

War in Iraqi Kurdistan

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On September 25, Iraqi Kurds voted overwhelming for independence. A 93% majority spoke for itself, Kurdish officials calling the results binding. Turnout was around 80%.

Voting was easy, enforcing the results another matter entirely. Baghdad followed through on its threat to send armed forces to the region in the country's north, bordering Turkey's southeast.

They seized Peshmerga-controlled territory near Kirkuk, continuing their advance, capturing the area's K-1 air base.

Clashes erupted between Kurdish and government forces in Kirkuk's industrial zone. Iraqi Afaq TV said army troops took control of Kirkuk's airport and area oil fields.

War rages. The Pentagon downplayed heavy fighting, deplorably calling it "coordinated movements, not attacks" - a "misunderstanding." Kirkuk is a battle zone likely to worsen.

On Sunday, Kurdish authorities refused to annul the referendum's results, pledging to defend the region.

Iraqi PM Haider al-Abadi called the presence of PKK fighters in Kurdistan a "declaration of war," adding:

"The central government and regular forces will carry out their duty of defending the Iraqi people in all its components including the Kurds, and of defending Iraq's sovereignty and unity."

Kurdish officials denied the presence of PKK fighters in Kirkuk, just some volunteer sympathizers there, according to General Jabar Yawer.

On Monday, Kurdish Peshmerga forces called Baghdad's takeover of Kirkuk "a flagrant declaration of war" on Kurdistan, warning Abadi he'd pay a "heavy price" for initiating

conflict, calling it “retaliation against the right of the people to vote on their fate.”

Senior aide to Kurdish President Masoud Barzani, Hemin Hawrami, accused a Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) faction of siding with Abadi’s campaign, calling it “a great and historic treason.”

Barzani ordered Peshmerga forces to resist advancing Baghdad troops. Fighting continues for control of Kurdistan.

In 2014, Peshmerga fighters liberated Kirkuk from US-supported ISIS. Kurdish authorities maintained control since then.

With his troops engaged in combat with Kurdish forces, Abadi’s office issued an outrageous statement, saying:

“We assure our people in Kurdistan and Kirkuk that we are protecting their security and interests, and have only fulfilled the constitutional duty of expanding federal authority, establishing security and protecting national wealth in the city.”

Earlier on Monday, he said he ordered an operation to make Kirkuk “a city of peaceful coexistence for all Iraqis.”

A Kurdistan Security Council statement said the following:

“At approximately 02:30 (AM local time, Iraqi and Shia militias) attacked Peshmerga Forces from two fronts...in the South of Kirkuk, using US military equipment, including Abrams tanks and Humvees.”

Kurdish leaders vowed to “continue...defend(ing) Kurdistan, its people and interests.”

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