

What is Behind the PYD's Attack on Barzani's Party?

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Articles & Testimony

A Syrian Kurdish group's hostile reaction to the digging of a trench along the Iraqi border is doing more to undermine Kurdish unity than the trench itself.

The Democratic Union Party (PYD) has begun a ruthless media war against the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Masoud Barzani in Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), after it initiated the digging of a trench along the Iraq-Syria border of both countries' Kurdish-majority regions. The PYD claims that this measure solidifies the principle of partition imposed by the countries in order to divide Kurdistan and shuts out the Syrian Kurds amid the difficult circumstances that they are currently undergoing. However, the PYD's hostile reaction and propaganda is in fact doing more to undermine efforts for Kurdish unity than the digging of a trench.

The PYD has ties with Iraq's KRG, despite its deteriorating relationship with Barzani's KDP, whose members are described by the PYD as clients of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and enemies of the Kurdish people. Of course, this is an old accusation and has a long backstory, but disagreements have come to the fore recently in light of the good relations between the KDP and the Turkish government. The PYD does not accept this and is wary about these good relations. For this reason, the PYD has mobilized its media against Barzani's party, and its supporters have amassed on the region's border to block the digging of the trench, although the decision to dig the trench came from the central government in Iraq to ensure the safety and security of the province.

According to Barzani, the purpose of the trench is to prevent the smuggling of goods and people on the roads and gaps, especially as "*takfir*" forces in Syria are drawing near the border of the KRG. Instigated and directed by countries and governments that want to destabilize the KRG, these forces want to undermine the sole gain that the Kurdish people have made in Kurdistan. This comes as the dream of a Kurdish state has begun to tantalize Kurdish leaders in the wake of Barzani's statements during his European tour early this year, during which he said that the establishment of a Kurdish state is no longer rejected by the international community as it was in the past. What is so surprising in the PYD's media war and its daily mobilization of supporters on the border is the timing of it all. These actions come after the central government in Iraq has imposed an economic blockade on the KRG amid preparations for parliamentary elections -- an election that required unified Kurdish support for the KRG.

If we review some of the measures taken by the PYD on the ground in Syrian Kurdistan, we see that they do not serve

collective Kurdish interests. The PYD lost in battle the most strategic areas -- i.e., Tel Abyad, Tel Aral, and Tel Hasel, areas that link the historic Kurdish Jazirah region, Kobane, and Afrin -- to the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and the Assad regime. This occurred because the PYD allowed itself to be distracted by side battles with extremist rebel groups in Tel Brak and Tel Hamis rather than working to liberate those other strategic areas and thus strengthen the geographical unity of Syrian Kurdistan. These strategic areas underwent the Syrian regime's project of Arabization, such that Kurds now represent only 42 percent of the local population, though there are about 82 Kurdish villages to the west and south of these towns.

Furthermore, the PYD is suspiciously protecting the Arab settlements that were established deep in the Kurdish region, which stretches from the northeasternmost point of Syria on the border with Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey to the Ras al-Ayn region on the Turkish border. These settlements amount to approximately 37 model villages, and they were positioned there as part of the Baath regime initiative to alter the demography of the area. There have already been a number of incidents in villages such as Zahr al-Arab in which militant extremist sleeper cells have emerged, leading to terrible consequences.

As for the PYD's accusation that the KRG sealed the border off from sick and displaced Kurds, the closing of the Simalka-Fish Khabour bridge crossing linking Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan over the Tigris River was in fact initiated under a directive coming from the Jazirah region, which is administered by the PYD. This crossing should have been opened to meet the citizens' daily needs, and indeed the KRG called for this and other crossings to be opened in order to facilitate both relief and trade.

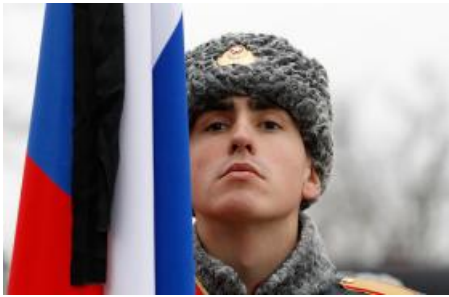
Rather than using the borders as an opportunity to harm the KRG, all factions of the Kurdish people should work to implement the Hawler Agreement (Barzani's reconciliation initiative between the PYD and the Syrian Kurdish National Council in 2012) to involve all Kurds in rights and duties and to build what the Kurdish people have been aspiring to for hundreds of years. The PYD is currently partaking in illicit activities under the pretext of protecting the Kurdish cause, while in reality, they are harassing their people daily by imposing regulations and levies, imprisoning activists on insubstantial pretexts, imposing laws on the region's parties and movements, and requiring them to obtain superficial licenses. Not even the regime undertook such excesses during the height of its power.

The PYD's excuses are typical of totalitarian regime culture, which has long been nourished by nationalistic slogans. Iraq's initiative of digging a trench is not intended to divide Kurdistan; rather, it is a security measure concerning the internal considerations of the KRG, and it is within the right of any state or entity to protect its natural borders. The flood of ISIS and its associates is sweeping the region, and the PYD and its armed forces are perhaps the most aware of their criminal acts and the danger they pose.

Barzan Sheikmous is a Kurdish journalist based in Amuda, Syria. This article originally appeared in [Fikra Forum](http://fikraforum.org/?p=4849) (<http://fikraforum.org/?p=4849>). ❖

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