
IRAQ LEADER SAYS HE WILL USE FORCE IF KURDISH REFERENDUM TURNS VIOLENT

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Iraq is prepared to intervene militarily if the Kurdish regions planned independence referendum results in violence, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi told The Associated Press in an interview Saturday.

If the Iraqi population is threatened by the use of force outside the law, then we will intervene militarily, he said.

Iraqs Kurdish region plans to hold a referendum on Sept. 25 to gauge support for independence from Iraq in three governorates that make up its autonomous region, and in disputed areas that are controlled by Kurdish forces but claimed by Baghdad.

If you challenge the constitution and if you challenge the borders of Iraq and the borders of the region, this is a public invitation to the countries in the region to violate Iraqi borders as well, which is a very dangerous escalation, Mr. Abadi said.

The leaders of Iraqs Kurdish region have said they hope the referendum will push Baghdad to negotiate a path for independence. Mr. Abadi said such negotiations would be complicated by the referendum.

It will make it harder and more difficult, he said, but added, I will never close the door to negotiations. Negotiations are always possible.

Iraqs Kurds have come under increasing pressure from regional powers and the United States to call off the vote.

In a statement released Friday night, the White House called for the Kurdish region to abandon the referendum and enter into serious and sustained dialogue with Baghdad.

Tensions between Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, and Baghdad have flared up recently. Masoud Barzani, the president of Iraqs autonomous Kurdish region, has repeatedly threatened violence if the Iraqi military or Shiite militias try to move into disputed areas, specifically the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, now under the control of Kurdish fighters.

Iraqs Kurds have long had a dream of statehood. Brutally oppressed under Saddam Hussein, whose military in the 1980s killed at least 50,000, many with chemical weapons, Iraqs Kurds established a regional government in 1992 after the United States enforced a no-fly zone across the north following the gulf war.

After the 2003 American-led invasion ousted Saddam, the region secured constitutional recognition of its autonomy but remained part of the Iraqi state.

When asked if he would ever accept an independent Kurdistan, Mr. Abadi said, Its not up to me, this is a constitutional matter.

If they want to go along that road, they should work toward amending the Constitution, Mr. Abadi said of the Iraqi Kurds. In that case we have to go all the way through Parliament and a referendum to the whole Iraqi people.

He added, For them to call for only the Kurds to vote, I think this is a hostile move toward the whole of the Iraqi population.

Kaynak/Source: