

Press Releases: Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government's Planned Referendum

Press Statement
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The United States strongly opposes the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government's referendum on independence, planned for September 25. All of Iraq's neighbors, and virtually the entire international community, also oppose this referendum. The United States urges Iraqi Kurdish leaders to accept the alternative, which is a serious and sustained dialogue with the central government, facilitated by the United States and United Nations, and other partners, on all matters of concern, including the future of the Baghdad-Erbil relationship.

If this referendum is conducted, it is highly unlikely that there will be negotiations with Baghdad, and the above international offer of support for negotiations will be foreclosed.

The costs of proceeding with the referendum are high for all Iraqis, including Kurds. Already the referendum has negatively affected Defeat-ISIS coordination to dislodge ISIS from its remaining areas of control in Iraq. The decision to hold the referendum in disputed areas is especially destabilizing, raising tensions which ISIS and other extremist groups are now seeking to exploit. The status of disputed areas and their boundaries must be resolved through dialogue, in accordance with Iraq's constitution, not by unilateral action or force.

Finally, the referendum may jeopardize Iraqi Kurdistan's regional trade relations, and international assistance of all kinds, even though none of Iraq's partners wish this to be the case. This is simply the reality of this very serious situation. In contrast, genuine dialogue, the alternative, which we urge Kurdish leaders to embrace, holds the promise of resolving a great many of Iraqi Kurds' legitimate grievances, and establishing a new and constructive course for Baghdad-Erbil relations that benefit all the people of Iraq.

The Kurds can be proud already of what the referendum process has produced, including more Kurdish unity, reviving the Kurdish parliament for the first time in nearly two years, and placing important issues on the international stage, with partners and friends prepared to build on the spirit of cooperation seen between Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish Peshmerga in the campaign against ISIS to help resolve outstanding issues. □Unfortunately, the referendum next week will jeopardize all of this momentum and more.

The referendum itself is now all the more unnecessary given the alternative path that has been prepared and endorsed by the United States and the international community.

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