
THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YEZIDIS IN IRAQ

Abstract

This article empirically examines the political situation of the Yazidi in Iraq from 2003 to 2022. It explains that the Yazidis have recently faced significant difficulty that poses a great menace to them, which can be considered a difficulty that the Yazidis have never historically faced. This, consequently, leads to deep segregation among the Iraqi Yazidi. The article finds that among the Yazidi, whose population in Iraq is less than 500,000 people, 12 groups and political parties are actively operating their activities and each group has its own militia. The article points to the lack of security and lack of the job opportunities as the two main reasons behind the current difficulties of the Yazidi. As a result, the Yazidis in their current situation will not be able to see a bright political future in Iraq, nor will they be able to fight for their rights either in the Iraqi parliament or in the Kurdistan region. At the end, the article raises some suggestion points for overcoming this difficulty.

Keywords: Yazidis, segregation, political party, militia groups, minority.

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Throughout the history, the Iraqi Yazidi has experienced a number of humanitarian deep-difficulties, namely genocide, refugee and mass killing as well as some others. All these historical difficulties were either created or emanated from outside the Yazidi community; but recently another wave of difficulty arose among the Iraqi Yazidi, different from the previous, but more effective, which led to significant segregation among them. Within this regard, both security and economy are positioned as the two main prior reasons behind the cultivation of the recent difficulty among the Yazidi as in splitting them up. This segregation has further led to put the future political situation of Yazidi under un-clarity and even unable them to properly fight for their rights inside Iraq as well as inside the autonomy of the Kurdistan region.

This article follows to explain the three main segments: firstly, it explains early

Yezidi political situation inside Iraq; then it turns to analysis of the political situation of the Yezidi during and after ISIL (banned in Russia, a terrorist organization); and finally, the future political situation of Yezidi put under discussion and raising some suggestion points to harmonize the situation of the Yezidi.

Should Yezidi be considered Kurds?

There are different interoperations regarding the origin of Yezidi, regardless of whether they should be considered as a Kurdish community or considered as an independent community. A number of Yezidi, the Iraqi Kurds, the former Iraqi government (regime of Saddam), the Syrian Kurds as well as the Syrian government believed that the Yezidi were Kurds and should be dealt as Kurds. But, recently, there a number of new voices raised from inside Iraqi Yezidi as well as from Yezidi

in other parts around world (in particular, from Armenia and Russia) considering themselves as a total different community from Kurds, Arabs and others. Therefore, they should receive their rights as independent community. However, the purpose of this article is not about to follow the justification of the Yezidi's identity, but one way or other, it comes up with the subject of this article.

Indeed, if we understand that the Yezidis are simply the religion of the Kurds and they are part of the Kurds, then we could carry out our analytical measurement for them in the circle of Kurds; but if we consider that the Yezidis are an independent society and community, then the result will be different.

As for the geographical location of the Yezidi, since they faced a number of threats throughout the history [1], they would not be able to inhabit in one specific area. The Yazidi have been separated all around the world, for example, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Armenia, Russia, and recently in Western countries as well as in Australia. A great number of them have been inhabiting North Iraq and Syria. Our target in this article is the Yezidi in Iraq. Since they considered themselves as natives of this area, the north of Iraq was their ancestral homeland. As for the Yezidi population, for political and security reasons, their actual number is unclear in this area. However, generally, it is estimated that between 500,000 — 700,000 lived in Iraq before 2014, but this number has not been officially confirmed [2]. The statistical number goes back to the 2014, and during the last years, it has been great changing, in particular after genocide took place against Yezidi in 2014 that resulted a great number of them to immigrate and flee to other countries. As it has a threat and the area lacks of security, the Yezidis are scaring to live in their areas as and the immigrants have been frightening to turn back to their homeland.

Early political situation among the Iraqi Yezidi

It is possible to accentuated that historically (before 1990) the Iraqi Yezidis were uniting all their social structures to a certain extent and were represented by the Emiri institution headed by Emir Tahseen Beg and the Yezidi Spiritual Council. The unification of the Yazidis could be due to their restriction of any political and social movements by the former Iraqi regimes, in particular by the regime of the Iraqi Saddam. When the Kurds in north of Iraq received a self-semi-independent from central government of Iraq, after the UNSC passed the resolution 688 [3] to create a safe haven for the Kurds, the Yezidi started to find themselves around two lines. Either to be under the regime of the former Iraq (Sadam regime) or to under the Kurds Autonomy in North of Iraq (leaded by the two parties: Kurdistan Democratic party — KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan — PUK). This situation went on until the year 2003, the full liberation of Iraq from Iraqi Saddam.

Followed this era, there has been great development in the area of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in terms of social, political and cultural means. It was a great opportunity for Yezidi to be able to establish a cultural heritage and a Yezidi history center. The origin idea of this center goes back to the 1993 the Lalsh Cultural and Social Centre. However, from a political viewpoint of view Yezidi did not attempt to create any political party. They continued to proceed under or within the Kurd dominance political parties (KDP and PUK). From 1990 to 2003, even some argued till 2014, there were great understanding among Kurds as well as among the Yezidi that Yezidi are part of Kurds ethnic heritage. Moreover, the only thing that distinguishes the Yazidi from the rest of the Kurds is their religion. Based on this understanding, it had deep consensus among all Kurds' parties that Yezidi do not need to have their own independent political party based on religion point of view.



Figure 1: A map of traditional Yazidi settlements in northern Iraq

Source: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/explainer/yazidi-people-who-are-they-and-why-are-they-run>

The Yazidis in Iraq and in particular in Kurdistan were been highly encouraged to join the Kurds parties, rather than to think about their own party. The Yazidi, from the 1990s to 2003, found themselves only in the Kurdish parties, but some voices were raised here and there and criticized that the role of the Yazidis' elites in the Kurdish parties became very limited only to cultural activities.

During 2003, the Yazidi political movement was forward and some of Yazidi formed a political party under the name of the Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress (YMRP). The interim authority resolutions and those of the Governing Council motivate this party. Both Amin Farhan Jeju and Hamad Matwe (who the later resigned from this party and forme its own party, named the Yazidi progress party in Sinjar) leded the YMRP.

The YMRP was very active and had a strong influence in Sinjar, but not in the Shekhan (Walati) district (look at the Figure 1). The reason is that YMRP was not allowed to engage in any activities and expand its own influence in this area. The YMRP has a different vision regarding the Yazidi identity; it believes that Yazidi is an

independent ethnic and religious element different from those of Arabs and Kurds. This became one of the key competitions regarding who might ultimately dominate Yazidi's areas.

Following the YMRP, the Yazidi Democratic Gathering as another political party of the Yazidi, was established in the city of Hanover, Germany in May 2003. The purpose of this party is about «achieving recognition of the Yazidi religion and having it enshrined in the constitution of Iraq and in the Kurdistan region of Iraq as well as the recognition that all Yazidi areas are part of the Kurdistan Region» [4]. Unlike the YMRP, this party theory was built on the idea of adopting moderate thought with a humanitarian, open and inclusive vision, covering national, ethnic and religious affiliation. The activity of this party in Iraq has gradually decreased, as it has not been able to establish a popular base in the Kurdistan region or in Iraq.

On 1 February 2004, another political Yazidi party was founded under the name the Free Yazidi Democratic Movement (TEVDA). In its conference, which held between 18 and 20 February 2004 the TEVDA declared, «It is not a class move-

ment and does not target a certain class, but rather aims at embracing all of the Yezidi community. Further, it justified its formation by claiming to be founded in response to the absence of an independent Yezidi policy» [5]. The role of the TEVDA grew after the ISIS (banned in Russia, a terrorist organization) occupation of Sinjar; this was because the organization served as a link in the formation of the Shengal Protection Forces Vanguard (YPS).

Yezidi political participation during and after ISIS (banned in Russia, a terrorist organization)

As aforementioned, Yezidi have only three parties until 2014, namely YMRP, the Yezidi Democratic Gathering and TEVDA. After 2014, the political environment of Yezidi was totally converted to a different situation, since the area went through significant security, humanity and social difficulties. To come out from these difficulties the political Yezidi parties created alliances with either Kurds or Arab parties, for example, the Yazidi Democratic Gathering developed its relations with PUK and Lalsh Centre received assistance from the KDP. The TEVDA movement has strong relations with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Yezidi Movement for Reform and Progress built good relations with Arab national parties representing the Sunnis. This has been counted as the initial moment for the Yezidi dis-unification.

If we look at the parliamentary elections in Iraq and Kurdistan between 2005

and 2018, we can quickly conclude how the disunity of the Yazidis had a significant negative impact on themselves. In the first Iraqi National Council election, which held on December 2005, the Yezidi won 4 seats. The YMRP had one seat and three other seats were attained for Yezidi through other political parties. In 2010, Yezidis celebrated to win a high number of Iraqi parliament seats (7). Out of these 7 seats, one seat belongs YMRP, and Yezidis nominated by the Kurdistan slate won 6 seats, 2 seats for the PUK and 4 seats for the KDP. This was the first time for Yezidi to win this high number of seats [6].

But in 2014 election, the Yezidi appeared as the biggest losers of electoral seats. In that election, Yezidi won only 3 seats, two slates and one quota seat. This was due to the increase in the numbers of candidates who were splitting the vote. The Yezidi candidates for the 2014 Iraqi parliament election totalled 73, where 28 under the KDP, 21 belonged to PUK, 12 under the Democratic Civil Alliance, 3 under National Coalition, 3 under the al-Rimah al-Wataniyah, two belonged to the Yezidi Reform Movement, 2 under the Yezidi Democratic Front slate, one belongs to the Arab coalition and 1 belongs to the United for Reform.

Regarding the Kurdistan region, Yezidi has not had any independent representatives or as other minorities, the Yezidis do not have a quota seat. The Yezidi can only find their representatives among other Kurdish political parties. In the past four terms (2005, 2009, 2013 and 2018) of the regional parliament, Yezidi candidates

Table1: History of the Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress’s participation during the Iraqi parliament elections [7]

Election	Votes	%	Results
December 2005 general elections	21,908	02%	1
2010 general elections	10,171	0,1%	1
2014 election	14,910	0,1%	1
2018 election	11,141	0,1%	1
2021 election			1

running on party lists obtained between one and three seats. For example, in Kurdistan parliament election for 2018 the Yazidi could only have one candidate (Hedya Murad Haidar Alu) on the list of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. To compare the Yazidi in Iraqi parliament are more favourable, along with any seats that might attained independently, they can have one quota seat, though the court has also ordered they should have more to reflect size of the population. During the last election, it has some voice among Yazidi asked for a quota seat in Kurdistan parliament [8]. However, this has become more complicated, since; it has had strong understanding among Kurds that the Yazidi is part of Kurds ethnic. Therefore, they may have obtained all their rights within Kurds parties. In this regard, in particular, Democratic Kurdistan Parties in almost all elections have given a seat to Yazidis.

A part of the parliament, the Yazidi have rarely been present in governmental positions. During the history of Iraqi governments after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Dr Mamo Farhan Othman was the only Yazidi hold a ministerial position, who chosen to serve as the minister of Civil Society in Iyad Allawi's government.

As for the Endowment Bureaus, generally there are two departments in Iraq: one located in Bagdad on the federal government level and the other located in Erbil on the Kurdistan region's level. The Bagdad Endowment Bureaus is called the Christians and other Religions Endowment, which was founded after the issuance of a special law in 2008. This Endowment Bureaus holds the responsibility of the affairs of the Yazidi, Christians and Mandaeans, in accordance with the law approved by the Iraqi parliament in 2012 and endorsed by the presidency council. The Kurdistan Endowment Bureau is known as the Yazidi Affairs Endowment Directorate in the Kurdistan Region Government, which is in charge with all Yazidi affairs.

Since 2014, the situation of the Yazidi in Iraq has moved to another level and has become even more complicated, as the area has faced a significant wave of terrorist attacks and led to a humanitarian catastrophe (the genocide of the Yazidi, 5,000 deaths and up to 7,000 people abducted by ISIS (banned in Russia, a terrorist organization)). Before this time, almost all Yazidi's areas were controlled by Peshmerga (Kurdistan region forces), but when the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL — banned in Russia, a terrorist organization) attacked, the Peshmerga forces withdrew from Shingal (Sinjar) district. This event destroyed trust between the Yazidi population and the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government). From this point, the political situation of the Yazidi area has been going under total confused and more difficult, since different groups have jumped in, under the name of save the Yazidi, in particular the PKK (Party Krekarani Kurdistan), and Popular Mobilization Forces. This led to the emergence of new parties and militia groups among the Yazidi, and even almost all the political parties of the previous Yazidi switched from social political parties to have their own militias.

Actually, during the early ISIL (banned in Russia, a terrorist organization) attack on Shingal, PKK-linked groups played significant role to give help Yazidis' people in Iraq and Syria. The PKK-linked armed forces, mainly from Syria, promptly entered Iraq and created a corridor to help Yazidi fleeing ISIL (banned in Russia, a terrorist organization) in August 2014. Apart from this, it became clear in the long-term strategy that the PKK's intervention in the Yazidi district was not temporary or simply to save the Yazidis from a terrorist attack, while it was about creating the PKK's own strategic interests.

According to the report, which was published by the Middle East Research Institute 2017 around 6 the political parties linked to PKK are active in Shingal districts namely: Group of Communities of

Table 2: Overview of the PKK-linked political and armed structures in Syria and the Shingal district

THE PKK-LINKED POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN SYRIA AND SHINGAL DISTRICT		
Level	Syria	Shingal District
International level	Group of Communities of Kurdistan (KCK)	
Country level	Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM) the dominant force was the Democratic Union Party (PYD)	The Self-Administration Council (Meclisa Avaker a Şingalê) The dominant force is the Yazidi Party for Freedom and Democracy (PADÊ)
Regional level, i.e. 'cantonal' level	Democratic autonomous administration of Jazîra, Kobanî and Afrîn 'cantons'	Shingal is considered one 'canton', therefore, the regional level is non-existent
Local (communal) level	Local councils in villages, local councils in towns, neighbourhoods in cities	Local branches of the Meclis in towns and villages
THE PKK-LINKED ARMED STRUCTURES IN SYRIA AND SHINGAL DISTRICT		
Level	Syria	Shingal District
International level	Group of Communities of Kurdistan (KCK)	
Country level (military structures)	People's Protection Units (YPG) and the female wing Women's Protection Units (YPJ)	Sinjar Protection Units (YBŞ) and the female wing Yazidi Women's Units (YJÊ)
Country level (internal security structures)	Asayish, including special units (e.g. counter-terrorism forces)	Asayish Êzîdxan, including special units (e.g. counter-terrorism forces, such as Yazidi Special Units established in January 2017)

Source: <http://www.meri-k.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Shingal-Report.pdf> [9]

Kurdistan (KCK), The Self-Administration Council (Meclis Avaker a Şingalê), The Yazidi Party for Freedom and Democracy (PADÊ), Sinjar Protection Units (YBŞ), The Female Wing Yazidi Women's Units (YJÊ), Asayish Ezîdxan and Yazidi Special Units. [9] (look table 2)

Apart from the PKK-linked groups, The Yazidi Democratic Party, Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress, The Yazidi Democratic Gathering, Free Yazidi Democratic Movement, Lalish Centre, The Iraqi Mobilization Forces, Iraqi Federal Forces and Kurdistan Region Forces are existing in the area.

Figure 2 provides a more detailed information on how a large number of

government forces, militia groups, tribal armies, as well as political parties operate and mess up in the Sinjar region.

Abdullah Hawez published an article in April 2021 and explained this issue in detail by the fact that the Yazidi are divided along a number of ideological lines. «There are four PMF regiments, each consisting of 150 fighters — the Lalish regiment led by Khal Ali: Kocho Martyrs regiment led by Talib Jaso (son of the chief of Madikan tribe Naif Jaso): the 4th regiment led by Dijwar Faqir: and the 79th regiment led by Sheikh Marwan. Most of the 600 Yazidi PMF were formerly in the YBŞ» [10]. Look at figure 3.

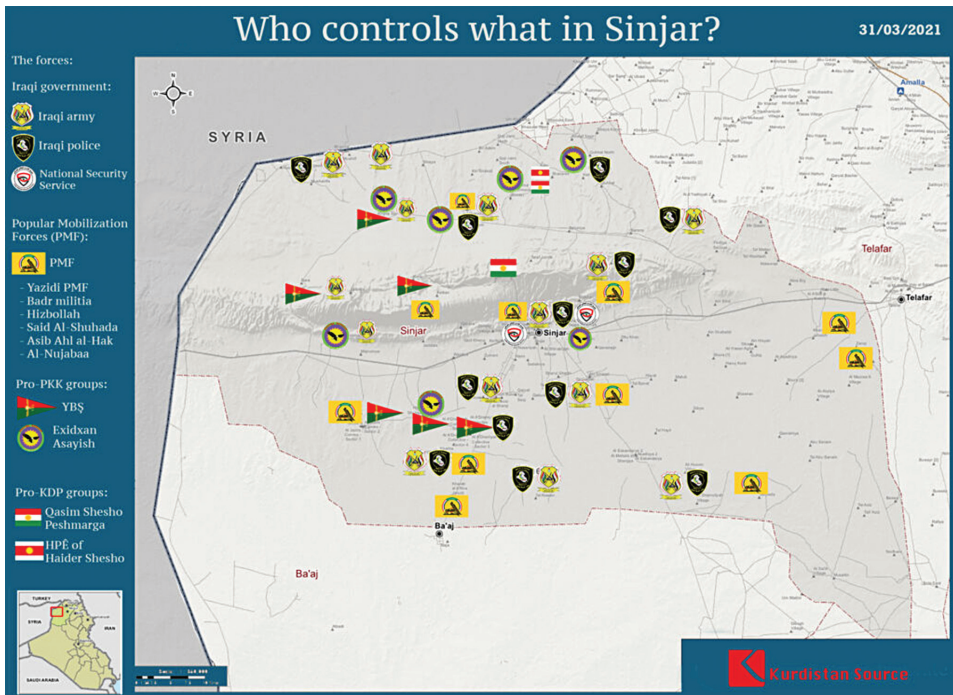


Figure 2. Who controls what in Sinjar?

Source: <https://kurdistan-source.com/how-many-yazidi-armed-groups-are-there/>

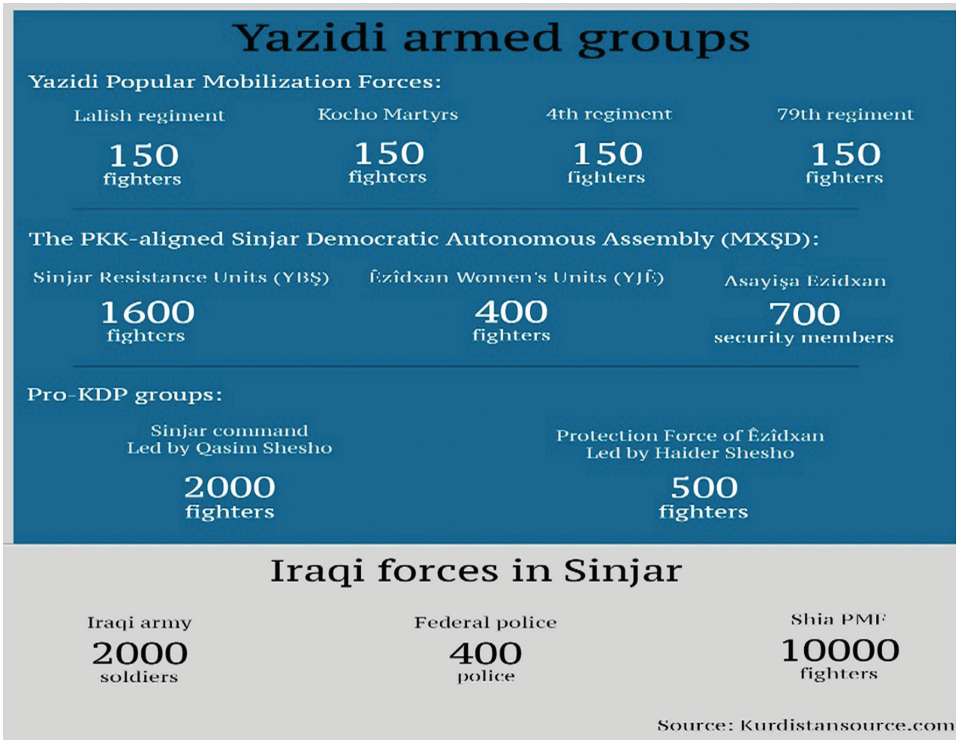


Figure 3. Yazidi Armed Groups

Source: <https://kurdistan-source.com/how-many-yazidi-armed-groups-are-there/>

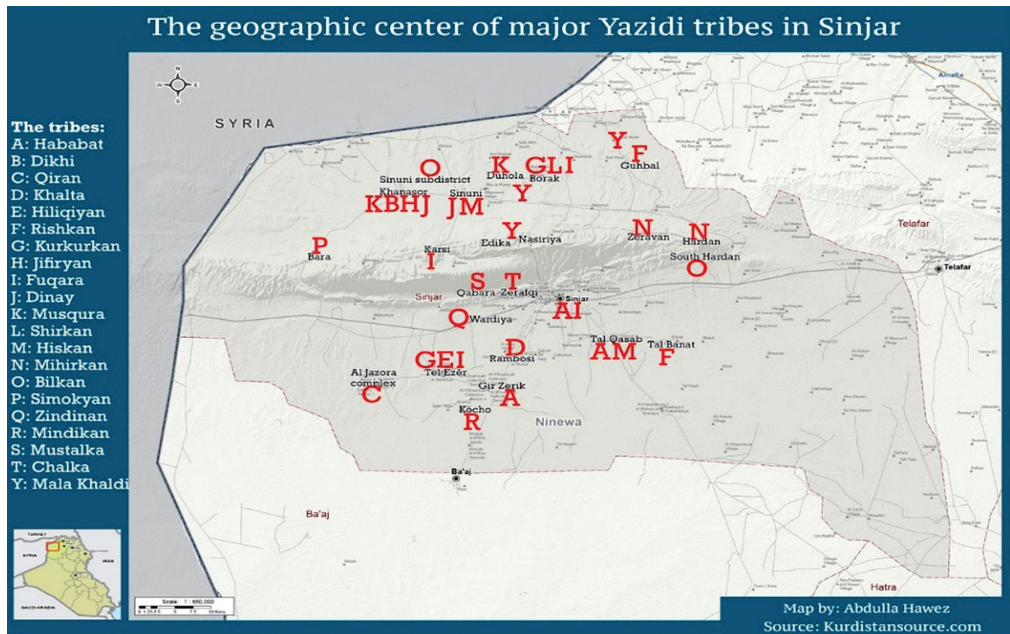


Figure 4. Tribes in Shingal

Source: <https://kurdistansource.com/how-many-yazidi-armed-groups-are-there/>

All these groups have left a significant negative impact on the political, social, economic security situations in the area. In addition, even made the process of restoring and returning displaced Yazidi to their homelands too slow and even so difficult. According to a recent assessment conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Iraq, in 2020, only 8,581 individuals returned to Sinjar. However, there are still 200,000 Yazidi displaced [11].

This has further created significant disunity among the Yazidi society. According to the Kurdistansource.com there are 21 Yazidis' tribes inhabiting Shingal district (look Figure. 4). Each tribe has its own head (sheikh), who is critical to making final decisions in the tribe. After 2014, there was significant disunity among these tribes, as each of them followed and showed sympathy for the agenda of various political parties and militia groups. For example, Hababat, one of the largest tribes, supports the pro-PKK groups. The Hababat members

constitute a large proposition of the fighters of the Asayisha Ezidixan and YBS. The other 4 largest tribes are the Fuqara, Qiran, Khalta and Simokyan. The Qiran tribe has sympathy for YBS. But Khalta is divided into two lines: «One of the most influential sheikhs, Khalid Dakhil Sedo, is aligned with the KDP, but other Fuqara sheikhs such as Naif Shamo Khudida (great-grandson of renowned nineteenth century Yazidi leader Hamo Sharo), and Shamo Khudida Abdo, who leads another branch, support the YBS and PMF». The other tribes are mostly allied with the KDP, although a small portion stand with the PUK.

This has risen significantly concerning in the region. To bring some sort of security to the area repeatedly the KRG and the Iraqi federal government asked PKK and other militia groups to leave the Sinjar (Shingal). The demand for the PKK-linked forces to withdraw have intensified over time with former KRG's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani suggesting in December 2016 that the KRG might

resort to military force against the PKK in the Shingal district. On March 3, 2017, clashes between the Peshmerga and the PKK-linked forces occurred near the town of Khanasor resulting in several deaths and many wounded.

The attempt further intensified in October 2020, the Iraq Federal Government and KRG signed an agreement to bring back security and forced out all forces from Shingal [12]. The main aim behind this agreement to pull out all militia and group force out of Shingal. In this regard, the PKK by itself or through the its-linked group created various obstacles in front of the agreement implementation. Even the PKK encouraged the heads of tribes (Sheikhs) to take an action and stand against the agreement. For example, the leading Qirani sheikh, Khidhir Haji Mirza, «was among a delegation that visited Baghdad to stand against the Baghdad-Erbil agreement and urge Iraqi officials to formalise the YBS's integration into the Iraqi security forces» [13]. Until writing this article July 2022, the PKK, either by itself or through pro-linked groups have not allowed the agreement come to force.

In addition, the disunity of political parties and movements in the Yazidi region, in addition to local instability, helped the foreigner to intervene in the situation. For example, the state of Turkey has officially announced that if the PKK continues to exist in this area, they will intervene and take measures against them [14]. Even recently, the number of Shiite groups close to Iran has increased in this area and has established good relations with the PKK. According to some political observers, the Shiites took advantage of the security instability in the area and intensified their attempts to complete their historical mythical plan of the Shiite Crescent. It is supposed to start from Yemen and then through the gulf countries, Iran, Iraq, Syria and concluded in Lebanon [15]. Regarding the Iraqi land, this project was supposed to go through the Yazidis area.

Future politics

The above narrative all highlights the political process of Yazidi in Iraq, which has gone through to get to where it is now. While the journey has been long and uncertain, generally, the Yazidi has gone through some point but still needs to do more to reach the end.

Apart from 2014s the humanitarian catastrophic (genocide, abducting, refugees and destroyed homeland), the Yazidi has recently faced significant difficulty. In a historical point of view, the Iraqi Yazidi did not have any political movements; they were found all their religious, social, political and cultural activities around the Emiri institution headed by Emir Tahseen Beg and the Yazidi Spiritual Council before 2003. But recently, when all these movements exist, the situation has become more complicated, and it seems that it is even quite difficult for the Yazidi to find a demand for their right, since their representative members in the Iraqi parliament have significantly decreased (in 2010, the Yazidis had 7 representatives, in 2014–3, in 2018 they had only 2 representatives and for 2021 they had obtained only one seat).

But recently more than 7 different officials and groups are active in Yazidi areas. This, as already mentioned, makes the situation more difficult and even gives chance to emerge new political movements and foreign interventions. The reasons for this can be explained, firstly, by the fact that the Yazidis have lost confidence in the Kurdistan region due to what happened in 2014. Additionally, there is a deep distrust between many Arabs, Yazidis and Kurds in Sinjar [Shingal]. As for the Yazidi, during 2014, some Arab tribes (neighbour of Yazidi) helped and guided the ISIS to demolish the Yazidi, and then in this difficult situation, the Kurdish forces left the Yazidis without protection [16]; secondly, the process of reconstruction of Yazidi area is too slow, and even in those areas where people still live, the most basic services are not existing; thirdly, it is very difficult for people to find a job, the

level of poverty in Iraq in general is too high 31.7%, this is much higher in Shingal [17]. According to the report published in 2020 by the EASO, 11% of Iraqi people depended on Agriculture to live [18]. The land in Shingal and around the city of Mosul is very suitable for cultivating. Before 2014 the Yezidi were very widely cultivated their lands, but for now they cannot use their areas since they lack security. Therefore, people are looking for other opportunities, the job opportunities can only be only found within political or militia groups; fourthly, under the name of self-defense, people can have weapons very easily. Finally, it has significant social disunity among the Yezidis' tribes, since each parties and groups drown the tension of the tribes. The groups and political parties encouraged these tribes to conduct according their political wishes.

As Rania Abouzeid 2018 mentioned, Sinjar or Shingal stretches across myriad and security fault lines, this is caught between the competing interests' Iraqi federal government and Kurdistan Regional government, Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and PKK's affiliates, Shia militia (Popular Mobilizations forces) and other paramilitary forces. Some of these groups directly supported by local and regional supports such as Turkey, Iran, USA, Syria and Hezbollah (Lebanon) and this gives these counties to directly intervene in the situation of Singar.

Based on all the above explanations we can reach the fact, the current situation is under significant difficulties, and has a great chance for any time to have another war in the area. It is possible to take a birth for new political parties or militia groups.

To overcome this situation, we are here rise number of suggestions:

1. Iraqi government should have reconstructed the area, automatically this helps find job opportunity in the area

2. Provide security in the area, in particular for agriculture land to encouraged farmers to turn back to their lands

3. Returning trust among tribes in area, this can be done through providing mutual activities among tribes.

4. Limiting foreigner fighter's intervention in to the area such as PKK, PJAK, or any others. Even bring the local fighters, such as the Iraqi Mobilization Forces, far from the area.

5. The people defence and security should be only under government forces, and limit weapons in hand on people in any names.

Conclusion

This article studied the political situation of Yezidis in Iraq. It explained that the Yezidi historically were not so active in political movements, in particular before 2003, all their political and social structures were collected under a certain extent and were represented by the Emiri institution headed by Emir Tahseen Beg and the Yezidi Spiritual Council. Nevertheless, since the Iraq liberated, some voices raised among Yezidis that they are an independent community; therefore, they should have their own independent party to obtain and protect their rights inside Iraq as well as inside Kurdistan region. From this point the Yezidi started to establish some parties, but were not active. After 2014, the Yezidi genocide, the number of Yezidis' political parties have unexpectedly emerged. The Yezidi area is deeply messed up with large number of armed groups and political parties. This article finds out around 12 groups and political parties are actively operating their activities.

This has been negative resulting on social, economic, security and the rights of Yezidi. Even it leads to the situation that Yezidi unable to properly asked and protect their rights inside the Iraqi and Kurdistan region parliament. It has helped, apart from inside groups, the foreigners to intervene the situation such as the PKK, Turkey and Iran.

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