



**Slow Genocide & the Ethnic Destruction of Iraq’s Indigenous Christian Assyrians:  
How History Can Guide Responsible American Action**

Contact: Michael Youash, Project Director, michael.youash@iraqdemocracyproject.org

*ISDP would like to thank Dr. Hannibal Travis for his assistance in understanding key matters around genocide in contemporary history and its treatment in international law.*

**Assyrians at the ‘Tipping Point’, Suffering a Slow Genocide**

Experience teaches that every humanitarian crisis requires difficult decisions. The slow genocide of Iraq’s indigenous Christian Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) is no different. Perhaps the most instinctive reaction to the massive dislocation of any population is to open borders and resettle refugees. Again, the plight of Christian Assyrians is no different. History teaches another powerful lesson in this case, however, that if not heeded will set the stage for the ongoing slow genocide to become a full-fledged genocide. Efforts by humanitarian organizations and lobby groups to push for mass, permanent relocation of Assyrians out of the Middle East can unwittingly set the stage for further ethnic extermination.

This policy paper is meant to assist decision-makers in understanding the consequences of policy support for efforts moving towards mass relocation of Assyrians. The purpose is to demonstrate that despite the best of intentions, policies moving towards mass relocation would only accelerate the slow genocide of Christian Assyrians and transform it into a full-blown genocide. In addition, moving decidedly away from mass relocation policies for Iraq’s vulnerable indigenous Assyrians without engaging in a genocide prevention strategy is not enough. A path of inaction on this matter would only allow the slow genocide to continue. A continuation of this crisis will end with the loss of this moderate population in Iraq. America will lose a vital ally that lives on the front lines in the war against violent extremism. Assyrians will either succumb to the pressures of refugee flight to the U.S. and other western nations, or, they will endure a full-blown genocide. The U.S. Government is urged to recognize the responsible course of action centered on the Nineveh Plain Province Solution and related policies.

Some humanitarian organizations, lobby groups and elements of the Assyrian community are urging the acceleration of the ‘Priority 2’ (P2) and ‘Priority 3’ (P3) processing for Assyrian refugees. P2/P3 statuses create a blanket category for all members of a given community to be eligible for relocation. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom, among others,

regularly urges expanding P2 relocation of Christian Assyrians.<sup>1</sup> Various humanitarian organizations echo this position.

Refugee statistics for Iraq from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from as far back as 2007 (capturing the second wave of targeted violence) indicate that Assyrians constitute 17-22 percent of refugees, consistently. For 2006 (straddling ‘Waves 1 and 2’ in Table 1), the Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report identified no less than 200,000 non-Muslims as refugees and IDPs.<sup>2</sup> Extrapolating from this reality and using the data from various humanitarian organizations, one arrives at a modest figure of roughly 400,000-500,000 Christian Assyrian refugees.

Refugee figures only illuminate one dimension of the crisis. Arguably the most significant dimension of the crisis can be observed within trends among indigenous Assyrian IDPs and the Nineveh Plain. For Assyrian IDPs, the destination of choice has been the Nineveh Plain. Survey data (available upon request) indicates the existence of high levels of support for building a future in the Nineveh Plain among IDPs *and also* refugees. Today, the IDP-refugee demographics indicate that Assyrians are sitting at a ‘*Tipping Point*’ whereby the ongoing, slow genocide produces the conditions ideal for a full-fledged genocide. The figures reported in Table 1 indicate that the ‘Ongoing Slow Genocide’ has reached the Nineveh Plain and the last area of territorial concentration is succumbing to ethnic destruction of the indigenous Assyrians.

**Table 1: Nineveh Plain – IDP Families<sup>3</sup> Inflow and Refugee Outflow (By Targeted Wave)<sup>4</sup>**

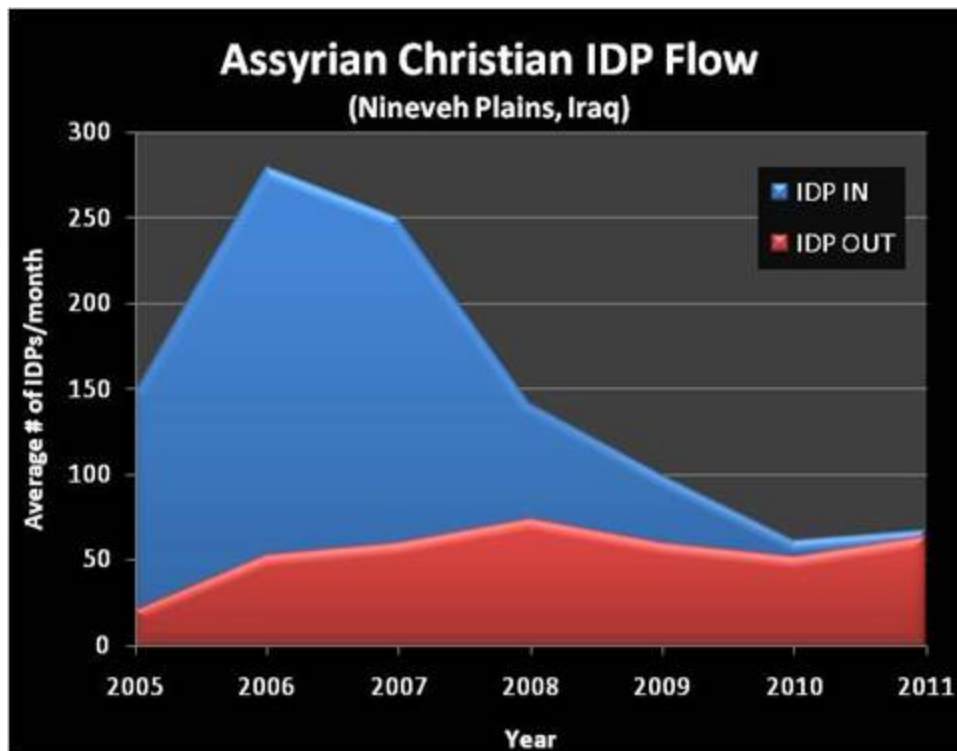
Category \ Waves 1-5	Jan 2005 to Aug. 2006 (20 months)	Sept. 2006 to Sept 2008 (25 months)	Oct 2008 to Dec 2009 (15 months)	Jan 2010 to Sept 2010 (9 months)	Oct 2010 to Present (6 months)
<b>New IDP Arrivals to NP</b>	2971	7016	2138	559	410
<b>Refugee flight from NP</b>	420	1325	1106	468	383
<b>Avg # of IDP in p/m</b>	148	280	142	62	68
<b>Avg # of IDP out p/m</b>	21	53	74	52	64
<b>Ratio: NP IDP inflow vs Refugee outflow</b>	<b>7 : 1</b>	<b>5.3 : 1</b>	<b>2 : 1</b>	<b>1.2 : 1</b>	<b>1 : 1</b>

<sup>1</sup> US Commission on International Religious Freedom. ‘2010 Annual Report’ <http://www.uscirf.gov/images/annual%20report%202010.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State. ‘International Religious Freedom Report – Iraq, 2006’ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

<sup>3</sup> The average family consists of 5 persons – information compiled from Assyrian Aid Society and Nineveh Center for Research and Development studies and databases.

<sup>4</sup> These are figures tracked for Christian Assyrians and do not include Shabaks, Yezidis and Turkmens.



Assyrians are at the ‘Tipping Point’, whereby their ethnic destruction becomes feasible if the Nineveh Plain is allowed to succumb to the slow genocide that continues unabated. The question for decision-makers is what to do in trying to reverse the situation.

### Lessons of History and Genocide

History of just the 20<sup>th</sup> Century reveals, unsurprisingly, that nearly all genocides were preceded by extensive ethnic conflict, persecution and *refugee flight*. The latter dimension includes resettlement (relocation) of the persecuted populations. The Holocaust of 1941-45 was preceded by a policy of emigration and resettlement in Africa, Asia or America from 1933 to 1941. Adolf Eichmann’s trial reveals the extent of Nazi reliance on resettlement of Jews in setting the stage for the Holocaust. Nazi German policy makers even seriously contemplated mass resettlement of Europe’s Jewish population in Madagascar as means of removing them from Europe. The ‘Madagascar Plan’ planners included Hermann Göring, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Adolf Eichmann, and Joseph Goebbels. Resettlement and relocation played a critical role in how these war criminals conceived and implemented the ‘final solution’.

Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Cambodia all demonstrate the same necessary stage in establishing the feasibility of genocide. Tutsis were heavily displaced under successive Hutu-dominated regimes, and resettlement played an instrumental role in establishing the feasibility of genocide. Moreover, the Rwandan government rejected the notion of Tutsi refugee return.<sup>5</sup> The Srebrenica genocide of 1995 was preceded by the mass flight of Bosnian Muslims, including many who fled to Srebrenica itself as a UN safe haven from mass violence in the surrounding region. Additionally, Radovan Karadžić, also worked to ensure the displacement could be

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch. HRW - World Report 1992. P. 100.

locked into place with ethnic partitions to render target populations more vulnerable.<sup>6</sup> The Cambodian genocide of 1975-78 was preceded by mass displacement of Cambodians by Vietnamese communists and American bombing. The Khmer Rouge implemented deportations and resettlements during 1975 to facilitate its genocidal agenda from 1976-78.<sup>7</sup>

Lessons of history on the critical refugee/resettlement dimension of genocide return sadly, and not without tragic irony, to the matter of Assyrians under the Ottomans. The Ottomans had a long standing policy of breaking up compact groupings like the independent Assyrians of Hakkari and Tiyari, and implemented the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide in such a way as to leave some survivors where they were overwhelmingly outnumbered by Turks and other Muslims, as in Istanbul and Mosul.<sup>8</sup>

The lesson is straightforward but nonetheless difficult to accept; any effort to accelerate or even support the Priority Two/Three group resettlement of Christian Assyrian refugees assists in setting the necessary condition found in almost every genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **How History Can Guide Responsible American Action**

Widespread displacement, resettlement and relocation of a targeted people are not *the cause* of genocide, but these dynamics play an integral role in each case. These experiences offer a lesson to decision-makers about making responsible decisions. ISDP emphatically believes that each refugee case with individual merits deserves all the rights accorded to refugees by domestic and international law. The problem arises when group classifications like the P2/P3 designations *contribute* to relocation and push factors similar to those preceding other 20<sup>th</sup> century genocides.

Moving away from accelerating refugee designations for groups like Assyrians and the P2/P3 classifications while doing nothing else, however, is inhumane. The U.S. should come to terms with the need for a policy to prevent genocide against the Christian Assyrians. Decision-makers are directed to the **“Nineveh Plain Province Solution”**, **available upon request from ISDP**. The ‘Nineveh Plain Province Solution’ represents a comprehensive policy covering three policy areas: governance, security and development. The ‘Nineveh Plain Province Solution’ is being pursued by indigenous Christian Assyrians as well as Shabaks and Yezidis. The U.S. has the ability to provide assistance so that these vulnerable minorities can help themselves.

Article 1 of the Genocide Convention directs that, “The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international

---

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch. War Crimes in Bosnia and Hercegovina, Volume Two. August 1992. P. 29

<sup>7</sup> Kiernan, Ben. The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79. Yale University Press, 2008). P. 205

<sup>8</sup> Interested readers are encouraged to consult Altuğ Taner Akçam’s book, A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility. (Henry Holt & Co. 2007).

law which *they undertake to prevent* and to punish.” In Iraq, the U.S. Government has the opportunity to undo the slow genocide of Assyrians, prevent a full-blown genocide, and preserve Iraq’s ethno-religious pluralism by establishing an explicit minority’s policy. For Christian Assyrians, the centerpiece of this policy is the formation of the Nineveh Plain Province.

The “Nineveh Plain Province Solution” requests that the U.S. Government assist in funding Assyrians, Shabaks, Yezidis and other vulnerable minorities in the community dialogue around forming the province – a political demand they have already collectively articulated. It also asks the U.S. Government to commit funding to the basic infrastructure of the Nineveh Plain and to support the construction of a university and provincial-level hospital in the Nineveh Plain. Finally, the plan asks decision-makers to commit to expanding recruitment, training and resourcing for the Nineveh Plain Police Force. The NPPS is a solution to the ‘Assyrian Question’ which has gone unaddressed for almost a century.

**Snapshot of the NPPS**

Governance	Development	Security	Total Projected Cost
Nineveh Plain Province – Community Dialogue & Empowerment (\$3 million)	(D-I) Start-Up: Nineveh Plain University (\$36 million)	Nineveh Plain Police Force (NPPF) to 5,000	<b>\$128 million</b>
	(D-II) Start-Up: Nineveh Plain Provincial Hospital (\$42 million)	Replacing current officers of NP Police Force with officers from the NP.	
	(D-III) NP Basic Infrastructure Development (\$47 million)		

ISDP is aware that the ‘Nineveh Plain Province Solution’ requires a significant commitment from Americans. The most difficult dimension of this appeal for help is the skepticism in supporting any *preventative measure*. For decades after WWII Americans committed untold resources to avoid another global war *and succeeded*. Americans committed to preventing another attack like 9/11 *and are succeeding*. Americans are committed to preventing a complete economic collapse *and are succeeding*. Americans are supporting Libyans in their struggle for freedom and Secretary Clinton is framing this support as morally necessary to prevent the chance of genocidal violence.<sup>9</sup> Success in prevention is the most difficult to grasp but the most noble and grand of endeavors. The ‘Nineveh Plain Province Solution’ represents just such a commitment; to undo the slow genocide of Iraq’s indigenous Christian Assyrian minority.

<sup>9</sup> NBC News, March 27, 2011. [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42275424/ns/meet\\_the\\_press-transcripts](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42275424/ns/meet_the_press-transcripts). See also ABC News, Clinton Cites Rwanda, Bosnia in Rationale for Libya Intervention. <http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2011/03/clinton-cites-rwanda-bosnia-in-rationale-for-libya-intervention.html>.