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## **IRAQI KURDS FEEL 'ABANDONED' BY THE US, AS ISRAEL OFFERS SUPPORT**

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Ariel Ben Solomon

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly lobbies world leaders to protect the Kurds as they lose ground in Iraq, some activists and experts feel that the US has sided with Iran in this regional conflict.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq is in disarray, after losing ground to the Iraqi Army and Iranian-backed Shia forces, following the Kurds independence referendum in late September. Without significant American backing, the Kurds could stand to lose even more territory beyond the oil hub of Kirkuk — which theyve already been forced to retreat from.

Dr. Kamal Sido, a Syrian Kurd who works at the Society for Threatened Peoples — a German human rights NGO — told JNS.org that, It is the biggest scandal that the Iraqi government is fighting with American weapons against Kurdish cities and villages in Iraq.

Sido also criticized the US for supporting a Shia-ruled Iraqi government that is controlled by the Iranian regime.

The Kurds in Iraq and Syria are fighting against radical Islam and are protecting Western values, he said, adding, After the Americans abandoned the Iraqi Kurds, Syrian Kurds fear that the US will also abandon them.

Arif Bawecani, the head of the liberal Kurdistan Independent Party, said that the attempt to conquer Kurdish areas has been part of Irans plan since the countrys 1979 revolution. Iran, he said, wants to occupy the entire Middle East and impose Shia Islam on the region.

Iran is also slowly infiltrating the US and Europe through establishing sleeper cells connected to

the Shiite mosques, asserted Bawecani, an Iranian Kurd originating from what he considers Iranian-occupied territory.

He added that Iran has always tried to sabotage and undermine the Kurdish region in Iraq, and has infiltrated Kurdish political parties in order to do so.

Regarding Kurdish-American relations, Bawecani said, Kurds have always been friendly and trusted the US, but history shows that the US has sold the Kurds out to occupying powers — Turkey, Syria, Iraq and especially Iran.

Bawecani cited a lack of US assistance during various historical episodes, including former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's gassing of the Kurds.

The Kurds are still friends with Americans, but, [in their view] the US government is not to be trusted, he said.

Some Kurds disagree, and accuse their government of corruption.

Ari Aram, the editor of the Kurdish news website Ekurd.net, told JNS.org that he is pleased that the US and other Western countries understand that the current Kurdish leadership — comprised of what he called mini-dictators — is unfit to lead.

The West is not blind and can see [that] there is no democracy in Kurdistan, and that the leaders are seeking money only for their private pockets, Aram said.

If Kurdistan officially declares independence under KRG President Masoud Barzani, it will be the most catastrophic situation for the Kurdish nation, Aram said, adding his belief that Barzani would become a dictator that nobody could stop or remove.

Aram said that a democratic government is a necessity for Kurdistan, especially in light of the fact that Barzani, whose term ended in 2013, is still in power.

The leadership is taking billions and billions of dollars of oil income, Aram claimed, adding that the referendum launched by Barzani was used to mask the bad situation in Kurdistan.

Fellow Ekurd.net writer Rizgar Khoshnaw, who is based in Washington, DC, voiced similar sentiments — and blamed Barzanis foreign advisers for the referendum.

The US is 100% with Baghdad now, he wrote in an email to JNS.org. The US did not abandon the Kurds — the Kurds did not listen to the US when they were told to postpone [the independence vote].

Despite his criticism of the KRG, Aram is pleased that Israel was the only country to publicly endorse an independent Kurdish state in advance of the referendum.

Phillip Smyth, a researcher specializing in Shia Islamist groups at the University of Maryland's Laboratory for Computational Cultural Dynamics, told JNS.org that there is always the chance of Iranian-controlled Shia militias increasingly moving into Kurdish areas of Iraq.

There is also the possibility that [Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-] Abadi feels emboldened to push towards other Kurdish positions after the success in Kirkuk, he told JNS.org.

Regardless, said Smith, it's really too soon to tell where Abadi, numerous Shia militia groups and Kurdish forces may take this.

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Kaynak/Source: