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Navigating Dispute and Displacement: The Yazidi Experience in Post-ISIS Iraq

Houman Oliaei

In October 2020, the Office of Iraq's prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, announced that Baghdad and Erbil had signed the UN-brokered Sinjar Agreement to restore stability in the Sinjar region in northern Iraq and facilitate the return of displaced Yazidis to their homeland. Since the 2014 attack by the Islamic State (ISIS) that resulted in the deaths of thousands of Yazidis and the forced displacement of countless more to Iraqi Kurdistan, the Sinjar region has experienced a surge in violence and has become a contested battlefield for various armed groups. In addition to the long-standing struggle between the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi government, recent years have seen the governance of Sinjar morph into an international conflict between actors—like the one between Iran, which supports the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), and Turkey, which seeks to eliminate Kurdish militias that are affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The agreement called for the withdrawal of all non-state military forces from the region, the formation of a new security force, and the restoration of administrative functions by selecting a new mayor. Several national and international actors, including the United States and Turkey, welcomed the agreement as a means of redressing the harm caused by the ISIS attack and alleviating the suffering of Iraqi Yazidis.[1]

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Yet, efforts to implement the agreement have not only failed but resulted in new waves of displacement and the further militarization of Sinjar. In May 2022, the Iraqi army launched a military operation in the name of enforcing the agreement, which left a dozen Yazidi fighters dead and displaced another 3,000 Yazidis. But despite these disastrous results, the UN Mission in Iraq reaffirmed its commitment a few months later to ensuring the full implementation of the Sinjar Agreement.[2] Why, despite these failures, do the Iraqi and Kurdish governments, as well as international actors, continue to insist on implementing the Sinjar Agreement? Why is return to Sinjar, no matter how unrealistic or perilous, offered as the only viable solution to the Yazidis' plight?

To answer these questions, this Brief focuses on three characteristics of the Sinjar Agreement as they relate to the Yazidi community. First, the agreement frames the Yazidi displacement as an isolated event caused by the 2014 ISIS attack, rather than an episode connected to a longer history of discrimination against the Yazidis and rivalry between the Iraqi and Kurdistan governments over Sinjar as a "disputed territory," which left the Yazidi community vulnerable in the first place. Second, the Yazidi community was not significantly involved in the negotiations prior to the agreement[3]—a top-down approach that assumed that Yazidis will continue to accept the undisputed authority of the Iraqi government and the KRG. Since the 2014 attack, however, Yazidis have built powerful militias, established self-governing institutions, and fortified new political identities that challenge Kurdish or Arab hegemony in the region.

Finally, the agreement's focus on the return of Yazidis to Sinjar is driven by the reluctance of national and international stakeholders to alter the pre-ISIS demographic makeup of northern Iraq. The designation of Sinjar as a "disputed territory" has constrained the ability of humanitarian organizations to assist Yazidis in resettlement or integration into host communities, as that would alter the balance of power in the region, as well as the potential outcome of future negotiations over the territorial status of these areas.

The Sinjar Agreement and the recent actions taken by the governments of Erbil and Baghdad to stabilize Sinjar have not resolved the long-standing conflicts between these governments. Rather, they reflect their growing concern with respect to the potential loss of control over Sinjar, as well as the increasing influence of Yazidi militias formed in the aftermath of the 2014 ISIS attack. But without considering the underlying structural issues that have impacted the Yazidi community and the changes in Iraq's political landscape following the ISIS attack, attempts to implement the agreement are likely to prove unsuccessful. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the military operation in 2022, such efforts may even exacerbate the violence and prolong the suffering of the Yazidi community.

A History of Yazidi Displacement and Discrimination under Iraqi and Kurdish Rule

Located in the Ninawa Governorate in northwestern Iraq, Sinjar is one of the two major settlement centers of Yazidis, one of Iraq's oldest ethnoreligious minority communities.[4] The exact number of Yazidis in Iraq is unknown, but estimates range from 200,000 to 400,000.[5] Based on these estimates, Yazidis constitute only 1 percent of Iraq's overall population, but they currently make up around 20 percent of the 1.2 million internally displaced persons in Iraq.[6] Though the Sinjar region and Iraqi Yazidis gained international visibility following the 2014 ISIS

attack, the fall of Sinjar and the mass displacement of the Yazidi community was not an isolated event: The region and its Yazidi people have been entangled in the tensions between Kurdish and Arab leaders in Iraq for decades.

During the Ba'th era (1968–2003), Yazidis suffered multiple waves of forced displacement (known to scholars as Arabization), which aimed at changing the demographics of the region, strengthening the central government's dominance, and suppressing the Kurdish nationalist movement. Starting in the late 1960s, Ba'thist governments forced hundreds of thousands of Yazidis to relocate, confiscated their property, and destroyed 200 Yazidi villages in Sinjar. Thousands of Yazidis were resettled in newly built collective towns known as *Mujamma'at*, located far from their fields and villages, which made it easier for Iraq's government to suppress any organized political opposition in northern Iraq.[7]

The ethnicity of Yazidis has been a point of contention between Kurdish leaders and Arab nationalists. Ba'thist officials insisted on identifying and registering Yazidis as ethnic Arabs, reinforcing that designation by referring to them as "followers of Yazid I," the Umayyad caliph (647–83 CE).[8] For their part, Kurdish nationalists have invoked the similarities between the Yazidi and Kurdish languages as evidence that Yazidis are ethnically Kurdish.[9] For almost a century, Kurdish intellectuals referred to Yazidis as "Original Kurds" and the Yazidi religion as a pre-Islamic Kurdish religion.[10] Identification of Yazidis as Kurds was crucial in order for Kurdish leaders to claim the land inhabited by Yazidis as part of "Greater Kurdistan," the homeland of Kurds.

Prior to 2003, tensions over the Yazidis' ethnic affiliation were largely a matter of rhetoric, but a legal provision in the post-U.S. invasion constitution transformed the issue into a significant political and legal controversy. After the downfall of Saddam Hussein, a provision was included in Iraq's constitution to rectify the injustices perpetuated by past governments' actions in the region. As specified in Article 140 of the 2005 constitution, the Iraqi government was tasked with determining the status of Kirkuk and other "disputed territories" contested by the Government of Iraq and the KRG, which had gained autonomy in the early 90s, after a fair census and referendum to determine their demographic composition and the will of their residents. These oil- and gas-rich territories, which stretch across northern Iraq from Sinjar on the Syrian border down to Mandali on the Iranian border, are home to a variety of ethnic groups, including Assyrians, Turkmens, Yazidis, Shabaks, Sunni and Shi'a Arabs, and Kurds.

Except for Kirkuk, the constitution did not clearly define which regions would be considered "disputed territory"—and this lack of specificity has only intensified concerns, for both the Iraqi and Kurdish governments, over demographic changes in these areas. Additionally, by characterizing the dispute as solely between these two governments, the constitutional provision erased the rights and voices of other ethnic groups, such as the Yazidis, who have resided in these areas for centuries.

In the end, the census in the "disputed territories" was never conducted—but the presence of Kurdish forces allowed the KRG to expand its influence in Ninawa Governorate. The KRG claimed a large area of the Ninawa Governorate as "historically Kurdish," though it had always been outside of its official administrative domain of control, and extended its patronage system throughout the Sinjar region.[11] Kurdish officials used various tactics to gain control over new territories, including funding pro-KRG organizations, hiring local leaders, nominating pro-KRG candidates, and intimidating or arresting those who opposed their policies. A 2009 report by Human Rights Watch documented instances of KRG intimidation of Yazidis who did not identify as ethnic Kurds or support KRG policies.[12] In a meeting with the U.S. delegation made public by Wikileaks, Prince Tahsin Saeed Ali, the hereditary political leader of the Yazidi community, warned that under the pressure of Kurdish officials, the Yazidi community would disappear "like snow in the sunshine."[13]

In the decade following the U.S. invasion, Kurdish forces retained near-absolute control over Sinjar. With the emergence of ISIS in 2013, however, the political situation in northern Iraq underwent a drastic transformation.[14] Yazidis in the Sinjar region found the presence of Kurdish Peshmerga forces to be reassuring, despite KRG intimidation and their differences with the KRG, as they believed that the KRG would provide protection during a critical moment.[15] But when ISIS launched an assault on Yazidi towns in southern Sinjar on August 2, 2014, Kurdish forces abruptly withdrew without engaging in battle or issuing any warnings to Yazidis. Their sudden withdrawal led to the capture of the city by ISIS and resulted in some 5,000 deaths, over 6,000 abductions, and the displacement of more than 300,000 Yazidis.[16]

The KRG's official stance was that their forces were not adequately equipped to defend Sinjar and that the fall of Sinjar was the fault of the Iraqi army, notwithstanding Kurdish control over the entire region.[17] In fact, the main reason for this outcome was that KRG forces were not

in Sinjar to protect the local population; their primary objective was to oppose the Iraqi army and prevent it from gaining a stronghold in the region. If not for the participation of small units of Yazidi fighters, as well as of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Syrian affiliate, People's Defense Units (YPG), the devastation inflicted upon the Yazidi community could have been even more severe.

Shifting Political Allegiances in Sinjar and New Yazidi Identities after ISIS

The 2014 mass displacement of Yazidis and the hasty withdrawal of Kurdish forces marked a rupture in the relationship between Yazidis and the governments in both Baghdad and Erbil. The ISIS attack not only sparked the formation of Yazidi militias and new political institutions but also revitalized an exclusive discourse of locality and belonging. The Sinjar Agreement and other initiatives aimed at stabilizing Sinjar tend to dismiss the importance of Yazidi militias and changes in Yazidis' political alignments that increasingly challenge the political authority of the KRG and the Iraqi government.

Following the retreat of KRG forces and the fall of Sinjar, militias associated with the PKK—designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, and the European Union—became a decisive force in northwestern Iraq. The PKK and its Syrian affiliate, the YPG, organized Yazidi fighters to prevent the consolidation of ISIS positions. Several Yazidi militias were formed and armed to defend the Sinjar region, including the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ), the Êzîdxan Women's Units (YJÊ), the Security Forces of Êzîdxan (Asayîşa Êzîdxanê), and the Protection Force of Êzîdxan (HPÊ). The Yazidi militias were able to establish a strong presence in the Sinjar region as a result of a joint military campaign undertaken in 2015 with the PKK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP, one of the ruling parties of the KRG) to drive ISIS out of the area.

The KRG's independence referendum in 2017 sparked widespread opposition as well as backlash from national and international actors, leading to a subsequent military operation by the Iraqi army and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to retake control of Kirkuk and Sinjar. KRG forces had to retreat from Sinjar once again, and the region largely fell into the hands of Yazidi militias and the PMF.

The growing power of the PKK and the PMF in Sinjar has established Iran and Turkey as significant actors in the region. The PMF, primarily composed of pro-Iranian

Shi'ite militias formed in 2014 in response to Grand Ayatollah Sistani's call to fight ISIS, has partnered with various minority groups, including Yazidis, to expand their influence in northwest Iraq. Both Iran and the PMF prefer the presence of PKK forces in Sinjar to the return of KDP Peshmergas, owing to the KDP's pro-Western and pro-Turkey stance. The Yazidi militias also prefer to align themselves with the PMF, in order to access their financial resources and pay their fighters' salaries.[18] Turkey, on the other hand, views the PKK's presence in Sinjar as a threat to its national security. Having lost its primary partner in Sinjar following the withdrawal of KDP forces, Turkey began air strikes in the region[19] that have targeted high-ranking members of Yazidi units as well as public facilities in Sinjar, including a hospital in 2021.[20]

Despite sporadic clashes, Yazidi militias, along with the PMF, have been the main security and governance actors in the region over the last five years. Yazidi militias have been able to establish their own "self-governance system," modeled after the YPG's in northern Syria, which includes an administrative branch as well as a self-defense unit made up largely of Yazidis and other local residents. The self-governance system, however, has not been recognized as an official institution by the Iraqi government, forcing Sinjar residents to commute to nearby cities and towns for their administrative needs.

Since the 2014 ISIS attack, many Yazidis no longer self-identify as ethnic Kurds or Arabs and make a clear distinction between their plight and the Kurdish struggle for independence.[21] In contrast to *Kurdeyati* (Kurdish nationalism) and Kurdistan, Yazidis vow to defend Êzîdxan (Yazidi nation). Rather than referring to their native language as Kurdish *Kurmanji* (or *Badhini*), Yazidis increasingly use the term *Ezdiki*. Instead of honoring the red, white, and green flag of Kurdistan, Yazidis celebrate their own red and white flag on September 14.

Moreover, instead of considering Yazidi lands to be part of Greater Kurdistan, Yazidis claim that they are the original inhabitants of Sinjar, whose presence predates that of Kurds.[22] Many Yazidis view this shift in ethnic identification as a necessary step in detaching themselves from the ongoing Arab-Kurdish conflict in Iraq. As a Yazidi activist told me during an interview, "Yazidis must acknowledge the history of exploitation by both Arabs and Kurds on their land and people. In order to reclaim autonomy, it is essential for us to reclaim our identity first."

It is important to note, however, that despite the emergence of this new discourse, the Yazidi community is neither monolithic nor politically homogeneous.

Historically, there have been occasional tensions between the two largest Yazidi enclaves in Iraq: Sinjar and Sheikhan. For example, in the early twentieth century, Sinjari Yazidis rejected the authority of traditional religious leaders in Sheikhan and instead chose to appoint their own leaders.[23] A diversity of opinion was also evident in the 2021 parliamentary election when Yazidi candidates supported by the KDP defeated Yazidi independent nominees as well as those supported by the PKK. The election of KDP politicians, however, should not be interpreted as amounting to Yazidis' unconditional support for Kurdish political parties or as based on a shared sense of Kurdish identity. Given that the majority of Sinjar's displaced population still lives and works in Kurdistan, it is not surprising that some displaced Yazidis would vote for KDP candidates. The KRG also has a history, as discussed above, of using intimidation tactics against Yazidis who support or join opposing political factions.[24] And more significantly, the 2021 election was marred by a historically low voter turnout—which, more than anything else, reflected growing dissatisfaction with the status quo.

The exclusion of Yazidi militias and other Yazidi voices from negotiations over the Sinjar Agreement, and from other initiatives aimed at stabilizing Sinjar, overlooks the new political landscape of the region. By ignoring these changes, the agreement has hindered its own stated goal, thereby contributing to an increase in violence and instability and impeding the return of displaced Yazidis.

Return of Displaced Yazidis and the Humanitarian Predicament

In May 2020, the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement utilized its social media accounts to disseminate a series of posts and images bearing the hashtag "voluntary return." Each post displayed the number of returnees, accompanied by pictures of long lines of vehicles at checkpoints transporting returnees and their belongings, along with images of children with joyful expressions alongside the trucks and pictures of the ministry's staff reviewing the documentation of those returning. These self-congratulatory posts failed to acknowledge, however, that many Yazidis were not returning from Iraqi Kurdistan owing to an improvement in security or living conditions in Sinjar but rather as a result of deteriorating living conditions in the camps caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, Yazidis had to either remain in temporary camps enduring ever-increasing surveillance, extended lockdowns, and loss of their livelihood, or accept the risks involved in returning to their home areas.

Ultimately, while some Yazidis did choose to return to Sinjar, the majority decided to remain in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The ministry's posts are one example of how humanitarian and government agencies have promoted the return to Sinjar as the favored solution for displaced Yazidis, which is in line with the goals of the Sinjar Agreement. They also illustrate the limited options available to displaced Yazidis in Iraq: either to continue living in a state of displacement or to accept the inherent risks associated with returning to their home areas. As internally displaced persons (IDPs) of a disputed territory, Yazidis have fallen into a protection gap whereby they are recognized neither as refugees by humanitarian organizations nor as full citizens by the Iraqi and Kurdish governments. Although protecting refugees, or those who cross national borders, has been codified in international law since the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, forced displacement *within* borders remains largely unaddressed by international protocols—and this situation has left displaced Yazidis vulnerable to various forms of discrimination. The KRG has put many restrictions on Yazidis' mobility within the region, and despite being Iraqi citizens, Yazidis are treated as unwelcome outsiders.[25] The protection and support offered by humanitarian organizations to displaced Yazidis are also limited because Yazidis remain inside Iraq, and their protection is entrusted to their own state—even as that same state is the very cause of their displacement.

Since 2014, numerous humanitarian organizations have been actively engaged in providing aid and support for displaced Yazidis. These efforts have been coordinated through the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster in Iraq, which is led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC) of the Kurdistan Regional Government, both of which were established in the same year.[26]

Three options are presented as durable solutions to internal displacement in the current guidelines of the UNHCR and other major aid organizations: return to the place of origin, local settlement in the areas where displaced persons have taken refuge, or settlement elsewhere within the country.[27] Owing to unstable security conditions and a lack of infrastructure and livelihoods, however, many displaced Yazidis have been unable or unwilling to return to Sinjar. Most displaced Yazidis have also been unable to settle in the Kurdistan Region because they have limited access to basic government services, such as education and healthcare. Displaced Yazidis also face challenges finding a job in

the Kurdistan Region's public sector, which is the main source of income for most Kurdish families.[28] To gain access to the KRG's patronage system, Yazidis must be members of one of the Kurdish political parties (the KDP or the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan ‹PUK›), which requires them to identify as ethnic Kurds and show support for the Kurdish cause. The process of obtaining permits for private businesses is also challenging, since it requires a significant amount of investment, which is not available to most displaced Yazidis.

Over the last eight years, humanitarian organizations, in coordination with the governments of Baghdad and Erbil, have implemented a range of measures that discourage Yazidis from feeling any sense of stability outside of their homeland and make return to Sinjar the only viable alternative to displacement. These measures include constant surveillance of Yazidis residing in IDP camps; strict restrictions on their movement in and out of the camps, as well as limitations on their travel within Iraqi Kurdistan; the provision of tents as the only accommodation, along with the prohibition of building long-lasting shelters; limitations on their participation in public gatherings; and even restrictions on their ability to speak with foreign journalists. The implementation of these measures constitutes an implicit strategy to force displaced Yazidis to view displacement as a temporary phenomenon. As a manager of one of the IDP camps in Iraqi Kurdistan stated during an interview with me: "We want to support Yazidis, but also discourage them from thinking that they can stay here forever. They should not think that aid is always available, or [that] living in the camp is permanent."

Framing the return to Sinjar, however impractical, as the only path for Yazidis' recovery stems from the desire of national and international stakeholders to not alter the pre-ISIS demographics of northern Iraq. Any demographic change in these disputed territories, including Sinjar, is regarded as a major threat by both the KRG and the Iraqi government because it can affect the balance of power between different groups in these areas, as well as future negotiations over their territorial status.

Conclusion

The Sinjar Agreement, though put forward as a solution for Yazidis' displacement, does not tackle the root causes of their vulnerability to displacement and violence. Instead, the agreement focuses on restoring the status quo before the 2014 ISIS attack. This Brief highlights the shortcomings of the agreement in addressing past discrimination against Yazidis, the formation of new

political identities and alliances following the ISIS assault, and ongoing conflicts with regard to control over the Sinjar region as a disputed territory, all of which hinder Yazidis' ability to relocate outside of Sinjar and to rebuild their lives.

These elements are interconnected and reveal a deeper issue with the approaches taken to address the Yazidis' predicament. As with the treatment of disputed territories in the Iraqi constitution, the Sinjar Agreement subordinates the agency of local inhabitants to the Arab-Kurdish rivalry, thereby denying Yazidis the opportunity to determine their own destiny.[29] Rather than viewing Yazidis as passive actors and helpless victims, any assistance must recognize them as active participants and empower them to take charge of their future.

Endnotes

1   U.S. Department of State, "Sinjar Agreement," October 10, 2020.
2   United Nations Iraq, "UN Iraq on Commemoration of 2014 Atrocities against Yazidis in Sinjar: Peace, Development, and Accountability Key for the Community to Flourish" (Baghdad, August 3, 2022).
3   Hanar Marouf, "The Sinjar Agreement Has Good Ideas, but Is It a Dead End?" (Atlantic Council, MENASource, April 1, 2021.
4   The other is Sheikhan District on the east side of the Ninawa Governorate, bordering the KRG.
5   For further detail, see Eszter Spät, "Religious Oral Tradition and Literacy among the Yazidis of Iraq," *Anthropos* 103 (2008): 393–403, and Sebastian Maisel, "Social Change amidst Terror and Discrimination: Yazidis in the New Iraq" (Middle East Institute, August 1, 2008). See also "Displacement from Sinjar, 3–14 August" (REACH Initiative, August 18, 2014).
6   International Organization for Migration, "Iraq Displacement Data – IDOs [IOM DTM]." See also "We Cannot Return: Part 1, Collapsed Security Threatens the Future of Yazidis & Minorities in Sinjar" (Wilson Center, Middle East Program, September 21, 2022; Yazda & The Zovighian Partnership).
7   For more information, see Eva Savelsberg, Siamend Hajo, and Irene Dulz, "Effectively Urbanized: Yazidis in the Collective Towns of Sheikhan and Sinjar," *Études rurales*, no. 186 (2010): 101–16.
8   Identifying Yazidis as Arabs had some proponents among Yazidis. Al-Amir Beyezid Al-Umawi, a Yazidi religious figure, was one of the most notable advocates of this designation. He opened the "Umayyad Office" in Baghdad in 1969 and published several articles to further publicize the Arab roots of Yazidis. He even urged Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and Iraqi president Abdul Salam Arif to support Yazidis as ethnic Arabs surrounded by non-Arab communities.

For more information, see Sa'ad Salloum, *Êzidîs in Iraq: Memory, Beliefs, and Current Genocide* (Baghdad, Iraq: Un ponte per, 2016).

9   Although the majority of Yazidis speak the Kurdish northern dialect known as Kurmanji, Yazidis in the villages of Bashiqa and Bahzani predominantly speak Arabic.

10   The first references to Yazidis' religion as a pre-Islamic Kurdish religion appear in the writings of Celadat and Kamran Bedirkhan, who founded Xoybûn, a pan-Kurdish nationalist party, in the early twentieth century.

11   For more information, see Sean Kane, "Iraq's Disputed Territories: A View of the Political Horizon and Implications for U.S. Policy" (United States Institute of Peace, April 4, 2011 [Peaceworks, no. 69 (March 2011)]).

12   "On Vulnerable Ground: Violence against Minority Communities in Nineveh Province's Disputed Territories" (Human Rights Watch, November 10, 2009).

13   "KRG Divided: Special Advisor Krajeski Discusses Corruption, Media Freedom, and Minority Issues with Kurdish and Yezidi Leaders, Part I" (WikiLeaks, Public Library of US Diplomacy, December 1, 2008), accessed November 12, 2019.

14   In early 2013, the group changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) after the merging of the Islamic State of Iraq and the al-Nusra Front.

15   See, for example, Nadia Murad, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight against the Islamic State* (with Jenna Krajeski) (Crown, 2018).

16   "We Cannot Return: Part I." See also Valeria Cetorelli et al., "Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates for the Yazidi Population in the Area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A Retrospective Household Survey," *PLOS Medicine*, 14(5), May 9, 2017.

17   For a detailed analysis, see Matthew Barber, "KRG Targets Minorities ahead of Kurdistan Independence Referendum: Part One, Exploiting the Yazidi Genocide," *Syria Comment*, September 6, 2017.

18   For further detail, see "Iraq: Stabilising the Contested District of Sinjar" (International Crisis Group, Report No. 235, May 31, 2022).

19   Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan justified Turkish air strikes and threatened ground offensives when he declared publicly that Sinjar would not become a "new Qandil," referring to the area controlled by the PKK. See Sibel Ugurlu, "Erdogan Says Sinjar Will Not Be 'New Qandil' for PKK," *Anadolu Agency*, October 27, 2016.

20   Amberin Zaman, "Turkish airstrikes claim Yazidi lives in Iraq's Sinjar" Al-Monitor, August 18, 2021.

21   For further detail, see Majid Hassan Ali, Dimitri Pirbari, and Rustam Rzgoyan, "The Reformation and Development of Yazidi Identity from Theoretical and Historical Perspectives," Ethnopolitics 21.3 (2022), and Saad Salloum, "Barriers to Return for Ethno-Religious Minorities in Iraq: Identity Politics and Political Patronage among Yazidi and Christian Communities from Ninewa Governorate," IOM Iraq, January 2020.

22   For example, the Kurdish parties requested that their flags be displayed at one of the Yazidis' religious sites in Sinjar, but the Yazidis refused to comply with this request.

See Ali, Pirbari, and Rzgoyan, "The Reformation and Development of Yazidi Identity."

23   For further detail, see Nelida Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

24   For a detailed analysis, see Barber, "KRG Targets Minorities ahead of Kurdistan Independence Referendum."

25   Houman Oliaei, "'Strangers in Their Own Land': Iraqi Yazidis and Their Plight, 7 years on from Genocide," *The Conversation*, December 14, 2021.

26   "IRAQ CCCM Cluster Terms of Reference" (CCCM Cluster, July 2015), and "About Joint Crisis Coordination Centre–JCC" (Kurdistan Regional Government, Ministry of Interior, Joint Crisis Coordination Centre).

27   UNHCR, *Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons.*

28   UNHCR, "COI Note on the Situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," May 2019.

29   After the U.S. invasion, Yazidis were largely excluded from the negotiations on Iraq's constitution. For more information, see Maisel, "Social Change amidst Terror and Discrimination."

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