

Yazidis, displaced again, fear more strife in Iraqi homeland

Author:

Wed, 2022-05-04 23:22

ZAKHO, Iraq: Iraqis in a northern town still traumatized by memories of the Daesh group feared more violence Tuesday after hostilities between the military and a local militia erupted, people internally displaced by the fighting said.

Tensions reached a fever pitch when Iraq's military launched an offensive in Sinjar district on Sunday to clear out armed elements of the YBS, a local militia comprising largely minority Yazidis.

The YBS has ties to the insurgent Kurdistan Worker's Party, or PKK, a separatist movement banned in Turkey.

The heavy fighting prompted over 3,000 people, most of them Yazidis, to flee toward the Kurdish-run north. It wasn't clear if there were any dead or wounded in the fighting: Iraqi officials have released no figures and have not commented on casualties.

Fighting ceased Tuesday and the Iraqi army said it had re-established control of Sinjar. But the violence and subsequent displacement dealt a blow to Baghdad's efforts to encourage more Yazidis to return to their ancestral homeland after years of war.

An agreement was brokered by the United Nations in October 2020 between Baghdad and the Kurdish-run government to implement order in the area. Under that agreement, the federal police are the sole state authority.

The accord has not proven successful. Critics have said this is because it did not consult powerful local forces in Sinjar or even Yazidi leaders. Local residents, who also include Arab Sunnis, are also deeply divided.

Lt. Gen. Abdul-Amir Al-Shammari, deputy commander of Iraq's Joint Operations Command, told a news conference in Sinjar that Iraqi forces have imposed security and law and order and have opened all the roads in the district.

"The goal of these operations was to impose the (rule of) law and security to secure a safe environment so that we can rebuild Sinjar and return the displaced."

But Yazidis, many displaced now for a second time, are reluctant to return.

Most of the displaced fled north to the Kurdish-run region where they were distributed across different camps. Many first fled in 2014 after IS's brutal onslaught and returned in recent years to rebuild their homes.

The memories are still fresh in Sewe's mind. His was among the dozens of

families who made their way to the Chemishko camp in Zakho on Monday. He only gave The Associated Press his first name.

“It is the second time that we escaped,” he said. “We don’t know where to go, we don’t have a place to go, and we don’t know where we are going now.”

The YBS was created in 2014 with assistance from the PKK. They proved instrumental in driving out IS elements from the area after the collapse of the Iraqi army. The YBS has since remained a powerful local force in the area, citing deep mistrust of the federal government forces deployed to protect the area.



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For Iraq’s persecuted Yazidis, return plan is fraught with risk
Displaced Yazidis head back to Sinjar as lockdown bites

[Expats prepare to vote, marking the start of Lebanon elections](#)

Wed, 2022-05-04 19:28

BEIRUT: Lebanese expats voting on Friday will inaugurate the first phase of

this month's parliamentary elections.

Expats will vote in 59 countries, but just 10 nations will commence the first phase of voting on Friday. The expats in these countries, which include Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Syria and Iraq, have a Friday weekend.

The second phase of voting takes place on May 8 in countries that have a Sunday weekend.

The elections in Lebanon will take place on May 15 with candidates competing in 15 districts in all of the governorates and districts to select new representatives for 128 parliamentary seats.

The term of the current parliament, elected four years ago, will end on May 21.

The code of conduct for candidates and media outlets comes into force 24 hours before the vote.

All means of invitation, intimidation and sectarian polarization have been used by the ruling parties to ensure their continuation in parliament, defeating tireless attempts by the opposition to turn the tables.

Regions with Christian influence top the list of candidates, with 269 registered in Mount Lebanon and 292 in the north.

The south, a region with a Shiite majority, has the lowest rate of candidacy, with just 105 standing, while Beirut registered 174 and the Bekaa region 203.

Nadim Abdelmalak, president of Lebanon's supervisory commission for elections, criticized "the chaotic opinion polls that claim the victory of one candidate and the failure of another, despite the warnings sent by the commission to those concerned. The election requires every opinion poll prepared for the announcement to be provided to the commission."

Abdelmalak criticized "the magnitude of hate speech and treason, given that the electoral law requires that such rhetoric be mitigated, steering away from abasement, revilement, incitement to sectarian conflict and sometimes terrorism, perhaps used to reinforce sectarianism."

The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections said that money has been spent to buy loyalties to secure victory, in addition to providing aid, promises and electoral bribes.

The association added that violence, pressure tactics, influence, public resources, racist and sectarian rhetoric, libel and defamation had all been used by some candidates seeking an electoral advantage.

Intimidation began in the Sarafand region of southern Lebanon to prevent opponents of Shiite groups Hezbollah and the Amal Movement from announcing their candidacy.

Intimidation was also exercised in the northern Bekaa region by the same duo

against other Shiite candidates, including Sheikh Abbas Al-Jawhari. Gunshots and rockets were fired in an electoral meeting he held.

Candidate Hassan Raad was beaten at a religious gathering in Baalbek. The Amal Movement and Hezbollah have previously pushed some families to disown female candidates participating in competing lists.

As a result, three Shiite candidates – Ramez Amhaz, Hayman Mchayek and Rifaat Al-Masri – withdrew from the election.

Intimidation also took place in the northern region of Jbeil. An unidentified drone was seen hovering over the district of candidate Faris Saeed, who opposes Hezbollah and the Iranian influences in Lebanese politics. A car was also spotted around his house in Qartaba allegedly monitoring his activities.

The inciteful atmosphere reached the highest level when Sheikh Nazir Jishi called for the election of Hezbollah's candidates and attacked the Lebanese Forces Party, using derogatory terms against women in predominantly Christian tourist areas, to the extent that he was renounced by Hezbollah and the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council.

The visits of Gebran Bassil, president of the Free Patriotic Movement, to some regions have been met with popular denunciations against the backdrop of Bassil's alliance with Hezbollah. During his visit to the northern Lebanese region of Akkar, Bassil's convoy was blocked, and images and signs of the party were burned, escalating into a violent clash.

Sunni voters are divided into two categories. The first, with the majority being loyal supporters of Saad Hariri's Future Movement, will abstain from voting, whereas the second group says there is a chance for change, noting that the Sunni scene controls more than half of the electoral districts in Lebanon.

Hassan Nasrallah, chief of Hezbollah, described the vote as "the most important political battle in Lebanon." In March, he stressed that "it's important for all Hezbollah's MPs to win and that we should work toward obtaining the majority."



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200 European observers to monitor Lebanese elections; Aoun warns of low voter turnout
Lebanese expats angry with Beirut over potential internet collapse

[UNESCO, UN Human Rights Office call on Houthis to 'immediately' release staff members](#)

Wed, 2022-05-04 18:07

LONDON: UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) called on Wednesday for the Houthis to release two of their staff members.

“As families across Yemen gather to mark Eid Al-Fitr this year, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet urge the immediate release of two of their staff members who have been detained since early November last year in Sana’a,” the two organizations said in a joint statement.

“Despite repeated assurances, as early as last November, by the Ansar Allah movement (also called the Houthis) that the two staff members would be immediately released, their whereabouts remain unknown,” it added.

UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Office said they were both “deeply concerned” about the well-being of the staff members.

“In this context, the UN Human Rights Office and UNESCO urge the (Houthis) to ensure the well-being of the two concerned staff members and to release them without any further delay,” the statement said.

“Under international law, UN staff are accorded privileges and immunities, which are essential to the proper discharge of their official functions.”



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Yemen Minister: Houthi militia raid WFP warehouse, kidnap 2 UN staff members
Secretary-General ‘deeply concerned’ about two UN staff members detained by Houthis in Sanaa

Arab nations to mull best prosecutorial practices at top European conference

Wed, 2022-05-04 15:57

ROME: Delegates from Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia will attend the European Conference of Prosecutors in Palermo on May 5 and 6 organized by the Council of Europe and the Italian government, to discuss several critical issues including the independence of the judiciary and fighting transnational crimes.

The conference will host representatives from all the CEO's member states. Delegates from Canada, the Holy See, Kazakhstan and the US will also take part in the event.

The symposium will focus on the independence and accountability of public prosecutors, co-operation in the investigation of transnational crimes, including a focus on offences related to the abuse of the environment, and the misuse of information technology.

"We are particularly interested in hearing the contributions from our colleagues from Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia so that we can share and implement with them best practices especially on protection of human rights," Antonio Balsamo, president of the tribunal of Palermo and judge of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo, told Arab News.

The plenary session will be held in the "Bunker Courtroom" built in the capital of Sicily especially to host Mafia trials. It will be chaired by COE Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić.

Italian president Sergio Mattarella will attend the event. The interior and justice ministers of Italy Luciana Lamorgese and Marta Cartabia will moderate working sessions.

Recognizing the essential role of the public prosecutor in the criminal justice system of a state governed by the rule of law, the COE Committee of Ministers decided in July 2005 to institutionalize the regular organization of conferences of prosecutors general of Europe and established the Consultative Council of European Prosecutors.

This consultative body to the Committee of Ministers is composed of high-level prosecutors of all member states.

The conference has the task of preparing opinions for the ministerial committee on issues related to the prosecution service, to promote the implementation of COE recommendations, and to collect information about the

functioning of such services in Europe and neighboring countries, including North African states.

During the conference, the 30th anniversary of the killing of top anti-Mafia prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino will be commemorated.

Falcone and Borsellino were killed by the Mob with car bombs in Palermo, the capital of Sicily, in May and July 1992 respectively.



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Sicilian judge Sergio Mattarella elected Italian president
Italian president extends 'warmest wishes' for Eid Al-Fitr

[Years after Daesh defeat, northern Iraq struggles to rebuild](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-05-03 23:25

HABASH, Iraq: In Iraq, "maku" means "nothing," and father-of-five Issa Al-Zamzoum says "maku" a lot: no electricity, no home, no rebuilding and no job. Eight years after heavy fighting between Daesh terrorists and the army, the reconstruction of his war-ravaged village in northern Iraq is at a standstill.

"There is nothing here, no electricity," 42-year-old Zamzoum sighed. "Even work, there is none."

Zamzoum lives with his wife and family in Habash, some 180 kilometers (110 miles) north of the capital Baghdad, a village dotted with dozens of bomb-blasted houses still ruined from intense fighting in 2014.

Part of their roof, which caved in during the bombardment, still lies in crumbling and bullet-scarred wreckage.

In one room, a hen watches over her chicks. In another, filthy mattresses are piled up against the wall.

The building does not even belong to Zamzoum: his own home was left uninhabitable.

While the Baghdad government eventually celebrated military "victory" over Daesh in December 2017, the scale of destruction was immense.

"Reconstruction? We do not see it," Zamzoum said gloomily. "Nothing has happened since the war."

Habash paid a heavy price during Daesh's siege of Amerli, a town less than 10 kilometers away.

In 2014, the jihadists, who controlled the key northern city of Mosul and surrounding areas, moved south to attack Amerli, using surrounding settlements such as Habash as bases for their assault.

The combined forces of the Iraqi army, Shiite militias and Kurdish forces launched a counterattack to break the siege with gruelling street fighting, and Daesh forces were pushed out.

But for residents of the already hard-hit area, it was not the end of their suffering.

According to Human Rights Watch, after the siege "pro-government militias and volunteer fighters as well as Iraqi security forces raided Sunni villages and neighborhoods" surrounding Amerli, including Habash.

HRW used satellite imagery to map "heavy smoke plumes of building fires, likely from arson attacks" in the village.

Today, nearly 20,000 people displaced by the conflict need aid in the area, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council, an aid agency.

"Humanitarian needs are significant," the NRC said.

As well as basic needs like clean water and electricity, even obtaining identity papers is a challenge for many.

"Many people have been displaced across governorates and face major barriers to travel to obtain civil documents," the NRC said.

"Others face security clearance issues related to perceived affiliation with the Islamic State" group, it added.

Like most of the residents of Habash, Zamzoum's neighbor Abdelkarim Nouri is a Sunni Muslim.

In Shiite-majority Iraq, Sunnis have sometimes been viewed with distrust, suspected of being complicit in past support of the extremists.

Daesh jihadists follow a radical interpretation of Sunni beliefs.

"Our life is a shame," Nouri said. "I don't have a job. I have five sheep, and they are the ones who keep me alive."

He said he had appealed to his member of parliament for support, but nothing had changed.

Nouri does not mention religion or talk of sectarianism – a deeply sensitive topic in a country where tens of thousands of people died during bloody inter-religious conflict in 2006-2008.

Now, over four years since the end of Daesh's self-proclaimed "caliphate" in Iraq, many Sunnis say they are victims of harassment and discrimination. A US State Department report last year cited concerns among Sunni officials that "government-affiliated Shia (Shiite) militia continued to forcibly displace Sunnis."

The report quoted officials describing "random arrests of Sunnis in areas north of Baghdad" and detentions made on suspicion of Daesh links.

In Salaheddin province, where Habash is located, officials speak of "security risks" which are delaying reconstruction – without mentioning Daesh jihadists by name.

While Habash is under government control, the militants still operate just 15 kilometers further north.

On the road that leads to the village of Bir Ahmed, forces of the Hashed Al-Shaabi – a Shiite-led former paramilitary coalition now integrated into Iraq's state security apparatus – stand guard.

"The situation in Bir Ahmed is beyond our control and that of the army," a senior officer said. "You can get in, but I can't guarantee you can get out."



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Iraq yet again hit by dust storm 19th century Iraq church holds first Mass

since Daesh defeat