

# H.Res.741

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## Sponsors:

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### *Type of Legislation: Simple Resolution*

*Simple resolutions are legislative measures introduced in either the U.S. Senate or the House of Representatives. Simple resolutions are not presented to the President, and do not have the force of law. These types of resolution are used to function as statements of intent for one chamber of Congress. Simple resolutions can also set the stage for a bill—a law that is sent to the President for assent—if the legislators sponsoring the legislation can demonstrate broad support in Congress for the policy intentions in the resolution.*

## Country of Focus: Iraq

### *Summary of Resolution*

H.Res.741 calls on the U.S. Government to support the safe return of displaced peoples to the Nineveh Plain, the establishment of a self-governing province, and the swift rehabilitation of devastated areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in Iraq. The legislation also highlights the importance of channeling U.S. aid directly to nonsectarian groups working in the region.

### *Background*

In 2014, ISIS invaded the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar in Iraq, the homelands of Assyrians, Yazidis, and other minoritized ethnic and religious groups. These territories are officially—though not entirely in practice—under administration of the central government in Baghdad. Prior to the emergence of ISIS, the Kurdistan Region's Peshmerga controlled security in these territories.

The atrocities perpetrated by ISIS against these communities include genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage. Hundreds of thousands were forced into displacement, while thousands were killed or taken captive. While the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar were liberated from ISIS occupation in 2017, the devastation, absence of federal authority, and divided security situation has contributed to the lasting instability in the region and continues to force emigration. Approximately 50 percent of the pre-ISIS population has since returned to the Nineveh Plain.

Security in the Nineveh Plain is currently divided among the KRG Peshmerga, Iraqi Police, Iranian-backed PMU forces such as the Babylon Brigades and Brigade 30, and the Assyrian-led Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU).

## Positives

- H.Res.741 highlights the indigenous status of ethnic Assyrians in Iraq, rejects sectarianism by promoting ethnic unity among Assyrians, and acknowledges the existential crisis faced by Assyrians.
- H.Res.741 emphasizes the importance of repatriation to the survival and longevity of endangered communities such as the Assyrians and Yazidis and calls for the United States to work with the Iraqi Government, local governments, and the international community to facilitate the safe return of displaced peoples to the Nineveh Plain.
- H.Res.741 recognizes the significance of the Nineveh Plain to the Christian Assyrian community in Iraq. The Nineveh Plain continues to represent the only hope for a sustainable future for Assyrians in Iraq.
- H.Res.741 calls for the establishment of a Nineveh Plain Governorate administered by the central government in accordance with the Iraqi Council of Ministers decision issued in January 2014 authorizing the creation of such a Governorate.
- H.Res.741 recognizes the significance of the Nineveh Plain Protection Units as the only Christian Assyrian force "formally listed as an ally alongside United States and Coalition forces."
- H.Res.741 emphasizes the need for the United States to facilitate aid and reconstruction efforts in coordination with non-sectarian, minority-led groups in order to "build unity among vulnerable peoples and transcend the vicious cycle of sectarian conflict in Iraq."

## Negatives

- H.Res.741 fails to acknowledge the KRG Peshmerga's preemptive and coordinated withdrawal from the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar as ISIS advanced. Acting on official orders from the KRG, the Peshmerga disarmed inhabitants of the Nineveh Plain in July 2014 and retreated in August 2014 ahead of the ISIS assault without notifying local populations. The relevant consequences of the Peshmerga's calculated withdrawal included genocide and the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of locals. Failure to acknowledge the actions of the KRG in 2014 prevents accountability and promotes a climate of impunity. The Peshmerga have since reasserted their security presence in multiple towns in the Nineveh Plain without the consent of local populations, despite the fact that Assyrians and Yazidis deeply mistrust the Peshmerga as a result of their actions in 2014. Their continued presence has deterred those Assyrians who remain displaced from returning. While tacitly rejecting KRG interference in the Nineveh Plain, H.Res.741 fails to explicitly state that KRG-affiliated forces must be excluded militarily from the permanent security apparatus in the Nineveh Plain.
- H.Res.741 fails to acknowledge the threats posed by Iran-affiliated forces, such as the Babylon Brigades and PMU Brigade 30, operating in the Nineveh Plain.

# Recommendations

- H.Res.741 should acknowledge the KRG's failure to defend the Nineveh Plain when faced with the ISIS assault and explicitly call for KRG-affiliated forces, including the Peshmerga, Asayish, and the Heresat, to be transitioned out of the Nineveh Plain.
- H.Res.741 should highlight the instability caused by Iran-backed PMU forces operating in the Nineveh Plain and call for their immediate transition out of the region.

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