

SMA Reach-back Report

How Can the US Retain Stability in Post-Kurdish Referendum Iraq?

Question (R6.8): *What is the role of the United States and coalition partners in maintaining stability as Iran, Iraq, Turkey, as other groups grapple with the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum?*

Contributors

Dr. Ofra Bengio, Tel Aviv University (Israel); Dr. Zana Gulmohamad, University of Sheffield (UK); Ambassador James Jeffrey, Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Dr. Michael Knights, Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Mr. Vern Liebl, Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL), Marine Corps University; Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, University of London (UK); Dr. Abdulaziz Sager, Gulf Research Center; Dr. Muhanad Seloom, University of Exeter (UK); Mr. Mubin Shaikh, Independent

Executive Summary

Weston Aviles, NSI Inc.

Overview

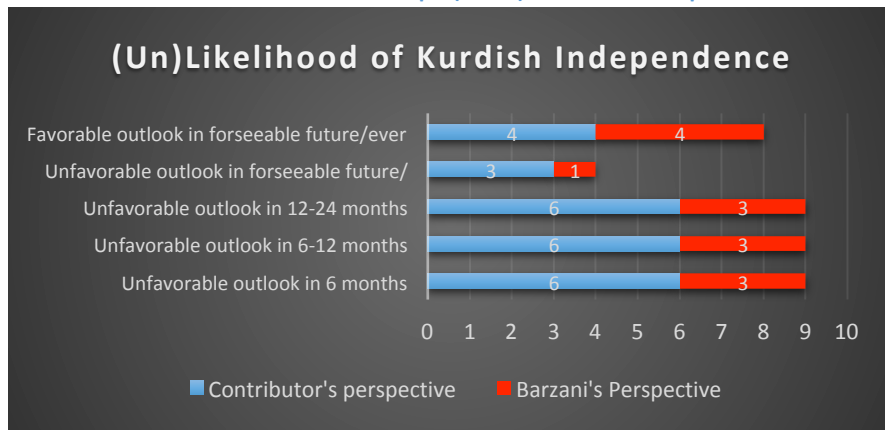
Since the controversial September referendum for Iraqi Kurdish independence, the political stability of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its relationship with the Iraqi government has been in crisis mode. The political uncertainty of the KRG has been clouded by the de jure resignation of President Masoud Barzani, an increase in violence and protests, and mounting economic woes. The precarious political balance between Erbil and Baghdad is not only subject to the tensions of internal Kurdish affairs, but also by the complex interests of regional and sub-state actors and the looming Iraqi parliamentary elections in May. Contributors to this response largely agree that actual Kurdish independence is very unlikely in the short-medium term and, moreover, that maintaining the territorial unity of Iraq and Kurdistan is critical to security in the region. However, contributors differ slightly on how to approach facilitating and maintaining stability in Iraq and how to balance competing interests from the KRG, sub-state actors in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and the international community.

Referendum for Independence

The independence referendum continues to be both a source and symptom of tension between Erbil and Baghdad. Furthermore, opposition from regional and international actors has resulted in significant setbacks for the KRG. Several experts cite the referendum as the catalyst for the territorial losses, decay of the ruling political class of the KRG, and the punitive measures the KRG has received from the Baghdad, Ankara, and Tehran—all of which makes independence more unlikely (Gulmohamad, Liebl).

Concurrent with expert consensus from an earlier reachback report,¹ Dr. Muhanad Seloom of the University of Exeter (UK) contends that the referendum was a gambit of political posturing intended to “maximize the KRG’s political and economic gains,” rather than an honest bid for independence. Experts are less decided on the long-term possibility of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan as can be seen in Table 1.² Since the referendum is responsible for a large portion of the KRG’s current political strife, Dr. Gulmohamad of University of Sheffield (UK) argues that the referendum will be utilized as bargaining chip as a “long-term strategy if/when the relationship with Baghdad gets worse or fails to improve.” As Erbil struggles to consolidate resources and political unity, the fallout of the referendum continues to expose and personify the underlying tensions between the KRG and the Iraqi government.

Table 1. Contributors were asked both their personal opinion (in blue) and their estimation of the KRG leadership’s (in red) outlook on Independence.



Sources of Instability

The movement for Kurdish independence in Iraq has a contentious history that has overlapped into the many conflicts and turmoil of Iraqi politics on both a national and regional level.³ It is therefore not surprising that mechanisms of instability can be attributed beyond the political implications of the September referendum. Experts discuss three interdependent sources of controversy between the KRG and other political elements in Iraq, namely economic revenue, political representation/power, and territorial governance. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) (with militia support of the Popular Mobilization Forces) have mounted several successful campaigns against Daesh that have reinvigorated federal authority, which resulted in the eventual reclamation of the Kirkuk governorate and other disputed territories from the Peshmerga (Gulmohamad, Liebl). These areas are coveted by both Erbil and Baghdad for their petroleum resources and smuggling routes, which both entities heavily rely on for revenue. These territorial losses ran concurrent with the disunity and fractionalization of the KRG political elite following the referendum and have left the KRG in a weak position to negotiate for a share of the resources found in the region.

Baghdad’s reassertion of authority, coupled with current weakness of the KRG cited by several experts, present opportunities for negotiation and to resolve these crises (Gulmohamad, Liebl). Dr. Muhanad

¹ Canna, S. & Aviles, W. (2017). Impact of Kurdish Independence in the Region. Produce for Strategic Multilayer Assessment Reachback Cell in Support of US Central Command. Retrieved from <http://nsiteam.com/kurdish/>

² Figures in table 1 represent dichotomous variables where an “favorable outlook” consisting of ratio values (i.e., equal to and greater than 50% likelihood) and ordinal rankings (e.g., “highly unlikely”). An “unfavorable outlook” includes the same variables but is limited to ratio values of less than 50%. Of the contributors who provided ratio values, an average of ratio rankings for the contributors’ perspectives includes the following % likelihood for a) 6 months: 0%, b) 6-12 months: 3.33%, c) 12-24 months 10%, d) foreseeable future/ever 53%; and for the contributors who provided their estimation of Barzani’s perception, a) 6 months: 0%, b) 6-12 months: 0%, c) 12-24 months 15%, d) foreseeable future/ever 25%.

³ See Liebl’s contribution for a holistic background of relevant events in the Kurdish quest for nationhood.

Seloom of the University of Exeter (UK) contends that these conflicts between Erbil and Baghdad are not new and, moreover, that “the secret behind the agreements and concessions between Baghdad and the KRG has been the elections and formations of government.” Others have suggested that such an engagement cannot occur under the current Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) hegemony due to their personal financial interests. This is critical as a meaningful reconciliation between Erbil and Baghdad hinges on a foundational overhaul of the KRG leadership.

What Can the US Do?

A majority⁴ of contributors argue that the US is best positioned to play the role of mediator and facilitate negotiations⁵ between Erbil and Baghdad, but suggest alternate methods of diplomacy. Dr. Ofra Bengio of Tel Aviv University emphasizes the KRG as the most consistent ally to the US and that Washington should demonstrate strong support for the KRG over the Iraqi government and other Shia and Turkish interests. Dr. Abdulaziz Sager of the Gulf Research Center stresses the need for the US to maintain the current sovereign integrity of Iraq and that “anything else opens a Pandora’s box with incalculable results and consequences.” AMB James Jeffrey and Dr. Michael Knights from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy continue this calculus but recognize the importance of maintaining the KRG as a pro-Western influence element within Iraq. They suggest that Erbil-Baghdad disputes endanger this paradigm. Dr. Knights goes on to clarify that “we are not on Baghdad or Erbil’s side, we’re on the [Iraqi] constitution’s side” and so the US has a strong interest in facilitating legal resolutions to all political disputes. Dr. Nicholas O’Shaughnessy of University of London suggests military aid to both the KRG and Baghdad could be used as a useful negotiating asset in mediation.

Interests of Iran and Turkey

Both Tehran and Ankara aligned with Baghdad on sanctions against the KRG following the referendum and, for the most part, share an interest in preserving the territorial sovereignty of Iraq (Gulmohamad, Jeffrey, Seloom). Turkey has a vested interest in the petroleum production of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (Jeffrey), Iran seeks to preserve their smuggling/patronage networks (Seloom), and both entities want to ensure the KRG is free of adversarial (e.g., Kurdistan Workers’ Party [PKK] and anti-Iran Sunni) influence. While contributors note the importance of perpetuating the US as the primary ally of the KRG, experts favor cooperation between the KRG with Ankara over Tehran (Jeffrey, Knights). Such cooperation is framed in the scenario of Baghdad becoming increasingly entangled into the yoke of Iran and by granting Ankara stakeholder influence with the KRG, Erbil could better balance an Iranian controlled Baghdad. Despite the interests of Iran and Turkey, contributors have not stressed the importance of their influence on Erbil-Baghdad dynamics but again, emphasize the role of the US in forging stability in Iraq.

⁴ Gulmohamad, Jeffrey, Knights, Seloom, Shaikh

⁵ Dr. Gulmohamad, Mr. Liebl, and Dr. Seloom also go one step further and suggest that the US is not doing enough to arbitrate conflicts between Erbil and Baghdad and must play a more active diplomatic role.

Expert Contributions

Dr. Ofra Bengio

Tel Aviv University

Kurdish Iraq Stability

1. How likely does Kurdish leadership think actual independence is

Answer:

Following the 16th October setback the Kurdish leadership is very cautious in raising publicly the idea of independence. Still this does not mean that they, especially the KDP, have given up the idea altogether. They are attempting to use the interim period before the general elections in May 2018 in order to overcome the internal rivalries, come to term with Baghdad and reach out to their world partners. The referendum which resulted in 93% support for independence reflects a genuine yearning of the Kurdish people for independence and gave legitimacy to such a move. Accordingly, this was not the KDP's whim or bargaining chip vis-à-vis Baghdad but real endeavor to move one step further in fulfilling this national project. For now, however, the project is in a standstill but if and when regional and international circumstances change, it will reemerge. In my opinion this might happen in the foreseeable future but not very soon.

2. What should be done to keep Kurdistan a part of the Iraqi state and by whom?

Answer:

In the longer run there is no way to keep Kurdistan part of Iraq. The last hundred years have proved that the Kurdish national movement will do everything possible to separate from Iraq. Conventional wisdom has it that the Kurds have been the source of instability in Iraq. In fact, however, any objective study would prove that it was the central governments which were the source of instability due to their policies of denial, oppression, Arabization and even genocide against the Kurds. The central governments have never honored the agreements they signed with the Kurds, starting with the "languages law" of the early 1930s, going through the agreements with Qassim and Saddam in the 1960s and 1970s as well as that with the governments of "new Iraq". The last example is that Baghdad did not honor the new constitution which stipulated in article 140 to carry out a census in the disputed areas. The point is that the conflict in Iraq is between two national movements the Arab and the Kurdish which cannot coexist because the former denies the existence of the other. Another important point is that developments of the last decade also proved that Iraq is a failed state and that the Kurdish entity will continue to struggle for independence, notwithstanding the 2017 October setback and the best thing the West can do is to help facilitate a friendly divorce.

3.What can the USG doe to maintain stability as regional powers react to the Kurdish independence movement?

Answer:

Considerations of realpolitik and interests should move the USG to support the Kurds on the political, economic and military level. It should support a strong Kurdistan because this entity has proved to be the most stable, pro- Western and reliable partner for the US in the last two decades. While in 2003 Turkey denied the US and its allies the use of Incirlik base from which to carry the attack on northern Iraq, it was the Kurds who were the boots on the ground. And while in 2014 the Iraqi army melted in front of ISIS the Peshmerga did manage to stop them with American support. Not one single American soldier lost his life in the Kurdish entity while more than 4,500 lost their life in Arab Iraq. The US has spent trillions of dollars in the last fifteen years in order to turn Iraq into a democratic, viable and functional state but all it got was a failed state which is moreover beholden to Iran. If morality and justice have any role in politics then one should add them too for American need to support the Kurdish entity. Such support will balance it vis-a-vis an authoritarian, pro-Iranian and unstable central government in Baghdad and most importantly deter Iran and Turkey from attacking this entity. It will also send a message to America's other allies in the region that the US has not abandoned the Middle East to Russian-Iranian grandiose projects.

Dr. Zana Gulmohamad
University of Sheffield

1. How likely does Kurdish leadership think actual independence is (as opposed to a bargaining chip vis a vis the Government of Iraq and/or the international community)? How likely do you think it is? Please use a percentage for each sub bullet below both for the Kurdish leadership and your personal assessment.

Due to the regional and international opposition towards the Kurdish referendum, currently, the Kurdish leadership are not utilizing the Kurdish referendum as a bargaining chip, at least for the time being. Moreover, on the 20th of November 2017 the referendum was rejected by the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court as unconstitutional. The KRG accepted the Iraqi Supreme Court's statements. Thus, officially for now the KRG cannot utilize the results for negotiation with the federal government in Baghdad. However, externally (beyond Iraq) the KRG might politically justify certain policies because it has the people's mandate [referendum results 93 percent for independence] although the KRG has frozen the results. This is more of a long-term strategy or if/when the relationship with Baghdad gets worse or fails to improve.

Since the referendum on the 25th of September, Iraqi Kurds have experienced economic pressure and lost more powers and territories due to primarily the federal government of Iraq's - backed by Iran and Turkey - punitive measures. For example, the ban of international flights to and from Kurdistan Region which was extended on the 27th of December 2017 to the 28th of February 2018 at the time of writing Erbil and Baghdad had begun technical and non-political talks Iraqi Security Forces with Popular Mobilization Forces had retaken Kirkuk, Khanaqin and other so called disputed areas and Iraq had not sent the budget to the KRG and salaries to the Kurdish government employees. Nonetheless during the time of writing the federal government started to allocate some salaries to some sectors [e.g. water resources] in the KRG and promised to send them and the flight ban was lifted in March 2018. Therefore, due to the current economic and political pressures including the severe financial crisis in Kurdistan Region, the Kurdish leadership want to talk and negotiate with the federal government in Baghdad. To date, the latter is not willing to sit with the Kurdish leadership for comprehensive political talks. Now, the Kurdish leadership wants to stay in Iraq but not at the expense of losing more powers to Baghdad. Although, the KRG has accepted the Iraqi Supreme Court's ruling and frozen the referendum results, Erbil has not completely dismantled the referendum's outcome as the federal government is asking for the annulment of the referendum results. Baghdad fears that the referendum results could be utilized in the in the long term or in the future. Meanwhile the KRG's leadership has stated several times that Baghdad wants the breakup of the Kurdistan Region's political autonomy.

To respond to the question regarding the prediction of approximate timing of when the Iraqi Kurds would utilize the results, if the federal government in Baghdad amends the relationship with Erbil, the prospect of utilizing the results of the referendum is unlikely to be before 24 months, in other words in the long term. This is because the Kurdish leadership and people are now aware of the regional states' firm rejection of this notion and its consequences. If the federal government in Baghdad takes a firm stance and does not restore a functioning relationship with the KRG, the latter might pursue an alternative way to come out of the financial crisis and regional isolation and might again pursue independence using the non-binding referendum results in the next 6 to 12 months. Therefore, it depends on the relationship and dynamics between Baghdad and Erbil as well as regional [Turkey and Iran] pressure on Baghdad and Erbil.

- a. Next 6 months
- b. Next 6-12 months
- c. Next 12-24 months
- d. Foreseeable future/ever

2. What should be done to keep Kurdistan a part of the Iraqi state, and by whom?

From the Kurdish leadership's perspective, to keep Kurdistan Region part of Iraq, it is necessary to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the KRG and its region's powers, rights and needs. International responses opposing the Kurdish referendum frustrated Iraqi Kurds. Although, the Kurdistan Regional Government (the KRG) demonstrated concessions towards the federal government of the Iraqi Supreme Court, this does not mean that the Kurdish leadership and parties will accept everything that the Iraqi government orders and demands. In the last three months the Kurdish leadership has increasingly received support from European countries; the KRG's PM and Deputy PM were invited to France by President Emanuel Macron, Chancellor Merkel invited the KRG's PM and Deputy PM to Germany; and British PM Theresa May invited the KRG's PM to the UK for talks in 2018. All these efforts have put diplomatic pressure on the federal government of Iraq to start negotiations with the KRG as well as to support the KRG's and Kurdish people's rights.

Another key factor in 2018 will be Iraq's national parliamentary and Kurdistan Region's coming elections, which will also shape Baghdad and Erbil's process of negotiation and its prospect of success or failure. The United States could mediate and observe constructive talks between Baghdad and Erbil, and could place pressure on the federal government of Iraq to lift the punitive measures including the ban on international flights to and from Kurdistan Region, which at the time of writing is still upheld. Baghdad has sent technical delegations in regard to international borders and airports in the Kurdistan Region, which will be under joint administration. The KRG has continuously asked Baghdad to start the talks but Baghdad is reluctant to sit down with the Kurdish leadership to solve the political stalemate unless they annul the referendum. The United States could persuade or bring in the coalition partners and allies to play a constructive role in the negotiations between Baghdad and Erbil.

3. What can the USG do to maintain stability as regional powers react to the Kurdish independence movement?

The United States can play a crucial role in mediating the negotiations between Baghdad and Erbil. The US could observe the process of negotiation between Baghdad and Erbil, make sure that it is fair and that both sides adhere to the constitution [although there are different interpretations of a number of its articles by both sides due to the lack of detail and ambiguity] and the commitments they make for their future relationship. If there is progress between Baghdad and Erbil on how to tackle their differences [e.g. budget and oil and gas control in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq], the regional powers [Iran and Turkey] are less able to disrupt the developments. The USG should engage more diplomatically and economically as well as maintain its military presence to in Iraq including the Kurdistan Region. This would help stabilize the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil.

Ambassador James Jeffrey

Washington Institute for Near East Policy

1. How likely does Kurdish leadership think actual independence is (as opposed to a bargaining chip vis a vis the Government of Iraq and/or the international community)? How likely do you think it is? Please use a percentage for each sub bullet below both for the Kurdish leadership and your personal assessment.
 - a. Next 6 months
 - b. Next 6-12 months
 - c. Next 12-24 months
 - d. Foreseeable future/ever
2. What should be done to keep Kurdistan a part of the Iraqi state, and by whom?
3. What can the USG do to maintain stability as regional powers react to the Kurdish independence movement?

1. Kurdish Leadership	Author
a. 0%	0%
b. 0%	0%
c. 30%	20%
d. 50+%	30-50%

(Kurdish leadership answer is an amalgam of author's knowledge of Masud Barzani, assessment of how rational Barzani now is, and relative decision relationships between Barzani, still informally in charge of KRG, and other key KRG leaders. This is all subjective.)

2. This is to some degree the wrong question. Rather the question should be: Why should Kurdistan remain part of the Iraqi state? As one who openly criticized the independence referendum this is not advocacy of KRG independence, rather, it is cold blooded reason—we are at such a dangerous point in the Middle East that we have to ask as first question in any conceivable situation—what are the long-term interests of the U.S. (and assuming that includes maintaining the U.S.-led regional security order) and what will serve that order?

At present/at present, U.S. interests and that order benefit from the KRG remaining part of Iraq. First, because the KRG as a usually reliable pro-Western, anti-Iranian entity can have at least marginal influence on Iraqi state policies if it is active in Baghdad and in the government. Second, Iraq as, if not a partner of the West (a second "Jordan" or "West Berlin" is unlikely at this point) at least a stable 'Finland' in the regional confrontation with Iran, is an important factor. If it becomes dominated by Iran, the impact on the region's Shia communities, oil production and revenues (combining Iran's and Iraq's oil/gas reserves and production—former greater than KSA, latter about the same), geographic location, population and status in Arab world would be comparable (to Iran's advantage) of the 'flip' of Egypt to the U.S. camp post-1973, diplomatically, militarily (own forces and access to other areas of region), and economically.

Thus, U.S. interest at present is to keep KRG inside Iraq. To do so the U.S. has to both pressure KRG and Baghdad (tendency at present is just to do the former) to cooperate on outstanding oil, budget, and territorial issues, while insuring KRG remains viable both as an independent actor inside Iraq and in extremis as an actor outside of Iraq. A commitment to keep U.S. troops in KRG regardless of status elsewhere in Iraq would go far to win over KRG leaders including Barzani to U.S. approaches.

To maintain a viable KRG, coordination with Turkey is vital to ensure it supports at least a de facto autonomous/independent KRG (a legally independent Kosovo model is probably not palatable to any Turkish government ever; a de facto independent one allied with Ankara militarily against PKK and Iran, economically via pipelines and oil/gas deals, and politically as a balancer against PKK element of regional Kurdish population, is absolutely feasible after next Turkish elections possibly early to mid-2018). But like U.S. Turkey would prefer a viable KRG operating inside Iraq including as an agent of influence of Ankara—i.e., situation before September 2017.

But if despite efforts of U.S., Turkey, Arab states and KRG itself Baghdad goes the route of Lebanon into the Iranian camp, with such markers as departure of U.S. military forces, pro-Iran parliament and government, further expansion of PMU at expense of ISF, then it could be in the interest of the U.S. and its regional order to have a KRG separate from and a 'balancer' to Baghdad.

But that latter situation again would only be possible if Turkey were in accord with the U.S. Turkey could be persuaded of this (its interests in KRG including gas and oil are profound) if it was aware of and agreed with the details of the U.S. Iran containment policy, and believed the U.S. could be trusted not to cross any Turkish red lines re the Kurds including KRG formal independence.

3. Covered by 2. Above.

Dr. Michael Knights

Washington Institute for Near East Policy

1. How likely does Kurdish leadership think actual independence is (as opposed to a bargaining chip vis a vis the Government of Iraq and/or the international community)? How likely do you think it is? Please use a percentage for each sub bullet below both for the Kurdish leadership and your personal assessment.
 - a. Next 6 months 0%
 - b. Next 6-12 months 10% (if Abadi falls, Iraq goes to Iran fully)
 - c. Next 12-24 months 20% (if Abadi falls, Iraq goes to Iran fully)
 - d. Foreseeable future/ever 50%

The Kurdish leaders fully grasp their miscalculation in the referendum. The pragmatists (PUK, Gorran, most Islamists, Nechirvan, some other KDP) know that only the most improbable swing against the West by Iraq (i.e., dump Abadi, evict CJTF) can brighten the prospect of independence this decade. Iraq would need to face a severe collapse to make it possible.

2. What should be done to keep Kurdistan a part of the Iraqi state, and by whom?

MK: Nothing should be done. It is a fact. The US only encourages Baghdad to strike a harsher tone with KRG by being more supportive of Iraqi unity than Iraqis are themselves. Being harsher on the Kurds makes their role as productive partners in Iraq less likely. So it is counter-productive.

Put another way, the US has a strong interest in the KRG maintaining its special status as a region, as the constitution requires. A semi-autonomous KRG in a revenue sharing deal with Baghdad can be a moderating influence on Baghdad politics, a sectarian balancer, a fallback base for the US. The US should press for strict constitutionalism (once the next government is seated) – we are not on Baghdad or Erbil's side, we're on the constitution's side, and it makes sense for everyone that the disputed areas get sorted out, as Article 140 of the constitution envisaged.

3. What can the USG do to maintain stability as regional powers react to the Kurdish independence movement?

MK: This is outdated really. One under-the-table thing we should do is to quietly help rebuild Turkey-KRG ties. This will keep Baghdad behaving humanely to the Iraqi Kurds, figuring they might always get Turkish support if Baghdad goes too far. A joint US-Turkish-KRG pol-mil effort against PKK is fertile ground.

Mr. Vernie Liebl

Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

Marine Corps University

vliebl@prosol1.com

Response to R6.8: What is the role of the United States and coalition partners in maintaining stability as Iran, Iraq, Turkey, as other groups grapple with the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum?

1. How likely does Kurdish leadership think actual independence is (as opposed to a bargaining chip vis-a-vis the Government of Iraq and/or the international community)?

Response:

- a. Next 6 months - 0%
- b. Next 6-12 months - 0%
- c. Next 12-24 months - 0%
- d. Foreseeable future/ever - 20% (Only in reference to KDP (KRG) and PYD, all others are at 0%)

How likely do you think it is?

- e. Next 6 months - 0%
- f. Next 6-12 months - 0%
- g. Next 12-24 months - 0%
- h. Foreseeable future/ever - 0%

2. What should be done to keep Kurdistan a part of the Iraqi state, and by whom?

Response: Kurdistan, more properly the Kurdistan Regional Government, is already legally a part of the Iraqi state.

The 2005 Constitution of Iraq provides for the official recognition of the Kurdistan Regional Government (hereafter KRG) as an internally administered autonomous grouping of three governorates, specifically Irbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dahuk (Dihok in Kurdish). Within that constitution are the pertinent articles Article 4, First, Second, Third (primarily concerning national language recognition, meaning Arabic and Kurdish)

Article 117. First (...upon coming into force, shall recognize the region of Kurdistan along with its existing authorities, as a federal region.)

Article 140, First (concerns continuing implementation of Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law of 2004), Second (concerns requirement to conduct the referendum noted in Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law covering Kurdish populations in Kirkuk, Nineveh and Diyala governorates)

Article 141, (concerns and confirms the validity of the existing legislation of Kurdish political entities within the KRG from 1992 up to implementation of the Constitution)

Article 143, (in toto – “The Transitional Administrative Law and its Annex shall be annulled on the seating of the new government, except for the stipulations of Article 53(A) and Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law.)

The now annulled Transitional Administrative Law of 2004 has two articles remaining in effect, as noted in the constitution. They are Article 53 (A), which states:

“The Kurdistan Regional Government is recognized as the official government of the territories that were administered by that government on 19 March 2003 in the governorates of Dahuk, Arbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, Diyala and Nineveh. The term “Kurdistan Regional Government” shall refer to the

Kurdistan National Assembly, the Kurdistan Council of Ministers, and the regional judicial authority in the Kurdistan region.””

Article 58, also remaining valid, states (abbreviated):

(A) The Iraqi Transitional Government, and especially the Iraqi Property Claims Commission and other relevant bodies, shall act expeditiously to take measures to remedy the injustice caused by the previous regime’s practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions, including Kirkuk, by deporting and expelling individuals from their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality. To remedy this injustice, the Iraqi Transitional Government shall take the following steps

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(1) With regard to residents who were deported, expelled, or who emigrated; it shall, in accordance with the statute of the Iraqi Property Claims Commission and other measures within the law, within a reasonable period of time, restore the residents to their homes and property, or, where this is unfeasible, shall provide just compensation.

(2) With regard to the individuals newly introduced to specific regions and territories, it shall act in accordance with Article 10 of the Iraqi Property Claims Commission statute to ensure that such individuals may be resettled, may receive compensation from the state, may receive new land from the state near their residence in the governorate from which they came, or may receive compensation for the cost of moving to such areas.

(3) With regard to persons deprived of employment or other means of support in order to force migration out of their regions and territories, it shall promote new employment opportunities in the regions and territories.

(4) With regard to nationality correction, it shall repeal all relevant decrees and shall permit affected persons the right to determine their own national identity and ethnic affiliation free from coercion and duress.

(B) The previous regime also manipulated and changed administrative boundaries for political ends. The Presidency Council of the Iraqi Transitional Government shall make recommendations to the National Assembly on remedying these unjust changes in the permanent constitution. In the event the Presidency Council is unable to agree unanimously on a set of recommendations, it shall unanimously appoint a neutral arbitrator to examine the issue and make recommendations. In the event the Presidency Council is unable to agree on an arbitrator, it shall request the Secretary General of the United Nations to appoint a distinguished international person to be the arbitrator.

(C) The permanent resolution of disputed territories, including Kirkuk, shall be deferred until after these measures are completed, a fair and transparent census has been conducted and the permanent constitution has been ratified. This resolution shall be consistent with the principle of justice, taking into account the will of the people of those territories.

Therefore it can be presented that the KRG is and always has been, since 2005, a constitutionally integral part of Iraq and any actions taken by any or all parts of the KRG to unilaterally attempt to secede from Iraq for the purposes to become an independent nation is an act of rebellion and unlawful under the existing Iraqi constitution. Iraqi governmental efforts to prevent such an action are rightfully an internal Iraqi matter in which any external/foreign intervention can rightfully be viewed as aid to rebellion at a minimum and invasion at the maximum (an act of war).

Thus, as the United States recognizes the constitutionally established government in Iraq (the Baghdad government) as the legitimate government of all of Iraq, the stationing of U.S. forces within the KRG

specifically to support unstated but provisionally separatist Kurdish Peshmerga can be viewed by the Baghdad government as the act of an unfriendly power. Further, the provision of U.S. military aid and training to those same Peshmerga forces, some of which has enabled Peshmerga forces to militarily engage and withstand Iraqi Security Forces (see 2012), could be construed as hostile intervention. That the Peshmerga forces were engaged in direct combat with insurgent (Islamic State) forces whose primary goal was the overthrow of the Baghdad government and the conquest of all of Iraq, in essence directly aiding the Baghdad loyalist forces in the defense and ultimate repelling of those insurgent forces (as of September 2017), does not obviate U.S. aid to those provisionally separatist Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

The U.S., perversely, refused to provide significant military equipment to those Peshmerga forces except via the Baghdad government, which in turn refused to release most of the military aid to the KRG Peshmerga forces unless and until the KRG government in Irbil cooperated with the Baghdad government within the constraints of the established 2005 Constitution. (Allied/Coalition governments working with both the Baghdad and the KRG government observed this disputatious relationship and generally shipped aid and equipment directly to Irbil.) The U.S. did provide military training and limited mentoring to select Peshmerga forces but even restricted the U.S. Consulate in Irbil to the provision of only humanitarian supplies. Yet, for a period between late 2014 to late 2016, the U.S. considered the Kurdish Peshmerga forces as the only 'reliable' regional actor who could be depended on to actively fight against the Islamic State forces with a reasonable chance of success, increasingly supplying combat air support but still not combat equipment in any meaningful amount.

As indicated above, the situation was confused, with the U.S. apparently making no effort to deconflict the situation in regards to its stance towards an independent Kurdish political entity, the KRG, or seriously supporting the constitutionally recognized Iraqi federal government in Baghdad. The U.S. wanted both entities to engage and defeat the Islamic State, which was the primary U.S. regional goal, vice addressing an internally dysfunctional federal relationship between Baghdad and Irbil. The state U.S. diplomatic goal was a unitary federal Iraq but one in which the U.S. could ignore that stated intent in order to get what it viewed as the most effective military force to fight the Islamic State.

To contextualize the Kurdish drive for independence requires a historical perspective. The first expressed Kurdish desires for an independent Kurdish political entity arose in the very late 19th century and early 20th century, after witnessing the failed Armenian drive to separate themselves from the Ottoman Empire (ironically, it was frequently Kurdish irregulars formed by the Ottoman government, termed Hamidiye, who persecuted the Armenians). World War I devastated the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire, with the death of over a million Kurds (over 11% of Kurdish population) as the Ottomans used them to fight the Russian Empire. The ensuing peace conference in Versailles, after the publication of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's "14 Points", specifically Article XII, brought Kurdish representatives to the post-war conference, only to be refused recognition as a people deserving independence. However, the 1920 Treaty of Sevres did create an ostensible Kurdish state but it was one to be divided into British and French 'spheres of influence' in order to safeguard their League of Nation Mandates in the Middle East. In this the Kurds, unwillingly but determinedly cast their lot with Kemal Ataturk and aided in the creation of a Turkish state. In the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, any idea of an independent Kurdish state was erased, seeing the creation of 'modern' Turkey, Iran, Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Syria.

Still, there were Kurds who sought independence. In 1921 a Mahmoud Barzanji established the 'Kingdom of Kurdistan' around the city of Sulaymaniyah, which was ultimately crushed by the British-assisted Iraqi Army in 1924. In 1927 a Ihsan Nuri Pasha, during a Kurdish revolt against the Turks,

established the 'Republic of Ararat' but was defeated in 1930, the territory being reabsorbed into Turkey with extensive anti-Kurd repression. In January 1946 the USSR assisted in the creation in northern Iran of the 'Republic of Mahabad' in concert with the Autonomous Azerbaijan People's Government, which was ultimately suppressed by Iranian military forces in December 1946, with U.S. assistance.

The bulk of the short-lived military forces of the Republic of Mahabad were Iraqi Kurds, led by a Mustafa Barzani. Most of the Iraqi Kurds fled back to Iraq while in 1947 Barzani went into exile in the USSR. From here a bulleted timeline is enlightening as to the progress of the Kurds towards an independent political entity and their internal divisions.

- 1951 – In Iraq, the KDP (Democratic Party of Kurdistan) established by Ibrahim Ahmed, with close ties to Iraq Communist Party
- 1975 – Mustafa Barzani (returning from the USSR in 1958 and wresting control of the KDP from Ahmed) leads a revolt in Iraq, suppressed by Saddam Hussein
- 1974 – The PUK(Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) established by Jalal Talabani in Damascus (the Talabani clan are opponents of the Barzani clan in northern Iraq)
- 1978 – Abdullah Ocalan established the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), whose stated goal is communist revolution in Turkey
- 1980 – Iran/Iraq War begins, Iranian Kurds rebel and are crushed by Iranian security forces (10,000 dead)
- 1984 – PKK begins “revolutionary” insurgency in Turkey, which lasts until May 2013 ceasefire (with an estimated 40,000 dead)
- 1989 – Initiation of KDPI (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan) low-level insurgency in Iran until finally suppressed in 1994
- 1988 – Iraq begins “Anfal” campaign against Iraqi Kurds, kills an estimated 100,000+ (Tabun/Mustard Gas attack on Halabja kills 5,000 alone)
- 1991 – Kurdish uprising in Iraq in wake of U.S. victory over Iraq; Baghdad responds ruthlessly, forcing 1.5 million Kurds to flee (Turkey seals border, U.S. initially refuses to assist then creates Kurdish “safe haven” [Operation Provide Comfort] with associated ‘No Fly Zone’ based on UNSC Resolution 688 but Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah omitted)
- 1992 – Elections in northern Iraq inconclusive, near equal division between KDP and PUK; severe economic hardship from UN embargo on Iraq/ Saddam embargo on KRG
- 1994-1998 – tensions due to resource allocation results in civil war between KDP and PUK, termed the *brakujie* (Brother Killings), approximately 5,000 dead
- 1998 – KDP and PUK sign U.S.-mediated Washington Agreement establishes formal peace treaty (the parties agreed to share revenue, share power, deny the use of northern Iraq to the PKK, and not allow Iraqi troops into the Kurdish regions; U.S. pledged to use military force to protect the Kurds from possible aggression by Saddam Hussein)
- 2001-2003 – Kurdish Islamist War, KRG fights Ansar al-Islam, defeats them
- 2002 – KDP and PUK agree to govern together
- 2005 – Saddam Hussein deposed, Jalal Talabani elected as Interim Iraqi President; KRG holds informal independence referendum (non-binding) in which registered Kurdish voters approve independence with a 98.98% affirmation
- 2007-2009 – Turks conduct numerous “hot pursuit” attacks into KRG against PKK
- 2009 – KRG begins to export 100,000 barrels of oil per day via Turkey
- 2012 – Peshmerga forces clash with Baghdad Iraq Army forces
- 2014 – After collapse of Iraq Security Forces (ISF) against the Islamic State, KRG seizes Kirkuk in December from Baghdad government, also occupying large slices of Nineveh and Diyala Governorates

- Distraction of conflict against Islamic State temporarily subsumes Baghdad-Irbil dispute as well as KDP-PUK disagreements
- 2017 – KRG forces an independence referendum against PUK (and Iraqi, Iranian, Turkish and U.S.) recommendations, “Yes” vote passes with 92.73% although almost 28% of registered Kurdish voters refused to participate; ISF forces retake Kirkuk from KRG Peshmerga 16 October, forcing extensive withdrawal of Peshmerga forces and re-establishment of Baghdad authority in formerly Kurdish occupied areas of Iraq

Note that this timeline excludes the parallel efforts to create an autonomous Kurdish political entity in northern Syria, the ‘Rojava’ (Western Kurdistan), which as an almost independent entity arose as a result of the Syrian civil conflict, which began in 2011. Rojava, which we recognize as the PYD (Democratic Union Party), has received extensive U.S. military assistance since 2015 (support greatly increased as of the beginning of 2017), and is also extensively supported by the PKK, which has been listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department since October 1997. The following highlights the intertwining of the problem of divining where the PYD Kurds come from:

“In a Wall Street Journal interview (24 Jul 2015), Kurdish fighter Zind Ruken expanded on the PKK-YPG relationship. ‘Sometimes I’m a PKK, sometimes I’m a PJAK [the PKK-allied affiliate, active in Iran], sometimes I’m a YPG. It doesn’t really matter. They are all members of the PKK.’”

Ultimately, the success of the Iraqi security forces, led by the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Services (CTS) Golden Division (aka Iraqi Special Operations Forces, or ISOF), in retaking Mosul, followed by Tal Afar, Hawija and then the western Euphrates River Valley (reclaiming Anbar Governorate), led to a resurrection of federal military effectiveness and unity. In regards to the KRG and Kirkuk, it was the unexpected success of the retaking of Hawija from the Islamic State (victory declared 8 October 2017) which left an Iraqi military force of approximately 40,000 (9th Armored division, the Mol Emergency Reaction Division of the Federal Police, a brigade of the Golden Division along with Hashd (PMUs) formed from Turkmen, Shias sponsored by Ali al-Sistani and other Shias supported by Iran) roughly 16 miles south of Kirkuk. Although reinforced by the Peshmerga by 6,000 troops a few days earlier, the Peshmerga was heavily outgunned and outnumbered by the Iraqi forces, as well as politically divided between KDP-loyal Peshmerga and PUK-loyal Peshmerga. Additionally, many of the Turkmen PMUs integral to the Peshmerga defense plans went over to the Iraqi side.

As a result of political disunity and military loss, the KRG forces were fractured, defeated with very little cost to the Iraqis and driven out of Kirkuk Governorate. Since this October 2017 disaster for the KRG, it remains severely weakened and much reduced in size. There is near civil war between the PUK and the KDP, President Barzani (the main driver for Kurdish independence) has resigned (1 Nov 2017) and there is little prospect for the foreseeable future of an independent Kurdistan in Iraq.

3. What can the USG do to maintain stability as regional powers react to the Kurdish independence movement?

At this time, the U.S. options remain limited by its very own statements, which as delineated by U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson on 29 September 2017, are: “The United States does not recognize the Kurdistan Regional Government’s unilateral referendum held on Monday. The vote and the results lack legitimacy and we continue to support a united, federal, democratic and prosperous Iraq. We urge calm and an end to vocal recriminations and threats of reciprocal actions.” Therefore, the U.S. would appear to support any legal actions taken by the government of Iraq (Baghdad) in ensuring the Kurds remain within the 2005 Constitution to which they agreed to. However, the U.S. support to the PYD in adjacent Syria is primarily funneled in via the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, which requires a benign and

supportive KRG. As the KRG is now openly riven between the KDP and the PUK, the U.S. has tended to favor the KDP, which controls the airfield at Irbil and regions stretching west to the Syrian border.

Bottom line – any Kurdish independence movement is dead for the foreseeable future, as all regional powers are inimical to it, it is extra-constitutional within the Iraqi constitution and the one major power which might support it, the U.S., will likely, if forced, support the Baghdad government over the Irbil government.

Postscript – There really should be an outlining of U.S. options in regards to the Kurds, in Iraq and elsewhere, as it has significant impact on U.S. interests within the larger Middle East (Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Armenia, Germany, Russia, Israel, etc). Examination of second, third and beyond effects would be critical. These options should range from (for example) complete U.S. support for an independent KRG, complete support for Turkey in the destruction of the PKK and anything and everything in-between.

Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy

University of London

1. How likely does Kurdish leadership think actual independence is (as opposed to a bargaining chip vis a vis the Government of Iraq and/or the international community)? How likely do you think it is? Please use a percentage for each sub bullet below both for the Kurdish leadership and your personal assessment.
 - a. Next 6 months
 - b. Next 6-12 months
 - c. Next 12-24 months
 - d. Foreseeable future/ever: Kurdish leadership would want this to happen as soon as possible but realise there has to be negotiation. But they will be impatient and want say a 3 year time frame. I would imagine more like ten years
2. What should be done to keep Kurdistan a part of the Iraqi state, and by whom?
3. The value of remaining is that it conserves an economic asset for Iraq as well as giving its government more internal prestige. It would lose face if the Kurds left. The pressure has to come from international organisations like the EU and UN as well as supportive nations like the US and also regional supporters. The US should exert its leverage. Kurdistan will go but this needs to be delayed. Maybe a 'commonwealth' concept of governing Iraq might apply, ie high regional devolution without secession.
4. What can the USG do to maintain stability as regional powers react to the Kurdish independence movement?

Kurdish independence in the short term would be very destabilizing even if it would vindicate the principle of national self-determination originally enunciated at Versailles. It would for example have a great impact in Turkey. The US can pressure the Kurds in subtle ways not to completely secede. However they have done much of the fighting against IS. It will not be easy. But US aid/ military help is a negotiating asset: persuade them to maximize devolution as the short term measure.

Dr. Abdulaziz Sager

Gulf Research Center

1. What is the role of the United States and coalition partners in maintaining stability as Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and other groups grapple with the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum?

The integrity of the nation-state is a must and the US must stick to keeping the geography of the region as it currently exists. Anything else opens a Pandora's box with incalculable results and consequences. It is okay to ask for the better protection of minorities but this should only be done within national frameworks. If one wants to maintain stability, one has to also maintain the current borders in place.

Dr. Muhanad Seloom

University of Exeter

1. How likely does Kurdish leadership think actual independence is (as opposed to a bargaining chip vis a vis the Government of Iraq and/or the international community)? How likely do you think it is? Please use a percentage for each sub bullet below both for the Kurdish leadership and your personal assessment.
 - a. Next 6 months
 - b. Next 6-12 months
 - c. Next 12-24 months
 - d. **Foreseeable future/ever (%55)**

For the Kurdish leadership, independence is an ethno-nationalist dream which can only come true under certain circumstances. Although I do not foresee independence in the next 24 months, I assess that Kurdish leaders hope they can make it come true in the foreseeable future by taking advantage of the post-Arab Spring shifting sands of the Middle East. Events, such as the collapse of the Baath regime in Iraq, the civil war in Syria, and potentially future unrest in Iran, can help Kurds realize their statehood dream(s). However, the decision to hold the independence referendum in the Kurdish region of Iraq was most likely (%85) a risky manoeuvre to maximize the KRG's political and economic gains.

My initial observations¹ about the circumstances and causes leading to the independence referendum in the Kurdistan region of Iraq unveil some of the nuances before and immediately after the referendum.² For example, President of the KRG (then) Mr. Masoud Barzani had the Iraqi flag next to the KRG's behind him during a broadcasted speech on the eve of the referendum. The presence of the Iraqi flag, while symbolic, sent conflicting messages about the true intentions behind holding the independence referendum. Additionally, the KRG did not coordinate with governments of the neighboring countries to secure their support towards the planned referendum. The Iraqi Kurdish leadership did not put any meaningful effort to introduce their new to-be-declared independent state which intends to join the Middle East club. The KRG made it clear after the independence referendum that the referendum was not meant to achieve immediate independence and that the referendum should only be viewed as an internal Iraqi-Kurdish affair which has nothing to do with Kurds in the region. Therefore, the KRG did not see any reason for Iran, Turkey, or Syria to be concerned about the implications of the referendum for their Kurdish communities.

2. What should be done to keep Kurdistan a part of the Iraqi state, and by whom?

The aftermath of the KRG's independence referendum revealed that regional and local opposition against the creation of an independent Kurdish state is still strong. However, these very neighboring governments which are anti-Kurdish separatism, namely Turkey and Iran, are supportive of maintaining

¹ Seloom, Muhanad (2017). The Day after the Independence Referendum in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. *Sharq Forum*. <http://www.sharqforum.org/2017/10/12/the-day-after-the-independence-referendum-in-the-kurdistan-region-of-iraq/>

² Seloom, Muhanad (2018). Future of Kurds in Iraq. *Sharq Forum*. <https://www.sharqforum.org/2018/03/02/the-future-of-kurds-in-iraq/>

a Kurdish federal region in northern Iraq. In addition, the Iraqi government has, so far, been respecting the Kurdish federal region which is currently governed by the KRG. To maintain Iraq's territorial integrity, the Kurdish federal region must be maintained in its current form supported by the Iraqi government under the Iraqi constitution. There are several actors in Iraq who can help re-define the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil in such a way that respects the sovereignty of Iraq and protects Kurdish ethnic and citizenship rights.

Since 2003, the relationship between the federal government in Baghdad and the KRG has been fraught with disagreements over centralised/decentralised powers, budget shares, disputed territories, and interpretations of sovereign powers. Yet, Kurdish and Arab politicians were able to reach compromises on these issues over the last 14 years. The secret behind the agreements and concessions between Baghdad and the KRG has been the elections and formations of governments. Iraq is set to hold general national elections on 12 May 2018. Iraq's ruling Shia political parties will soon start negotiating often politically expensive deals with Kurdish and Sunni political parties in order to secure top political offices in the upcoming government and maintain political influence. Expected to secure approximately 58³ out of 238 seats in the upcoming Iraqi Parliament, Kurdish political parties are certainly powerful political actors in Iraq.

Traditionally, Kurdish political parties enter general elections in Iraq either under one Kurdish electoral list or individual parties to be united in one bloc after elections. However now, Kurdish political parties are more divided due to internal rivalry and the loss of Kirkuk as an immediate result of the KRG's independence referendum held on 25 September 2017. In an interview, Minister Falah Mustafa, Head of the KRG's Department of Foreign Relations (DFR), said, "we are working on uniting Kurdish political parties ahead of the upcoming elections in Iraq... even if we enter the elections as individual parties, we shall work on forming a [Kurdish] political bloc after the elections".⁴

The United States is a major partner in Iraq's war against terrorism and leader of the Global Coalition against ISIL. The US government enjoys a special relationship, based on trust and mutual interests, with the Iraqi government and the KRG. It is in a unique position to help Baghdad and Erbil negotiate a new political accord under which the relationship between the federal government and the KRG is re-defined. The Iraqi government is attempting to re-define the relationship with the KRG in such a way that protects Iraq's territorial integrity, respects the constitution, and imposes its sovereign powers all over Iraq. Equally, the KRG is keen on protecting its ethno-political rights as a federal region within Iraq. However, Iraq's political history instills mistrust between the Iraqi federal government and the KRG. A senior official from the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party KDP said in an interview, "We have informed our friends in the United States government that we [KRG] are not able to resolve issues with the federal government in Baghdad regarding the budget, disputed territories, and other administrative powers. The United States government did not do much to help resolve these issues. We cannot wait forever to have our rights. Hence, we decided to hold the independence referendum which is our constitutional and legal right".⁵ The United States government as a trusted partner can mediate negotiations between the KRG and Baghdad to ensure that the KRG is part of Iraq under a well-defined relationship between the region and the federal government.

³ Sasa Post (2014): Iraqi Parliamentary Elections 2005, 2010, and 2014, numbers and analysis. https://www.sasapost.com/iraq_parliamentary_elections_2014_2010_2005/

⁴ Mustafa, Falah (2017). Tape-recorded phone interview on 31 December 2017.

⁵ Senior KDP official (2017). Face to face interview, London, 12 December 2017.

3. What can the USG do to maintain stability as regional powers react to the Kurdish independence movement?

Despite the KRG's assurances, Iran and Turkey have taken specific measures to ensure that the independence referendum does not achieve any meaningful results. Iran has closed border crossings with the KRG, suspended all flights to/from the KRG, and suspended security and diplomatic cooperation with the KRG. Turkey has taken similar measures for a limited period of time. The Turkish government has recently alleviated these measures. The border crossing with the KRG has been re-opened soon after the referendum. Yet, until recently, there were no flights between the KRG and Turkey and diplomatic relations are yet to be fully restored. There are indications that Iran intends to re-open all border crossings with the KRG and resume normal diplomatic relations.⁶ Iran and Turkey have vested interests in maintaining the status quo of Kurds in Iraq. In other words, Turkey and Iran wish to see Iraqi Kurds under the control of the central government of Iraq as a federal/autonomous region.

The United States government can help Kurds normalise relations with the federal government in Baghdad and consequently normalise relations with Iran and Turkey in such a way that serves the stability of the KRG and Iraq.

⁶ AFP (2017): إيران تعيد فتح المعابر الحدودية مع كردستان العراق: <http://www.france24.com/ar/20171218-إيران-تعيد-فتح-المعابر-الحدودية-مع-كردستان-العراق>

Mr. Mubin Shaikh

Independent Analysts

With the failure of the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum, one consequence from this is the increasing cooperation between Turkey, Iran, and Iraq to maintain a narrative of territorial sovereignty and integrity. This also allows the three to contribute to the stabilization of areas adjacent to their respective borders. The role of the U.S. and Coalition partners here is to maintain a prominent profile so that influence can still be wielded where and when the need arises especially as the immediate post-Referendum period will demonstrate.

Biographies

Dr. Ofra Bengio



Professor Ofra Bengio, Senior Research Fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies and head of Kurdish Studies Program in the Center. Fields of specialization: contemporary Middle Eastern history, modern and contemporary politics of Iraq, Turkey and the Kurd. Her hobby is translation from Arabic and Kurdish poetry.

She is the author of *The Kurdish Revolt in Iraq; Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq; The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders; The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State; Kurdistan's Moment in the Middle East*. She is also the editor of a few books the last of which is *Kurdish Awakening: Nation-Building in a Fragmented Homeland*. She is the author of more than hundred articles on the history of the Middle East.

Dr. Zana Gulmohamad

PhD in Politics from the Department of Politics from the University of Sheffield, UK. The thesis title is "The making of Iraq's foreign policies post-Saddam". I have an MA in Global Affairs and Diplomacy from the University of Buckingham, UK, and a BA in Political science from the University of Sulaymaniyah – Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I worked for six years (2005-2011) in the Kurdistan Region Security Council – Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. Currently I am teaching in the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield.



My articles have been published by journals, international platforms and think tanks, such as CTC Sentinel at West Point, the Jamestown Foundation "Terrorism Monitor", The National, Open Democracy, E-International Relations, Global Security Studies, Your Middle East, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed (The New Arab), and Middle East online. I have been invited to give talks and interviews with various platforms such as BBC radio and Sheffield live radio & TV, I24News, Morgenbladet, and other media and NGOs. I am a regular visitor to the Middle East, Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq and am now based in the UK.

Ambassador James Jeffrey



Ambassador James F. Jeffrey is the Philip Solondz distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute where he focuses on U.S. diplomatic and military strategy in the Middle East, with emphasis on Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.

One of the nation's most senior diplomats, Ambassador Jeffrey has held a series of highly sensitive posts in Washington D.C. and abroad. In addition to his service as ambassador in Ankara and Baghdad, he served as assistant to the president and deputy national security advisor in the George W. Bush

administration, with a special focus on Iran. He previously served as principal deputy assistant secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the Department of State, where his responsibilities included leading the Iran policy team and coordinating public diplomacy. Earlier appointments included service as senior advisor on Iraq to the secretary of state; chargé d'affaires and deputy chief of mission in Baghdad; deputy chief of mission in Ankara; and ambassador to Albania.

A former infantry officer in the U.S. army, Ambassador Jeffrey served in Germany and Vietnam from 1969 to 1976.

Dr. Michael Knights

Michael Knights is a Lafer fellow at The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of [Iraq](#), [Iran](#), Yemen, and the [Gulf Arab states](#). Dr. Knights has traveled extensively in Iraq and the Gulf states, published widely on security issues for major media outlets such as *Jane's IHS*, and regularly briefs U.S. government policymakers and U.S. military officers on regional security affairs. Dr. Knights worked as the head of analysis and assessments for a range of security and oil companies, directing information collection teams in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. He has worked extensively with local military and security agencies in Iraq, the Gulf States, and Yemen. Dr. Knights has undertaken extensive research on lessons learned from U.S. military operations in the Gulf during and since 1990. He earned his doctorate at the Department of War Studies, King's College London, and has worked as a defense journalist for the *Gulf States Newsletter* and *Jane's Intelligence Review*.



Mr. Vernie Liebl

VERNIE LIEBL, M.A., M.S.

Middle East Desk Officer

Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

vliebl@prosol1.com

703-432-1743

Degrees:

- M.A. National Security and Strategic Studies
- M.S. History
- B.A. Political Science



Areas of Interest:

- Culture and History of Middle East
- Culture and History of South Asia
- Culture and History of Islam

Profile:

Vernie Liebl is an analyst currently sitting as the Middle East Desk Officer in the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL). Mr. Liebl retired from the Marine Corps and has a background in intelligence, specifically focused on the Middle East and South Asia.

Prior to joining CAOCL, Mr. Liebl worked with the Joint Improvised Explosives Device Defeat Organization as a Cultural SME, and before that with Booz Allen Hamilton as a Strategic Islamic Narrative Analyst. He has also published extensively on topics ranging from the Caliphate to Vichy French campaigns in WW2.

Mr. Liebl has a Bachelors degree in political science from University of Oregon, a Masters degree in Islamic History from the University of Utah, and a second Masters degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College (where he graduated with “Highest Distinction” and focused on Islamic Economics).

Dr. Nicholas O’Shaughnessy



Nicholas O’Shaughnessy is Professor of Communication at Queen Mary, University of London, UK and latterly director of their Marketing and Communications Group; Visiting Professor (2016-) in the Department of War Studies at King’s College London, and a Quondam Fellow of Hughes Hall Cambridge University. Earlier in his career he taught for eleven years at Cambridge. Nicholas is the author or co-author or editor of numerous books on commercial and political persuasion.

Ultimately his concern is with the ‘engineering of consent’- the troubling matter of how public opinion can be manufactured, and governments elected, via sophisticated methodologies of persuasion developed in the consumer economy.

A co-authored book, *Theory and Concepts in Political Marketing*, was published in April 2013 with Sage. *Selling Hitler: Propaganda and the Nazi Brand* (Hurst) was published in September 2016, and a second volume – *Marketing The Third Reich: Persuasion, Packaging and Propaganda*- has been out since September 2017 with Routledge. ‘Key Readings In Propaganda’ (with Paul Baines, four volumes, Sage London 2012): Volume One: Historical origins, definition, changing nature. Volume Two: The psychology and sociology underpinning Propaganda. Volume Three: Propaganda in military and terrorism contexts. Volume Four: Advances and contemporary issues in Propaganda.

Other topics in propaganda are pursued in numerous journal articles such as *Selling Terror: The Symbolization and Positioning of Jihad* (with Paul Baines), *Marketing Theory* Volume 9 (2) (pp 207-221) 2009. *The Dark Side of Political Marketing, Islamist Propaganda, Reversal Theory and British Muslims* with Paul Baines et al, *European Journal of Marketing*.V44 3/4 2010. *Al Qaeda message evolution and positioning, 1998- 2008: Propaganda analysis re-visited*, Baines and O’Shaughnessy, *Public Relations Inquiry* pp 163-191 May 2014. *Putin, Xi, And Hitler: propaganda and the paternity of pseudo democracy*. *Defence Strategic Communications* (the official journal of NATO Strategic Communications Centre of

Excellence) Vol 2 Spring 2017. The Politics of Consumption And the Consumption of Politics: How Authoritarian Regimes Shape Public Opinion By Using Consumer Marketing Tools. Journal of Advertising Research, June 2017, 57 (2). His perspective has always been that persuasion is the hidden hand of history, its core dynamic. And certainly it is the case that propaganda has become again an important part of our global public and civic discourse.

Dr. Abdulaziz Sager

A Saudi expert on Gulf politics and strategic issues, Dr. Abdulaziz Sager is the founder and Chairman of the Gulf Research Center, a global think tank based in Jeddah with a well - established worldwide network of partners and offices in both the Gulf region and Europe.



In this capacity, Dr. Sager has authored and edited numerous publications including Combating Violence & Terrorism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia , The GCC's Political & Economic Strategy towards Post - War Iraq and Reforms in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Feasible Solutions . He is also a frequent contributor to major international media channels and appears regularly on Al - Arabiya Television , France 24 and the BBC . In addition to his academic activities, Dr. Sager is actively engaged in track - two and mediation meeting. For example, he has chaired and moderated t he Syrian opposition meetings in Riyadh in December 2015 and November 2017 .

In addition to his work with the Gulf Research Center, Dr. Sager is President of Sager Group Holding in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is active in the fields of information technology, aviation services and investments. Furthermore, he holds numerous other appointments including on the Makkah Province Council, Advisory Board of the Arab Thought Foundation, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Faculty of Economics and Administration at King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Ministry of Education, Geneva Center for Security Policy and German Orient Foundation. Dr. Sager has also sat on the advisory group for the UNDP Arab Human Development Report, and participates in the Think Tank Leaders Forum of the World Economic Forum and the Council of Councils of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Dr. Sager holds a Ph.D in Politics and International Relations from Lancaster University and an M.A. from the University of Kent, United Kingdom and a Bachelor Degree from the Faculty of Economics and Administration of King Abdulaziz University.

Dr. Muhanad Seloom



Dr. Muhanad Seloom is an associate lecturer in International Security at the University of Exeter, United Kingdom. His main research interests are within the fields of political violence and peace-building. He has been particularly focused on interdisciplinary research on counterterrorism policies, ethno-nationalist and sectarian violence, and criminology. He has conducted fieldwork in Iraq, Turkey, UK, and several EU states and has published articles and reports in leading publications such as NY Times, think tanks, British Society of Criminology (BSC), Women and Criminal

Justice (Routledge), and Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, as well as providing consultancy to MENA governments on political and security issues.

Dr. Seloom worked for the US Department of State, the GRD US Army, and Canadian Embassy as a policy advisor in Iraq (2004-2007). He speaks Arabic, English, and Kurdish.

Mr. Mubin Shaikh

Born and raised in Canada, **Mubin Shaikh** grew up with two conflicting and competing cultures. At the age of 9, he went to India and Pakistan where he had a chance encounter with the Taliban before their takeover of Afghanistan in 1995. Shaikh became fully radicalized as a supporter of the global Jihadist culture, recruiting others but the 9/11 attacks forced to him reconsider his views. He spent 2 years in Syria, continuing his study of Arabic and Islamic Studies and went through a period of full deradicalization.



Returning to Canada in 2004, he was recruited by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and worked several CLASSIFIED infiltration operations on the internet, in chat-protected forums and on the ground with human networks. In late 2005, one of those intelligence files moved to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) for investigation. The "Toronto 18" terrorism case resulted in the conviction of 11 aspiring violent extremists after testifying over 4 years, in 5 legal hearings at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

Shaikh has since obtained a Master of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (MPICT) and is considered an SME (Subject Matter Expert) in national security and counterterrorism, and radicalization & deradicalization to the United Nations Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate, NATO, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), CENTCOM, various special operations forces, the FBI and others. He has appeared on multiple U.S., British and Canadian media outlets as a commentator and is extensively involved with the ISIS social media and Foreign Fighter (including Returnees and rehabilitation) file. Shaikh is also co-author of the acclaimed book, *Undercover Jihadi*.

Mr. Weston Aviles

Weston Aviles is an analyst at NSI, Inc. He studied criminology and political science at Arizona State University (BS) with minors in Middle Eastern history and economics, and certificates in political thought and leadership, international studies and religion and conflict. Weston then studied Government at the InterDisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, Israel graduate school with a focus in counter-terrorism and security studies (MA). His graduate studies focused on Arab Spring dynamics, international security in the MENA region and radical Islam. Weston is an alumni of the University of Virginia's Semester at Sea program and has participated in several academic programs in Israel to study terrorism and counter-terrorism. Weston is now an analyst for NSI and continues a research focus on Middle Eastern politics and conflict studies.

