

The Yazidis

There Is No Going Back to the Time
Before the Genocide



**PRO
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Imprint

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Published: April 2024

Cover: Yazidi IDPs in Kabarto camp near Dohuk, © Thomas v. der Osten-Sacken

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Stop Deporting Yazidis back to Iraq

Between the devil and the deep blue sea. Rarely has a saying captured the multitude of equally terrible options that are the reality of the Yazidis in northern Iraq. Since the genocide in 2014, the Sinjar area, where they have lived for centuries, has become a dangerous hotspot in which state and non-state actors, mostly with weapons, ruthlessly fight for power and influence. In the strategically important border area between Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran, interests collide - with no solution in sight.

And the situation is changing constantly. There have already been changes between the writing and publication (April 2024) of this report: in those short weeks, the Iraqi and Turkish governments agreed on joint action against the PKK, which is likely to have a lasting impact on the security situation in northern Iraq.

The messy, complicated situation and the deep background are explained in this report published by PRO ASYL and Wadi. We thank the editor Dr. Oliver M. Piecha for this impressive presentation. The aim of this report is to close an information gap and create a basis for qualified decisions on the future of the Yazidi community in Germany. Germany has the [largest Yazidi](#) diaspora in Europe, with around 250,000 people; they have found a new home here, especially in Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia (Celle, Oldenburg, Bielefeld). Germany has a special responsibility here, one that should not be taken lightly.

The Yazidi community became the focus of global attention in mid-2014 when the terrorist organization Islamic State (IS) systematically murdered, enslaved, and raped Yazidi women, men and children. The entire German Bundestag recognized these crimes as genocide on January 19, 2023. Tens of thousands of Yazidis in Germany drew hope from this act of political solidarity. Hope, which soon turned into fear and terror.

Just a few months later, the first German federal states began deporting Yazidis to Iraq in light of [increasing cooperation with Iraq](#). At the same time there were court rulings that there was no longer any group-specific persecution in Iraq. These two events had the effect of Yazidis who had been promised asylum and safety in Germany now being deported to the country of their genocide. To be deported to a country in which at least 200,000 Yazidis in northern Iraq still live

in tent camps with no prospects. A country where they no longer have a source of livelihood, in which they encounter former perpetrators and constantly feel threatened. Deportation to a country in which a Yazidi family cannot freely move to another city or regions because there they would be alone, without the vital protection of a community. To be deported to a country where they are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea – through no fault of their own.

This report is expressly about the Yazidis as a group, whose homeland was systematically destroyed - and that is also what genocide is all about. This also distinguishes them from many others from the Middle East who are fleeing war and destruction: IS did not just want to kill Yazidis, but to obliterate Yazidis from all existence. And so with every deportation from Germany to Iraq, the fear grows that not only individuals will be forcibly torn from their new home and sent into an uncertain future, but that the Yazidi collective existence is also threatened.

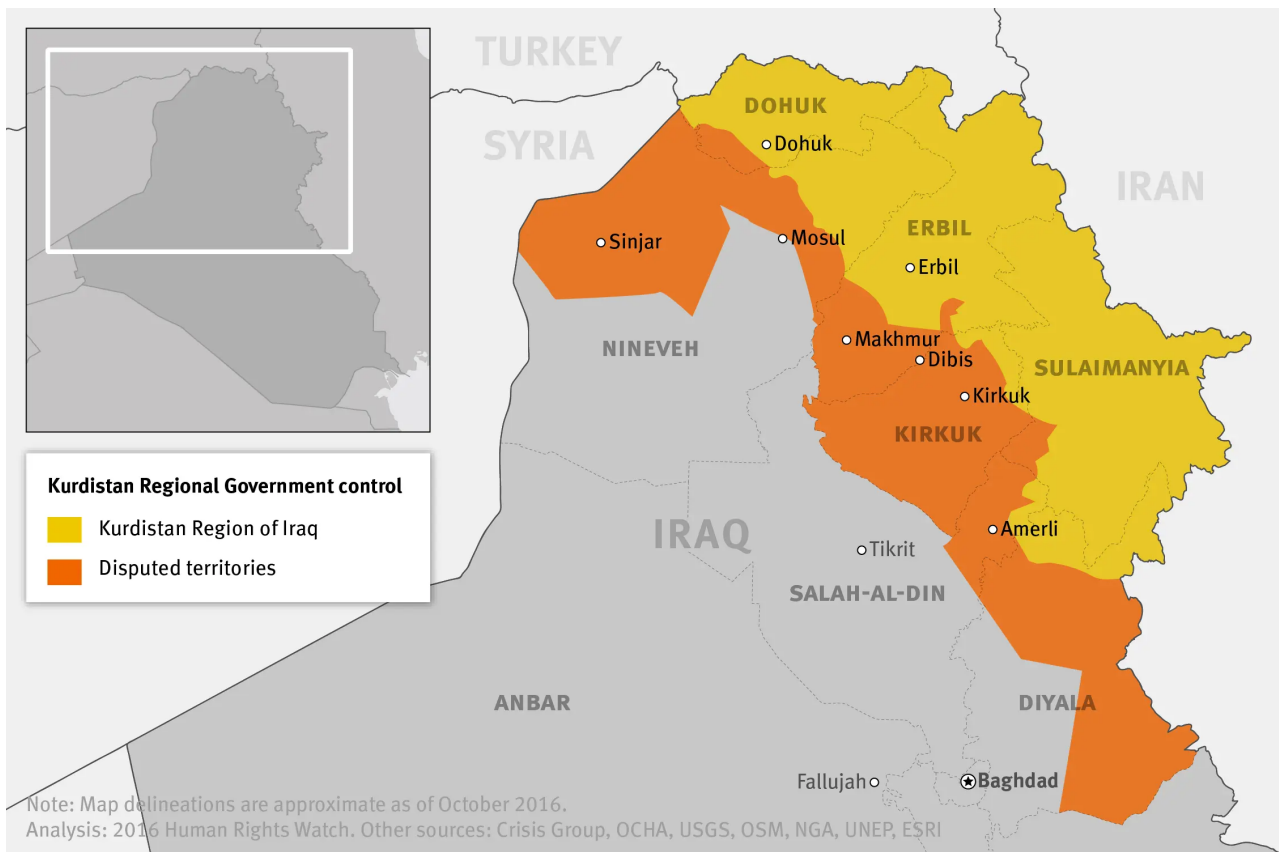
The Bundestag [resolution](#) states: "The diaspora is part of our society with all of its experiences and memories. The German Bundestag will work vigorously to protect Yezidi life in Germany and their human rights worldwide." If the Bundestag in Berlin recognizes a genocide a few hundred meters from the Holocaust memorial, it should take the resulting responsibility seriously. This would also be an important signal for other European countries.

That's why politicians' good words must now be followed by good actions: people who have been recognized as victims of genocide must not be deported to the country where the genocide occurred. That is why there must be an immediate nationwide ban on deportations for Yazidis so that tens of thousands of Yazidis do not have to continue to live in fear of deportation. In addition, they must be given a permanent and secure perspective, for example a residence permit for international law and humanitarian reasons in accordance with Section 23 of the Residence Act. Germany must give the Yazidis security, especially after recognizing them as victims of genocide.

Because after a genocide there is no going back to the time before.

Karl Kopp (Managing Director PRO ASYL)

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Introduction

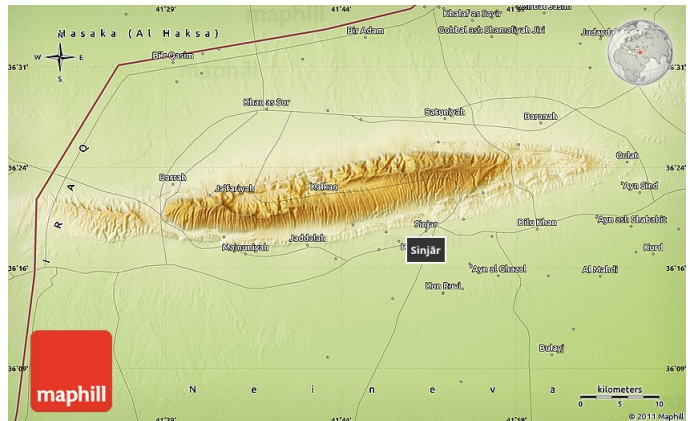
The Sinjar, ancestral origin of the Yazidis, is a strategically important border area where the interests of numerous actors, including Iran and Turkey, collide. The security situation here, which was always precarious, will not fundamentally change as long as the conflict in Syria has not found a solution. The overwhelming majority of Yazidis that were originally driven out by the Islamic State, are still living in refugee camps in Iraq that were set up as emergency relief in 2014/15.

Even if the overall situation in a country like Iraq may stabilize, one must differentiate regionally and take into account the specific circumstances to understand the case of the Yazidis. For the Yazidis, future prospects in Iraq remain bleak for the time being.

- The ideological-religious justification for the discrimination and persecution of the Yazidis is based on the fact that, from the Muslim Orthodox perspective, they are not considered a “religion of the book” and therefore their right to exist as a religious group has been and is continuously denied. This

fundamental non-acceptance of the Yazidi religion led to attempts at forced religious assimilation in the Ottoman Empire and was the basis of a long, continuous history of persecution culminating in the attack by the “Islamic State”.

- The main settlement area of the Yazidis in Iraq, the district around the city and the Sinjar (Shingal) mountain range, will continue to be the focus of political and military conflicts with non-Iraqi actors as long as the situation in the larger region, including Syria, does not fundamentally change.



The area is of central strategic importance in the conflict between various parties (state and non-state) in Syria, Iraq, but also Turkey and Iran.

- The fate of the Yazidis is a bleak example of the reality that genocide creates. There is no “going back” to the time before. In an area characterized by minorities and numerous lines of conflict, the Islamic State's genocide has torn apart the already fragile social fabric. Traumatized victims are confronted with neighbors who could have been potential perpetrators of the genocide against their own – and the threat of them potentially becoming perpetrators again is always there.
- A selective reconstruction of destroyed houses and restoration of parts of the infrastructure at a low level cannot even communicate a symbolic meaning of the ‘return to normal’ when the security situation remains permanently unstable and military conflicts can escalate at any time. As long as the region remains the strategic focus of so many actors, the consistent and lasting restoration of Iraqi state sovereignty will not succeed. This applies in particular to the Sinjar Agreement of 2020, which has not been implemented to date, or the Iraqi government's announcement in February 2024 that it would end support for the remaining camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northern Iraq with the intent that this closure would encourage Yazidis to return to Sinjar. These are nothing more than announcements and declarations of intent.

- A central error in the assessment of the Yazidi problem is the focus on topicality: Even if there is currently no organized persecution of the Yazidis – the feeling among them is having survived this particular pogrom, but fearing the next. Everyone, both the Yazidis as members of a particularly vulnerable minority and any potential perpetrators, know that the Iraqi state's promise of protection is only a very relative and hypothetical one. And as long as the central government has weak authority, especially in the disputed areas, it will remain that way. The Yazidis of Sinjar experienced the cruel logic behind the relativity of security promises in 2014, when the Kurdish KDP fighters who controlled the area withdrew literally overnight, leaving the Yazidis defenseless. These are not questions of theoretical consideration – the lack of trust in state authorities is based on a violent, experienced reality.
- Relevant security guarantees, self-administration, functioning law enforcement measures and compensation processes, a clarification of the status of the “disputed areas”, in particular their political classification, as provided for in the Iraqi constitution, the demilitarization of the various militias: the question of a future for Yazidis in Iraq can only be addressed when these basic requirements are first discussed or met.

The Yazidis in Iraq and on the Run – A History of Problems

The Yazidis (other spellings include Yezidis, Ezidis) are a monotheistic religious community whose settlement areas were (or are) in southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq and northeastern Syria. Their historical origins are obscure, there are references to ancient Iranian elements in their religion. The Yazidis see themselves as a very old religion, whose origins lie before Christ (BC). However, they only become historically tangible from the 11th/12th century. Various influences can be identified in the Yazidi faith, such as (Muslim) Sufism. The Yazidi religious traditions were passed down exclusively orally until modern times; there is no “holy book”. You become a “real” Yazidi by birth and by having both paternal and maternal descent. Yazidis are often identified as Kurds, also because of their mostly Kurdish language; there have also been efforts, for example in Iraq, to identify them as Arabs. Parts of the Yazidi community define themselves as an independent people.ⁱ Power relations are always reflected in the respective external and self-determinations. All of these parameters, linguistic, cultural, religious, sociological, that define who is a “Yezidi” have had a decisive influence on the historical and contemporary fate of the Yazidi community:

- Yazidis lived scattered in settlement areas, which tended to be in remote or inaccessible areas for protection.
- Yazidis have been discriminated against and repeatedly attacked and persecuted because of their religion for centuries. This also includes efforts to force conversions to Islam, such as forced participation in Muslim religious education in Turkey in the 1980s.
- Their survival strategy as a community consisted of rigorous isolation with strict endogamy (the ban on marriage with outsiders corresponds to separation by caste on the inside).
- As a relatively small group – with perhaps a million members todayⁱⁱ - which only began to write down its religious texts and teachings in modern times, and in which oral tradition and very complex social relationships play the central role in religious practice, the continued existence of Yazidi culture and religion is, at least for the time being, dependent on settlement areas.
- Since the onset of modernity in the Middle East – and with it the idea of nationalism – Yazidis have repeatedly been forced to position themselves nationally and ethnically, or have been positioned accordingly without being asked. This intensified their history of persecution in the 20th century.

The most serious event in recent Yazidi history is the attack by the Islamic State (IS) in 2014 on the central Yazidi settlement area around the Sinjar mountain range in northern Iraq.ⁱⁱⁱ "Sinjar" (in Kurdish Shingal) here means both the mountain, the district and the central city of the area. During their attack, the Islamists killed between 5,000 and 10,000 mainly male Yazidis, but also massacred practically the entire population in places where no one managed to escape. The majority of the Yazidis of Sinjar, estimated to be around 400,000 people in total, were able to escape in a dramatic way (through a corridor kept clear by PKK/YPG fighters) to the Kurdish region in northern Syria, from where they traveled via Turkey to the Kurdish Autonomous Region (KRG) of Iraq. The majority of these people still live in the camps that opened in 2014 which were built primarily in the north of the Kurdish autonomous region.^{iv} While military aid to rescue the Yazidis was very hesitant and limited, their fate subsequently received a great deal of international attention. This was due to the systematic enslavement of at least 7,000 Yazidi girls and women and their organized sexual abuse by the jihadists. To this day, abducted women and girls are still being ransomed, and around 2,700 are still missing. The crimes committed by IS against the Yazidis were recognized as genocide by the German Bundestag in January 2023.

However, the Islamic State's monstrous crime did not come out of nowhere. In order to adequately understand the significance of the events of 2014 and their consequences, their historical context must be taken into account. In their traditional history, the Yazidis themselves counted 74 attacks of a destructive nature on their community, which were carried out by state or other powerful actors.^v Enslavements, abductions of children, sexual violence, pogroms and forced assimilation have been recurring experiences of this community since the early modern period. Flights and expulsions have also occurred again and again: As part of the genocide against the Armenians during the First World War, Yazidis from what is now eastern Turkey had to escape to the Caucasus and what is now Armenia, where they still form a lively Yazidi diaspora today.

The history of the lead up to the attack on Sinjar in 2014 also includes the harassment of the Yazidis under the rule of Saddam Hussein. Perceived as "Kurdish", they were subject to an Arabization policy, in which village names were changed. But it didn't stop there: up to 400 villages and settlements in Sinjar have been destroyed since the 1960s, and their residents have been resettled in "model villages" or "collective towns", which were located in a wide area in the flat land around the mountain range and were therefore easier for the central government to control. This Sinjar settlement structure, which itself was already an expression of a policy of repression, made it easier for the Islamists to carry out their attack in 2014. The further away the attacked Yazidi communities were from the mountain range, the more difficult their escape became.

While the IS fighters were able to be driven out of Sinjar again in 2015/16, there was only a partial and selective return of the refugee population. The reasons for this are explained below. But it can essentially, be boiled down to the precarious security situation in Sinjar which continues to prevent Yazidis from returning to this day. The defeat of the Islamists was immediately followed by further new conflicts in the region. After almost ten years, up to 280,000 Yazidis are still living in refugee camps in northern Iraq with no prospects.^{vi} According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Sinjar area is badly destroyed; 80% of the city of Sinjar and its surroundings and public infrastructure and 70% of private homes are affected. Agriculture, the people's main livelihood before the IS attack, has been affected by the systematic destruction of all facilities.^{vii} For several years now, funds have been flowing into the region for reconstruction – at least in theory. What funds go where is a completely different question.

The most striking result of the discrimination and persecution of the Yazidis in the 20th century and especially in the past decades is that they barely live where they once mainly lived 50 years ago. The big exception was Iraq, until 2014, where the main Yazidi settlement areas are still located. But Yazidis have largely disappeared as a prominent minority from Turkey and Syria. In Syria they have been affected by the massive flight of refugees since 2012/13; the exodus of Yazidis from Turkey dates back to the time when Yazidis came to Germany as guest workers and as refugees from the 1980s onwards.^{viii} It is questionable whether the term diaspora still captures the point here; Among Yazidis in the northern Iraqi camps you hear the phrase “the new homeland is Germany” again and again.^{ix} In fact, with between 200,000 and 300,000 Yazidis living here, the Federal Republic of Germany is now the community's global settlement center after Iraq. Yazidi culture and religion will inevitably change as part of this large-scale migration, but to ensure cultural and religious continuities, Yazidis seek community. A significant number live in the region around Celle, Germany.

It's hard to avoid the question of whether or not the Yazidis have a long-term future in Iraq. This is not an abstract question; both the number of Yazidis who have left Iraq (and Turkey and Syria before that) and examples of other Iraqi minorities inspire this question. There is the exodus of various Christian groups, especially the Assyrians from the Nineveh Plain, and the Mandaeans are an example of an ethno-religious group that has largely left Iraq over the past twenty years.^x

The Disputed Areas of Iraq

The Sinjar is one of the so-called "disputed territories", which geographically is defined as a strip along the inner Iraqi border of the Kurdish Autonomous Zone ("Iraqi Kurdistan", KRG) which stretches to the extreme northwest of the country to Shingal/Sinjar near the borders next to Syria and Turkey. After the defeat of the Islamic State, the “disputed areas” were de facto controlled by the northern Iraqi Kurdish parties. In 2017, in the wake of the Kurdish independence referendum, the Iraqi military took control of (almost all) these areas. An exception is the second important settlement area of the Yazidis, Shaikhan (Shekhan), with the central Yazidi sanctuary of Lalish^{xi}; The district has been under Kurdish control since 1991 – the end of the second Gulf War and the establishment of the KRG – and is not claimed by Baghdad. The Kurdish side continues to maintain its claim to the “disputed areas”, while the Baghdad central government rejects this claim.

The situation is unclear in this area, and has not changed since in the recent past; a constitutional referendum on the affiliation of the “disputed areas” has not taken place, nor does the central government really control the entire area. The “disputed areas” are characterized by an explosive mix and represent a fundamental problem for the stability of Iraq. This is where minorities meet and the religious or ethnic dominance can change from settlement to settlement. In the last few decades there have been numerous expulsions and resettlements, and attempts have been made again and again to change the composition of the population. This applies especially to the decades under Saddam Hussein's rule with its “Arabization policy,” which was implemented actively in the Kirkuk oil region. It is also no coincidence that IS has found a broad field for their activities in these areas with their dense population of minorities. Here, existing tensions and conflicts can be exploited or easily brought back to life. Local incidents occur again and again: kidnappings, shelling of villages, attacks, threats, expulsions. The situation is characterized by weak state authorities and security forces, various militias and armed groups. On the surface, the situation has calmed down since the defeat of IS, but an invisible web of violence threads across the country.^{xii}

From a historical perspective, it is noteworthy that the diversity of population groups, religions and identities in northern Iraq and especially the “disputed areas” – various Christians including Assyrians, who often see themselves as a separate “people”, Yazidis, Turkmen, Shabak, Kakai, Kurds, Arabs, Shiites, Sunnis, and even Zoroastrians are said to be there. Again reflecting a reality that was once normal in the Middle East. It was modernity with the idea of nationalism that first implanted the idea that we could and should create a population that was as homogeneous as possible. The conflicts that inevitably arose were linked to older, pre-modern sources of conflict and became mutually charged; This multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multinational situation in the “disputed areas” has mutated from a normal state into a highly explosive area of conflict. And the Yazidis have had to suffer the fate of being caught between the fronts without strong supporters and traditionally discriminated against anyway.

The “Internally Displaced Persons” (IDPs) of Iraq

With the triumph of IS and its subsequent defeat, the number of Iraqis refugees (IDPs) within Iraq reached its peak at over six million. It was the apex of the ongoing crisis since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, and the official numbers have now fallen drastically: The IOM's IDP tracker system still counts around

1,123,000 internally distributed persons in Iraq as of December 2023.^{xiii} Those affected come from the North of the country, the disputed areas, and the areas where IS ruled. The refugee camps for the IDPs are also located here, especially in the area of the Kurdish autonomous zone, where the Yazidi refugees also live.

The massive decline in IDPs by 5 million people can be explained by the defeat of IS and a gradual domestic political stabilization in Iraq over the last few years. In particular, the Sunni Arab IDPs were able to return to largely pacified areas. The central government's decision to force the closure of all refugee camps within six months from the end of 2022 also plays an important role in the statistical decline in IDPs. However, this did not apply to the camps in the Kurdish autonomous region – at least so far. Now, according to the government in Baghdad, they should also be closed by June 2024. The government of the Kurdish autonomous zone has already said that it will not force anyone to resettle. The Arab IDPs and Syrian (Kurdish) refugees will probably be the first to be affected by the camp closures. With regards to the Arab IDPs, this is about the dismantling of double structures (e.g. Arab schools with a Baghdad curriculum in the Kurdish autonomous zone) and the abolition of the status as an internally displaced person, which can definitely make sense in the context of normalization – as soon as people have the real have the opportunity to return to their original places of residence. But that is precisely not the case with the Yazidis. Now, according to the government in Baghdad, these camps are to be closed by June 2024, but the Kurdish government of the autonomous zone has already said that it will not force anyone to resettle. In the area around Dohuk (where most of the camps in which Yazidis live are located) the KRG's official figures, count just over 120,000 IDPs, most of whom are Yazidis, in 15 camps.^{xiv} Other camps are in the Governorates of Erbil and Suleimania. In total there are between 200,000 and 280,000 Yazidis, meaning they represent between a quarter or a fifth of the IDPs officially registered by the IOM in Iraq.^{xv}

Although information can vary, as with most figures concerning the Yazidis; As far as the camps are concerned, a constant fluctuation must be taken into account. But the numbers also represent a political issue: from the KRG's side, high numbers highlight the need for financial support, they also create political pressure. For the UN, low numbers mean documentation of its own successes, and also for a government in Baghdad that expects the numbers to fall and is aiming for the camps to be closed as soon as possible. In general, all numbers concerning the Yazidis also point to the variable ways in which they can be categorized: Yazidis can be Kurds, or Arabs, Iraqis, Syrians or Turks, and in a Muslim dominated environment an individual Yazidi may prefer not to specifically reference not being a Muslim.

The widely used term “minority” is often misleading in the context of the Middle East. It does not describe a political or legal category and “minority rights” generally did not exist, at least in the past. In the region, two key factors are used for legal classification and how people identify themselves: ethnicity (like “Kurd” or “Arab”) and religion. However, these categories don't always reflect individual identities. For example, during Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq, Yazidis were forced to choose between identifying as “Kurd” (which automatically classified them as Muslim) or “Arab.” This policy, driven by Arabization efforts, aimed to assimilate non-Arabs. Consequently, official documents might not reflect a person's true identity. It's important to note that the latest Iraqi ID cards no longer include religious information, acknowledging the limitations of these previous classifications.

The reasons given by the IDPs against returning to their places of origin are repeatedly documented by the various UN organizations. It is always about a dysfunctional public administration, destroyed infrastructure, a lack of electricity, a lack of water supply, about destroyed houses, but also about a lack of financial opportunities.^{xvi} The conditions for the returnees are also regularly assessed. For Sinjar, the IOM noted an increase in returnees in June 2023 who are confronted with particularly difficult living conditions:

“The increase in Ninewa Governorate was notably observed in Sinjar District due to new returns to locations with severe conditions. Overall, the severity in the district is driven by poor conditions of livelihoods, services, and security. Specifically, the slow recovery of agriculture and businesses, poor provision of government services and water supply, presence of multiple security actors, concerns about violence and harassment at the checkpoints, need for reconciliation, and cases of block returns in Qaeyrrawan subdistrict.”^{xvii}

The security situation is always central to the question of the possibility of return: as long as it is precarious, return is generally ruled out. The slightly over one million remaining IDPs represent something of a sediment, the return of which becomes increasingly unlikely as time goes on.

Genocide – The Special Case of the Yazidis

However, the general problems expressed by the average of all Iraqi IDPs that stand in the way of a return to the AoOs (Areas of Origin) do not address the specifics of the Yazidi problem. The conditions in the Sinjar district are really bad; the public infrastructure is broken, the houses are destroyed, the

administration is dysfunctional. Compounding the problem is that just as before 2014, in whatever future, 85% of the population will no longer be able to live from agriculture, as those lands have also been systematically destroyed. But this is about more than that, namely genocide.

First keep in mind the long historical persecution of the Yazidis and the repeated attempts at forced religious assimilation. IS claimed to justify its attack on the Yazidis and their enslavement through this historical tradition.^{xviii} It is important to note that the specific form of enslavement practiced by IS against the Yazidis was unique and not replicated against other groups they persecuted.

From an Islamic perspective, Yazidis in the region are not seen as a “people of the book”, i.e. they do not belong to the accepted “book religions” and are therefore viewed as – to use a corresponding term from a Christian context – pagans.^{xix} Moreover from a traditional perspective itself based on a misunderstanding of Yazidi religious ideas, they are considered “devil worshippers.”^{xx} However, while orthodox Muslim doctrine theoretically calls for tolerance toward “People of the Book” the Yazidis were excluded from this protection. The Christians from the Nineveh Plains were also driven out by IS, but Christian women were not enslaved. Relying on orthodox Sunni doctrines, IS also broadcast these enslavements and the treatment of the “pagan” Yazidis in their propaganda and did not conceal or deny what they were doing.

Behind the seemingly strange attempt by the jihadists to show that Yazidis should be viewed as legitimate “prey” was another brutal message: the sexual violence carried out was aimed at nothing less than the destruction of the Yazidi community. The “dishonoring” of women is a very prominent topic in the Middle Eastern context, but in the Yazidi context it has even greater significance due to the strict endogamy (which says something about IS using this internal Yazidi tradition). Added to this were the pregnancies of the kidnapped women: According to current Iraqi personal status law, which, like almost everywhere in the greater region, is based on Sharia law, the religious affiliation of the children is determined by the father. The children of the raped Yazidis are legally Muslims. And according to orthodox Muslim teachings, they remain so for the rest of their lives; apostasy is an offense punished by death. This could potentially open the door for those same Islamists (who raped those women) to make the next set of accusations against Yazidis in the future. After their return, the abducted women were accepted back into the Yazidi community, which was certainly an important step in overcoming traditional reflexes – however, the children of these women conceived in captivity were generally not accepted.^{xxi} Of all the victim groups affected by the conflicts in the Middle East in recent decades, the fate of these children may perhaps be the most shocking – if it even

makes sense to compare them. The Yazidi children (born of rape) who were indoctrinated by IS to become fighters and suicide bombers must also be remembered here.

The genocide does not only consist of the number of people killed in a group (cynically speaking, 5,000 or 10,000 murdered people is a comparatively small group of victims in the historical context of the last decades in the Middle East), It's about the fact that a group of peoples existence is not accepted and that they can be essentially made to disappear – and that there are perpetrators who want exactly that and presumably also have the means to do it. Yazidis are not only threatened with potential expulsion in their wider living environment in the Middle East – like Christians, for example. From the point of view of certain Islamists, who can rely on orthodox doctrines, their very existence is not justified.

On the Consequences of Genocide

There is a classic relatively uncomplicated employment opportunity, especially in the Middle East, and many refugees work in this area all over the world- a restaurant. However, Yazidis are not allowed to work in a restaurant. Many Muslims around them consider food that passes through their hands to be “unclean”. This is a “classic” example of discrimination that Yazidis encounter in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. It is a type of discrimination that Yazidis have long learned to live with. The consequences of the genocide belong to a different category – living with them in the current environment presents a completely different kind of challenge. It is existential in nature.

An example of this is an event in the early summer of 2023 – or rather a non-event that nevertheless demonstrates the full force of the psychological consequences of the genocide. In April there was a protest in the city of Sinjar against a transport of Arab returnees accompanied by Iraqi security forces – i.e. returnees from the Arab part of the local population who had not fled from IS, but from the Iraqi army. The return of these Sunni Arabs should actually be preceded by a security check to examine their possible involvement with IS. The fact is that many Yazidis do not trust these checks or assume that they do not take place at all. Again one must realize that one of the traumatizing experiences of the IS attack for Yazidis was the realization that the attackers also included local Arabs, possibly neighbors, although the perpetrators were masked, their local dialects allowed the Yazidis to determine this. This genocide

tore apart the local social fabric. Who could trust whom in the future? It's about murder, it's about rape, it's about a fulfilled desire for destruction.

During this protest in April 2023 in Sinjar, Yazidi children and young people threw stones, probably in the direction of a mosque, which had served as a gathering point for abducted women and girls after the IS attack. And as was bound to happen: a Yazidi woman recognized a former rapist among the returnees, (he was probably arrested afterwards). According to some reports, the Iraqi army also took the Arab returnees with them. Recognizing rape perpetrators by Yazidi women has long been something of a topos. This is not intended to specifically cast doubt on any individual case, this is about the chain of consequences that such a genocide entails. The recognition of perpetrators on the loose, which is so often repeated in reports, points to the fundamental problem that now exists on site: yesterday's perpetrators and the potential perpetrators of tomorrow live in the neighborhood or in the next village. A basic trust on which social interaction is based has been destroyed. That is also the meaning of genocide. Afterwards things will never be the same again. As a member of the victim group, I now know very practically what acts a neighbor or someone I happen to meet on the street can be capable of and, if in doubt: was capable of.

The April 2023 protest in Sinjar could have ended with a few harmless stone throws and would have been long forgotten if it had not triggered something: namely a "non-event", or rather a virtual event, that in turn created real fear. Immediately after the protest in Sinjar, images of a mosque in ruins appeared on social networks, coupled with claims that Yazidis had attacked and set fire to the mosque in Sinjar. Now a 'shit-storm' broke out online, with threats to attack a Yazidi refugee camp, remarks about wanting to rape Yazidi women, and a remarkably long series of hate-filled sermons in which mullahs delivered the classic litany of the devil-worshipping Yazidis, supplemented by the accusation that they were also ungrateful, after all they had been saved. The truly shocking thing for Yazidis was not the nature of the attacks, but that they came from Kurds. In the logic and dynamics of communication via social networks on the Internet, evidence videos in which religious representatives of Yazidis and Muslims stood together in front of the supposedly burned down mosque were no longer of any help to show that nothing had happened at all - the alleged images of the destroyed mosque actually showed an Iraqi mosque that was destroyed in fighting against jihadists after 2003.^{xxii} The rapid spread and massive impact of rumors and propaganda on the Internet (a global phenomenon), is compounded by the problematic state of the regional and local media landscape; Publications and media channels are usually partisan and the objectivity of reporting is questionable.^{xxiii}

In response to the hateful posts on the Internet, a feeling of threat and rising panic emerged among the Yazidis, which could be characterized as “it's starting again.” Nobody wanted to return from the camps to Sinjar; rumors about panic sales of land and houses in Sinjar by Yazidis were making the rounds. More than a month after the events, one could still find agitated and fearful Yazidis whose entire thoughts revolved around a potentially imminent deadly threat. This is also what genocide means: Traumatized people cannot simply, calmly, rationally weigh out a threat scenario. The fear (of violence) can be called up at any time and is firmly seated in the mind, a fear that creates its own reality.

A Strategically Important Region – The Shingal/Sinjar Problem

Along with Kirkuk, the Sinjar region is the most tense zone of the “disputed territories”. Kirkuk is about the question of the originally Kurdish character of the region and the oil reserves there, and thus an internal Iraqi conflict. On one level, the conflict around Sinjar is also about the intra-Iraqi conflict between the claims of the KRG (or de facto the KDP) and the Iraqi central government, but on another level, interests and strategic calculations also intersect in the Sinjar region from actors outside Iraq – the Sinjar conflict area is not a purely internal Iraqi problem and cannot be pacified from an Iraqi perspective alone.

Originally, the Sinjar, a mountain range surrounded by a plain, was a rather uninteresting piece of land and therefore ideal for Yazidi settlement. One could retreat to the inhospitable heights when danger threatened and, at the same time, hope to be forgotten by the passage of time in order to survive it unscathed. The Sinjar is similar to other mountainous regions in the wider geographical area that served as settlement areas for threatened peoples, tribes and minorities, such as the Lebanon Mountains for the Druze or the mountains in northern Syria for the Alawites. As part of the demarcation and state formation in the Middle East after the First World War, the Sinjar was now close to the Iraqi border with Syria, but this was still a forgotten corner of the Middle East, however with the war in Syria and the disintegration since 2011/12 especially in the Syrian north, several territories suddenly became strategically interesting.

The Syrian side of the border is controlled by the PKK or its Syrian offshoot PYD; It was their fighters who secured the corridor through which the large mass of Yazidis managed to escape from the Sinjar Mountains across the Syrian border. As a result, the PKK/PYD founded a branch of a Yazidi militia (YBŞ) (and other

branches were founded) as well as the participation of the PKK/PYD/YBŞ in the fighting against IS in Sinjar, which meant that the PKK de facto found itself as the settlers of the area. From the PKK's point of view, this makes strategic sense: The Kurdish-controlled Syrian "Rojava" has a border problem; apart from the Assad territory and Turkey or Turkish-dominated Syrian areas, the only external connection remaining is the Iraqi border, whose only official border crossing is to "Rojava". However, it is under the control of the KRG – and therefore the KDP, which in turn is close to Turkey.

Control of the Iraqi-Syrian border and smuggling routes is essential for the PKK/PYD. The PKK also has its main base in eastern Iraqi Kurdistan, in the Qandil Mountains, and has a keen interest in another territorial base in Iraq. This, in turn, is what Turkey (which itself maintains military bases on Iraqi territory) and its allied KDP (which itself has territorial claims on the Sinjar and would love to drive the PKK out of the Qandil Mountains) are trying to prevent. The PKK's entrenchment in Sinjar soon brought Turkish airstrikes and targeted drone killings.^{xxiv} Sinjar is now part of the battlefield between PKK and Turkey. This is already a considerable mix, but overall the situation in Sinjar is much more complex: from the Iraqi government's point of view, the establishment of the PKK in Sinjar is also not desirable; after all, the armed presence of the PKK means ignoring Iraqi sovereignty and the establishment a parallel, parastatal administration. This means that three administrations exist in parallel: the local administration influenced by the PKK forces and the popular mobilization militias, the former administration influenced by the KDP, which operates from Dokuk, and the administration of the Nineveh Governorate, to which Sinjar actually belongs.

However, parts of the YBŞ are on the payroll of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF, Hashd al-Shaabi), a primarily Shiite militia group originally founded to defend against IS, which is now officially integrated into the Iraqi armed forces, but is increasingly a kind of state within the state and is largely under the influence of Iran and the Pasderan (Iranian Revolutionary Guards). The Hashd al-Shaabi have an interest in establishing themselves as a power factor in northern Iraq. Iran in the background is also looking at the Syrian border, because this is about the land connection to its ally Assad.^{xxv} In fact, Iran also maintains an alliance with the PKK. So one can also say that Sinjar is at the center of the Iranian-Turkish rivalry.^{xxvi}

All the apparent chaos of parties, militias, interests, claims, allegations, accusations, and maneuvers can be broken down into very clearly calculated strategic interests. But perhaps you can also realize that in the end it always comes down to something as banal as money and power. The boundaries

between grand strategic calculations, corruption, individual aspirations for power and simple criminality are fluid, and militias cost money. In Sinjar, observers often count eight or ten militias, but sometimes a few more, although there is not even agreement on that^{xxvii}. In addition to the Iraqi army, there are the Yazidi militias associated with the PKK (or its Syrian offshoot), which, as already mentioned, are now partly involved and are affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Units (Hashd al-Shaabi), there are Kurdish Peshmerga and local militia leaders who sometimes change sides depending on the political situation and financial incentives (e.g. from the Kurdish KPD to the Iraqi armed forces). A Yazidi woman once commented dryly that at the checkpoints on her way home she heard Syrian and Turkish dialects, but no local ones.^{xxviii}

Recently there have been rumors about the recruitment of former local IS members by militias in Sinjar. This is not implausible, the militia system alone is an essential field for generating income. Lists are also circulating, supposedly from secret service circles, containing figures on former IS members of well-known Arab extended family groups present in Sinjar. This is as plausible as it is unverifiable – on a factual level. However, it reflects the Yazidi population's perception of reality, shaped by genocide: these are things that they, as Yazidis, expect. They are the ones who have to bear the consequences if things get serious again.

In October 2020, the Sinjar problem suddenly appeared to be on the way to a solution: an agreement between the KRG (led by the KDP) and the Iraqi central government provided for the Iraqi armed forces to take control of the region and the withdrawal of the PKK and its branches, including the PMF militias. The official administration controlled by the KDP should be reinstated locally – the “official” mayor of Sinjar effectively governs from a kind of exile in the Kurdish town of Dohuk. The agreement was praised by the UN as a “step towards a better future”.^{xxix} It only had one disadvantage: it has not been implemented to date. In early summer 2023, the UN and Human Rights Watch complained about the permanent blockade in Sinjar.^{xxx} It doesn't look like much is going to happen in this regard in the near future – at least not as long as nothing fundamental changes in the balance of power on site – and thus de facto in the greater region.

This also applies to Baghdad's announcement that it wants to close the remaining camps for IDPs in the Kurdish autonomous zone by July 2024. The plan reads very well: those who return are to receive a ‘starter stipend’, 4,000 houses are to be built in Sinjar and numerous offices and government offices are to be opened so that the state administration can be effective. They even thought about support staff for people with disabilities.^{xxxi} However, since no

part of the security problem affecting the situation in Sinjar has been solved in recent years, the implementation of these great plans will probably take a while. Basically it boils down to this: the central government will no longer pay for the camps – but it cannot order the camps to be closed in the Kurdish Autonomous Government's area of responsibility anyway.

As it stands – as of late winter 2024 – the central government wants to stop its financial support for the camps in the Kurdish autonomous zone; the IDPs should return to their places of origin or lose their IDP status. In addition to the Yazidis, it is also true for a certain number of other IDPs that they have de facto not yet been able to return to their places of origin. How all this will be implemented and whether and how there could be exceptions is unclear. The fear and unrest among the Yazidis is there, but it is unlikely that the camps could actually close for them in the summer of 2024. The status quo in Sinjar is based on the fact that each of the actors has at least the power to maintain their current position – no one will leave voluntarily. It's like a mobile, the many local, regional and international actors swing in a precarious equilibrium, which works well as long as the status quo is not shaken. For the time being, peace in Sinjar is only temporary.

Internal Iraqi Alternatives for Refuge?

There is one point that needs to be understood fundamentally in order to be able to understand the life of the Yazidis – and generally also of the other minorities and ethnic groups in the region: we stay together. You live where many other members of your own group also live. There may be historical reasons for this, religious reasons, and last but not least, very tangible practical reasons. First and foremost is the certainty that in situations of existential threat, only one's own group can really be relied on, and this is not an abstract consideration or a distant historical memory. This was exactly the terrible experience of the Yazidis in 2014: they found themselves alone against IS literally overnight. Every state structure and especially the security forces suddenly no longer existed and only internal Yazidi cooperation offered any hope of survival. This experience has only confirmed old certainties and is not questioned by any other group in Iraq. There is only security in an environment with your own people. No Yazidi man, no Yazidi woman, no Yazidi family would voluntarily move to an environment where there are no other Yazidis. Nobody in Iraq would sensibly expect this from Yazidis or even from other minorities.

The close cohesion of a community like the Yazidis – here extremely enforced by very strict endogamous marriage regulations – should not be understood exclusively as a cultural or religious practice – it has assisted survival for centuries. The groups in a country like Iraq live separately, they form clusters – unfortunately, it is precisely this way of life that makes a genocidal attack like the one on the Yazidis so comparatively easy: they all live together.

In addition to the existential question of security, there are other reasons that massively limit the real possibility of location changes in a country like Iraq – even if there is nothing de facto against it. Support, and this can simply mean successful access to government agencies, quickly depends on the appropriate networks, whether they are primarily of a family nature, ethnic, linguistic or political. People in Iraq are looking for and need a somewhat homogeneous background. As long as the state tends to remain weak and corresponding ethnic, political or religious networks apparently dominate politics and society for everyone, it would be practically suicidal, especially for a rather small ethnic group, not to rely primarily on specific religious or ethnic ties.

In the case of the Yazidis, there is also their discrimination based on their religion, but above all the non-recognition of their religion as a “book religion” by Islamic authorities of any stripe. This makes them a constant, hypothetical target for Islamist extremists. If in doubt, Yazidis would try to hide their Yazidi identity if they were forced to live in a foreign environment. The apparent possibility of a “domestic escape alternative” completely ignores reality. The major role rumors and fear play in the constitution of “reality” for Yazidis has already been discussed. Ultimately, it is the knowledge that existential threats can break into everyday life at any time and quickly. The Ashti camp near Suleimania is divided into two parts with a double fence that looks like a very wide border barrier. Yazidi refugees live on one side, while Sunni Arab IDPs were housed on the other when the author visited in 2018 Yazidi families interviewed stated that they would under no circumstances send their children, but especially the girls, to the school run by the UN, which was located in the “Arab” part of the camp. The awareness of the threat does not stop at the gates of a refugee camp. The psychological shock of the media smear campaign after the fictitious “mosque fire” in Sinjar in early summer 2023 was great. It was primarily the fact that the social media campaign was “Kurdish” that shocked the Yazidis. In their world there is no trust in safety. In theory, Yazidis could certainly move to Shiite southern Iraq, where they would hardly encounter a Sunni Arab, and certainly not an IS supporter, or to Baghdad. In reality this option doesn't exist.

Another question is about alternative options in the north of the country, i.e. in the Kurdish region. There is actually Shekhan, a district populated by many Yazidis, and other places where Yazidis now live. This is not an option for the Yazidis who remain in the camps. In order to be able to permanently leave the camp with the entire family and move to a new place where there is a Yazidi settlement support, a lot of money is needed – one could realistically estimate US\$ 500 per month for a family. Leaving the camp permanently means the end of basic supplies of electricity and food; appropriate accommodation must also be rented or purchased. And neither Shekhan nor the surrounding area of Dohuk is a particularly favorable area, on the contrary. The families are large, especially since surviving relatives are often taken in. Beyond the cities, there is a lack of financial opportunities and, according to previously mentioned IOM data, 85% of Yazidis from Sinjar worked in agriculture. Where should they go? Live on what? It is plausible to assume that those who could afford to leave the camps have done so in the past ten years. Permanent living in tents is not an option you “choose” if you have the option to avoid it.

Perspectives

In a region characterized by: numerous armed groups controlling checkpoints, competing administrative structures, foreign air strikes and influence through militias, no single actor with the capacity to alter the fragile regional power dynamics. It's crucial to recognize the limitations of concepts like “reconstruction,” “return options,” and “normalization”. These terms carry significant meaning and can be misleading when applied to such a complex and unstable context. A more nuanced approach is necessary. It should also be clear that the victory over IS does not mean a return to the previous conditions or even the beginning of such a return, but rather has created completely new realities and conditions on the ground that have become charged with new conflicts. The many international appeals, warnings and reconstruction discussions that continually take place, seem to ignore the why – now in the tenth year after the IS attack – Yazidis still have to live in tents in refugee camps.^{xxxii} All of this is like a ritual: Reports of rebuilt houses are followed by reports of renewed refugee movements when fighting or even tension has broken out again somewhere.^{xxxiii}

Essentially, the facts are actually clear: the internal Iraqi unification process over the “occupied territories” and especially the Sinjar is blocked because it would call the status quo into question. The forced withdrawal of the Kurdish Peshmerga (especially the KDP) from the “disputed areas” and the at least

“formal takeover” of control by Iraqi government security forces have not significantly changed the situation. The agreement concluded in 2020 between the KRG and the central government on Sinjar has not been implemented – this is contradicted by the very presence of the PKK and its affiliates in Sinjar, whose withdrawal would have formed the basis of the agreement. The advance of Iraqi security forces in May 2022 against checkpoints of one of the PKK-affiliated militias (YBŞ) immediately led to fighting and the escape of several thousand people from Sinjar.

Since then, a fragile state of equilibrium has prevailed again. Nobody knows exactly how many Yazidis have actually returned to Sinjar so far, it may be 100,000^{xxxiv}; the figures for those living in the refugee camps are also relative – simply because of the fluctuation. There are also returnees to the camps. Since necessary official papers have to be obtained in Sinjar or employees of the Iraqi state have to be present there, families often have individual members on site. All figures also represent a political issue. The regulation of the status of the disputed areas is actually stipulated by the constitution in Iraq – there should have been a referendum long ago. To do this, however, it would have to be clarified who is actually allowed to vote – a very difficult undertaking in a region that has seen decades of expulsions, mass murders and resettlements, not least in order to change the demographics.

A genocide creates facts. The IS attack has irrevocably changed conditions in the region. This cannot yet be acknowledged by the actors in Sinjar because it would fundamentally affect the fragile balance of power. That's why everyone, whether regional or international actors, ultimately acts as if a situation that cannot be restored, will soon be restored. So it's best to keep everything in limbo. It is obvious that a relevantly large proportion of the minorities from the “disputed areas” - especially Yazidis and Christians – are now abroad, in the case of the Yazidis the majority are in Germany, and will not return to Iraq.

The Iraqi government's repeatedly announced investments in the reconstruction of Sinjar are failing due to the unresolved questions of power, administration and ultimately sovereignty. In practice, it looks like this: the PKK has set up quarters in the former police station, while the Iraqi police, who are present again, have to rent other quarters, according to a Yazidi woman's description of everyday life from the Sinjar^{xxxv}. So sustainable reconstruction remains an illusion.

The new reality that IS has created also includes the fatal fact that the Yazidis have now been included in the disputes over the question of staking claims to power in the region. The Yazidis are being used by various sides to legitimize

claims and are now divided into political camps. The hope of the majority is likely to be that the Iraqi state's monopoly on power will be restored or even enforced and that Sinjar will slowly be forgotten in a new, peaceful normality. In any case, one thing is essential, as one Yazidi woman interviewed said: "We have demanded reconstruction aid, the punishment of the IS perpetrators, and compensation. We have become humble. We just can't be without security."

Glossary

KDP

Northern Iraqi Kurdish party with a very long history. It is ruled by the Barzani family and dominates the government of the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq (KRG). The zone controlled by the KDP covers the north of the Kurdish Autonomous Region around the city of Dokuk and the capital Erbil. Through the KRG government, the KDP claims control over Sinjar as well as other "disputed areas." Strategically, the KDP is de facto allied with Turkey and stands against the PKK and Iranian influence.

PUK

The second major northern Iraqi Kurdish party; Formerly a split from the KDP, the PUK's base is in the south of the Kurdish autonomous region around the city of Suleimania. PUK and KDP nominally form the government of the autonomous region, which is de facto divided between the two parties' spheres of influence and politically blocked internally. Over the past decade, the PUK has lost influence; it no longer dominates the south in elections like the KDP dominates the north. PUK tends to be close to Iran.

PKK

The Turkish Kurdish Party, founded in the 1980s on a Marxist basis, has been fighting against the Turkish state for decades. No longer militarily present in Turkey, the PKK controls the Kurdish area in Syria ("Rojava") through its Syrian branch PYD. The PKK's main base is located on Iraqi territory in the Kurdish Autonomous Region's Qandil Mountains, near the Iranian border. The PKK is also trying to consolidate its presence in the Sinjar area through Iraqi Yazidi

branches. The PKK is strategically linked to Iran – while its Syrian offshoot PYD cooperates with the Americans.

PYD

The Syrian-Kurdish branch of the PKK, which largely controls the Kurdish area in Syria ("Rojava"). Its military arm, the YPG, is the most important component of the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), which fought against IS with US support and to this day controls Arab areas of northern Syria along the Iraqi border.

YBŞ / Yabasha

Yazidi-Iraqi militia, which was founded along the lines of the YPG as part of the fight against IS around Sinjar. The YBŞ is the largest of the PKK branches in Sinjar, but not the only one. Parts of the YBŞ have been incorporated into the PMF and are paid for by the Iraqi state. The (so far not implemented) Sinjar agreement between the government of the Kurdish autonomous zone and the Iraqi government of 2020 provided for the withdrawal of the PKK (or its affiliates) from Sinjar as a central element.

PMF/Popular Mobilization Units/Al-Hashd al-Shaabi (various spellings)

Originally founded as Shiite militia groups as part of the fight against IS, the PMF militia group has grown into a kind of state within a state. Both the status and the further development of the PMF cannot be clearly named or identified; They are now officially part of the Iraqi army, but operate independently. Their most important militias operate under the patronage of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and some observers see a similar development here – they are now also economically active. The militias under the umbrella of the PMF also include warlords with their local private armies and units from the PKK environment in Sinjar.

IS / Islamic State

The Islamic State (IS) emerged from the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda and eventually overtook the organization founded by Osama bin Laden as the world's best-known jihadist group. The group's self- and external names changed several times; it is also known as "ISIS" or "Daesh". At times, especially between 2014 and 2017, IS controlled large areas of Syria and northern Iraq. Virtually defeated in Iraq after 2010, the predecessor organization of IS found refuge in Syria before returning to Iraq and driving the Iraqi army out of large parts of northern Iraq in 2014/15. This also led to the genocide of the Yazidis. IS recruited fighters all over the world, not least from Europe and the West, and was only defeated after long battles led by the Americans. IS has lost territorial control over a large, unified area, but continues to exist in several regional branches as a jihadist terrorist organization.

Kurdish Autonomous Zone / KRG

Much of Iraq's Kurdish region, from which Saddam Hussein withdrew his military after the UN established a no-fly zone in 1991. Since then, the autonomous region has undergone a development that is clearly separate from the rest of Iraq; To this day it is separated from the rest of Iraq by a "green border". The autonomous region is governed by a government based in Erbil; in many areas, different regulations apply than in the rest of Iraq.

Disputed areas

A strip of territory along the internal Iraqi border to the Kurdish autonomous zone, which is characterized by a very high proportion of minorities. In recent decades there have been repeated expulsions and forced resettlements in the disputed areas. After the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the disputed areas were taken over by the KRG, which claimed them for the Kurdish autonomous region. After the IS attacks, Kurdish control was largely lost again. In 2017, the Iraqi military occupied the disputed areas, but was unable to restore the sovereignty of the central government anywhere. The allocation of the disputed areas remains a core Iraqi problem, and this is where the main conflict zones lie. The Sinjar and the area around Kirkuk are particularly prominent.

Pasderan/Revolutionary Guards

The Pasderan are the center of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran. They not only include armed forces separate from the regular military and a militia, they also control large areas of the Iranian economy. The Pasderan Al-Quds Brigades are responsible for operations abroad and are involved in the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. On the Iranian side, militias were founded or reformed there based on the model of the Lebanese Hezbollah. In Iraq, at least significant parts of the "Popular Mobilization Forces" belong to the Iranian sphere of power. They also operate in Sinjar.

Peshmerga

Originally a term for the Kurdish fighters of various parties and clans, popularized in the fights against Saddam Hussein's regime. The KRG's armed forces are now known as "Peshmerga". They are officially part of the Iraqi armed forces, but are de facto party militias.

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- i This view is very widespread in the Yazidi communities in Armenia and Georgia; This probably reflects the increasing nationalist mood in Armenia in the wake of the wars with Muslim Azerbaijan since the end of the Soviet Union; In this reading, the identification as “Kurdish” is too closely associated with “Muslim”, and an emphasis on Yazidi independence seems more desirable. Christine Robins, “Fragile Yezidism, Hidden Strength” in *Yezidism. Between Continuity and Transformation*, ed. Khanna Omarkhali; Philip Kreyenbrock (Wiesbaden: Iranica, Volume 29, 2021),166.
- ii For the general problem with practically all numerical data, see below.
- iii A first precise historical reconstruction of the events can now be found in Matthew Travis Barber, “A Survey of the Political History of the First Year of the Yazidi Genocide”, in: *Yezidism. Between Continuity and Transformation*, ed. Khanna Omarkhali; Philip Kreyenbrock (Wiesbaden: Iranica, Volume 29, 2021).
- iv This means that most of the Yazidis are located in the area of the autonomous region controlled by the KDP, although the KDP also maintains its claim to the Sinjar as a “Kurdish” area - before the IS attack in 2014, the KDP controlled the Sinjar.
- v Christine Robins, Fragile Yezidism, Hidden Strength, in: *Yezidism. Between Continuity and Transformation*, ed. Khanna Omarkhali; Philip Kreyenbrock (Wiesbaden: Iranica, Volume 29, 2021), 156.
- vi While the IOM speaks of 200,000 Yazidis in and outside the camps, an advisor to the president of the Kurdish autonomous region put the number of 280,000 Yazidis in the camps alone at the end of 2023.
More Support Needed for Survivors of the Sinjar Massacre, International Organization for Migration (August, 2022)
<https://www.iom.int/news/more-support-needed-survivors-sinjar-massacre>;
Nearly 300,000 Yazidis remain in Kurdistan Region Camps: Official, Rudaw (December 6, 2023)
<https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/06122023>
- vii [More Support Needed for Survivors of the Sinjar Massacre](https://www.iom.int/news/more-support-needed-survivors-sinjar-massacre), International Organisation for Migration (August, 2022) <https://www.iom.int/news/more-support-needed-survivors-sinjar-massacre>
- viii On the persecution and harassment of the Yazidis in Turkey and the situation of Yazidi refugees in the Federal Republic of Germany at the time See: Robin Schneider (editor), ‘The Kurdish Yezidis. A people on the way to destruction, without a place,’ (original German title *Die kurdischen Yezidi. Ein Volk auf dem Weg in den Untergang, ohne Ort*, der Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker herausgegebenen Band(Göttingen?) 1984.
- ix You could always read this in the press, and the author was told this himself when he visited refugee camps; “Germany” has an almost mythical sound there.
- x The Mandaeans are estimated to number around 100,000 people, of which 2,000-3,000 are said to still be living in Iraq; Originally native to southern Iraq, the center of Iraq’s remaining Mandaeans is now the Kurdish Autonomous Zone. Most Mandaeans now live in Sweden and Australia. Some similarities connect them with the Yazidis: The Mandaeans are one of the oldest syncretic religions. As an unrecognized religious community, they have suffered from Muslim persecution and are also considered “unclean”. They have also been a specific target of attacks by Islamist groups. In contrast to the Yazidis, they were recognized as a “book religion” a few years ago, at least by the Shiite side in Iran. But by then the problem of Mandaean existence in the Middle East had already largely been practically solved.
- xi The advance of IS was stopped in front of the valley of Lalish; Mosul, the seat of the IS “caliph,” is barely 60 kilometers away.
- xii *Iraq: Security Forces Open Fire on Kirkuk Protesters*, Human Rights Watch (September 8, 2023)
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/08/iraq-security-forces-open-fire-kirkuk-protesters>
- xiii Displacement tracking matrix, IOM (Last update: December 31, 2023)
<https://iraqdtm.iom.int/>
- xiv Update from the department of Migration and Crisis Response, as communicated by Aid Organisation Wadi in Dohuk on 18.1.2024.
- xv See endnote vi
- xvi A good summary on the issue of IDPs
Iraq: Camps Intentions Survey Round 2-Camps in Erbil, Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah and Diyala, January 2018, ReliefWeb International (January 31, 2018)
<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-camps-intentions-survey-round-2-camps-erbil-dahuk-sulaymaniyah-and-diyala-january>
- xvii *Return Index: Findings Round Eighteen – Iraq*, International Organization for Migration (June, 2023)
https://iraqdtm.iom.int/images/ReturnIndex/202365025940_Return_index_round18_April2023.pdf

- xxviii *Islamic State: Systematic enslavement as a tactic of war*, Modern Slavery Evidence Unit (MSEU) Research Briefing 8, University of Nottingham Rights Lab (February 2020)
<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/report/modern-slavery-evidence-unit-mseu-research-briefing-8-february-2020/rights-lab-briefing-islamic-state-use-of-enslavement-feb-2020.pdf>
- xix Another ethno-religious group, for example, which can also be understood as a separate religion are the Kakai, have been, so to speak, co-opted by Shiites; The Shiite side is quite open here, as with the example of the Alawites in Syria.
- xx In the religious cosmos of the Yazidis, the angel Melek Taus also plays a key role in imagery, and is depicted as a peacock. In anti-Yezid propaganda, Melek Taus is interpreted as a “fallen angel” whom God banished to hell as punishment. Following this logic, the Yazidis can therefore be denounced as “devil worshipers”. The seven archangels of the Yazidis, of which Melek Taus is the most important, point to the syncretic character of the Yazidi religious ideas, which ultimately draw from the same source as the Abrahamic religions. For these reasons the room for misinterpretations and reinterpretations are particularly ripe.
- xxi Frantzman, Seth J., *Yazidi Ruling helps children of women kidnapped by ISIS return*, Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis (April 26, 2019)
<https://www.mideastcenter.org/post/yazidi-ruling-helps-children-of-women-kidnapped-by-isis-return>
- xxii A twitter (now X) thread by Matthew Travis Barber brings together central Internet postings surrounding the demonstration with image examples of anti-Yazidi propaganda:
<https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1652427808256434179.html>; Here is a compilation of the anti-Yazidi sermons by Kurdish mullahs on the Internet, as they circulate among Yazidis and to document the events on the Internet
https://twitter.com/zidan_yezidi/status/1655182642747244545; See also the news article *No one entered Rahman Mosque, nothing burnt down*, KirkukNow (April 29, 2023)
<https://kirkuknow.com/en/news/69383>
- xxiii An exception is the non-commercial news site Kirkuk Now, which is explicitly committed to reporting neutrally on events in the disputed areas in multiple languages and explicitly combating misinformation; There is also a collaboration with the Deutsche Welle Academy:
<https://akademie.dw.com/en/avoid-being-labeled/a-61077248>
- xxiv *Commander of Pro-Iran Paramilitary Killed by Turkish airstrike in Shingal(Sinjar), Ninewa*, KirkukNow (February, 27, 2023)
<https://kirkuknow.com/en/news/69266>
- xxv “A new PMF brigade in Sinjar supports Iranian efforts to establish and secure ground lines of communication into Syria, however [...] The PMF’s plans to increase its presence in Sinjar would facilitate another Iranian shipment route into Syria and risk conflict with Turkey in Iraqi Kurdistan . Sinjar has strategic significance to both Iran and Turkey and is located within disputed Iraqi Kurdistan territory containing a highway into northern Syria.” See
<https://www.understandingwar.org/background/iran-update-april-17-2023>; The Iranian influence in Sinjar is also reflected in street names after the Iranian Pasderan general Qasim Sulaimani, the head of the “Al-Quds Brigades”, the Pasderan formation responsible for foreign operations, who was killed in a US missile attack.
- xxvi According to the Science and Politics Foundation: “The strategic region of Sinjar in northern Iraq has been at the heart of the Iran-Turkey rivalry.” <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/turkish-and-iranian-involvement-in-iraq-and-syria>; see also the Crisis Group analysis:
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-stabilizing-contested-district-sinjar>
- xxvii A query by the author to the editorial team of “Kirkuk Now” (see footnote) in January 2024 revealed that there are 10 individual armed groups in Sinjar. Another Middle Eastern news site, which is generally quite reliable, even speaks of around 20 groups: “In and around Sinjar there are about 20 local and regional armed factions. Iran controls half of them and has strategic alliances with the other half,” a senior Iraqi official told Middle East Eye:
<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/how-iraqs-sinjar-became-battleground-between-turkey-and-iran>
- xxviii In an interview with the author in June 2023 in Dohuk.
- xxix *New agreement in Iraq signals ‘a first and important step’ toward a better future*, UN News (October 9, 2020)
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1075102>

- xxx *Iraq: Political Infighting Blocking Reconstruction of Sinjar*, ReliefWeb (June 7, 2023)
<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-political-infighting-blocking-reconstruction-sinjar-enar>;
The Iraqi Government is Failing Victims of ISIS in Sinjar, ReliefWeb (May, 17, 2023)
<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraqi-government-failing-victims-isis-sinjar>
- xxxii *In return for financial and other "privileges", Iraqi government to Shut IKR camps for displaced in six months*, KirkukNow (February 4, 2024)
<https://www.kirkuknow.com/en/news/69965>
- xxxiii The EU in August 2023: "The Yazidi community in Iraq continues to face major challenges. These include various obstacles to the return of displaced people to their homes, particularly in the Sinjar/Shingal district, as well as limited access to basic social services and security concerns given recent incidents of incitement, which the EU strongly condemns. The EU calls on the Iraqi government and the government of the Kurdistan Region to continue implementing the Sinjar Agreement." See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2023/08/03/yazidi-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-situation-of-the-yazidi-community-in-iraq/>; The American side also complains: "The United States US Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Barbara Leaf, stressed that the Yazidi and Christian communities in Iraq do not feel safe to return to their homes."
<https://kirkuknow.com/en/news/69399>
- xxxiv *Iraq announces return of 487 Yazidis to Sinjar, nine years on from genocide by Islamic State*, The New Arab (November 7, 2023)
<https://www.newarab.com/news/iraq-announces-return-487-yazidis-sinjar>;
- xxxv This number was given to the UN by Nadia Murad.
Six years after genocide, international community must prioritize justice for Yazidi community, UN News (August 2020)
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1069432>
- xxxvi Interview with the author, Dohuk, June 2023.