

Amidst Universal Opposition to KRG Referendum, Israel Stands by Kurds

By [Sarah Abed](#)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),
[US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

With the September 25th scheduled Kurdish Referendum in Iraq less than a week away, nations worldwide including; the US, UK, France, UN, Iran, and Iraq have expressed their objection and dissent and are calling for its suspension.

All except for Israel, a lone supporter, and longtime friend of the Kurds.

However, this doesn't seem to have any impact on deterring the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq led by Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) **President Massoud Barzani** from holding the referendum as planned.

In 2014, [Time Magazine](#) had this to say about the "Time Person of the Year" runnerup Mr. Barzani and "Kurdistan". "Massoud Barzani, The Opportunist: When ISIS threw the Middle East jigsaw puzzle into the air, the Kurdish leader reached for a piece. What does it say that the most reliable U.S. ally in its campaign against ISIS is an imaginary country? Kurdistan—Land of the Kurds—exists only in two spheres. One is on maps sold in bazaars wherever the Kurdish language is spoken. The other is on yellow-red-and-green flags Kurds sometimes wave in the countries where they actually reside (according to maps sold everywhere else in the world). Yet in one of those countries, the Kurds have built themselves a state in all but name. Far to the north of Baghdad, where Iraq's deserts rise into stony foothills and then into mountains, the Kurdistan Regional Government holds sway".

The only non-Kurdish flag at rally going on now in [#Erbil](#). Israel the sole country to support independence referendum pic.twitter.com/MMGxTsOrLN

— jane arraf (@janearraf) [September 16, 2017](#)

I wrote about the [Kurdish-Israeli relationship](#) in depth and how it has matured significantly over the years in this [article](#).

Since at least the 1960s, Israel has provided intermittent security assistance and military training to the Kurds. This served mostly as an anti-Saddam play - keeping him distracted as Israel fought two wars against coordinated Arab neighbors - but mutual understanding of their respective predicaments also bred an [Israeli-Kurdish](#) affinity.

All signs point to this security cooperation continuing today. Israeli procurement of

affordable Kurdish oil not only indicates a strengthening of economic ties, but also an Israeli lifeline to budget-starved Erbil that suggests a strategic bet on the Kurds in an evolving region.

The people closest to the Jews from a genetic point of view may be the Kurds, according to the results of a [study by Hebrew University](#).

The Kurds are allied with Syria's fiercest enemy - Israel - whose planned [Greater Israel project](#) coincidentally aligns almost perfectly with the Kurds' plans for "Kurdistan." In the [Oded Yinon plan](#), which is the plan for a "Greater Israel," it states the imperative use of Kurds to help divide neighboring countries in order to aid in their plans for greater domination. Interestingly enough, Kurds brush this alliance off as being just another step in achieving their ultimate goal of creating an autonomous Kurdistan.

[Every major Kurdish political group](#) in the region has longstanding ties to Israel. It's all linked to major ethnic violence against Arabs, Turkmens, and Assyrians. From the PKK in Turkey to the PYD and YPG in Syria, PJAK in Iran to the most notorious of them all, the Barzani-Talabani mafia regime (KRG/Peshmerga) in northern Iraq.

Thus it should come as no surprise that [Erbil supplied Daesh \(ISIS\) with weaponry](#) to weaken the Iraqi government in Baghdad. And when it becomes understood that Erbil is merely the front for Tel Aviv in Iraq, the scheme becomes clear.

Israel has reportedly been providing the [KRG with weapons and training](#) even prior its military encounters with Daesh. On the level of economic strategy, Israel granted critical support to the KRG by buying Kurdish oil in 2015 when no other country was willing to do so because of Baghdad's threat to sue. KRG Minister of Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami [even admitted to the arrangement](#), saying that Kurdish oil was often funneled through Israel to avoid detection.

In January 2012 the French newspaper [Le Figaro claimed](#) that Israeli intelligence agents were recruiting and training Iranian dissidents in clandestine bases located in Iraq's Kurdish region. By aligning with the Kurds, Israel gains eyes and ears in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. A year later, the [Washington Post disclosed](#) that Turkey had revealed to Iranian intelligence a network of Israeli spies working in Iran, including ten people believed to be Kurds who reportedly met with Mossad members in Turkey. This precarious relationship between Israel and Turkey persists today.

According to [Foreign Policy](#) September 18th, 2017:

Iraqi President Fuad Masum who was scheduled to speak to the U.N. General Assembly this week in New York canceled his trip to the United States in order to address the upcoming Kurdish independence referendum. He stated that the impending vote "threatened the stability of Iraq". The president decided to remain in Iraq to jump-start an initiative to resolve the crisis.

While the referendum is not necessarily legally binding, Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish autonomous region, hopes that a strong show of support will strengthen the Kurds' hand in future negotiations with Baghdad.

Adding to the flurry of activity, a Kurdish delegation is expected in Baghdad on Tuesday for more talks, and British **Defense Secretary Michael Fallon** is set

to meet with Barzani in Erbil late Monday.

“I will be in Erbil to tell Massoud Barzani that we do not support the Kurdish referendum,” Fallon [said](#) at a press conference in Baghdad before leaving for the north.

The United States, United Kingdom, and most other states involved in the American-led anti-Islamic State coalition, as well as Turkey and Iran, have come out forcefully against the referendum. Those countries are reportedly backing an as-yet-unannounced “alternative” plan for immediate negotiations between Baghdad and Erbil — in exchange the Kurdish government’s halting the referendum.

Kurdish referendum in Iraq

The semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq plans to hold a nonbinding independence referendum on Sept 25.

POPULATION
5.2 million

CAPITAL
Erbil

GOVERNED BY
Kurdistan Regional Government
Established in 1992, governs the provinces of Erbil, Sulaimaniya, Duhok and Halabja.

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT
Parliamentary democracy

ARMED FORCES (PESHMERGA)
More than 200,000

Officially under Kurdistan Regional Government (40,000km²)
Disputed areas
Under Peshmerga control
Claimed by KRG



Sources: KRG, Rudaw



According to [Bloomberg](#) on September 13th, 2017:

Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** voiced support for Kurdish statehood, offering a lone source of backing for an autonomy referendum in Iraq this month that allies oppose.

Israel “supports the legitimate efforts of the Kurdish people to achieve their own state,” Netanyahu said in a statement Tuesday night during his visit in Latin America.

His endorsement clashes with the U.S. and Turkish positions. The Turkish government is concerned that sovereignty for Iraqi Kurds would encourage its own Kurdish insurgents. The U.S. says a Kurdish vote could destabilize the region and undercut the war on extremism.

Israel, with few allies in the region, has previously spoken in support of Kurdish autonomy, but the timing of Netanyahu’s statement so close to the scheduled vote gives it added significance. Iraq’s Kurds plan to hold a referendum on Sept. 25, to be followed by another for a new parliament and president on Nov. 6.

According to [BBC](#) on September 18th, 2017:

“Iraqi **Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi** has formally demanded the suspension of next week’s referendum on Kurdish independence.

The Supreme Court also ordered that the poll must be postponed until questions over its legality were addressed.

Despite global opposition, the Kurdistan Regional Government backed the 25 September vote on Friday”.

According to [Al Masdar](#) on September 18th, 2017:

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, **Stéphane Dujarric**, [issued](#) a statement on Sunday that rejected the recent Kurdish independence referendum in Iraq.

“The Secretary-General believes that any unilateral decision to hold a referendum at this time would detract from the need to defeat ISIL, as well as the much-needed reconstruction of the regained territories and the facilitation of a safe, voluntary and dignified return of the more than three million refugees and internally displaced people,” the Dujarric’s statement read.

“The Secretary-General respects the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Iraq and considers that all outstanding issues between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government should be resolved through structured dialogue and constructive compromise,” the statement continued.

[#UN](#) rejects Kurdish independence referendum <https://t.co/PPhwNptbEC> [#Iraq](#) [#Kurdistan](#)

— Al-Masdar News (@TheArabSource) [September 18, 2017](#)

The White House Office of the Press Secretary issued an [official statement](#) on September 15th, 2017.

Statement by the Press Secretary on the Kurdistan Regional Government Proposed Referendum:

“The United States does not support the Kurdistan Regional Government’s intention to hold a referendum later this month. The United States has repeatedly emphasized to the leaders of the KRG that the referendum is distracting from efforts to defeat ISIS (Daesh) and stabilize the liberated areas. Holding the referendum in disputed areas is particularly provocative and destabilizing. We, therefore, call on the Kurdistan Regional Government to call off the referendum and enter into serious and sustained dialogue with Baghdad, which the United States has repeatedly indicated it is prepared to facilitate”.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 15, 2017

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Any remaining happy allies for the US in the region? Outrage at the Coalition's remarks on the referendum <https://t.co/ZYeEALOUVx>

— Hassan Hassan (@hxhassan) [September 18, 2017](#)

According to [Bloomberg](#) on September 18th, 2017:

"The Turkish army kicked off a military drill near the border with Iraq's Kurdish region, underscoring Turkey's threat to do whatever it deems necessary against an Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum scheduled for next week.

Dozens of Turkish tanks dotted an open field just a few kilometers from the Iraqi border on Monday, according to footage on CNN-Turk television. Erdogan, who fears a sovereign Kurdish state would encourage Turkey's own Kurdish separatists, said Sunday that he would discuss the Sept. 25 vote with President Donald Trump and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly session in New York.

While Ankara and the semi-autonomous [Kurdistan Regional Government](#) have strong ties based on energy links and suspicion of the central government in Baghdad, a vote for Kurdish independence in Iraq's oil-rich north could set back Turkey's campaign to stamp out a Kurdish insurgency it's been battling for three decades.

The referendum is a "matter of national security for our country," Turkey's **Prime Minister Binali Yildirim** said last week. "Nobody should doubt that we will take all action necessary against it."

The military drill is a "signal that Turkey may review its support for Iraq's Kurds, rather than intervene in Iraqi affairs militarily," said **Nihat Ali Ozcan**, an analyst at the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, an Ankara-based research center.

Iraqi Kurdish President Massoud Barzani has rejected U.S. appeals to postpone the referendum, prompting Turkey to move up a National Security Council meeting to Sept. 22. The Turkish cabinet will decide its final position that day, Erdogan said. Israel is the only country to back the plebiscite.

Iraq's Kurds have defied the Baghdad government by independently selling oil

from disputed Kirkuk province via Turkey. On Monday, Russia's state-run energy company Rosneft said it sees an agreement on a gas pipeline project with the KRG completed by year's end.

Abadi said last week that Kurdish crude exports from Kirkuk violate the Iraqi constitution, and Iraq's parliament voted to dismiss the province's Kurdish governor".

Iraq top court rules to suspend Kurdish referendum <https://t.co/EiXr5jBOUy>
[pic.twitter.com/idnsXvwFDU](https://t.co/EiXr5jBOUy)

— Al Jazeera English (@AJEnglish) [September 18, 2017](#)

According to [CNN](#) on September 17th, 2017:

Iraq's Supreme Court on Monday ordered the suspension of a September 25 referendum on Kurdish independence, but a Kurdish official said the vote will go on as planned.

The court's move came in response to at least two lawsuits challenging the planned vote. One was filed by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

"President of the Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani on Friday said that the people of the Kurdistan Region have not received the alternative yet to the upcoming independence referendum scheduled for Sep. 25, stating the vote will be held on time.

Another was filed by four members of Iraq's Parliament — who called for the suspension of the referendum and the designation of the poll as unconstitutional, according to court documents.

But Abdullah Warty, a member of the referendum committee, told CNN that the vote will go on as scheduled despite the court's order. The referendum has been criticized by the United Nations, and US, British and Turkish diplomats.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said any referendum would take away from the battle against ISIS, and that the issue should be resolved through "structured dialogue and constructive compromise."

"The Secretary-General believes that any unilateral decision to hold a referendum at this time would detract from the need to defeat ISIL, as well as the much-needed reconstruction of the regained territories and the facilitation of a safe, voluntary and dignified return of the more than 3 million refugees and internally displaced people," Guterres said in a statement.

British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon echoed his remarks.

"That is our message to President Barzani, (of Iraqi Kurdistan) this referendum is a mistake, and could detract from the essential campaign of defeating Daesh (ISIS)," Fallon said Monday.

Meanwhile Turkey fears the vote could stoke separatist aspirations among its own sizable Kurdish minority.

According to [Al-Monitor](#) August 10th, 2017:

Ordinary Kurds, in particular, those in Sulaimaniyah, are angry about the government's mismanagement of the economy, and many appear ready to express their dissatisfaction with their approach to the referendum.

Over the last two months, Al-Monitor has spoken with several dozen people, primarily in Sulaimaniyah, to gauge their views on the [upcoming referendum](#). Those interviewed include police officers, teachers, peshmerga, shopkeepers, taxi drivers and civil servants, the overwhelming majority of whom reject the referendum outright. They consider it a ploy by the current leadership to distract attention from its failure to efficiently run the government and manage the economy for the last 25 years, since the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992.

Sulaimaniyah, nestled between several mountain ranges, is the largest province in Iraqi Kurdistan, the other two being Dahuk and Erbil. Sulaimaniyah is home to around 2 million of the region's total indigenous population of 5.2 million people. The anger and frustration among them is palpable.

French Foreign Minister Says Kurdish Iraq Referendum inappropriate; calls for talks between Baghdad and Erbil. pic.twitter.com/5qUYYBvzo5

— Press TV (@PressTV) [September 18, 2017](#)

[#Iran](#) warns Iraq Kurds independence means end to border deals <https://t.co/ur2viWJWIM> [#KurdishReferendum](#) pic.twitter.com/nkZ7dvaRnX

— Al Arabiya English (@AlArabiya_Eng) [September 18, 2017](#)

According to [Al Arabiya](#) on September 18th, 2017:

"Border agreements stand only with the central government of Iraq, and secession of Kurdistan region from the central government of Iraq would mean the blocking of all shared border crossings," Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, told the state broadcaster IRIB.

"The secession of the Kurdistan region from Iraq's territory would be the end of security and military agreements between Iran and the Kurdistan region," he added.

Sarah Abed is an independent journalist and political commentator. Focused on exposing the lies and propaganda in mainstream media news, as it relates to domestic and foreign policy with an emphasis on the Middle East. Contributed to various radio shows, news publications and spoken at forums. For media inquiries please email sarahabed84@gmail.com.

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