
KURDISH REGIONAL FLAG TRIGGERS ROW IN IRAQ'S KIRKUK

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Hanging the flag of northern Iraqs Kurdish region outside public buildings in Kirkuk could lead to friction between city residents, Iraqi Vice-President Osama al-Nujeifi asserted on Tuesday.

"Such an act is incongruous with national unity in Kirkuk and conflicts with the spirit of understanding and solidarity among city residents," he said in a written statement.

"It is unacceptable to impose the will of a single group or party on residents," he added.

Al-Nujeifi issued the statement after 26 Kurdish members of Kirkuks provincial assembly on Tuesday decided to hang the Kurdish regional flag -- alongside Iraqs national flag -- outside the citys public buildings and institutions.

Arab and Turkmen members of the provincial assembly were conspicuously absent from Tuesdays meeting.

In a statement issued later the same day, the Turkish Foreign Ministry blasted the move, saying the unilateral assembly decision violated Iraqs national charter.

The adoption of unilateral steps related to Kirkuks status hurts the prospects for dialog and is contrary to the notion of a constitutional process, the ministry asserted.

It added: Such an approach will have an adverse affect on the countrys security and stability.

During the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, Kurdish Peshmerga forces seized Kirkuk, prompting a subsequent influx of Kurds into the city.

Article 140 of Iraqs 2005 constitution stipulates that Kurds forced to leave Kirkuk under former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein be allowed to return; that a population census be held in the region; and that a popular referendum be held to determine whether or not Kirkuk should fall within Iraqs Kurdish region.

Due to deep-seated political sensitivities, however, Article 140 has yet to be implemented.

While Baghdad says Kirkuk is administratively dependent on Iraqs central government, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party demands Kirkuks incorporation into the Kurdish Region.

The citys Turkmen residents, however, oppose this idea, saying Kirkuk should enjoy a special status.

Kirkuks population is mainly composed of Arab, Turkmen and Kurdish inhabitants.

Kaynak/Source: