Wanted: good governance - protection of minorities and human rights in northern Iraq
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Wanted: Good Governance

Protection of minorities and human rights in northern Iraq

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Recommendations

\ Create inclusive economic incentives

Camps can only be a strictly short-term solution. In the mid-term, cash-for-rent schemes under the roof of an international organization such as the United Nations are necessary. Add rent subsidies from the beginning and combine vocational training, higher education and cash-for-work schemes in parallel to create inclusive economic incentives in the long run.

\ Promote small- and medium-sized enterprises with a conflict-sensitive approach

Connect profound conflict and market analyses to (re-)build sustainable livelihood activities and markets. Rather than returning to an inefficient economic system, small- and medium-sized enterprises ought to be promoted.

\ Apply a needs-based community approach that addresses IDPs, refugees and hosts alike

Foster local integration and reintegration policies of regional governments by creating the necessary additional infrastructure (housing/education/health) in destination communities as a compensation for the solidarity of hosting populations rather than increasing social tensions by targeting specific groups—such as vulnerable persons.

\ Link the protection of human rights with the delivery of assistance

Reward minority/human rights guarantees, (re-) integration projects and good government practice by making them a prerequisite for assistance.

\ Foster reconciliation activities between host communities and the displaced

Frame all activities with inter-community trust-building activities intended to foster reconciliation. Infrastructure projects should create spaces that connect hosts and displaced persons while respecting traditional structures of ethno-religious co-existence amongst different communities.

\ Make psychosocial support mandatory

Traumata are prevalent and have to be addressed in all projects by providing respective psychosocial support.

Wanted: Good Governance

Protection of minorities and human rights in northern Iraq

Executive summary

Dealing with the aftermath of the current situation in northern Iraq requires a a mid-and a long-term strategy. Both have to recognize limitations that are due to the cyclical re-occurence of conflict and that mirror specific historical and socio-political circumstances. The success of mid-term strategies to tackle the stream of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) will depend in large part on the convincing development of long-term positive scenarios for the future of Iraq, introducing noticeable political and socio- economic change. In the mid-term, promoting good governance practices, the protection of human rights, integration of refugees and ethnoreligious minorities with aid projects that benefit both the displaced and host communities ought to be rewarded. In the long-term, a sustainable conflict resolution as well as a solution for the withdrawal of international actors must be found even if the current political realities and military strategies in the country impede this and increase the need for external aid.

The Kurdish regional government (KRG) stresses that it respects ethnoreligious minorities and human rights. This *policy brief* recommends, thus, to seize this claim as an opportunity. If compliance with human rights, the protection of ethnoreligious minorities and integration were rewarded, a role model would be created that could eventually attract imitators. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) already serves as a role model for the integration of displaced persons from different ethnoreligious communities. Official IDPs and refugees in camps, individuals out of camps or unrecognized displaced persons are often well integrated into work and business spaces. This relative safe haven for ethnoreligious groups in Iraq offers headroom for humanitarians and development actors to promote good governance—regardless of whether future scenarios see KRI more or less independent /or integrated into Iraq.

Displacement trends

Most of those displaced by force in Iraq are internally displaced persons (IDPs). By January 2017, there were roughly thirteen times more IDPs than refugees in Iraq: 2,996,004 million IDPs (IOM's DTM Dataset of mid-March 2017), compared to 233,224 Syrian refugees (UNHCR data, January 2017). These numbers, however, have to be taken with a grain of salt as the region is experiencing ongoing violence and continuing displacement. Ahead of the current military campaign to liberate Daesh [ISIL]-held territory including Iraq's second largest city Mosul, senior UN staff expected over one million additional displaced persons. Against expectations, however, after a peak in March 2016 (over 3,400,000 people), the national number of IDPs decreased. This trend continued even after the start of the campaign. From the peak of March 2016 until March 2017, numbers dropped by just under 355,000. This can be explained by the number of returnees who, since April 2016, have increased from just under 116,000 to more than 1.6 million in March 2017. Yet, these overall numbers are misleading. Disaggregated, the picture changes. The battle of Mosul has displaced over 160,000 inhabitants since mid-October. The situation is aggravated by the unusual fact that the majority of civilians have not fled the battlefield in Mosul.

Historical and socio-political background

Forced displacement in Iraq is framed by the following historical and socio-political circumstances:
   \ Ethnoreligious division has shaped the local social reality and has led to forced displacement since precolonial times;
   \ Colonial administrative order and boundary-drawing exercises have exacerbated rising nationalistic dissection discourses in the region;
   \ Chasms amongst the current factions have steadily increased due to national political practices of 'divide and rule' since the times of postcolonial nation-building;

\ The recent explosion of ethnoreligious tensions is intrinsically connected with the two Gulf Wars and the trajectory of the US-led rebuilding project in Iraq;

\ The situation in Iraq (and in Syria) has been exacerbated by the armed stuggle for a new order in the Middle East in this arena.

Ethnoreligious divides

Current and past fighting in Iraq are about to prepare the ground for another round of retaliation. Once again, the international community and the Iraqi central government prioritize short-term military alliances over solving the issues underlying the conflict and making sustainable socio-political change happen. Therefore, history threatens to be repeating itself, and it seems highly likely that the very same sectarian, clientelist and/or discriminatory policies that have led to the current crisis continue. The course of action has raised the level of social division and mistrust between Iraq's ethno-religious communities, increasing the need for a dialogue about a coherent socio-political vision for Iraq as a prerequisite for aid measures aiming to be sustainable.

Need for coherent long-term scenarios

Political visions for Iraq have historically been neither coherent nor realistic. The reality on the ground is characterized by deepening ethnoreligious divides, increased discrimination and exclusion on the one hand and political discourses about a unified Iraq on the other. Considering the most likely scenario, Iraq is heading straight for a cantonization like Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnoreligious communities, most prominently Kurds, Sunnites and Shiites have been proactively deepening the divide between independent administrative entities characterized by diverging militaristic, political, constitutional and

economic realities. The ongoing violent conflict has not only exacerbated the already high level of hatred and mistrust but also consolidated *de facto* independent states. Any coherent strategy must not ignore such facts on the ground, such as in the KRI.

Current developments in the KRI

Despite a *de facto* autonomy, Erbil's economic, political and social situation is still strongly influenced by Baghdad and other parts of Iraq—evident in the chosen destination of the displaced and the practical local integration process. Many people who are currently staying in urban Christian camps in Erbil had been displaced from Baghdad before, moved to the Mosul plains and have recently been forced to move again. Many wealthy Arabs had owned houses in Kurdish mountain resorts or invested in residential housing projects in KRI and were, therefore, able to change residence smoothly. Affluent neighbourhoods in urban Kurdish areas are full of displaced people that are on no one's IDPs list. Even after the *de facto* segregation of KRI and the Daesh [ISIL] occupied area of Baghdad, ties and intersections with other Iraqi regions still remained. Many IDPs in the KRI are still on a central government payroll even though payments to the government (KRG) have officially been suspended.

KRI, thus, has a unique position in the general trend of ethnoreligious segregation in Iraq. While, on a national level, the region as such has become increasingly segregated from Iraq, both politically and economically, everyday lives of the people have become more interlinked. The region has been coping with an influx of different ethnoreligious groups: Many Sunni Arabs and Yezidis sought refuge in KRI because they have been considering it a model for democracy and development since well before the current crisis. Members of the Christian minorities felt safe in KRI while reporting harassment and intimidation in Baghdad: Even though most Shia minorities did not head to KRI, those who did seemingly felt protected there.

Support for local integration and reintegration policy of regional governments

The following recommendations are intended to help promote good governance and the protection of human rights and minorities. They offer mid-term solutions that reflect ongoing local coping strategies in northern Iraq. Durable and sustainable solutions to complicated questions such as that of disputed territories can, however, only be found in the international and regional political arena:

Create inclusive economic incentives
Camps offer logistical advantages and are quick and adequate short-term solutions. These advantages turn into disadvantages when camps are used beyond the 'short term'. Decades of experience with camp management have shown that they are likely to become a permanent fixture when there are no alternatives. Therefore, such alternatives must be found as soon as possible. UNHCR reported that the cash-for-rent scheme in Lebanon had shown that landlords appreciate having the United Nations as a reliable tenant. This case also revealed that it is more advantageous to negotiate rents when housing is organized by one single organization. The prospect of a stable revenue mobilized investments in real estate projects, and the income that was generated by the rents furthermore stabilized an economy struggling with the impact of hosting large parts of the population.

From what can be gleaned upon arrival in northern Iraq is that such a scheme may well work there. Ambitious high-rise residential blocks, fancy villas in gated communities and imposing skyscrapers command the landscape around the Kurdish district capitals of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, heralding the KRI's economic potential. Upon closer inspection, one finds a high vacancy rate—empty floors echo the despair of a crumbling economy. Potentials and challenges manifest themselves side by side: New buildings are joined by shell constructions, motorways end in unpaved roads, and behind various city skylines, camps loom on the horizon.

Housing, learning and livelihoods are the three most important issues for people affected by displacement—including host communities. Especially Syrian refugees deplore limited opportunities for vocational training, lower and higher education. IDP and refugee camp residents alike also complain about the lack of access to social, cultural and economic life. However, due to the economic crisis, hosts can no longer afford access to these commodities either. This became evident when aid workers reported that the first Iraqis from host communities had applied for a place in the refugee camps for displaced from Syria.

The triple challenge of housing, learning and livelihoods is thus an issue that needs to be tackled coherently across sectors. In various cases, the research team spoke to IDPs and refugees who had actually built the aforementioned shell structures. A combined programme could advance their capacities on site, train the next generation and offer positions for students of engineering or architecture. A combination of ongoing vocational training and cash-for-rent schemes will benefit landlords, investors, workers and prospective trainees alike and would be an economic incentive for the entire region.

Promote small and medium-sized enterprises with a conflict-sensitive approach
As any project idea in this area, measures need to be embedded into a profound structural assessment of the local political economy. Since the Baath regime, most commodities have been allocated by or through state authorities. Food, education, health care, housing and loans had all been provided for by the state. The Kurdistan regional government (KRG) has continued this policy to date: Citizens obtain their food through PDS (public distribution service) cards that are available to all households. Large parts of the heavily subsidized agriculture sector are based on a false or distorted market that mostly does not produce competitive goods. The number of people that are directly or indirectly on a government payroll is extremely high—according to the last reliable estimates, it was one out of 2,5 persons. The impact of state employees not being paid their salaries for

nearly a year in a region where most people depend directly or indirectly on such salaries has been devastating. Sustainable value chains do not exist and need to be established in the first place. To make sure that this results in an inclusive development of all groups, long-term assessments on patron–client networks, including extended do-no-harm and conflict analyses are necessary.

Apply a needs-based community approach addressing IDPs, refugees and hosts alike.
At the beginning of the Syrian war and the subsequent influx of refugees, the level of solidarity in the KRI was exceptionally high. Memories of personally experienced attacks, displacement and ensuing exile translated into a high degree of solidarity amongst civilians and led to spontaneous aid. Also, a workforce was needed then, and the Syrian Kurds, who constituted the vast majority of refugees, were appreciated for their skills. After having accepted hospitality themselves so many times, respondents from the host community reported a feeling of moral obligation. But due to the economic crisis and decreasing work opportunities, they became more hostile over time. Displaced persons, specifically the much bigger number of IDPs that were less qualified, were increasingly blamed as partly responsible for the decrease in wages—especially for daily workers. Host communities also complained about the deterioration of basic services such as education, electricity and security. They were reluctant to trust in law enforcement and complained about little international support for themselves.

This criticism must be taken seriously, and host communities ought to be compensated for their solidarity to avoid social tensions. To address the impact displacement has had, the whole community needs to benefit from the respective infrastructure aid—primarily in the health and education sectors. The deterioration of these services due to the sheer number of IDPs and refugees can be reversed with a needs-based community approach. Awarding a community's (re)integration efforts with aid for projects could assure that solidarity with the displaced will not decrease further, but rather upsurge again.

Link the protection of human rights with the delivery of assistance
The Kurdish regional government (KRG) stresses that it respects ethnoreligious minorities and human rights. The context of this discourse must be viewed against the background of claims about Kurdish autonomy, independence or statehood and is therefore to be taken with a grain of salt: Many organizations, amongst them Amnesty International, have blamed KRG for human rights violations. By no means should such violations be accepted or standards lowered. The destruction of Arab villages and the sexual enslavement of Yezidis by Daesh [ISIL] cannot be weighed up against each other. But there is one crucial difference: While Daesh [ISIL] does not care about allegations of human rights violations, the Kurdish regional government does.

While the current armed fight is in many ways a continuous historical and therefore rather consolidating, unifying and fortifying element of Iraq's Kurdish society, the economic crisis is gnawing at its foundations. There is a window of opportunity for change in any direction—also for international aid and cooperation. Against the backdrop of existing patron–client relationships, this window of opportunity ought to be used as a positive leverage to implement a good governance policy rather than to consolidate the *status quo*.

Foster reconciliation activities between host communities and the displaced
The stance of Kurdish politicians and citizens towards Arabs is ambiguous—while ethnic cleansing as reported in some publications (Amnesty International, 2016) could not be verified during our research[1], the Kurdish government's process to counter Saddam Hussein's Arabization campaign has been ongoing

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1 \ The *Policy Brief* is based on findings of a research conducted in various locations in northern Iraq between February and May 2016. The BMZ funded, dialogue-oriented research project "Protected rather than Protracted: Strengthening Refugees and Peace," included individual interviews and focus group discussions with persons affected by displacement, government agencies, stakeholders from international and non-governmental organizations..

on all levels since 2003. Besides the known lines of conflict between Kurds and Arabs, there are also many other animosities between and within Iraq's different ethnoreligious groups that are shaped by collective memory and exacerbated by current events. Respondents, such as Yezidis who had fled from Shingal, constantly evaluated prospects of flight and return with references to a history of genocides. The recent war has exacerbated the ethnoreligious chasm and is likely to strongly impede communal coexistence in the future: "How can you trust your neighbour who has betrayed you, attacked you, sold your daughters to Daesh? How can you ever trust them again?" those Yezidi survivors would frequently ask. "We will wait until international troops guarantee our safety [before we go back]."

Any planned reconciliation should therefore proactively build upon the arrangements that have made it possible for the different groups to live alongside each other despite all: Ethnoreligious communities either live in geographically segregated towns and villages or in new suburbs, which, in turn, are segregated according to economic class. Rather than forcing communities to abandon this segregation, one feasible option might be to concentrate on spaces of encounter in-between them. Traditionally, there have been spaces of encounters for all ethnoreligious groups. Strict conflict analyses can contribute to identifying barriers such as language, religion, ethnicity or other group markers as well as spaces where these can be overcome. The choice of such spaces—such as schools and hospitals—needs to be assessed from the bottom up to avoid doing any harm.

Make psychosocial support mandatory
In Syria and Iraq, people have experienced massacres, detainment, torture, abduction, intimidation, extortion, deportation and expropriation. Many had no right to own property, had no identification papers, in sum, were deprived of all citizens' rights. Virtually all displaced persons and most hosts reported that such incidents occurred in their families. The level of resilience shown by the respondents in the face of such

insecurity and violence is remarkably high. This, however, does not mean that traumata are healed; on the contrary, they are successively layered on top of each other.

The religious minority of the Yezidis, for example, has been experiencing attacks, mass murder, rapes, abductions and enslavement from the hands of Daesh [ISIL]. They report having been abandoned to fend for themselves in the mountains of Shingal and feel left alone in the battle to liberate their women and girls. The fact that mothers and sisters are still in captivity and that the whereabouts of male members of the family are still unknown is a chilling reminder that the traumatic experience is ongoing. While the extent of the current crisis seems exceptional for an outsider, it is just another piece in the mosaic for survivors: After decades of civil war, the notion that it has happened before—and that it will happen again—prevails across all ethnoreligious groups. Like in a self-fulfilling prophesy, these groups become stronger and stronger while alternatives beyond these front lines are increasingly on the wane.

FURTHER READING

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