

# Three Reasons behind the Erbil Attack

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## Introduction

The rocket attack on Erbil on February 15<sup>th</sup> claimed by the Awliyaa al-Dam (The Guardians of the Blood Brigade) have exposed security gaps which requires urgent solution. It's important to take this seriously and start precise investigation on the possibility of existing trade and smuggling within Kurdistan region with the armed groups, which can open the way for security infiltration and transfer illegal arms to KRI.

Filling the security gap between Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army alongside the decline of multi-force in Nineveh and Kirkuk as well as get more information on the main and secondary roads into the Kurdistan Region is very important. But not only the security precautions but knowing details of reasons behind the Erbil attack is needed. Meanwhile, the Iran-Shia political groups did not protest the Erbil attack strongly, Muqtada al-Sadr was more outspoken than others, and he has linked the Erbil attack to local-foreign interference and Pope's expected trip to Iraq. This was the most rational comment made on the motivations behind the attack.

There are many reasons to discuss but three of them are the most important one:

### First: Pope's visit and Shia internal rivalry

Expressing the Erbil attack as a reason for Pope's visit to Erbil is simple and quick observation. This has a deeper dimension that could be related to the rivalries over Shia Marjaya (Shia Authority). In recent days, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's office has rejected a statement by Rahman Ameri, brother of Hadi al- Ameri, leader of the Fatih coalition, about the possibility of signing a document between Pope and the Shia Authority<sup>[1]</sup>. The document mentioned by Rahman Ameri is the document on human fraternity for peace and coexistence also known as the Abu Dhabi declaration or agreement<sup>[2]</sup>. Is a joint statement signed by Pope Francis of the Catholic Church and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Until here there is no issue but when you talk about internal Shia rivalry over who is a supreme authority (Marjaiya), then it's more meaningful. Pope's visit to Iraq and its meeting with Ayatollah Sistani will strengthen the position of Iraq's supreme Shia Marjaiya and the Najaf seminary among the Shia seminaries. In addition, signing the document is considered a seal of witness to a large part of the Christian world to recognize Ayatollah al-Sistani as Marjaiya. In Iran and Iraq, the Shia groups and parties use the term "Wali Amr al-Muslimin", "Imam" to Ali Khamenei, Iran's current supreme leader, and except him, they do not recognize any other person to lead the Shia's World's and even all Muslims. And this raises a question about whether the Iran-backed groups are against Pope's visit to Iraq? Did they make this attack to say that Iraq's most peaceful place is unstable, and as Sadr talked about it is to press Pope to cancel's his Iraq trip? Is this attack was made with instruction from foreign actor or it was just act of ideological group did it deliberately?

### Second: the impact of international conflicts in Iraq

Many of the Iraqi and KRG leaders have indicated that the goal of the attack was to create chaos and instability. Iraqi PM Mustafa Kadhimi stated that " the terrorist attack was carried out after Iraq's attempts to stabilize the region and keep the country out of conflicts". So indirectly he pointed to the foreign hand in the attack. Sadr also mentioned involvement of the internal and external hand.<sup>[3]</sup>

Iran is suspicious actor behind the attack, which has refused to have any connection with the Erbil attack, but many media and political actors see the role of Iran is important in the stability and security of Iraq and the region. Since the beginning

of this month and within 10 days two UN representatives went to Tehran to discuss two issues related to the stability and crises of the region. Martin Griffiths Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Yemen made a two days visit to Tehran on February 7<sup>th</sup> to discuss the Yemen crisis with them<sup>[4]</sup>. Earlier Ms Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq also made two days visit to Tehran to discuss Iraq's stability! The question here is Iran linked to the Erbil attack, as Iran released a short film on its "aid" to Kurdistan region in the fight against ISIS titled Tawakul (trust in Allah), also is Iran linked to the attack on Saudi Arabia that was done by the Iraqi group called Al-Wadd al-Haq (promise of Truth) and increase of Houthis attacks in Yemen? Is increasing Shia armed groups attacks in the region related to the new US administration policy that is not rushing to restore the Iran nuclear deal? Is the UN mediating? Answer of these questions need clear evidence, but whether Iran has role in the Erbil attack or other events or not at least the world sees Iran as an actor involved in instability of Iraq, Yemen and other places in the region.

### **Third: The Sinjar deal and Erbil attack**

The Sinjar issue is still one of the key issues on the table of internal and external actors. The Erbil and Baghdad deal over Sinjar is still on the paper and a lot has changed the ground. The presence of armed forces including the PMF in Sinjar is complicated issue and sending the federal police and presence of Iraqi army divisions might be an indication that Iraqi government eventually think of kind of military pressure to impose its mission there.

Although the Shia armed groups verbally say are committed to the government order to withdraw from Sinjar but practically they do not want to do so. Bringing up the likely Turkish operation in Sinjar by Iran-backed groups might be a pretext to send more PMF forces to Sinjar to prevent any new pressure from PM Kadhimi and KRG to execute the deal which was expected to be implemented more this month. Complicating the security situation of Kurdistan region can affect reduction of such pressure. Kadhimi during the visit of Turkish defense minister to Baghdad said that the Iraqi army is able to launch operation anywhere in Iraq. This can be an answer to Turkey's intention to launch military operation in Sinjar! Otherwise is impossible for Turkey to launch such operation without US and Iran's approval. If Turkey was able to make such operation would have done it back in 2017. If we link all parts of the scene then it will be clearer that how Sinjar developments and the Erbil attack connected.

[1] <https://www.mawazin.net/Details.aspx?jimare=141932>

[2] Document on Human Fraternity

[3] - <https://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/1602202111>

[4] - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-yemen-un-idUSKBN2A707I>