
ANKARA ACCUSES BARZANI OF 'DISSOLVING IRAQ'

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Turkey has accused Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leader Massoud Barzani of dissolving Iraq, vowing to take all necessary actions to contain any fallout from the independence referendum at a national security meeting just days before the Sept. 25 vote.

If you opt for the disintegration of Iraq, we will not tell you OK, go ahead. We have told them many times. We have told them in our bilateral talks, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told reporters on Sept. 17 before departing for New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly.

With just a week left until the referendum, Ankara has hardened its stance against the planned vote in recent days, linking the issue to Turkey's national security.

I have sent my [National Intelligence Organization] MİT Undersecretary [Hakan Fidan] to Erbil. I told them are making a mistake. You continue to resist after we have discussed this issue with you so many times, Erdoğan said.

He strongly criticized Barzani by recalling Turkey's support and aid for the KRG in recent years.

You knock on our doors when you face difficulty and receive all kinds of support from us, but when it comes to disintegrating Iraq you go your own way, Erdoğan added.

His statement came after Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said Turkey regards the referendum as a national security issue and will act accordingly. Erdoğan and Yıldırım had held an announced meeting on Sept. 16.

'Decisive stance to be announced on Sept 22

The president reiterated Ankara's decision to move the date of the biannual National Security Council (MGK) from Sept. 27 to Sept. 22, adding that a cabinet meeting will follow the top security meeting on the same day.

This issue will be discussed in detail at the MGK. The cabinet will take necessary decisions upon the advisory suggestions of the MGK. Turkey will therefore reveal its decisive position on this issue, he said.

Meeting with al-Abadi, Trump

Underlining that Ankara and Baghdad have similar positions regarding the referendum, stipulating the indivisible integrity of Iraq, Erdoğan recalled that he would be meeting Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi in New York to discuss the situation.

This issue will also be on my agenda during my meeting with [U.S. President Donald] Trump. I particularly want this to be known, he said.

No step back from Barzani

Despite reactions from both inside Iraq and the international community, KRG President Barzani defied all criticisms, vowing to go ahead with the referendum on Sept. 25 as planned.

We still haven't heard a proposal that can be an alternative to the Kurdistan referendum, Barzani told a rally in the KRG, referring to a proposal put forward by the United States and other Western envoys this week. He also underlined that Arbil wants to continue its good ties with neighboring countries but would not let anybody intervene in the ongoing process.

Barzani's statements came after the KRG Parliament approved the plan to hold the referendum, ignoring opposition from Baghdad and the wider region as well as Western concerns. Parliament reconvened in Arbil on Sept. 14, where an overwhelming majority of Kurdish lawmakers taking part backed the plan.

Playing with fire

Meanwhile, Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi said on Sept. 16 that the KRG referendum plans amounted to playing with fire, according to the Iraqi Media News Agency website.

The referendum could jeopardize gains achieved by the Kurds under the current self-rule regime, al-Abadi said, in words that came after the KRG Parliament vote.

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