

For Iraq's persecuted Yazidis, return plan is fraught with risk

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-17 01:49

DOHUK/IRAQ: The Yazidis of northern Iraq, an ancient religious minority brutally persecuted by Daesh, want nothing more than peace, security and a better life in their home town of Sinjar – but they want it on their terms. Many there distrust a new security and reconstruction plan unveiled this week by the Baghdad government and Kurdish regional authorities which hailed it as a “historic” agreement.

“The deal could pacify Sinjar – but it might also make the situation even worse,” said Talal Saleh, a Yazidi in exile in nearby Kurdistan.

The Yazidis have suffered since Daesh marauded into Sinjar in 2014, one of the extremist group’s conquests that shocked the West into military action to stop it.

Daesh viewed the Yazidis as devil worshippers for their faith that combines Zoroastrian, Christian, Manichean, Jewish and Muslim beliefs.

It slaughtered more than 3,000 Yazidis, enslaved 7,000 women and girls and displaced most of its 550,000-strong community.

Since Daesh was driven out of Sinjar by US-backed Kurdish forces in 2015, the town and its surrounding areas are controlled by a patchwork of armed groups including the Iraqi Army, Shiite militia, and Yazidi and Kurdish militants with different loyalties.

The government plan would enforce security and allow the return of tens of thousands of Yazidis afraid to go back because of a lack of security and basic services, according to the office of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

But many Sinjar natives feel the plan is vague, dictated by Baghdad and the Kurdish capital of Irbil. They say it has not included them and entails security reforms that could mean more division and violence.

SPEEDREAD

Yazidis distrust a new security and reconstruction plan unveiled this week by the Baghdad government and Kurdish regional authorities which hailed it as a ‘historic’ agreement.

“The PKK and their Yazidi allies are not just going to leave Sinjar without a fight,” Saleh said.

The security arrangements include booting out the PKK, a Kurdish separatist group that has fought a decades-long insurgency in Turkey and bases itself in northern Iraq.

It would also drive out PKK “affiliates,” an apparent reference to a Yazidi force of hundreds of fighters.

Escape

The PKK with Yazidi volunteers helped thousands of Yazidis escape the Daesh onslaught to Syria after the Iraqi Army fled many areas of Nineveh province and Irbil's peshmerga forces retreated. The peshmerga returned to help recapture Sinjar with US air support.

The PKK is under attack by Turkish forces in Iraq and exists uneasily alongside the peshmerga and the Iraqi Army.

The army and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Iraq's state paramilitary body dominated by Shiite militias, would oversee the ejection of the PKK, according to a copy the plan seen by Reuters.

Some locals fear this could split up families where siblings sometimes belong to different militias, forces and groups. The Yazidis also have their own force in the PMF, separate to the Yazidi PKK affiliate.

"There are about six political groups in Sinjar now. Brothers belonging to the same family each join different parties," said Akram Rasho, another displaced Yazidi in Kurdistan. Baghdad and Irbil defend the plan. "This is a good step to solve problems," said Kurdistan government spokesman Jotiar Adil. Sinjar has also been caught up in a territorial dispute between Baghdad and Irbil since a failed Kurdish bid for full independence in 2017.

Under the plan for Sinjar, the Baghdad and Irbil governments would choose a new mayor and administrators and appoint 2,500 new local security personnel. Supporters of the PKK suspect those would include returning Yazidis affiliated with the peshmerga.

At a demonstration against the deal in Sinjar on Sunday, Yazidi tribal leader Shamo Khadida shouted, "Sinjar belongs to its people and we are the people." Others distance themselves from the politics and simply want to see delivery of services on the ground.

"If actual efforts are made to improve our situation, the people of Sinjar will find agreement," said Rasho.



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[European powers, GCC condemn Israel settlement approvals](#)

Sat, 2020-10-17 01:36

BERLIN, RIYADH: European powers on Friday condemned Israel's decision to approve thousands more settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, calling it a "counterproductive" move that undermines regional peace efforts.

"The expansion of settlements violates international law and further imperils the viability of a two-state solution to bring about a just and lasting peace to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," said a joint statement from the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Spain.

"As we have emphasized directly with the government of Israel, this step furthermore undermines efforts to rebuild trust between the parties with a view to resuming dialogue," they said, urging an immediate halt in settlement construction.

The ministers said pushing ahead with more settlements would be a "counterproductive move in light of the positive developments of normalization agreements reached between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain."

A day earlier, Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajjraf also deplored Israeli authorities' approval of building thousands of housing units in the occupied Palestinian territories.

HIGHLIGHT

Pushing ahead with more settlements will be a 'counterproductive move in light of the positive developments of normalization agreements reached between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.'

In a statement, Al-Hajjraf affirmed full rejection to the Israeli plans on expanding settlements in the West Bank and imposing its sovereign over it. He stressed the necessity of halting the settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories, saying that building settlements is a big obstacle against reviving peace in the Middle East region.

Al-Hajjraf emphasized the GCC's support to the brotherly Palestinian people and their legitimate right to establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the Arab peace initiative, the international legitimacy's resolutions and international laws. The UAE and Bahrain had in mid-September set aside decades of enmity with Israel to sign a US-brokered deal to normalize ties. Western powers had hoped the deals would bring regional stability and give a boost to hopes for peace. But the Palestinians have branded the shift by the Gulf nations as "betrayal."



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diwaniya concept

Fri, 2020-10-16 23:00

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait is a small country in the Gulf with a high-income per capita rate, most of it made from oil exports, similar to the economic climate seen in the more affluent countries of the region.

Yet, what sets this country apart is its hybrid government, comprising a hereditary monarchy and a semi-democratic political system.

While democratic and constitutional forces are at work at the top level, the socio-political undercurrents that influence the state and especially Kuwait's youth are also equally hard to miss.

Kuwait's youth groups were largely formed out of a common need to address issues pertaining to their future such as unemployment and gender discrimination, as well as broader issues including corruption, judicial reform, and the fundamental need for their voices to be heard at the highest level.

The Cross Cultural Diwaniya (CCD) is one such popular initiative – the brainchild of Faisal Al-Fuhaid and Leanah Al-Awadhi – which started out hosting gatherings to encourage an open dialogue on various topics across different communities.



The Cross Cultural Diwaniya (CCD) – brainchild of Faisal Al-Fuhaid and Leanah Al-Awadhi – started out hosting gatherings to encourage an open dialogue on

various topics across different communities. (Supplied)

“Back in 2013, there used to be a lack of public spaces where individuals could converse with others openly within a safe circle,” Al-Awadhi said.

“There were only traditional diwanis, which were mostly restricted to Kuwaiti men, thus not enabling their networking and knowledge-sharing advantages to the wider society.”

According to Al-Fuhaid, the aim was to start conversations “in and around topics of social and global significance and to be a networking platform.”

Initially, the reception was not particularly warm, as many Kuwaitis were not used to attending diwanis outside societal norms where individuals would be welcomed regardless of their socio-economic position, corporate hierarchy, gender, or age, Al-Fuhaid said.

Over the years, however, the group’s influence has gradually widened and the diwanis have become a popular platform among youth. Their main challenge now is choosing relevant topics and crossing language barriers, as the diwanis are open to all and attended by citizens and expats, Al-Awadhi added.

As part of the forum’s formula of exploring solutions to some of the country’s challenges, the team sometimes engages attendees to develop case studies where they work together in groups and look at issues from multiple angles.

Collaborations with groups such as the Kuwait Transparency Society, Equate Petrochemical, and Kuwait Commute mean some of the suggestions put forward at the forums lead to changes in the country’s urban infrastructure.

“Some of the solutions proposed by the attendees are then taken into account when policies are drafted or decisions made,” added Al-Fuhaid.



Faisal Al-Fuhaid, the co-founder of the Cross Cultural Diwaniya (CCD).
(Supplied)

Earlier this year, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak took hold, the country was rocked by several high-profile corruption and human trafficking scandals. But with elections fast approaching, it remains to be seen whether initial measures will be followed up with stricter reforms.

“It is vital that all citizens make use of their voting powers to elect parliamentary members that have the country’s best interests in mind and confront officials who actively engage in corruption, no matter who they are. No one should be above the law,” Al-Fuhaid said.

In recent times, Kuwait has also faced criticism for its human rights record and perceived xenophobia toward the expatriate community. The CCD aims to highlight and address these challenges.

Al-Awadhi said: “Everyone is welcome, regardless of their nationality, gender, or religion. We have hosted multiple sessions discussing xenophobia and human rights and work tirelessly to make sure that the CCD is a space where all participants listen to and learn from each other. The only way to progress is to coexist.”

This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of

Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.



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Treat Arab youth as a driver of development: UAE Youth Minister

[MEA runs first flight with all-female crew](#)

Fri, 2020-10-16 22:20

BEIRUT: On October 13, an all-female crew staffed a Lebanese Middle East Airlines (MEA) flight for the first time in MEA's history.

Captain Rola Hoteit piloted the round trip to Cairo and told Arab News that

it was only once the crew had boarded that they realized the plane was being flown by an all-female staff.

“We were all surprised,” Hoteit said. “Such an arrangement happened by coincidence. We did not know that it was a pioneering event. The computer specifies the work schedule and no one – neither in the management of the company nor in the airport – knew that the crew would be an all-female one. We were very excited. We took a lot of photos since coincidence only happens once.”

The crew consisted of Hoteit, her assistant and six flight attendants. Hoteit posted about the flight on social media on Wednesday and said she cannot believe the amount of positive feedback she has received.

“It was a full plane on the way to Cairo and there were around 100 passengers on the way back to Beirut. However, none of the passengers knew that the whole crew is made up of women only, and we did not inform them that, fearing that some of them might be concerned,” she added. “We did our job perfectly and we later found out, through comments, that people accepted the matter and that everyone is ready to accept change.”

Hoteit has been a pilot for 25 years, and said her ambition has always been to fly with an all-female crew on board. “I had the privilege to be the pilot on Tuesday, with a crew consisting only of women for the first time in Lebanon,” she said. “I expected this event (to happen) on International Women’s Day, for example, as a sign of women’s power in Lebanon and their ability to excel in all areas of work. However, (my) dream was realized by coincidence.”

While women account for more than 50 percent of MEA’s administrative staff, according to airline management, Hoteit is the only female pilot currently on its books, along with six female first officers. Over 85 percent of the airline’s flight attendants are women.

Claudine Aoun Roukoz, president of the National Commission for Lebanese Women, said women are also playing an increasingly important role in the military, in line with Lebanon’s commitment to international resolutions, including the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which urges the increased participation of women in all defense and security forces.

Lieutenant Rita Zaher, 27, was the first female pilot in the Lebanese Air Force, followed by First Lieutenant Chantal Kallas, 28. Women have also joined the maintenance, testing, and administrative departments. The percentage of women in the Air Force is now 8.51 percent, Roukoz said.

Women also account for 43 percent of students in Lebanon’s military academy and 5.5 percent of soldiers. Five women currently hold the rank of brigadier general, according to Roukoz.



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Lebanese national carrier Middle East Airlines to only accept US dollars

[Video shows missile fired where Turkey cleared way for S-400 test, prompting US warning](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2020-10-16 18:00

ISTANBUL/WASHINGTON: A missile was fired into the sky on Friday on Turkey's

Black Sea coast where the military was expected to test its Russian-made S-400 defense systems, according to local video obtained by Reuters, drawing a strong warning from the US State Department.

The video, taken in the coastal city of Sinop, showed a narrow column of smoke headed high into the blue sky. In recent days Turkey had issued notices restricting air space and waters off the coastal area to allow firing tests. Tests of the S-400s, if verified, could stoke tensions between Turkey and the United States, which sharply opposed Ankara's purchase of the weapons from Moscow on grounds they compromise shared NATO defense systems.

State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said the United States has expressed to the most senior levels of the Turkish government that the acquisition of Russian military systems such as the S-400 is unacceptable, adding that Washington has been clear on its expectation that the system should not be operationalized.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

"We have also been clear on the potential serious consequences for our security relationship if Turkey activates the system," Ortagus said.

"If confirmed, we would condemn in the strongest terms the S-400 test missile launch as incompatible with Turkey's responsibilities as a NATO Ally and strategic partner of the United States," she added.

A US official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, confirmed that Turkey had tested the S-400 system on Friday but did not provide details.

Turkey's defense ministry said it would neither deny nor confirm missile tests.

Washington reacted last year by suspending Turkey from its F-35 jet program and has threatened sanctions.

Defense analyst Turan Oguz said a preliminary assessment of the color, intensity, angle and route of the smoke in the video coincided with S-400 missiles. The angle of the column suggested the target "must not be too high," he added.

Last year the military conducted radar tests of the surface-to-air defenses, which is among the world's most advanced and can spot and track incoming aircraft at medium and long ranges.

Turkey signed the S-400 deal with Russia in 2017. Deliveries of the first four missile batteries, worth \$2.5 billion, began in July last year.

Last week – after reports of the planned tests circulated – two US senators called again for President Donald Trump's administration to impose sanctions on Turkey.



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