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IRAQI PM: KRG'S UNILATERAL REFERENDUM WOULD LEAD IRAQ INTO A DARK TUNNEL

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Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said that the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) plans to hold a one-sided referendum on Sept. 25 would only lead the country into a dark tunnel.

Speaking at a press conference in Baghdad Wednesday, Abadi said that having a referendum without reaching concrete results would be deceiving people.

He also announced that an operation to liberate Havice, a town in northern Iraq's Kirkuk, from Daesh control will be launched soon. Regarding the forces that will take part in the operation, Abadi said that the Iraqi central government will coordinate between the peshmerga and its military forces.

Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 that toppled Saddam Hussein, the KRG's relations with the central government in Baghdad have become strained over a range of issues, including the sharing of oil revenues and control of some areas, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

In a session boycotted by Turkmen and Arab deputies, the Kirkuk Provincial Council (KPC) voted in August in favor of joining the planned independence referendum by KRG.Meanwhile, the KRG leader Masoud Barzani has promised a "strong reaction" to any attempt to take over the contested province of Kirkuk, ahead of the polls.

English-language news outlet Iraqi News reported Monday that the KRG leader has said any possible attempt to take Kirkuk by force will be "faced by the people of Kurdistan."

According to a unilateral decision of the KPC, the status of the city and its surrounding area, classified as a disputed area in Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, will be determined in a referendum that will decide whether the Iraqi central government or the KRG should rule the province.

Meanwhile, a leading Turkmen politician criticized moves related to the vote, including the establishment of an election office in the disputed city of Kirkuk.

The founding of an office in Kirkuk by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Supreme Board of Elections is illegal, according to Iraqi-Turkmen Front (ITF) Vice President Hasan Turan, who is also a member of the Iraqi parliament.

"The KRG-linked Supreme Board of Elections' establishment of an office in Kirkuk is yet another constitutional violation," Turan told Anadolu Agency (AA).

"The board can only operate in Irbil, Sulaymaniyah and Duhok, which are affiliated with the KRG," Turan continued.

Turan added that legal action would be taken against civil servants if they vote in the referendum, which is set to be held on Sept. 25.

Warning that the vote would jeopardize Iraq's unity and solidarity, Turan said, "The [Kirkuk Provincial] Council connected to [Iraq's] central administration should issue a cancellation of the decision to take part in the referendum."

Meanwhile, a group of people protested the KRG's independence referendum in the Mandali sub-district of Diyala, a governorate in eastern Iraq.

Consisting mostly of Sunni Arabs, the group emphasized that the sub-district was one of the disputed zones between Irbil and Baghdad so that they will not accept Mandali to attend the referendum.

"There has been no disagreement in Mandali until now. Arabs and Kurds have lived together in peace. Making it part of the referendum will negatively affect security and economic conditions in the region and will cause a big tension," Menaf al-Abidi, one of the protestors, told Anadolu Agency.

On Sept. 25, residents of northern Iraq's Kurdish region will take part in a popular referendum on whether to declare formal independence from the Iraqi state.

Officials in Baghdad, however, reject the planned poll, saying it could adversely impact the fight against the terrorist group Daesh, which despite a string of recent defeats still maintains a significant presence in Iraq.

The Iraqi government also claims that the poll would violate the country's 2005 constitution and would be "of no political or economic benefit to the region's Kurds."

Turkey, too, rejects the planned referendum, insisting that the region's stability is inextricably linked to the maintenance of Iraq's unity and territorial integrity. Iran, which also has a Kurdish minority in its western areas, opposes the referendum.

Washington has also voiced concerns that the referendum could serve as a "distraction" from other pressing regional issues, especially the fight against terrorism and efforts to bring stability to post-Daesh Iraq.

Kaynak/Source: