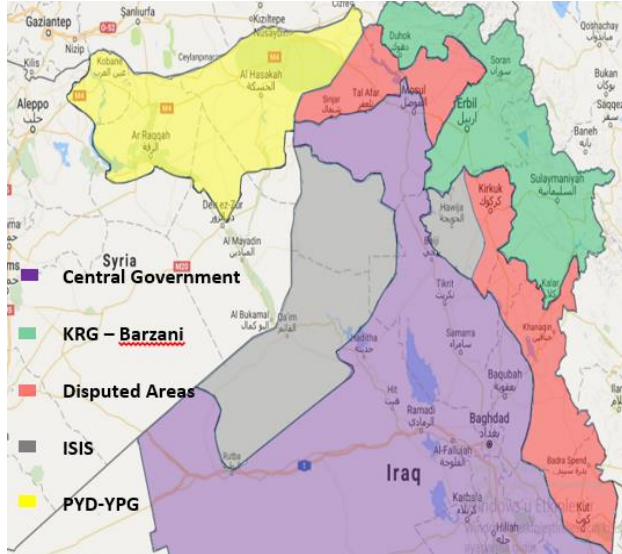


DRK SNAPSHOT

Kurdish Independence Referendum in Northern Iraq



Population of Iraq: 55% Shia Arabs, 20% Sunni Arabs, 25% Kurds, Turkmen, Chaldeans, and Assyrian Christians. Population under KRG is estimated 5.3 million, 15% of the population of Iraq.

Who is who?

- **Central Government:** Constitutionally recognized administrative and political body of whole Iraq.
- **Kurdistan Regional Government - KRG:** De facto semi-autonomous Kurdish political body in Northern Iraq traditionally led by **Barzani Clan**, which has also considerable ethnic, religious and sentimental influence among the societies in the neighboring areas, primarily in South East Turkey. KRG has **locally influential armed forces** known as “Peshmerga”. Having the lowest rate of poverty in Iraq, KRG economy rests pre-dominantly on oil industry where Turkey is the primary importer.
- **Jalal Talabani – PUK:** Sixth President of Iraq from 2005 to 2014 and secretary general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Having a serious influence on many parts of Northern Iraq, Talabani has been a traditional rival and partner of Barzani.
- **Gorran Movement:** An Iraqi Kurdish political party under the leadership of Omar Said Ali. Movement has been the opposition to the ruling two-party coalition of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.
- **Turkmen Front:** Headed by Erşat Salihi. Around 3.000.000 Turkmen people live in Iraq. Turkmen Front is against referendum and supports the unity of Iraq.

- **PKK: A *conjuncture dependent partner and a rival for KRG.*** The well-known separatist terrorist organization, PKK has been led from Qandil Mountain and many camp areas in Northern Iraq under the ***unquestionable protection of Barzani.*** It has practically established balanced relationships with prevalent Kurdish entities against Turkey since its appearance.

Developments

Masoud Barzani set the date for independence referendum as September 25, 2017. Referendum has drawn ***huge reaction*** from local authorities, Central Government and international society. ***Global actors*** have also warned Barzani on the ***“timingly inappropriateness”*** of this decision. Major local actors, Gorran Movement and Iraqi Turkmen Front boycotted the meeting Barzani’s referendum decision was taken. Almost ***all of other Kurdish local political parties and groups sided with Barzani. Top officials of PKK have made contradictory statements*** both in favor and against the referendum(!) Iraqi Central Government, Turkey and Iran were prominent international opposition figures. KRG has kept its determination on its decision. Barzani stated that ***Kurds would be ready to fight*** if there is someone trying to change the situation in Kirkuk by force. Prominently, ***Turkey has alarmed military forces*** and initiated military exercises as force demonstration around Habur and Silopi around the borderline.

Current Status – Barzani Gambling

As the ***heavy pressure from international fora*** seems to have increased over KRG’s decision, attempts to hinder or postpone the referendum seem to have failed so far. UN, UK, USA, Germany and France have been involved in the issue most recently as of September 20.

Security Implications

Due the ongoing clashes with PKK, as well as the potential influence of Barzani among the ethnic Kurdish society in Southeastern Turkey, “an independent Kurdish political formation in Iraq” has long been a ***serious nightmare*** for Turkey for decades. This combination of factors can be even more threatening when ***a possible cooperation*** among KRG, PKK and PYD is to be considered. In such a picture, Turkey may be in quite a ***controversial political-military position in three different security environments***, namely; PYD and KRG Kurdism in Syrian and Iraq proximities which may potentially further the internal Kurdism led by PKK.

Future Scenarios

In the short term, whether the decision be implemented or not, the **Kurdish problematic** itself is **self-explanatory** for Turkey for decades. As such, the sentimental linkages between the interior Kurds of Turkey with those of the exterior ones were well demonstrated during the **Kobane events** of 8-9 October 2014 in Turkey's southeast.



It was moreover witnessed that PKK, to engage Turkish Security Forces internally, started a seemingly illogical series of clashes in some well-known urban areas against in southeastern Turkey during the spread of **YPG across the Euphrates River** in Northern Syria.



Turning to Barzani side, we assess that Barzani has so far already successfully **leveraged** the issue of “Independence” as an efficient **tradeoff** for furtherance of his local and international positioning throughout the current turbulence in this modern times of ancient Mesopotamia Valley of Iraq and Syria.

We further assess that, despite the highly self-confident posture of Barzani in his decision, international society may well witness **a last minute “postponement” of referendum** decision in the bargaining table.

In the long term, **furtherance and consolidation of current tiny sparks of Kurdism** in and around Turkey into a coordinated political-military movement may well logically be expected.

Turkey’s endurance and determination against such a future formation seems to lay in its internal **political harmony, economic sustainability and military adequacy** against different simultaneous security fronts. And, these are the areas of challenges against which Turkish Presidency demonstrates an apparently robust posture.

