichotomy (between Christians and the rest of the country's population) helped drive an approach that prioritizes a narrowly defined type of "minority protection" above all other concerns, further degrading the notion of politically neutral humanitarian aid and doing little to address the pervasive public corruption and failures of governance that affect all Iraqis.

This paper situates current trends in American humanitarian aid in Iraq within a broader history of Western intervention. The goal of this paper is to understand better (1) how foreign intervention in Iraq has created and exacerbated tensions between various ethnic and religious groups and (2) the roots and manifestations of favoritism towards particular groups. To do this, we use historical scholarship, policy analysis, survey data, and USAID reports. We begin with a brief discussion of the development and enforcement of international norms around minority protection, followed by a close look at the relationship between foreign powers and the Assyrian Christian population in Iraq during and after World War I. Next, we discuss recent actions taken by the Trump administration to divert aid to Christian communities as a part of broader post-IS reconstruction efforts. Finally, we examine U.S. aid in post-Islamic State (IS) Iraq and its effectiveness, as perceived by Iraqis from different ethno-sectarian backgrounds. In our conclusion, we lay out policy recommendations for the U.S. government on how to mitigate what we view as a shortsighted shift in American priorities, both in Iraq and in the region as a whole.

Simply put, the Trump Administration's aid policies in Iraq represented a (perhaps fleeting) backwards shift towards a community-level model of aid distribution that has deep roots in past Western approaches. While aspects of these policies may significantly shift with the change in presidential administrations, the billions of dollars

allocated under these recovery efforts will continue to influence developments within Iraq for years to come.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | ii |
| Table of Contents | v |
| Historical Parallels and International Norms around Minority Protection | 1 |
| Christians in Iraq during World War I and the Mandate period | 3 |
| A minority in independent Iraq: “Christian Kurds” | 8 |
| Displacement(s) in Ninewa Province: 1970-Present | 9 |
| American Aid in Post-IS Ninewa: A Deceptively Simple Dichotomy | 11 |
| USAID in Iraq, 2004 - 2020: An Increase in Targeted Aid | 16 |
| Public Perceptions of U.S. Aid Distribution in Iraq | 19 |
| Conclusion | 23 |
| Recommendations | 24 |
| Bibliography | 25 |

Historical Parallels and International Norms around Minority Protection

Two main historical parallels may be drawn between the actions of foreign powers vis-à-vis Christians in Iraq during and after World War I and those of the United States today. First and most importantly, foreign favoritism of minorities has driven a wedge between those groups and their countrymen, or at least exacerbated pre-existing tensions. Missionary work with Christians in the Ottoman Empire provoked suspicion by Muslim imperial subjects. After World War I, foreign powers singled out displaced Christian communities as candidates for ethnic-based partitioning and transfer as part of a Western-led process of creating new, homogenous nation-states. This was despite the fact that many Christians expected to maintain a level of autonomy similar to what they had enjoyed under the Ottoman Empire, even after suffering mass murder and widespread displacement during and after the war. While Iraq was under the rule of the British Empire (known as Mandatory Iraq, 1920 - 1932), Assyrian Christians were viewed as extensions of British colonial power and therefore obstacles to the Iraqi nationalist project. Today, Iraqi Christians say that they fear retribution from Islamists as well as other Iraqis because of the perception by those groups that Christians in Iraq are aligned with the U.S.⁴

Secondly, though moral or value-based intentions motivate many humanitarian workers and government employees on the ground, these are complemented by the drive of foreign powers to maintain their own security and control over the region. In Iraq during and after World War I, the British maintained refugee camps and worked with the League of Nations to respond to the needs of Christians who had been displaced and were at risk from neighboring populations. But they also employed Assyrian Christians in military units against opponents of British control during the mandate period and again in World War II (a British missionary, in describing the contributions of the Assyrian units, called them “our smallest ally”).⁵ During the mandate period, the French welcomed Assyrian refugees no longer safe in Iraq into

⁴ “On Vulnerable Ground: Violence against Minority Communities in Nineveh Province’s Disputed Territories,” Human Rights Watch, November 10, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/11/10/vulnerable-ground/violence-against-minority-communities-nineveh-provinces-disputed>; Emma Green, “Iraqi Christians Face an Impossible Choice,” *The Atlantic*, May 23, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/iraqi-christians-nineveh-plain/589819/>.

⁵ W. A. Wigram and H. H. Austin, *Our Smallest Ally: A Brief Account of the Assyrian Nation in the Great War*, vi, 57 p. (London : New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge ; Macmillan Company, 1920).

northeastern rural areas of Syria in part to bolster their territorial control. Today, administration officials highlight the plight of the Christian Iraqis above that of their compatriots, and the director of USAID has remarked that if Assyrians remain in northern Iraq, IS will not return as easily.⁶ This would benefit not only the Iraqi Christian community (as well as many others in the country and the region), but the United States itself, which considers IS a major threat to national security.

Before exploring the historical precedents for direct U.S. aid to Christians in Iraq, it is important to lay some foundation for the terminology and international norms around “minority rights” and genocide prevention, both then and now. This kind of rhetoric, espoused by persecuted groups around the globe as well as those who advocate on their behalf, conveniently also serves the interests of those countries who wield the most influence in the international community. Laura Robson’s *States of Separation* shows how Western powers in the wake of World War I promoted a vision of homogenous nation-states and used the concept of ‘minority rights’ to attain it. They championed the rights of smaller communal entities in the Middle East who had enjoyed a level of autonomy under the Ottoman Empire to live separately, in their own homeland or at least removed from direct Arab rule. The first ‘minorities treaty’ was signed between the League of Nations and Poland in 1919, and it served as a model for subsequent treaties, including the one Iraq would sign in 1932 when it became the first non-Western country to do so.⁷ These treaties required their signatories to afford minorities the same rights as the majority received. But, as Robson compellingly argues, minorities “were to serve as a site for western European intervention and a reminder of the limitations of sovereignty in territories labeled less civilized.”⁸

Similar criticism has been made about the United Nations principle known as “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P), adopted at the 2005 UN World Summit. In the final document agreed upon at the summit, paragraph 139 states: “The international community, through the United Nations, also *has the responsibility* to use appropriate

⁶ Emma Green, “Iraqi Christians Face an Impossible Choice,” *The Atlantic*, May 23, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/iraqi-christians-nineveh-plain/589819/>.

⁷ Human Rights Watch, “On Vulnerable Ground.”

⁸ Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 28. For more on the history of minorities treaties, see Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, *to help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity... we are prepared to take collective action, ... should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity* [emphasis ours].”⁹ The United States has also initiated its own “Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response” program at USAID specifically to “help ethnic and religious minorities in northern Iraq heal and restore their communities after the genocide committed by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.”¹⁰

These international norms have been applied unevenly by Western powers depending on the persecuted group, and they are only to be enforced in one direction (Robson, for instance, notes that architects of Poland’s minority treaty “rejected the idea of universal protections for minorities on the grounds that they would impinge on national sovereignty in places like Britain and France”).¹¹ The United Nations is unlikely to invoke its responsibility to protect minorities from the actions of the United States government, and every intervention justified by R2P has been made into a formerly colonized nation. The case of the Christians in Iraq, both during the Mandate period and today, makes clear that minority rights and the responsibility to protect are in large part window dressing for policies that advance the interests of the intervening powers.

Christians in Iraq during World War I and the Mandate period

Though the community of Christians in Iraq is sometimes referred to as a monolithic, united entity, this is not the case, and divisions amongst the coreligionists have frustrated external powers wishing to deal with them as such.¹² The majority of the Christian population in Iraq today belongs to the Chaldean Catholic denomination, the Syriac Orthodox Church, or the Church of the East, and traces its roots to the kingdom

⁹ “Responsibility to Protect,” United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, official website, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml>, accessed September 15, 2020.

¹⁰ “Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response,” USAID official website, <https://www.usaid.gov/iraq/genocide-recovery-and-persecution-response>, accessed September 15, 2020.

¹¹ Robson, 28.

¹² For British frustration with Christian disunity in Iraq see Robson, *States of Separation*, and R.S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935). American frustration was voiced during the author’s interviews with former and current U.S. State Department officials.

of Assyria which ruled over ancient Mesopotamia for millennia.¹³ The historiography on the subject, while acknowledging deep divisions within the community, reflects a tendency to lump the entire population under one name. The historical parallel presented here represents mainly that of the group today referred to as Assyrian, whose historiography is largely drawn from those Christians in Iraq who were brought in as refugees by the British from the town of Hakkari in modern-day Turkey.¹⁴ Their story has been documented in their petitions to the British and the League of Nations, as well as by British officials in Iraq at the time.

The history of Christians in Iraq in the modern era has been a complex one. It is important to recall that under the Ottoman Empire, non-Muslim monotheistic religious communities such as Christians and Jews enjoyed a privileged though subordinate status that provided them a certain level of autonomy, particularly around personal status issues, though they were subject to special taxes until the mid-nineteenth century. These communities faced pervasive discrimination in the empire, and their protection under the Ottoman sultan depended on obedience and submission.¹⁵ The delicate balance according to which such communities lived was undone later in the nineteenth century, when nationalistically inclined groups emerged in the majority Christian provinces along the empire's western border. The territories that broke away from the Ottoman Empire at this time - Greece (1829), Montenegro, Serbia and Romania (1878), Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bulgaria (1908) - did so with the backing of European powers. The fights for secession were commonly framed in both Europe and the Ottoman Empire as religious wars between Christians and Muslims. It is against the backdrop of the rising tensions and territorial conflicts that Assyrian Christians in the southeastern region of what is today Turkey suffered a fate similar to that of the Armenians during the First World War: massacres, forced displacement and starvation.

¹³ Hannah Müller-Sommerfeld, "The League of Nations, A-Mandates and Minority Rights during the Mandate Period in Iraq (1920–1932)," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East*, edited by S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah and H.L. Murre-van den Berg (Boston: Brill, 2016), 267; Peter BetBasoo, "Brief History of Assyrians," November 1, 2013, Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), <http://www.aina.org/brief.html>, accessed September 15, 2020.

¹⁴ The entire population is sometimes referred to as Assyrian, Chaldo-Assyrian, Syriac, or some combination of these terms. It has also been called "Christian Kurdish" in recent history as will be seen below. For more on the reaction of Christian communities who pre-existed the Hakkari refugees in Iraq, see Robson, *States of Separation*, 55-56.

¹⁵ Makdisi, Ussama. *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World*. 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2019), 30; Minna Rozen, "The Ottoman Jews," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Suraiya N. Editor Faroqhi, vol. 3, Cambridge History of Turkey (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256–271, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521620956.013>.

The deaths of 1.5 million Armenians at the hands of Ottoman forces has been widely recognized by scholars outside of Turkey as genocide, and a number of recent scholarly works have pushed to label the murder of hundreds of thousands of Assyrians as genocide as well.¹⁶

Survivors of the massacres and marches made contact with the British in Iraq, who would simultaneously protect, use, and collaborate with the Assyrian population in Iraq for decades to come. The British housed about 25,000 Assyrians along with nearly 15,000 Armenians in a refugee camp in Ba‘qūba, northeast of Baghdad.¹⁷ Though many wished to return to their home province of Hakkari, they knew that the Turks would not allow them back in.¹⁸ There was a push for an internationally mandated homeland, but the international community was not very supportive.¹⁹ Resigned to these realities, Assyrians did not want to lose the autonomy they had under the Ottoman Empire to be placed under direct rule by fervent Arab nationalists in Iraq.²⁰

Soon after their arrival in Ba‘qūba, Assyrians were drafted (with help from missionaries) into the British colonial army known as the Levies, further alienating Assyrians from the Arab (and Kurdish) populations of Iraq.²¹ The Levies were employed mostly to secure the frontier areas of Iraq, which pitted them against Kurdish and Turkish forces.²² According to British administrative inspector R.S. Stafford, who served

¹⁶ For more on the Assyrian massacres, see Hannibal Travis, “Native Christians Massacred”: The Ottoman Genocide of the Assyrians during World War I,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 1, no. 3 (2006), and idem, “Genocide by Deportation into Poverty: Western Diplomats on Ottoman Christian Killings and Expulsions, 1914–24,” in George N. Shirinian (ed), *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks, 1913-1923* (New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2017), 354-402; David Gaunt, “Sayfo Genocide: The Culmination of an Anatolian Culture of Violence,” in David Gaunt, Naures Atto and Soner O. Barthoma (eds.), *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo – The Genocide Against the Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire* (New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2017), 54-69; Cathie Carmichael, *Genocide Before the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and “The Assyrian Genocide” Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), <http://www.aina.org/genocide100.html>, accessed September 15, 2020.

¹⁷ Robson, 40.

¹⁸ Sami Zubaida, “Contested Nations: Iraq and the Assyrians,” *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no. 3 (July 2000): 367, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1354-5078.2000.00363.x>.

¹⁹ R.S. Stafford, the British administrative inspector who was in Mosul when Iraqi troops massacred Assyrians and looted their villages in 1933, wrote: “It was interesting to observe how rapidly the Assyrians picked up the new ideas which just after the war deluded so many people in an exhausted world. Their hopes of reviving the ancient Assyrian Empire rose high. And as the days passed their claims grew more and more expansive. Finally, they demanded a kingdom stretching from Kifri, south of Kirkuk, to Diarbeke. They appear to have forgotten that even if all the Assyrians in the world were collected together, they would only form a small minority in this area. They also forgot that the absolute essential to the formation of a nation was unity, and even at Hamadan the British officers found the divisions among the Assyrians confusing and humiliating.” (Stafford, 29)

²⁰ See Müller-Sommerfeld, 271-2, and Robson, 107.

²¹ R. S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 1935), 51, <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463211509>.

²² Robson, 52.

in Mosul during this time, Assyrian participation in the British military and occupation effort had a deleterious effect on the relationship between the Assyrians and the Iraqi Arabs: “[m]ost serious was the effect [a military operation in 1924 in Kirkuk] had in widening the gulf between the Assyrians and the Iraqis....the Assyrians’ unpopularity from 1932 onwards is largely the result of their service with the British.”²³

In 1933, one year after the British midwived the official independence of Iraq and its rushed acceptance into the League of Nations along with a promise to protect minorities within its

borders, the plight of the Assyrian refugees became much more urgent. That summer, Iraqi troops massacred Assyrians in the village of Simele and surrounding areas, looted their properties, and were then welcomed back to Mosul with an elaborate military parade which thanked them for ousting foreign elements.²⁴ The British put the number of killed at 600, while the Assyrians claim it was several thousand.²⁵ The

massacre was denied by the Iraqis themselves and downplayed by the British, for whom it was an embarrassment in front of the international community.²⁶ As scholar Sami



Figure 1. No 1 Army Film & Photographic Unit, Smith Sgt. Iraqi Levies in Training at Habbaniya. 1939. Photograph. Imperial War Museums.

²³ Stafford, 53 - 56.

²⁴ Keith David Watenpau, *Bread from Stones*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2015), 195, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt14jxvf9>; Robson, 87-88.

²⁵ Zubaida, 370.

²⁶ Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, “THE ASSYRIANS IN WORLD WAR ONE AND THE 1933 MASSACRE: NEW DISCOVERIES IN THE RSAA ARCHIVES,” *Asian Affairs* 50, no. 4 (August 8, 2019): 579–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2019.1672427>.

Zubaida points out, differing accounts of the Simele massacre over the years place more blame on the Assyrians, the army, or the tribes, and allot different roles for the antipathy of the British.²⁷ The League of Nations set up a committee to explore options for resettlement of the entire Assyrian population in British Guiana, Brazil and Syria, among other locations.²⁸ Finally, it was Syria under the French Mandate to which the Assyrians were transferred.

The French were initially reluctant to take in the Assyrian community, but in the end, they determined that it was in their best interest to do so. While battling a long-running insurgency led by Arab nationalists, French Mandatory authorities saw a concentrated non-Arab population in the northeastern rural areas of the country as a harbinger of future security.²⁹ The

Assyrians were settled in a remote and sparsely populated area in the Khabur Valley, where a number of Assyrian refugees had already settled over the years. With funding from the Iraqi government and the French, villages were built and maintained for about nine thousand refugees. Despite opposition inside Syria, back in Iraq, and among the refugees themselves (some of whom repeatedly requested repatriation in Iraq), this group remained in the area.³⁰

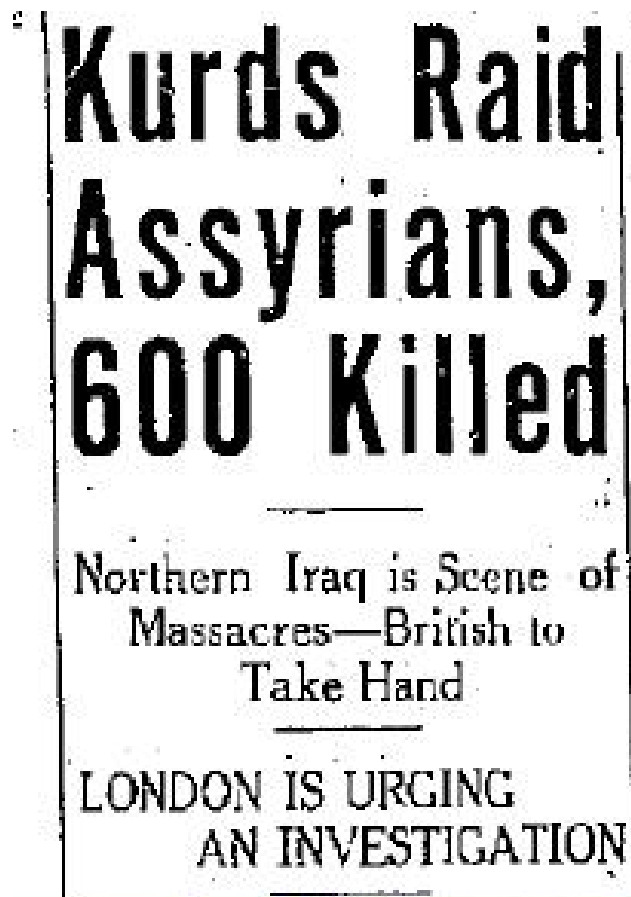


Figure 2. "Kurds Raid Assyrians, 600 Killed."
The Lethbridge Herald, 1933.

²⁷ Zubaida, "Contested Nations."

²⁸ For an in-depth discussion of the exploration and research done on the resettlement options by the League of Nations, see Robson, 91-96.

²⁹ Robson, 96.

³⁰ Robson, 99.

A minority in independent Iraq: “Christian Kurds”

The year 1958 marked the end of the British-installed monarchy in Iraq, and brought new challenges for ethnic and religious minorities in the country. Christians there fit into both categories, as many consider themselves to be ethnically distinct from Arabs and Jews.³¹ Throughout the 1960s, Christians in Iraq were divided. Many fought alongside the Kurds against the Iraqi government and some formed alliances with warring Kurdish factions. The Iraqi government was wary of these relationships. Between 1961-3, dozens of Christian villages were attacked and then resettled by pro-government militias.³² In 1972, the newly instated ruling Ba’ath Party passed a decree recognizing the cultural rights of the Assyrians, allowing them to educate their children in the Syriac language, publish magazines, and broadcast Syriac programs on the radio. However, the decree was later overturned.³³ Though in larger cities such as Baghdad and Kirkuk, Assyrian cultural organizations thrived for a time, Assyrian political organizations were forbidden. Christians were targeted for marking their ethnicity as Assyrian on the census, and some singers were imprisoned for singing Assyrian songs.³⁴ After the Algiers Agreement in 1975 between Iraq and Iran, ostensibly signed to prevent Iran from providing assistance to Kurds in Iraq, dozens more Assyrian villages were cleared in a campaign known as “border clearings.”³⁵

Christians would be targeted alongside Kurds in the *Anfal* campaigns waged by Saddam Hussein in 1988. Indeed, the regime referred to them as “Christian Kurds.” Hundreds disappeared, over 2,000 were reported dead, and dozens of villages were attacked and/or cleared.³⁶ The subsequent section will provide more detail on the forced displacements of Christian and other communities in Ninewa Province.

³¹ Shak Hanish, “Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in Iraq: The Chaldo-Assyrian Case: Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in Iraq . . .,” *Digest of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 2 (September 2011): 161–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1949-3606.2011.00090.x>.

³² For a list of Assyrian villages that were attacked, looted, or forcibly cleared, see Sargon Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the 20th Century* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 180–86, <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748686025.001.0001..>

³³ Hanish, 162.

³⁴ Donabed, 172.

³⁵ Donabed, 180–6.

³⁶ For a list of Assyrian villages affected in the Anfal campaigns, see Donabed, 203–208.

Displacement(s) in Ninewa Province: 1970-Present



Figure 3. Demonstrators protest pull-out of PMF units from the area. 2019. Photograph. PMF media

As the decades following the establishment of the Iraqi state saw successive waves of displacement, Ninewa Province served as a microcosm of these demographic changes. Layers of forced migration and repatriation (and the communal political alliances that emerged to both support and contest these policies) led to an intricately structured web of communal alliances that expanded beyond the simple ethnoreligious

dichotomies that underlie policies like R2P. A full accounting of Iraq's recent history can (indeed, should) thread a difficult needle: placing the collective suffering of Iraqi Christians within a larger legacy of communal violence without minimizing the horrific acts to which those within that community have been subjected. The Trump Administration's approach to post-IS relief in Iraq (rather than representing an aberration in American policymaking) represented one point in the century-long struggle between minority-focused and state-focused policy approaches to both Iraq and the region as a whole.

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime pursued a policy of centrally planned developmentalism while consolidating its hold over disparate areas of the country, a process epitomized in the construction of the Mosul Dam across the Tigris River. The dam (which provides electricity to the city of Mosul and surrounding areas) also allowed Baghdad to encourage the migration of (mainly Sunni Arab) technicians to areas of Ninewa Province.³⁷ The Iraqi

³⁷ "On Vulnerable Ground," Human Rights Watch, November 10, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/11/10/vulnerable-ground/violence-against-minority-communities-nineveh-provinces-disputed>.

state discriminated in favor of these recent arrivals in housing, employment, and state services, creating a class of Ninewa residents both privileged and resented by the area's residents.³⁸

Fallout from this process of state “Arabization” continued following the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. In the past decade alone, three distinct waves of displacement have altered Ninewa's ethno-religious landscape: the rapid advance of the Islamic State (IS) forces drove Yazidis, Kurds, Shi'i Shabakis and Christians into eastern Syria and the the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI); the subsequent recapture of the so-called Disputed Territories by KRI and Iraqi Government forces displaced many Sunni Muslims;³⁹ and rapid advances by units of the quasi-governmental militias known as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) displaced Kurds affiliated with anti-PMF elements of the Kurdistan Regional Government.⁴⁰ Ninewa's current security landscape bears the scars of these repeated displacements and changes in authority, with security responsibilities divided amongst a patchwork of Iraqi military and police units, the various component groups of the PMF, and local militias whose character and ultimate allegiances change on a town-by-town basis.

In a paper of this length, it would be impossible to thoroughly and accurately dissect the specific communal hardships that make up Ninewa's legacy of relentless dislocation and reciprocal depopulation. This very legacy, however, complicates efforts to describe the violence inflicted on Christian communities as a discrete genocide, unmoored from the century of forced displacements that preceded it and exclusively deserving of American sympathy.

³⁸ “On Vulnerable Ground.”

³⁹ The Disputed Territories are a swath of land extending in a rough semicircle from the Syrian border (in the west) to the Iranian border (in the east), all abutting areas recognized as KRI territory. Due to both their population composition (with large concentrations of non-Arabs) and natural resources (which include the oil-rich city of Kirkuk), the Disputed Territories have been a site of contestation between the KRI and the Government of Iraq since the 2003 American invasion.

⁴⁰ The PMF, a collection of militias initially formed as a bulwark to regular Iraqi security units after the latter's wholesale collapse during the 2014 advance of IS, maintains a contentious and nebulous relationship with the Iraqi state. While components of the PMF have been formally incorporated into the Iraqi security apparatus, concerns about Iran's influence of PMF-affiliated groups has led America and regional actors to counter this growing influence. For a more detailed discussion of the PMF's formation and composition, see: “Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State,” International Crisis Group, July 30, 2018.

American Aid in Post-IS Ninewa: A Deceptively Simple Dichotomy

In October 2019, Mark Green became the first USAID Administrator to speak at the Values Voter Summit, a gathering of conservative evangelical activists sponsored by the Family Research Council. After describing religious faith as “a source of strength and inspiration...woven into the fabric of American history” and decrying persecution of faith communities around the world, Green spoke forcefully about the agency’s priorities in Iraq. To date, he said, USAID’s “Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Program is already providing \$400 million to help persecuted minorities.”⁴¹ This shift occurred in spite of overall cuts in both USAID’s spending (with Trump originally seeking a 30 percent cut in the agency’s budget⁴²) and the staff necessary to properly oversee these funds’ disbursement.⁴³ The sum allocated for these programs is approximately one third of the agency’s \$1.16 billion assistance budget for Iraq⁴⁴, speaking to the Trump Administration’s priorities in shaping the United States’ humanitarian aid budget in Iraq.

Around the same time as Green’s speech, and separate from the agency’s established pillars of support, USAID announced a discrete wave of funding assistance targeting “Victims of ISIS Genocide in Northern Iraq.” Through grants to the Catholic Relief Services and Solidarity Fund Poland, USAID would support medical services as “part of the U.S. Government’s commitment to help persecuted minorities and preserve Iraq’s heritage of religious and ethnic pluralism.” A press release by the agency reiterated that “USAID is working with elected officials, community leaders, local and faith-based non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to help religious and ethnic minorities targeted by IS to improve their living conditions, expand their economic opportunities, and promote their democratic participation.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ “USAID Administrator Green’s Remarks at the Values Voter Summit | Press Release | U.S. Agency for International Development,” United States Agency for International Development, October 11, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/oct-11-2019-usaid-administrator-green-remarks-values-voter-summit>.

⁴² “U.S. Agency to Help Iraq Recover from IS despite Trump Aid Cuts,” *Reuters*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-aid-idUSKBN1E40TS>.

⁴³ “Trump Admin. Cuts Staff Overseeing Iraq Aid Budget; Watchdog Concerned,” *ProPublica*, November 22, 2019, <https://patch.com/us/white-house/trump-admin-cuts-staff-overseeing-iraq-aid-budget-watchdog-concerned>.

⁴⁴ “The Trump Administration Gutted the Staff Overseeing \$1 Billion in Aid to Iraq. A Watchdog Is Raising Red Flags,” *Government Executive*, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://www.govexec.com/management/2019/11/trump-administration-gutted-staff-overseeing-1-billion-aid-iraq-watchdog-raising-red-flags/161493/>.

⁴⁵ “New U.S. Assistance to Help Victims of ISIS Genocide in Northern Iraq | Press Release | U.S. Agency for International Development,” September 20, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/sep-20-2019-new-us-assistance-help-victims-isis-genocide-northern-iraq>.

This approach would eventually draw criticism of inappropriate political influence in the aid allocation process. An investigation by the news outlet ProPublica detailed the immense pressure that career USAID employees felt from the White House to specifically allocate assistance to Christian groups. This rush to distribute assistance (one USAID official complained that “we need to stay ahead of this curve everywhere lest our interventions be dictated to us”) resulted in a range of questionable grants. One recipient group had never managed a major charitable grant before, while another had accepted funds from (and appeared in promotional videos for) the explicitly Islamophobic foundation “The Clarion Project.”⁴⁶ While the White House denied improper influence over the grant-allocation process behind these funds,⁴⁷ speeches by the highest officials in the Trump Administration (including President Trump himself) show the extent to which American policy came to reflect a very specific definition of persecuted minority in the Iraqi context.

Shortly after these initiatives were announced, Max Primorac, USAID’s Special Representative for Minority Assistance Programs, drew an unvarnished picture of the administration’s aims and attitudes towards the delivery of humanitarian aid in Iraq. In addition to his position at USAID, Primorac spoke proudly of his work in Vice President Mike Pence’s office, saying that “I provide [Iraqi Christian] communities a direct line into the White House,”⁴⁸ implicitly circumventing the processes other beneficiaries must normally follow. Primorac described the Shlama Foundation (which had never before managed a charitable grant) as “one of our favorite” grantees and said that USAID had made a priority of “working with similar minded countries like Poland that wants [sic] to support the Christian communities.”⁴⁹ In choosing partners for these initiatives, he continued, it was “very important for us that we work with faith-based organizations here, hence [overtures to groups like] the Knights of Columbus,”⁵⁰ as part of the aid distribution process.

⁴⁶ Yeganeh Torbati, “How Mike Pence’s Office Meddled in Foreign Aid to Reroute Money to Favored Christian Groups,” ProPublica, accessed August 6, 2020, <https://www.propublica.org/article/how-mike-pences-office-meddled-in-foreign-aid-to-reroute-money-to-favored-christian-groups?token=dobN47zStvHcmbER7GvkvKAYTIy9JN7t>.

⁴⁷ Torbati.

⁴⁸ “A Conversation with Max Primorac,” Chaldean News, October 8, 2019, <https://www.chaldeannews.com/one-on-one/2019/10/22/a-conversation-with-max-primorac>.

⁴⁹ “A Conversation with Max Primorac.”

⁵⁰ “A Conversation with Max Primorac.”

In orders like these, and the speech referring to it, American officials cast Christian communities within Iraq as groups whose victimization and collective suffering deserved a form of recognition set apart from existing policy priorities within the country. This approach also hinged on a specific definition of “minority” that elevated religious identity over the range of internally and externally imposed social categories by which Iraqis view themselves. Breaking the Iraqi population down by religious sect, for instance, leaves Sunni Muslims as the largest “minority” within Iraq; counting Iraq’s population through an ethnolinguistic lens shows a significant Kurdish minority presence. American focus on religious difference as a key delineator of minority status came at the expense of this nuance, effectively ignoring the complex history of forced displacement and communal violence in Ninewa of which the sufferings of Christians formed only a part.



Figure 4. Max Primorac, key adviser to Vice President Mike Pence on aid to religious minorities. 2017. (Obtained via Facebook).

A range of factors, in addition to the desire to appeal to a segment of the Republican base, drove this shift. The involvement of many Trump Administration officials with explicitly Islamophobic⁵¹ and white nationalist⁵² groups played a clear role in the construction of several marquee policies, including the 2017 travel ban—situating Iraqi non-Muslim minorities as the perennial victims of a

Muslim majority speaks to aspects of both of those worldviews. Actions like the administration’s Iraq policy, however, interacted with and exploited a communal landscape that had been shaped by past efforts of foreign support for faith communities.

⁵¹ “The Trump Administration and Anti-Muslim Groups,” *Georgetown University Bridge Initiative* (blog), accessed November 28, 2020, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/the-trump-administration-and-anti-muslim-groups/>.

⁵² “Stephen Miller’s Emails Cite White-Nationalist Sources - The Atlantic,” accessed November 28, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/11/stephen-miller-alarming-emails/602242/>.

Indeed, even mid-nineteenth century American and European humanitarian appeals to non-Muslim communities within the Ottoman Empire could not avoid the prejudicial tropes with which Ottoman Muslims were portrayed.⁵³ While communitarian policies on behalf of European donors have had to contend with over a century of technocratic reforms within the aid field, impulses like these still remain as prominent drivers of policy. This policy shift was, however, not simply the case of a zealous White House forcing a faith-centric agenda on a reluctant technocratic bureaucracy. At the end of his interview with the *Chaldean Times*, Primorac was asked about the permanence of this policy shift. What (his interviewer wonders) would be the fate of this program if President Trump were to lose reelection? Primorac responds that H.R. 390, a law that designates Iraqi Christians and Yezidis as uniquely persecuted minorities deserving of American assistance and specifically recognizes “faith-based entities, that are providing assistance to address [their] humanitarian” needs,⁵⁴ was unanimously passed by both houses of Congress. While some Americans may chafe at the idea of the Trump Administration (primarily through Pence’s office) so explicitly linking ostensibly technocratic humanitarian aid initiatives to conservative religious organizations, these sentiments did not translate into any serious political objection. Beneficiaries of assistance are simply too distant from the consciousness of most Americans, the successive waves of communal violence that have shaped the ethno-sectarian fabric of Ninewa Province too nuanced to understand without the reassuringly simple religious dichotomy that the Administration has adopted over the past three years.

The simple dichotomy promoted by the Trump Administration and accepted by Congress, situating a “minority” of Christians and Yezidis against a “majority” of Iraq’s remaining population, also ignored the complex ways in which all of these actors engage with a range of non-state or sub-state actors, such as the PMF. In an interview, an employee of a U.S.-funded governance program in Ninewa expressed concern and alarm at the increased competition for the significant funds allocated to Ninewa by USAID. “All of the people are looking to Ninewa,” they said, “there is a lot of money, a lot of

⁵³ Watenpaugh, Keith David. *Bread from Stones*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt14jxvf9>.

⁵⁴ “Text - H.R.390 - 115th Congress (2017-2018): Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act of 2018,” December 11, 2018, 2017/2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/390/text>.

[opportunities] to get cash easily.”⁵⁵ This pressure, they continued, has been compounded by more direct PMF influence into the aid distribution process; after the Government of Iraq’s announcement of internal travel restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020,⁵⁶ PMF-affiliated groups restricted movement across checkpoints under their control to merchants with financial ties to their organization.⁵⁷ This particular implementor described these moves as representative of the threat posed by Iran to relief and development efforts in Ninewa, describing the increased security concerns they felt when working with the areas predominantly-Shi’i members of the Shabaki community.⁵⁸ The PMF, however, counts a range of local militias in Ninewa as allies, including groups drawn from Christian and Yazidi communities.⁵⁹ Failing to recognize the degree to which these “minority” groups have allied themselves with (and, to a degree, incorporated themselves into) “majority” institutions like the PMF only perpetuates this deceptively-simple dichotomy on which American policy has been structured.

Shedding light on the complex intersections of ethno-sectarian identity and political affiliation that undergird intercommunal relations in Ninewa does not (and should not) erase the horrific communal violence that members of the area’s Christian and Yazidi communities have suffered. Following their rapid advances across Ninewa in the summer of 2014, IS subjected members of these communities to a systematic regime of torture, forced conversion, enslavement, and sexual violence.⁶⁰ When groups like IS chose to pursue these ends, however, they did so in a way that harmed a gamut of ethno-religious communities across Iraq and Syria. While IS used the dichotomy of religious belonging to justify crimes against Yazidis and Christians, the atrocities carried out against these groups stand beside acts of violence against a wide range of Muslim and non-Muslim communities across Syria and Iraq. During its period of uncontested territorial control, IS massacred (at least) several hundred members of a Sunni tribe

⁵⁵ Telephone Interview with USAID Implementer, August 7, 2020.

⁵⁶ “Displacement Tracking Matrix- COVID-19 Mobility Restrictions- 20 April to 14 May 2020” (International Organization for Migration, May 20, 2020), http://iraqdtm.iom.int/files/COVID-19/Mobility_Restrictions/DTM_COVID_19_Mobility_Restrictions_20Apr_4%20May2020.pdf.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Philip Hoffman and Tori Keller, “Ninewa Province Conflict Analysis” (Mercy Corps, April 30, 2018), 16.

⁶⁰ “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis” (United Nations Human Rights Council, June 15, 2016), https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf.

opposing its rule,⁶¹ and carried out high-profile mass executions of hundreds of Shi'i prisoners as it initially advanced in Mosul.⁶² IS propaganda uses derogatory slurs to describe anti-IS Sunni tribal militias, political Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood, and non-Sunnis with interchangeable levels of vitriol, while massacring communities of various ethno-sectarian identities across the Middle East. Instead of simply capturing the communal language through which the victims of the past six years describe their suffering, the United States built an entire policy regime around the false pretense that the main driver of conflict in Ninewa Province straddles a divide: with Muslims on one side, and non-Muslims (Christians in particular) on the other.

USAID in Iraq, 2004 - 2020: An Increase in Targeted Aid

In a country that has experienced decades of war, multiple population displacements, and economic turmoil, the injection of billions of dollars of foreign aid along explicitly sectarian lines has led to further complications and, as this section will demonstrate, inflamed tensions among different sectors of the population. Data from USAID shows that province-specific aid has increased over time while general aid has decreased. As reflected in public opinion polls, this differential between the two forms of aid affects perspectives on U.S. foreign aid, with those who received U.S. aid more supportive of it. Over time, those who have received aid have come from a smaller fragment of the population, exacerbating an already fragile political situation.

Since 2004, the United States has been allocating foreign aid to Iraq in several forms, ranging from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction. Due to the advent of IS, beginning in 2014, much of this aid has been aimed at creating stability in conflict-affected areas and towards specific internally displaced communities, as described above. Though beneficiary communities under this allocation have undeniable needs, this redirection of aid is problematic because it comes at a time when foreign aid for country-wide projects has been significantly reduced. Just as the British during the Mandate period viewed the non-Muslim minorities as a particularly aggrieved population, the United States, under particular administrations, has held this view as well, which is

⁶¹ "Islamic State Executed 700 People from Syrian Tribe: Monitoring Group," *Reuters*, August 17, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-execution-idUSKBN0GG0H120140817>.

⁶² "Iraq: ISIS Executed Hundreds of Prison Inmates," Human Rights Watch, October 30, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/30/iraq-isis-executed-hundreds-prison-inmates>.

reflected in their aid allocation. The sums allocated represent a range of multi-year programs, creating a “tanker ship” of implementation whose course may prove quite difficult to alter.

Alongside the pivot in awarding aid to conflict-affected areas beginning in 2014, domestic politics within the United States have affected the overall budget of USAID. Before Republican President George W. Bush left office in 2009, the budget for USAID in Iraq was \$527 million. In contrast, in fiscal year 2016, the last year of the administration of Democratic President Barack Obama, over \$1 billion was given, more than twice the amount of the previous administration. Under Republican President Trump in fiscal year 2020, however, the budget was again down to \$502 million, marking an almost 50% reduction in funding. Nonetheless, rather than comparing overall budgets between administrations and political parties, it is necessary to see how funds were allocated.

While aid can be awarded for country-wide projects or for a subset of provinces, American aid in Iraq has steadily become more concentrated in a smaller number of areas. Table 1 below presents the amount of aid directed to specific subsets of provinces in addition to country-wide projects under the three different administrations. This directed aid is used for various items like sanitation, food, settlements, and health. Of Iraq’s 19 provinces, the number of provinces singled out for specific aid has dwindled over time and, most importantly, by geographic spread. The eight provinces in Northern Iraq are Salah al-Din, Diyala, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Dahuk, Halabja (created in 2014), and Ninewa. In the center are the seven provinces of Anbar, Babylon, Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf, Qadisiyah, and Wasit. Southern Iraq contains Maysan, Dhi War, Muthanna, and Basra. From these provinces, it is those in the South (the Shi’i strongholds) that have largely been excluded from province specific aid. This exclusion has worsened over time. Under the Bush administration 15 provinces received specific aid, followed by 12 under Obama, and 10 under Trump.

Table 1: Amount Allocated to Specific Provinces

| Fiscal Year | Provinces | Amount |
|--------------------|---|---------------|
| 2020 | Anbar, Baghdad, Dahuk, Diyala, Erbil, Karbala, Kirkuk, Najaf, Ninewa, Salah al-Din | 55,240,000 |
| 2016 | Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Dahuk, Diyala, Erbil, Karbala, Kirkuk, Najaf, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Sulaymaniyah | 76,745,622 |
| 2009 | Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Dahuk, Dhi Qar, Diwaniyah, Diyala, Erbil, Karbala, Kirkuk, Najaf, Ninawa, Sulaymaniyah, Muthana, Wasit | 54,253,762 |

Data from USAID "Iraq – Complex Emergency" Fact Sheets.

Under the Bush administration, aid allocation was more geographically widespread than under administrations that followed. Although the Bush administration allocated approximately 10% of the overall budget towards specific provinces, those grants were spread across provinces in the country. In contrast, in both 2016 and 2020, governorate-specific aid was allocated mostly to areas in Central and Northern Iraq. A total of \$76 million in governorate-specific aid was allocated in 2016, which is 6.87% of the overall budget for that year, and in 2020, the total was \$55 million, or nearly 11% of the budget.

Hence, even though the overall USAID budget is smaller under the Trump Administration than it was during the Obama Administration, the percentage of the aid going towards a smaller subset of provinces is higher. In fact, it is even higher than that of fellow Republican George W. Bush. Furthermore, in addition to the regular USAID budget, the Trump Administration launched the aforementioned Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response initiative. This initiative allocates \$354 million to ethnic minorities in Iraq that were targeted by IS, continuing a trend of geographic concentration in the distribution of aid. The discourse of the Trump administration was not just rhetoric, but had real implications for the USAID budget. However, administrations do not only influence the budget of USAID, but also the politics within a country through the distribution of aid. The geographic narrowing of aid over time in Iraq, such that it is today primarily allocated to the North, has had an impact on the ground.

Public Perceptions of U.S. Aid Distribution in Iraq

What effect, then, does this geographic concentration of aid have on the climate within Iraq? The politicized U.S. foreign aid, in the best-case scenario, does not lay a foundation that allows for improved relations between various ethnic and religious groups or mitigate the conditions that permitted the rise of IS. The geographic concentration of U.S. aid has played a similar role in Iraq to that of the British Mandate period for the Assyrians. With much of the aid going to Northern provinces (Ninewa in particular), there is increased competition to procure aid. This, in turn, leads to differing views, often along sectarian lines, about U.S. foreign aid. To assess the presence of divisions along ethnic and sectarian lines, we used survey data from Arab Barometer Wave V.⁶³

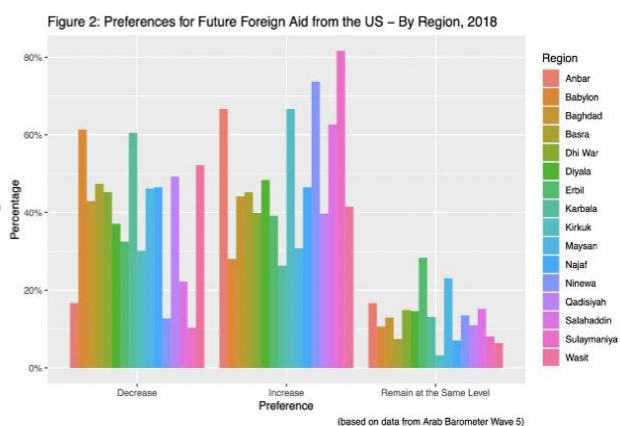
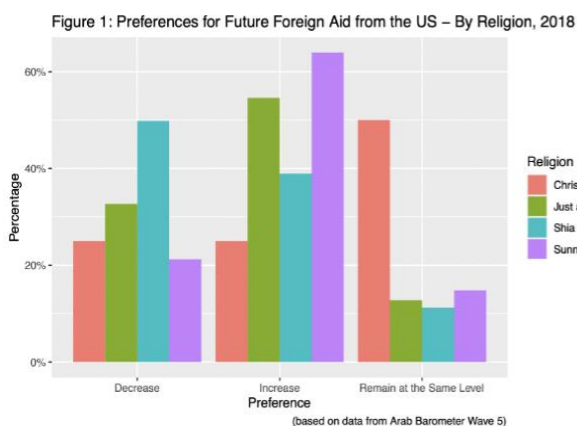
If U.S. foreign aid creates divisions within a country due to the focus on non-Muslim minorities, the first area in which this division should be clearly present is preferences for U.S. foreign aid. When asked whether the amount of foreign aid should change, 38% of Shi'i Muslims wanted to see U.S. foreign aid increase, over 60% of Sunni Muslims wanted to see it increase, and just 25% of Christians wanted it to increase. This latter point deserves a particular emphasis. While the Christians sampled in this survey hail from a wide range of areas across Iraq, and not specifically Ninewa, their response to this question demonstrates a relative ambivalence to the flood of aid that USAID (under significant pressure from the White House) had begun to direct their way. Assistance to Christian communities that was announced with much fanfare from Washington has been met much more ambiguously by Iraqi Christians themselves.

The Christians' lack of desire for an increase in aid may be indicative of their situation. With Christians being one of the targeted populations, it is necessary to consider why only 25% want foreign aid to increase yet 50% of Christians surveyed want foreign aid to remain the same. It may be the case that Christians are content with the amount received, but there are other factors to consider.

First, it is important to note that Figure 1 does not take geographic location of the survey respondent into consideration. Due to displacement, not all Christians surveyed are located in Northern Iraq or, more specifically, Ninewa. This explains some of the

⁶³ This survey was conducted over the 2018-19 time period. There are 2,461 respondents in this survey.

variation in answers, as Figure 2 demonstrates that preferences for U.S. foreign aid are geographically concentrated. Second, the desire for aid to remain the same may be indicative of their situation. In particular, since the fall of IS, the PMF and Peshmerga (the security apparatus of the KRI) have assumed responsibility for maintaining security in Ninewa. This has made it much more difficult for ethnic minorities in Ninewa. The PMF have verbally and physically harassed Assyrians and Yezidis, prevented displaced individuals from returning to their villages, and established checkpoints throughout the region. To deliver foreign aid, development agencies must pass through these checkpoints. These checkpoints not only hinder the delivery of basic necessities but are also a source of revenue for security forces, as bribes must be paid to pass through.⁶⁴ For these reasons, minorities are in a difficult position as they may fear retribution from Islamists as well as other Iraqis because of perceptions that they are aligned with the U.S., but they also need support given the situation with IS. Therefore, a decrease or an increase in U.S. foreign aid would be harmful for them. Overall, however, there are differences of opinion along sectarian lines on the issue of U.S. foreign aid. This divergence in preferences for future foreign aid relations with the United States is also present regionally.



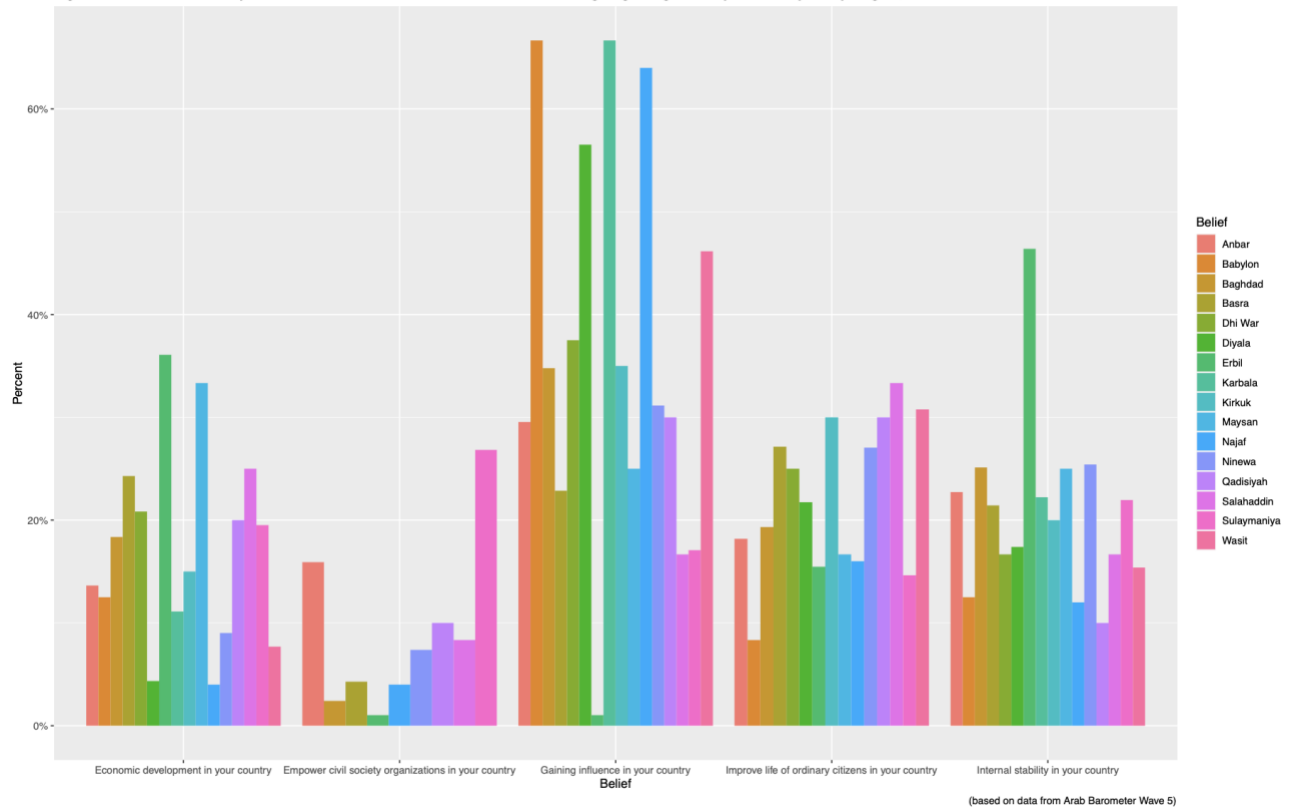
⁶⁴ “2019 Report on Religious Freedom: Iraq.” *U.S. Department of State*. 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>
 “Iraq’s Christians remain at eradication- lack of security forces migration.” *Aid to the Church in Need*. <https://www.churchinneed.org/iraqs-christians-remain-at-risk-of-eradication-lack-of-security-forces-emigration/>
 Laurie Mylroie. “US Sanctions Nineveh Plains Leader Terrorizing Population, Blocking IDPs’ Return, and Corruption” *Kurdistan 24*. July 19, 2019. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/fc822f07-9717-4757-874f-d75b3798754b>

While all provinces contain a variety of ethnicities and sects, Northern provinces are primarily composed of Sunni Muslims, many of whom are non-Arab, and those who are neither Arab nor Muslim. In contrast to the North, the South is primarily Shi'i Muslim. This distribution of ethnic and religious groups across geographic lines also affects communal identity formation in which ethnicity plays a greater role for non-Arabs than religion. As presented in Figure 2 above, the provinces that want U.S. foreign aid to decrease the most are Babylon and Karbala, which are located in Central Iraq and have Shi'i majorities. In contrast, the two provinces that want U.S. foreign aid to increase the most are Sulaymaniyah and Ninewa, with over 80% and 70% of the population sampled wanting an increase in U.S. foreign aid, respectively. The Sulaymaniyah province is located in the Northeast and has a Kurdish Sunni majority as well as some Chaldean Christian communities. The population of Ninewa contains Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen, who are all primarily Sunni Muslim, as well as Assyrian Christians, Chaldean Catholics, Yazidis, Shabaks, and Mandeans. The answers to this survey suggest that there is a division along sectarian and ethnic lines. These divisions are most visible when examining opinions geographically, divisions which map onto where U.S. foreign aid is distributed. The presence of a division along these lines is problematic, because it indicates that U.S. foreign aid is viewed by the majority of the population as political.

The politicization of U.S. foreign aid in Iraq has not only affected opinions about future U.S. foreign aid but also beliefs over the motivation of Western countries. When respondents were asked to identify the main motivation of Western countries in providing foreign aid, over 50% of the respondents in Babylon, Diyala, Karbala, and Najaf believe the main goal is to gain influence in Iraq. All four of these provinces are located in Central Iraq. Almost no respondents from Erbil, a province in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), believe foreign aid is a tool to gain influence in the country. In fact, as presented in Figure 3, nearly 50% of respondents from Erbil believe the motivation for the awarding of aid is to provide internal stability in Iraq. Most importantly, however, within Ninewa, respondents have mixed views. 30% of Ninewa respondents believe the main goal is to gain influence, another 30% believe it is to improve life of ordinary citizens, and only 25% believe the motivation is to provide internal stability. Given the security landscape of and ethnic groups in Ninewa, it is unsurprising that there is no consensus amongst respondents surrounding Western motivation. Just as favoritism of minorities

drove a wedge between ethnic minorities and their countrymen under the British Mandate, there is a division between Northern Iraq and the rest of the country, and even within the province of Ninewa, on issues related to foreign aid. Foreign aid exacerbates pre-existing tensions.

Figure 3: Which of these do you think is the main motivation of Western countries giving foreign aid to your country? – By Region, 2018



Of course, Iran has gained a considerable amount of influence in Iraq since the U.S. withdrew the vast majority of its troops in 2011, and its growing influence partly explains some of the statistics discussed here. Although Iran-backed militias are present all over Iraq, including various component units of the PMF in Northern Iraq, it is in Central and Southern Iraq where Iranian influence is most acute. Not only do Iranian militias protect Shi'i pilgrimage sites in Najaf and Karbala, but pro-Iran political parties have solid majorities in province-level politics across Central and Southern Iraq.⁶⁵ Hence, with significant Iranian influence in the southern half of the country and U.S. aid going

⁶⁵ Tim Arango. "Iran Dominates in Iraq after the U.S. 'Handed the Country Over.'" *New York Times*. July 15, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-iraq-iranian-power.html>

to the North, it comes as no surprise that there is variation in opinion about U.S. foreign aid along geographic and sectarian lines.

Conclusion

In Iraq, favoritism towards minority populations has often been driven by strategic concerns. The British used Assyrian Christians in military units against opponents of British control in Iraq during the Mandate period and again in World War II. Figures within the Trump administration, in turn, used non-Muslim minorities to appeal to their evangelical voter base (while receiving bi-partisan support for a fundamental re-shaping of post-IS recovery efforts within a minority-focused paradigm). However, as demonstrated in this paper, this strategic favoritism comes at a cost. The decrease in the amount of country-wide aid and increase in province specific aid is detrimental to the overall development of Iraq and, in turn, to the stability the country needs to provide a safe environment for its ethnic minorities.

For the Assyrians during the British Mandate, close ties with the British harmed their relationship with Iraqi Arabs by exacerbating pre-existing tensions. In the present day, the focus on non-Muslim minorities by the Trump administration has led to politicization of aid distribution. The current approach of concentrating a majority of foreign aid to Ninewa province undermines U.S. policy objectives because it does not address the factors that cause tension across ethnic and sectarian lines. At a time when overall aid in Iraq has decreased, structuring assistance around a specious dichotomy between non-Muslim and Muslim recipients belies the complexity of governance and security bodies in contemporary Iraq.

The incoming administration of President Joseph R. Biden (free from the pressure to appease an Evangelical Christian political base) seems unlikely to continue some of the more blatant acts of political interference on the American aid-distribution apparatus in Iraq. While the multi-year grants distributed under intense political pressure to faith groups will remain in place for years, American policymakers seem poised to partially set aside the simplistic Christian-Muslim dichotomy that guided so much of the Trump Administration's policy in the region. This does not, however, signal a definitive end to the distribution of humanitarian aid along the lines of religion or ethnicity. While a range of global priorities compete for the president-elect's attention, Biden has a strong record

of viewing Iraq through an ethno-sectarian lens (having notably called in 2006 for a partition of the country into Sunni, Shi'i, and Kurdish statelets).⁶⁶ Only time will tell whether the incoming Biden administration views aid toward Iraq as a tool to bolster a (deeply imperfect) state or as a way to comfort communities whose place in a national political community has already been written off. Whatever choice Biden makes, his actions will find historical precedent in over a century of minority-assistance programs.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of this report, we broadly recommend the following policy changes:

- Placing a renewed emphasis within the USAID bureaucracy of allocating humanitarian assistance based on standards of beneficiary needs that directly relate to UN-recognized, sector-level categories of aid.
- Further insulating the allocation process within USAID from political appointees.
- Giving broader authority to USAID in-country Chiefs of Mission regarding aid allocation priorities.

⁶⁶ JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR and LESLIE H. GELB, "Opinion | Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq (Published 2006)," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2006, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/opinion/01biden.html>.

Bibliography

- AP NEWS. "Watchdog Groups Say Convention Appearances Broke Hatch Act," August 27, 2020. <https://apnews.com/a6ea0162c2ea6242cb9c8284c451560f>.
- Chaldean News. "A Conversation with Max Primorac," October 8, 2019. <https://www.chaldeannews.com/one-on-one/2019/10/22/a-conversation-with-max-primorac>.
- AidData. "IraqAIMS_GeocodedResearchRelease_Level1_v1.3.1 Geocoded Dataset." Williamsburg, VA and Washington, DC: AidData, 2016. <http://aiddata.org/research-datasets>.
- Al-Jeloo, Nicholas. "Post-Withdrawal Prospects for Iraq's 'Ultra-Minorities.'" In *The Legacy of Iraq*, edited by Benjamin Isakhan, 110–22. From the 2003 War to the "Islamic State." Edinburgh University Press, 2015. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt16roj1w.12>.
- Arab-Barometer Wave V. "Public Opinion Survey Conducted in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen, 2018-19." Ann Arbor, Michigan: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2019. <https://www.arabbarometer.org/surveys/arab-barometer-wave-v/>.
- Jr, Joseph R. Biden, and Leslie H. Gelb. "Opinion | Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq (Published 2006)." *The New York Times*, May 1, 2006, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/opinion/01biden.html>.
- Briggs, Ryan C. "Does Foreign Aid Target the Poorest?" *International Organization* 71, no. 1 (2017): 187–206. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818316000345>.
- . "Leaving No One Behind? A New Test of Subnational Aid Targeting." *Journal of International Development* 30, no. 5 (2018): 904–10.
- "Displacement Tracking Matrix- COVID-19 Mobility Restrictions- 20 April to 14 May 2020." International Organization for Migration, May 20, 2020. http://iraqdtm.iom.int/files/COVID-19/Mobility_Restrictions/DTM_COVID_19_Mobility_Restrictions_20Apr_4%20May2020.pdf.
- Donabed, Sargon. *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the 20th*

- Century*. Edinburgh University Press, 2015.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748686025.001.0001>.
- ElaphPublishing. "Corruption in Relief Aid May Topple Mutlaq." @Elaph. Accessed September 1, 2020. <https://elaph.com/Web/News/2014/11/957675.html>.
- "Governance | Iraq | U.S. Agency for International Development," November 8, 2016. <https://www.usaid.gov/iraq/governance>.
- Green, Emma. "Iraqi Christians Face an Impossible Choice." *The Atlantic*, May 23, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/iraqi-christians-nineveh-plain/589819/>.
- Hanish, Shak. "Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in Iraq: The Chaldo-Assyrian Case: Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in Iraq . . ." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 2 (September 2011): 161–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1949-3606.2011.00090.x>.
- Hoffman, Philip, and Tori Keller. "Ninewa Province Conflict Analysis." Mercy Corps, April 30, 2018.
- Human Rights Watch. "Iraq: ISIS Executed Hundreds of Prison Inmates," October 30, 2014. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/30/iraq-isis-executed-hundreds-prison-inmates>.
- _____. "Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq: III. Background," 2004. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/iraq0804/4.htm>.
- Crisis Group. "Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State," July 30, 2018. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/188-iraqs-paramilitary-groups-challenge-rebuilding-functioning-state>.
- "Islamic State Executed 700 People from Syrian Tribe: Monitoring Group." *Reuters*, August 17, 2014. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-execution-idUSKBN0GG0H120140817>.
- Kurdistan24. "Iraq Begins Closure of Displacement Camps in Nineveh Governorate." Kurdistan24. Accessed August 10, 2020. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/6bf56e41-d6dd-43d4-8915-de4ecf41dbb9>.
- Lee, Matthew. "Pompeo Warned Diplomats to Avoid Politics; He'll Talk at RNC." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 25, 2020. <https://www.star->

[telegram.com/news/politics-government/national-politics/article245234315.html](https://www.telegram.com/news/politics-government/national-politics/article245234315.html).

Llewellyn-Jones, Rosie. "THE ASSYRIANS IN WORLD WAR ONE AND THE 1933 MASSACRE: NEW DISCOVERIES IN THE RSAA ARCHIVES." *Asian Affairs* 50, no. 4 (August 8, 2019): 569–87.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2019.1672427>.

Makdisi, Ussama. *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2019.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvp2n37g>.

Müller-Sommerfeld, H. "The League of Nations, A-Mandates and Minority Rights during the Mandate Period in Iraq (1920–1932)." In *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East*, edited by S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah and H.L. Murre-van den Berg, 258–83. BRILL, 2016.

https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004323285_011.

"New U.S. Assistance to Help Victims of ISIS Genocide in Northern Iraq | Press Release | U.S. Agency for International Development," September 20, 2019.

<https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/sep-20-2019-new-us-assistance-help-victims-isis-genocide-northern-iraq>.

The New Humanitarian. "Corruption Disrupts Government Aid to Iraq's Displaced," October 22, 2014.

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2014/10/22/corruption-disrupts-government-aid-iraq-s-displaced>.

"U.S. Agency to Help Iraq Recover from IS despite Trump Aid Cuts." *Reuters*, December 10, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-aid-idUSKBN1E4oTS>.

USAID. "Iraq - Complex Emergency, Fact Sheet #1, Fiscal Year (FY) 2008/2009." US Government, 2009.

———. "Iraq - Complex Emergency, Fact Sheet #2, Fiscal Year (FY) 2020." US Government, 2020.

———. "Iraq - Complex Emergency, Fact Sheet #6, Fiscal Year (FY) 2016." US Government, 2016.

- United States Institute of Peace. “Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa: Barriers to Return and Community Resilience.” Accessed August 10, 2020. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/04/ninewa-plains-and-western-ninewa-barriers-return-and-community-resilience>.
- “Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI),” November 4, 2016. <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/bureaus/bureau-conflict-prevention-and-stabilization/office-transition-initiatives>.
- Human Rights Watch. “On Vulnerable Ground,” November 10, 2009. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/11/10/vulnerable-ground/violence-against-minority-communities-nineveh-provinces-disputed>.
- Phillips, Morgan. “Trump OKs \$50M to Aid Syria amid Outrage over US Military Pullout, Turkish Offensive.” Fox News. Fox News, October 12, 2019. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-addresses-values-voter-summit-announces-50-million-in-aid-to-syrian-christians-and-religious-minorities>.
- Robson, Laura. *States of Separation*. University of California Press, 2017.
- Rozen, Minna, “The Ottoman Jews,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Suraiya N. Editor Faroqhi, vol. 3, Cambridge History of Turkey (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256–271, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521620956.013>.
- Secretary Pompeo Full Remarks at the 2020 Republican National Convention*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQqbs5pQ1Wc>.
- Stafford, R. S. *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*. Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 1935. <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463211509>.
- “Text - H.R.390 - 115th Congress (2017-2018): Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act of 2018,” December 11, 2018. 2017/2018. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/390/text>.
- Government Executive. “The Trump Administration Gutted the Staff Overseeing \$1 Billion in Aid to Iraq. A Watchdog Is Raising Red Flags.” Accessed August 11, 2020. <https://www.govexec.com/management/2019/11/trump-administration-gutted-staff-overseeing-1-billion-aid-iraq-watchdog-raising-red-flags/161493/>.
- “The United States and Hungary: Working Together Toward Recovery in Northern Iraq | Press Release | U.S. Agency for International Development,” May 27, 2020. <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/oct-25-2019-united->

states-hungary-working-together-toward-recovery-northern-iraq.

“They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis.” United Nations Human Rights Council, June 15, 2016.

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf.

Torbati, Yeganeh. “How Mike Pence’s Office Meddled in Foreign Aid to Reroute Money to Favored Christian Groups.” ProPublica. Accessed August 6, 2020.

<https://www.propublica.org/article/how-mike-pences-office-meddled-in-foreign-aid-to-reroute-money-to-favored-christian-groups?token=dobN47zStvHcmbER7GvkvKAYTIy9JN7t>.

ProPublica. “Trump Admin. Cuts Staff Overseeing Iraq Aid Budget; Watchdog Concerned,” November 22, 2019. <https://patch.com/us/white-house/trump-admin-cuts-staff-overseeing-iraq-aid-budget-watchdog-concerned>.

“U.S. Agency to Help Iraq Recover from IS despite Trump Aid Cuts.” *Reuters*, December 10, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-aid-idUSKBN1E4oTS>.

United States Agency for International Development. “USAID Administrator Green’s Remarks at the Values Voter Summit | Press Release | U.S. Agency for International Development,” October 11, 2019. <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/oct-11-2019-usaid-administrator-green-remarks-values-voter-summit>.

Watenpaugh, Keith David. *Bread from Stones*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt14jxvf9>.

Wigram, W. A., and H. H. Austin. *Our Smallest Ally: A Brief Account of the Assyrian Nation in the Great War*. vi, 57 p. London : New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge ; Macmillan Company, 1920.

<//catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100246155>.

Zubaida, Sami. “Contested Nations: Iraq and the Assyrians.” *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no. 3 (July 2000): 363–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1354-5078.2000.00363.x>.