

Pshdar District

Kurdistan region of Iraq



DISRUPTED LIVES

**the effects of cross-border attacks
by Turkey and Iran on Kurdish villages**

a report by Christian Peacemaker Teams – Iraqi Kurdistan



**2011
2012**

Christian Peacemaker Teams:

Building partnerships to transform violence and oppression.

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) is an international human rights and violence-reduction non-governmental and non-profit organization.

CPT offers an organized, nonviolent alternative to war and other forms of lethal inter-group conflict and provides organizational support to persons committed to faith-based nonviolent alternatives in situations where lethal conflict is an immediate reality or is supported by public policy. CPT accompanies communities affected by violence and oppression, documents human rights violations and advocates for the nonviolent solutions.



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INTRODUCTION

The villages of the Kurdistan region of Iraq situated in the mountain areas bordering Turkey and Iran were experiencing cross-border military violence by the Turkish army already in the 1990s. Since 2006, the military of Turkey has renewed these attacks. Not only have their bombings become more regular, but in addition Iran has also launched cross-border artillery shelling. Village residents reported that in 2011 the attacks were the most intense of the last six years.

This report focuses on the effects endured by communities and individuals living in the Pshdar¹ district of Iraqi Kurdistan as the people sustained this cross-border bombing and shelling during the summer and autumn of 2011. The report explores the impact of the attacks and their aftermath on these villages and how the military operations threaten a distinctive Kurdish traditional way of life.

Data used for this report comes from interviews and observations conducted by Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), from local Kurdish media sources related to the issue, as well as findings presented by three reports released in 2011. The first is a report published in September 2011 by the Federation of the Civil Society Organizations in Sulaimani and titled "*Turkey and Iran: killing the citizens of KRG and crossing the border of Iraq*". The other two reports were released by Human Rights Watch: "*Iraqi Kurdistan Cross border attacks should spare Iraqi Civilians*,"² published on 2 September 2011, and "*Recent attacks on civilians in Iraqi Kurdistan*,"³ published on 20 December 2011.

Moreover, in 2010 CPT released "*Where there is a promise there is a tragedy: Cross border bombing & shelling of the northern village peoples of the Kurdish region of Iraq by the nations of Turkey and Iran*,"⁴ a report that includes more comprehensive resources on the background and history of the cross-border attacks and the challenges they pose to residents of the border regions. A chapter of this report focuses in-depth on the experiences and plights of the twelve rural communities accompanied by CPT in the Pshdar district.

1 As there are several possible transliterations from the Kurdish script into Latin, names and places might be transcribed slightly differently in other resources.

2 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/02/iraqi-kurdistan-cross-border-attacks-should-spare-iraqi-civilians>

3 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/20/iranturkey-recent-attacks-civilians-iraqi-kurdistan>

4 http://www.cpt.org/files/CPT_Iraq_Bombing_Report.pdf

Overview

The rugged Qandil mountains, part of the Zagros mountains range, span most of the northern and eastern borders of the Iraqi Kurdistan and provide homes to hundreds of Kurdish villages and seasonal grazing grounds to local shepherds. Some of the remote areas are also used by guerrilla fighters of PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, Kurdistan Worker's Party*) who carry out low-intensity military operations against the government of the Republic of Turkey and PJAK (*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan*) who carry military operations against the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



Turkey and Iran use the presence of guerrilla fighters as a reason to bomb and shell the villages and their surrounding areas; however, the guerillas have their own camps and bases and do not live in the villages that bear the brunt of the military action.

Although there is sporadic military activity throughout the year, the majority of bombing and shelling occurs in the summer and early autumn months, seriously disrupting agricultural and grazing activities and forcing farmers and shepherds to choose between safety and income-generating activities. Cross-border military activities affecting civilian population have been conducted by Turkey, by Iran or by both in the districts of Zakho and Amedi (Duhok governorate), Mergasur, Soran and Choman (Erbil governorate), Pshdar and Penjwin (Sulaimani governorate).

The cross-border operations in Pshdar

Pshdar district is situated in the northern part of the governorate of Sulaimani which is under the administration of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. Pshdar borders the Islamic Republic of Iran and its northernmost point lies approximately 80 km (50 miles) south of the Republic of Turkey's border. The majority of bombing and shelling in the Pshdar district in 2011 occurred over a period from July through September, although there was sporadic military activity at other times. On 16 July 2011, an unknown number of Iranian soldiers crossed the border and for several consecutive days conducted military activity several kilometers deep into the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan.

On 21 August seven people (including two infant children) were killed as result of a bombing, reportedly by a Turkish aircraft, while traveling in a pick-up truck on a frequently used road. On 22 November, Turkish warplanes bombed the region causing damage to farms and livestock and injuring a twenty year old shepherd. Turkish warplanes and unmanned drones are a



A woman injured in her arm by shelling meet with CPT members in Prde Mangorayati.

frequent occurrence on the sky over the Pshdar district and cause considerable distress and anxiety among the people.

CPT visits to the Pshdar district

CPT's Iraqi Kurdistan team has been visiting and maintaining relationships with villagers from Pshdar district since 2008. In the months of August through October team members conducted multiple visits to the IDP camps of Gojar and Prde Mangorayati (also known as Prde Hawsoy). In the following months, the team visited the villages of Sunnah and Zewgah, and met repeatedly with a villager from Basta who resided with his family in the town of Zharawa during the winter. Residents of Sunnah and Basta provided the majority of the information for this report, while some information relates also to Zewga, Ali Rash and other villages. On 20 October, an international delegation organized by CPT visited Sunna and the deserted Gojar IDP camp. CPT's visits to Pshdar district villages and IDP camps centered on the following purposes:

- to maintain and deepen existing relationships with the villagers as well as to build new relationships;
- to express solidarity with the displaced villagers, hear their stories, and investigate how the current development of the situation is affecting their daily lives;
- to document the current situation and create reports in order to raise awareness and support for the villagers and bring an end to the attacks;
- to implement a documentation project with students at Sunnah school.



Community leaders in Prde Mangorayati IDP camp share with CPT team members.

Villagers' responses to internationals and local visitors

Following a team discussion within CPT about the nature and appropriateness of our visits, and the villagers' hopes from them, we spoke to the villagers about their thoughts and feelings about visitors, both local and international, taking photographs and making reports.

The villagers said that they were happy and eager for visitors to come and hear stories, make reports and take photographs. They hoped that this information would be spread around Kurdistan, Iraq, and throughout the world to raise awareness of the pain of their situation, to gain local and international support, and to try and stop the attacks. They said that they felt valued and respected by visitors.

Two issues arose: first, the fear that visitors would make money from their reports and photographs and that this profit would not go to the village. Second, the hope that visitors would be practical about what they could do and open about what they were going to do with the information gathered. The villagers understood and were realistic about the fact that most visitors could not always stay for extended periods, offer solutions to the bombing, or give material support.



A man in Prde Mangorayati sharing his hope that an increase in international awareness will bring support for the villagers and an end to the attacks.

THE IMPACTS OF THE CROSS-BORDER BOMBING AND SHELLING IN 2011

The bombing and shelling of the region and the relocation of villagers back and forth from their homes to IDP camps has affected many aspects of people's lives. This report focuses on the consequences of cross-border attacks in the Pshdar district which represent only a portion of the area affected by the attacks.

Villagers' casualties

On 21 August a family of seven died traveling on a frequently-used road when their car was hit by a bomb almost certainly launched by a Turkish plane.

Villagers' injuries

On 22 November, Ismail Baz Hamed, a 20 year old man, was wounded in a Turkish bombing attack⁵. The villagers in Sunnah reported also that a woman was seriously injured and two men were wounded during the summer as a result of the Iranian shelling⁶.



Exploded ordnances collected in Sunnah village

⁵ <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/11/turkey3579.htm>

⁶ This is not an exhaustive list of the people injured in 2011. It includes only the cases known by the team. The same disclaimer is valid for all other information presented in this report.

Displacement

As result of the bombing and shelling, many villages were deserted between July and October of 2011. Villagers of Basta, Razgai, Maradue and others fled to the IDP tent camp of Prde Mangorayati; while villagers from Sunnah, Zewgah, Ali Rash and other villages relocated to Gojar camp. Other families were able to stay with relatives, afford rented housing or share houses in the nearby towns of Qaladize, Zharawa, Sangasar or Ranya.⁷



Prde Mangorayati IDP Camp

The local authorities and various agencies provided toilets, showers, some tents and water tanks for the camps. Although there were donations of food, water, goods and some money, the villagers said they needed much more support - especially from the local authorities.

Several groups and organizations visited, made reports and took photographs. The villagers said that many promises were made about aid, including relocation, more permanent structures, and proper compensation for their losses in the villages - but that these promises had not been honored. Some villagers reported feeling angry and abandoned.

⁷ More information on numbers of displaced families and names of the evacuated villages can be found in the report published by the Federation of the Civil Society Organizations of Sulaimani or in the HRW report published on December 20th.



Gojar IDP camp

On 9 October, the local authorities visited Gojar camp and told the residents that they would not support the camp any longer. Authorities told the villagers that the following day, the generator and water tanks would be removed. On 10 October, two members of CPT were present to witness the generator being unhooked and taken away, and all the water tanks being emptied and removed. By the end of the day, the camp was empty and all the villagers had returned to their village homes despite their fears that the attacks might be resumed.



New IDP camp under construction few kilometers from Gojar camp

In February 2012, and the months following, CPT observed new semi-permanent dwellings (white cabins) being built for the villagers around 4 km away from the Gojar camp area. Villagers in Sunnah report that these the government is building these in expectation of the coming summer's renewed attacks.

Damages to crops and animals; Food and Water Contamination

Due to the displacement to IDP camps and thus the separation from their fields and gardens, villagers were unable to maintain and harvest their crops. With the exception of some donated goods, most food and water had to be bought and transported from nearby towns. The camps had little refrigeration, which led to significant waste of food. The villagers' diet shifted from fresh foods to more highly processed non-perishable foods. These factors, together with the difficulty of maintaining hygiene in the camp, led to sickness, especially among the children.

In the villages, the impact of artillery shells, resulting fires, and contamination by glass and shell residues damaged fields, crops, food and grain stores. Animals were injured and killed. Toxic residue left by the explosions polluted the air and the villagers



Crops in Sunnah ruined by the attacks

worried that continued bombing might contaminate their village water supply. A villager from Basta told CPT that he had lost a herd of 118 sheep and goats, and his brother a herd of 330 they co-owned, due to the water contamination.

The majority of the crops failed because the villagers were not able to water or tend them during the summer. Summer crops that usually provide fresh food for the families, including food to sell and food to preserve for the winter, had largely perished. In the village of Sunnah, reportedly about a thousand hectares of fields, orchards, gardens, vineyards and grass used for grazing had been burned by the shelling. For example, one villager said that he usually got between 60-70 large boxes of produce each year from his fields. Last year he had been unable to fill even one.

Villagers rely heavily on their livestock, including goats, sheep, chickens, and cattle, for milk, eggs, meat and wool (primarily to stuff mattresses and pillows). Many villagers had to sell their animals to pay for food and goods during their stay at the IDP camps. Most people do not have the means to replace their animals. This has led to an economic crisis for many in the villages.

Damages to homes

The traditional village dwellings of mud and stone require regular maintenance to keep them safe and sealed. As this was not possible for several months, the homes suffered considerable damage and some were in danger of collapsing.

The most serious damage to the homes occurred when shells exploded on or penetrated houses through the roofs. Shock waves and shrapnel also resulted in repeated damage to doors and



Shell hole in a house roof - Sunnah village

windows. In addition to the health hazards and danger to life, there is a serious economic cost in having to repeatedly repair homes.



Shattered windows by shelling - Sunnah village

Damages to schools

Some village schools were damaged by attacks. The school in Sunnah was hit by three rockets. The repairs cost around seven million IQD (approx. \$5,800 USD). The school can not afford to carry out full repairs.

The school in Zewgah that was damaged by the shelling, has yet to be reconstructed, due to the difficulties to bring building materials to the area. This

means that students from Zewgah must walk over an hour through the mountains to get to the nearest open school. Some young people, especially girls, are thus discouraged from making this journey and are not currently attending school.

In September, the beginning of the school year, children and young students were still in camps. By teachers' initiative, a school was opened in



Sunnah school under repair from the damages



*Shock wave damages to the school
Zewgah village*

Gojar camp in substitution for the schools of Sunnah, Zewgah, Ali Rash and Barda'qsl; this school served the displaced student coming from a dozen different villages.

Other schools in the area experienced a shortage of teachers due to concerns about personal safety.

Psychological and social consequences on children and families

The villagers had mixed feelings about being back in their homes after several months in the IDP camp. Their emotions included happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and worry about the future of their families and villages.

Although many of the children were happy to be back in their own homes, many were sick from being in the camps, traumatized by the situation, and scared of possible recurrence of the attacks.



Traumatic experiences emerges in children's art

Many children had trouble sleeping. This impacted every family across the villages. "Has the bombing stopped?" children would ask, and parents could not answer. "Where will we go, and what will we do if the bombing starts again?" Why is this happening to us?" Many children are too young to make sense of any



Sunnah village, primary school

answers parents might provide. Some families said their children did not ask questions – they just got on as best they could. However, the teachers reported that while many young people struggle to speak about the situation, it often comes out in their work - in the form of art, poetry and sculptures.

Villagers in the IDP camps expressed their pain about being in such a situation. They felt their pride and dignity had been severely affected by having to live in the camps under such circumstances. There was a sense from some male villagers that they had "failed" their families because they could not provide a safe environment for them.

VILLAGE POPULATION CRISIS

Villagers fear that their villages are failing; village populations are certainly decreasing. In Sunnah village alone, it was reported that at least eight families left last summer, most of them moving to Qaladize.

People interviewed gave three primary reasons for the decline in village populations: safety and security, lack of schools and lack of services:



- **Safety and security:**

Some villagers have left because they can no longer handle the stress of the cross-border attacks and the moves to and from IDP camps. This places them in a vulnerable economic situation as they have to leave behind their homes, many of their possessions, and their land. Some villages are very close to the Iranian border and increasingly have Iranian armed forces present and moving about on the mountains behind them.

- **Lack of schools:** Because of the cross-border attacks, some villages (e.g., Basta, Zewgah) don't have functioning primary schools. Because there are no secondary schools in the villages, students have to travel extensively every day or leave home and stay with friends or relatives in the bigger towns during the school week. Some families with several teenagers are simply leaving the villages. If they stay, it means that most of their family is away most of the time and there are considerable expenses for travel and subsistence.

- **Services and Utilities:** Several villages including Basta and Zewgah remain without electricity and/or good road access, making it harder to live there. CPT learned recently of a project, still in its initial stages, to bring electricity to Zewgah, and that a road to Basta through Ali Rash and Zewgah is under re-construction.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the continued shelling and bombing in the Pshdar district, and the yearly moves to and from IDP camps, continue to affect and threaten every aspect of village life and basic human needs. More specifically, the attacks:

- Kill and injure civilians
- Destroy and damage homes, gardens, fields and crops
- Kill and injure animals and disrupt their grazing
- Pollute and contaminate the land, water and air
- Disrupt and negatively affect:
 - Family life
 - Education and achievements
 - State of mind (happiness, peace of mind, etc.)
 - Safety and security
 - Personal physical and mental health
 - Village economy

Villagers expressed to CPTers the fear that continued bombing and shelling would eventually threaten the very existence of the villages themselves, and jeopardize an important part of the Kurdish national identity.



Sunnah village in Spring 2012. Shall her people leave for the IDP camp once again?

CALL TO ACTION

We urge the **Governments of the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran** to cease their cross-border operations which harm, disrupt and damage the lives of the Kurdish civilian population.

We urge the **Government of the Kurdistan region of Iraq** to pursue a political solution to the cross-border attacks and to stay in direct contact with the villagers to ensure that they are protected, supported and compensated for their losses and that the villages do not become extinct.

We urge the **Central Government of Iraq** to pursue a political solution and to plead to the United Nations for a negotiation with Turkey and Iran in order to end the cross-border attacks.

We urge the **international community** to become engaged and to speak up on this issue and to encourage governments and representatives to the United Nations, and other international organizations to protect the lives of the civilian population of the Iraqi Kurdistan border region. We encourage as well every concerned citizen to contact the Turkish and Iranian consular representatives in their countries asking to stop cross-border operations which disrupt the lives of the Kurdish civilian population.

We urge the **media** to use every means possible to inform the local and international community about the reality and consequences of the cross-border operations.

We urge the **local government authorities**, especially the **mayors of the affected areas**, to ensure that the villagers are supported and their voices are heard, and that the villages might be preserved.

CPT has been present in Iraq since 2002, and since 2006 has been based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, documenting the effects of cross-border attacks on the civilian population living near the borders with Turkey and Iran and accompanying these rural communities in their quest for a peaceful existence.

For more information on the CPT presence in Iraq:

<http://www.cpt.org/work/iraq>

For updates, news and stories about the people affected by the cross-border attacks in Pshdar and other districts of Iraqi Kurdistan:

www.cpt-iraq.blogspot.com

The present report "*Disrupted Lives - the effects of cross-border attacks by Turkey and Iran on Kurdish villages*" is available online at:

cpt.org/files/iraq/Disrupted-Lives-Cross-border-attacks-2011-2012.pdf

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