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## **IRAN, TURKEY BACK IRAQ'S INTEGRITY, VOICE OPPOSITION TO KURDISH SECESSION**

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The military brass of Iran and Turkey have voiced their opposition to the separation of Iraq's Kurdish region and expressed support for the country's territorial integrity.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri on Monday held talks and attended a joint press conference with Turkish Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar, who arrived in Tehran Sunday night ahead of a scheduled visit by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Iran.

Addressing reporters following the meeting, Baqeri pointed to common threats against Iran and Turkey and said the two countries have common and similar positions on the recent independence referendum held in the Kurdistan region and believe that it was unacceptable.

Tehran and Ankara also believed that Iraq's territorial integrity must be preserved, he added.

In defiance of Iraq's stiff opposition, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) held a non-binding referendum on September 25 on secession from the central government in Baghdad.

Official results showed 92.73 percent of voters backed the secession. Turnout was put at 72.61 percent.

Major regional and international parties have voiced serious concern over the secessionist move, saying it would compound the problems of the country, which is already busy with counter-terrorism operations against Daesh terrorist group.

Iran and Turkey had warned that the controversial vote could lead to further instability in the entire Middle East, a region already ravaged by numerous conflicts and terror threats.

Deputy Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri said on Saturday Iran and Iraq would hold joint military exercises along their border with the Kurdistan region in the coming days in line with Tehran's policy to support Baghdad's central government, after the recent controversial independence referendum in the semi-autonomous region.

A senior Iranian commander says Iran and Iraq will hold joint military exercises along their border with the Kurdistan region in the coming days.

Elsewhere in the presser, Baqeri said he had held discussions with his Turkish counterpart on the latest achievements made by the Iraqi and Syrian armed forces in the campaign against Daesh and expressed hope they would help Damascus and Baghdad to restore security to their countries.

We also held negotiations about [ways] to counter terrorism in the region and [promote] the two countries border security and made good decisions, the top Iranian commander pointed out.

He also noted that the Iranian and Turkish armed forces would boost cooperation in training troops, hold joint military exercises and share experience on border security.

Baqeri paid an official three-day visit to Turkey in mid-August at the head of a high-ranking politico-military delegation. It was the first visit by an Iranian chief of staff of the Armed Forces to Turkey.

Iran, Turkey vow to boost military cooperation: Akar

The top Turkish commander, for his part, said Iran and Turkey agreed to continue the fight against terrorism and increase security in border areas and added that the two countries would boost military cooperation.

Iran and Turkey have always enjoyed cordial relations and agreed to make more coordination in line with commonalities given the ongoing sensitive situation in the region, Akar said.