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# Nomads abandon Erbil's highlands in fear of Iranian attack

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SIDAKAN, Kurdistan Region - Out of fear they could be caught in the middle of an Iranian military operation against Kurdish opposition groups accused of targeting Iran from the Kurdistan Region's mountains, nomads raising livestock in the highlands of Bradost in Erbil province have had to move into more populated areas.

The areas of Barbzin, Khnera, Lolan, Horne, and Kelashin were completely evacuated on orders from the local authorities of Soran district amid repeated threats from Iran of a wide-scale military operation against Iranian Kurdish opposition groups who have camps along the mountainous border.

"We don't know why they keep saying come down. I don't know what's going on. The Turks are coming, Iran is coming. I don't know. We don't know what is really happening," said Abbas Aziz, a nomad who owns livestock.

Rashid Faqe is a farmer. "Somebody in a car came and told us that the government required us to leave our house by 3 pm the following day. That night, we swiftly packed up and moved half of our belongings out of the house. The other half is still inside," he said.

In March, Iran and Iraq signed a border protection deal in which Baghdad agreed to a September 19 deadline to disarm Kurdish opposition groups and secure the border regions. The Iranian military in July threatened to use military action if Baghdad fails to meet the deadline.

Iraq on Tuesday announced that it has complied with the terms of the security pact, that it had disarmed the exiled Kurdish groups and offices used by them have been evacuated.

"People just left everything. Some even left their farms with crops like tomatoes and cucumbers. Others left behind all their belongings," said Imran Qadir, another farmer who was moved for his safety.

Roughly 1,286 families used to settle in the Bradost border area.

"For the safety of people visiting the area, we deemed it necessary to return them to their places even prior to the deadline we had given them to leave these areas for their own safety," said Ihsan Chalabi, mayor of Sidakan.

"Unfortunately, one person has been killed and three others have been injured as a result of Iranian shelling on our borders in the past four years," Chalabi added.

Livestock farmers have brought their sheep and cattle down from the mountains and farmers have been forced to abandon months of hard work.

Tehran has long accused the KRG of harboring opposition groups it considers "terrorists" and allowing them to use the border areas as a launchpad for attacks against Iran.

Iranian-Kurdish opposition groups based in the Kurdistan Region - namely the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), Komala, Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK), and the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) - have also been accused by Tehran of fueling the nationwide protest movement in Iran last year and inciting unrest in the country. The groups, struggling for greater rights for Iran's marginalized Kurdish population, have fought an on-and-off war with the Islamic Republic for decades.

Iranian armed forces have carried out many attacks on the alleged positions of these groups, including using both ballistic missiles and drones.

Since the 1980s, the Iraq-Iran-Turkey triangle border has been plagued by conflict and instability. Tehran and Ankara have both fought Kurdish groups in these mountains. Some 500 villages have been emptied, farmlands and orchards destroyed, and civilians caught in the crossfire.

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