
KURDISTAN REGION SAYS IRAQI FORCES PREPARING MAJOR ATTACK IN OIL-RICH KIRKUK

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Iraqi government forces and Iranian-trained Iraqi paramilitaries are preparing a major attack on Kurdish forces in the oil-rich region of Kirkuk and near Mosul in northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said on Wednesday.

But an Iraqi military spokesman denied any attack on Kurdish forces was planned and said that government troops were instead preparing to oust Islamic State militants from a border area with Syria in the west of Iraq.

Tensions between the KRG and the Iraqi government have been running especially high since the Iraqi Kurds overwhelmingly voted for independence in a referendum last month.

The Kurdish-held multi-ethnic region of Kirkuk has emerged as a flashpoint in the crisis as it is claimed by both sides.

Iraqi forces and Shiite paramilitaries, known as Popular Mobilisation, are deployed south and west of Kirkuk, in areas previously under the control of Islamic State.

Were receiving dangerous messages that Iraqi forces, including Popular Mobilisation and Federal Police, are preparing a major attack .. on Kurdistan, said the KRGs Security Council in a tweet confirmed by a Kurdish official.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Oct 5 that his government wanted to avoid clashes with the Kurds, but Popular Mobilisation leaders have repeatedly threatened to oust Kurdish forces from Kirkuk.

TARGETING ISLAMIC STATE

An Iraqi military spokesman denied the KRG claim.

We are getting ready for the battle in al-Qaim, were not concerned by confrontations other than with Daesh, he said, using an Arabic acronym for Islamic State.

The area around the border post of al-Qaim, in western Iraq, is the last Iraqi region still under the control of the militants who overran a third of the country in 2014.

Offensives are being prepared south and west of Kirkuk and north of Mosul, said the KRGs security council.

Iraqi forces captured Mosul from Islamic State in July, after a grueling nine-month U.S.-backed offensive with the participation of Kurdish Peshmerga. Kurdish forces are deployed north of the city, in an area also claimed by Baghdad.

Abadis government, seeking to keep the country together, has taken measures to isolate the KRG, including a ban on direct international flights to the region. Neighboring Iran and Turkey back Baghdads stance, fearing the spread of separatism to their own Kurdish populations.

Iraqs Supreme Judicial Council issued arrest warrants on Wednesday for the chairman of the Kurdish referendum commission and two aides for violating a valid (Iraqi) court ruling banning the independence vote as against the Constitution.

Kaynak/Source: