
IRAQ REFUSES TALKS WITH KURDS UNLESS THEY COMMIT TO UNITY

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Iraq's central government imposed a ban on direct international flights to the autonomous Kurdish region after the Kurds held a Sept 25 referendum on independence, which Baghdad says was illegal. It is calling for its neighbors to shut the landlocked regions borders.

Among other measures to isolate the Kurdish region, Baghdad stopped selling dollars to four Kurdish-owned banks and called for a halt to its independent crude oil sales.

The Kurds have repeatedly called for negotiations following the referendum in which an overwhelming majority voted for independence.

To avoid this collective punishment, we invite (Iraqi Prime Minister) Haider al-Abadi, again, ... (to) any form of dialogue and negotiations in conformity with the Iraqi Constitution, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said in a statement.

It offered discussions regarding the crossings, internal trade, providing services to the citizens, the banks and the airports.

But Baghdad has said the Kurds must disavow the referendum result as a pre-condition for any talks. Asked about the latest offer, an Iraqi government spokesman said there could be no talks until the Kurds gave a commitment to Iraq's unity.

The KRG must accept the sovereign authority of the federal government on (..) oil exports, security and border protection, including land and air entry points, he told Reuters.

The Kurds, who have sought an independent state for generations, say their referendum was

meant to be the start of a negotiation that would see them gain independence after agreement with the Iraqi government.

But Baghdad considered the vote illegal, especially as it was held not only in territory that forms part of the Kurdish autonomous region, but also in disputed neighboring parts of Iraq occupied by Kurdish troops.

Iraq has maintained its tough line toward the Kurds with support of neighbors Turkey and Iran, which strongly oppose the secessionist movement. Washington, long friendly with the Kurds, had also called on them before the referendum to cancel it.

President Tayyip Erdogans spokesman said on Thursday Turkey would gradually close border crossings with northern Iraq in coordination with the central Iraqi government and Iran.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim is expected to visit Baghdad on Sunday to meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Abadi.

On Wednesday, the Kurdish authorities accused Iraqi forces and Iranian-trained Iraqi paramilitaries of preparing a major attack on the oil-rich region of Kirkuk and the area near Mosul. Both are in parts of northern Iraq outside the Kurdish autonomous region but held by Kurdish forces since Islamic State fighters were driven out. [L8N1MM5J1]

Baghdad has denied it has plans for a military move against the Kurds.

Abadi said on Thursday he would not use the army against the Kurdish region, and a military spokesman denied any attack on Kurdish forces was planned, saying government troops were preparing to oust Islamic State militants from an area near the Syrian border.

We wont use our army against our people or to launch a war against our Kurdish citizens, Abadi said in a statement.

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

Kirkuk, a Kurdish-held, multi-ethnic city and surrounding province with large oil reserves, has emerged as a flashpoint in the crisis as it is claimed by both Baghdad and the Kurds.

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

Kaynak/Source: